



Copresence and interaction in public open spaces in Arapiraca, Alagoas: restrictions to contact among individuals from different social groups

Copresença e interação em espaços públicos em Arapiraca, Alagoas: a restrição do contato entre indivíduos de grupos sociais diferentes

Copresencia e interacción en espacios públicos abiertos en Arapiraca, Alagoas: la restricción del contacto entre miembros de diferentes grupos sociales

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Abstract

The creation of opportunities for face-to-face contacts between people from different social groups is one of the main contributions of public spaces to life in society and to the mediation of differences. However, studies on socio-spatial segregation have focused more on the effects of residential location in restricting contact between members of different social groups than on the potential of public spaces such as squares to stimulate or hinder these contacts. Furthermore, research about the latter tend to be from contexts outside of Brazil and focus on racial and ethnic rather than socioeconomic segregation. In this study we analyze two town squares in Arapiraca, Alagoas, using in-depth interviews to understand how contacts occur between members of different social groups and, especially, how and why they are restricted or avoided. The results show three categories of reasons for contact restriction: those related to morphological attributes, socioeconomic attributes, and individual attributes.

Keywords: Public spaces; social contacts; urban segregation; restriction of contacts; town squares.

Resumo

A possibilidade de contatos face a face entre pessoas de diferentes grupos sociais, é uma das principais contribuições dos espaços públicos à vida em sociedade e à negociação das diferenças. Entretanto, estudos sobre a segregação socioespacial têm se concentrado mais nos efeitos da localização das residências na restrição do contato entre membros de diferentes grupos sociais do que propriamente no potencial que os espaços públicos como praças possuem para estimular ou dificultar esses contatos. Além disso, os trabalhos que buscam este último objetivo costumam ser de contextos fora do Brasil e se concentram na segregação racial e étnica, e não na socioeconômica. Neste trabalho, analisamos duas praças em Arapiraca, Alagoas, por meio de entrevistas em profundidade, buscando entender como acontecem os contatos entre membros de grupos sociais distintos e, principalmente, como e por que acontece a restrição desse contato. Os resultados mostram que há três categorias de motivos para a restrição de contato: por atributos morfológicos, por atributos socioeconômicos e por atributos individuais.

Palavras-Chave: Espaço público; contatos sociais; segregação urbana; restrição do contato; praças.

Resumen

La posibilidad de contactos cara a cara entre personas de diferentes grupos sociales es una de las principales contribuciones de los espacios públicos a la vida en sociedad ya la negociación de las diferencias. Sin embargo, los estudios sobre segregación socioespacial se han centrado más en los efectos de la ubicación de las residencias en la restricción del contacto entre miembros de diferentes grupos sociales que en el potencial que tienen los espacios públicos como las plazas para estimular o dificultar estos contactos. Además, los trabajos que persiguen este último objetivo tienden a ser de contextos fuera de Brasil y se centran en la segregación racial y étnica más que en la socioeconómica. En este trabajo, analizamos dos plazas en Arapiraca, Alagoas, a través de entrevistas en profundidad, buscando comprender cómo ocurren los contactos entre miembros de diferentes grupos sociales y, principalmente, cómo y por qué ocurre la restricción de ese contacto. Los resultados muestran que existen tres categorías de motivos de restricción de contacto: los que ocurren por atributos morfológicos, atributos socioeconómicos y atributos individuales.

Palabras clave: Espacios públicos; contactos sociales; segregación urbana; restricción de contactos; plazas.



1 Introduction

Social-spatial segregation materializes as a consequence of the unequal occupation of space by different social groups, and, at the same time, tends to reinforce these differences. Until the 1950s, urban space was seen as a stage for the best human adaptations, which was a consensus among urban sociologists of the Chicago School (PARK, 1916; MCKENZIE, 1923; BURGESS, 1928). These scholars started from generalized explanations of American cities, using the concepts of Sociological Ecology and treating the concentration of social groups in certain areas of the city as a natural occurrence and a reflex of a supposed efficiency in the allocation of resources and individual preferences. Beginning in the 1960s, scholars inspired by the dialectical method (LEFEBVRE, 2001; HARVEY, 1980; CASTELLS, 1983; LOJKINE, 1997) began to consider the form of production, the process of capital accumulation, and aspects inherent to labor force (MARAFON, 1996) to explain this phenomenon, elucidating aspects of the social division of space from new perspectives, particularly the housing issue.

In Brazil, analyses of models of segregation followed this perspective by emphasizing social exclusion (KOWARICK, 1979), the logic of housing production (ROLNIK, 1989; RIBEIRO, 1997), urban land values (MARICATO, 1997, 2014), physical distances influenced by economic aspects that interfere in the location of residences by different social classes (VILLAÇA, 2001, CALDEIRA, 2011; SUGAI, 2015), the reinforcement of patterns of segregation by means of state actions (VETTER e MASSENA, 1975), conditions of poverty and sociability (MARQUES, 2005) and social networks and mobility (NETTO, 2014), among other aspects.

With the consolidation of studies about these topics, various effects of socio-spatial segregation have been identified. Brazilian studies in particular are focused on metropolises and denounce that segregation, as a form of unequal consumption among social classes, increases difficulties of access to public facilities, services and infrastructure (VARGAS, 2005); exposure to violence (CALDEIRA, 2011); salary differences and reduced job opportunities (CUNHA; JAKOB, 2010); prejudice and discrimination (RODRIGUES, 2007); and a lack of stimulus to socio-cultural programs, and for healthcare and education (MAAS et al., 2019).

Socio-spatial segregation, understood as a restriction on interaction in space between different social groups, is also associated to isolation (MARQUES, 2005) and social avoidance (KOWARICK 2004). Studies about this restriction usually appear in a research context related to the location of housing, which can limit the use and living experience of space because of the creation of distances and difficulties to the establishment of social relations and contacts between different social strata located in areas increasingly isolated from each other. Thus, they usually do not explore the restrictions of interaction among social groups that occupy similar spaces, such as public squares.

From a more theoretical perspective, Freeman (1978) proposed an index for measuring these restrictions of contact in studies about segregation, contrasting the contacts effectively realized between two or more groups with the total number of contacts expected in a situation of non-segregation. More recently, in Brazil, Netto (2014) concentrated his studies on restrictions on interaction based on issues of mobility of agents in spaces, focusing on the movement of bodies as condition for the formation of social contact and restrictions between socially distinct individuals. These studies help understand segregation as the absence of interaction between socially distinct groups and open up questions that go beyond aspects strictly related to residential location, including the social relations that are facilitated or made more improbable in public spaces. However, studies focused on contacts (or their restriction) between different social groups in public spaces such as squares are still rare, despite the importance



that these spaces have for sociability in cities in general. Existing studies usually focus on racial and ethnic segregation (see, for example Cattell et al., 2008 and Priest et al., 2014), as opposed to segregation by socio-economic aspects.

The advance in understanding of the restriction of contact in public spaces for conviviality can help us to understand how “segregation shapes social relations among groups, imposing social distance and making the different invisible” (NETTO, 2014, p.45, our translation). To deepen understanding of the development and functioning of these social relations and specifically how they are restricted in space can help to improve proposals for urban planning and design policies, and to develop projects with actions to improve exchanges of information and the performance of activities that help a public space promote opportunities for contact between socially different groups and the resulting enriching of experiences of use and fruition of the city.

Thus, this study investigated copresence, social contacts and their restrictions in the Pereira Magalhães and Coronel José Alves town squares, located in two socioeconomically different areas in the city of Arapiraca, in the interior of Alagoas state. The investigation focused on the relationship between the morphological aspects of the squares and the socioeconomic and individual aspects of their users. In both places, we applied a field study with a quantitative and qualitative perspective to understand how social contacts take place, how and in what conditions they are restricted among different social groups, and the possible relations of these phenomena with socio-spatial, socioeconomic, and individual aspects of their users.

2 The restriction of contact in public spaces

Although it is the most basic form of segregation (FREEMAN, 1978), studies that consider explicit restrictions to contact are relatively recent when compared to approaches that emphasize spatial conditions of distance and separation such as the classic studies of Duncan and Duncan (1955) and Massey & Denton (1988), as well as Villaça (2001), in Brazil. Considering limitations on social interactions (FREEMAN, 1978; NETTO, 2014) in the constitution of relations between distinct social groups allows us to widen the repertoire of analysis to other areas of cities, overcoming the exclusively residential context commonly used in most studies.

Under this perspective, conditions that restrict contact are found throughout the fabric of cities, affecting their structure of sociability (NETTO, 2014). In public spaces this happens through two mechanisms: the first is related to limitations of appropriation (in being present - copresence), which is materialized in the opportunities for encounters between bodies (NETTO, 2014) due to concrete restrictions of each space; and the second is the willingness to interact or engage between individuals who are open to contact or not, through the need for sharing of the social repertoire that they have and the socioeconomic and cultural context to which they belong.

In the first situation, Holanda (2010) identifies that social groups have different ways of organizing themselves in space. In this sense, configurational properties that act in the production of encounters interfere directly in the constitution of relations between groups. From a sociological perspective, Giddens (2008) argues that these encounters are the connecting thread of social contact and have systematic properties that can be understood by two characteristics: one of opening and closing and the other of alternation. These properties create opportunities for interaction, given that they refer to the position of an individual's body in relation to another. For Giddens (2008), the importance of positioning of bodies is closely related to the level of spatial and temporal distancing of social totalities. In this context there is a situation favorable to contact or its restriction, because the context in which each



individual is involved largely conditions the appropriation of spaces “befitting” of the social group of which they are a part.

In daily praxis, the lack of encounters in space between different groups is typical in Brazilian society, a fact that is manifest in concrete examples in the operation of social relations. The IBGE census of 2010 shows that more than 70% of the population marries people who are similar in terms of social class, color, and schooling (IBGE, 2010). Obviously, this finding involves many other considerations, but there is no way to disassociate the effect of the appropriation of space from the materialization of these relations over time, because “at the interior of the network of field or class, lines of action of the actors tend to interlace more or less frequently, due to their dispositions and locally shared social situations.” (NETTO, 2014, p. 59, our translation).

Thus, the situation of opening of engagement is directly related to the configurational properties of space that, in this case, promote the spatial crossing between groups and for this reason feed the basic condition for this engagement: copresence. Nevertheless, it only takes place though each individual’s need or predisposition to share contact, whether between different or homogeneous social groups, characterizing itself as another property of restriction of contact, which in this study we call social avoidance between those who cross.

When materialized in space, this mode of avoidance creates situations and groups of actions that tend to make “invisible” individuals from different social groups (NETTO, 2014), even if they frequent the same space. Studies by Goffman (1963) explain this condition by demonstrating that continuous and solid forms of social interaction only take place today through pre-existing relations, which are structured by the social positions of the individuals involved. These positions, in turn, delineate modes of behavior and thus indicate conditions for initiating an interaction or, to the contrary, can suggest that it is more suitable to avoid it in each concrete situation.

Goffman (1963) investigated the dimensions of a restriction by means of situational properties involving individuals who know each other and those who do not know each other. In the first situation, Goffman (1963) clarified that this restriction is found when individuals do not establish a mutual recognition of a cognitive and social nature, although they know each other. When there is no instance of this recognition, there are automatically restrictions on initiating or extending the engagement, because it is very difficult for individuals to feel comfortable in the conversation. Meanwhile, restrictions between individuals who do not know each other exist when there is no specific reason to begin a conversation; therefore, when this occurs and one of the parties does not feel comfortable, it is common to realize what Goffman (1963, p. 146) called the “terminal squirm” in which attention is given to other situations, people, objects, and actions, turning away from the other person.

The analysis of these restrictions in the daily life of different social groups on the forms of social interaction can indicate how these differences are spatialized, and what are their motivations and subordinations. This, in turn, can help us to think of spaces of different sizes that facilitate the copresence and intervention between members of different social groups, contributing to the construction of mutual tolerance and understanding.

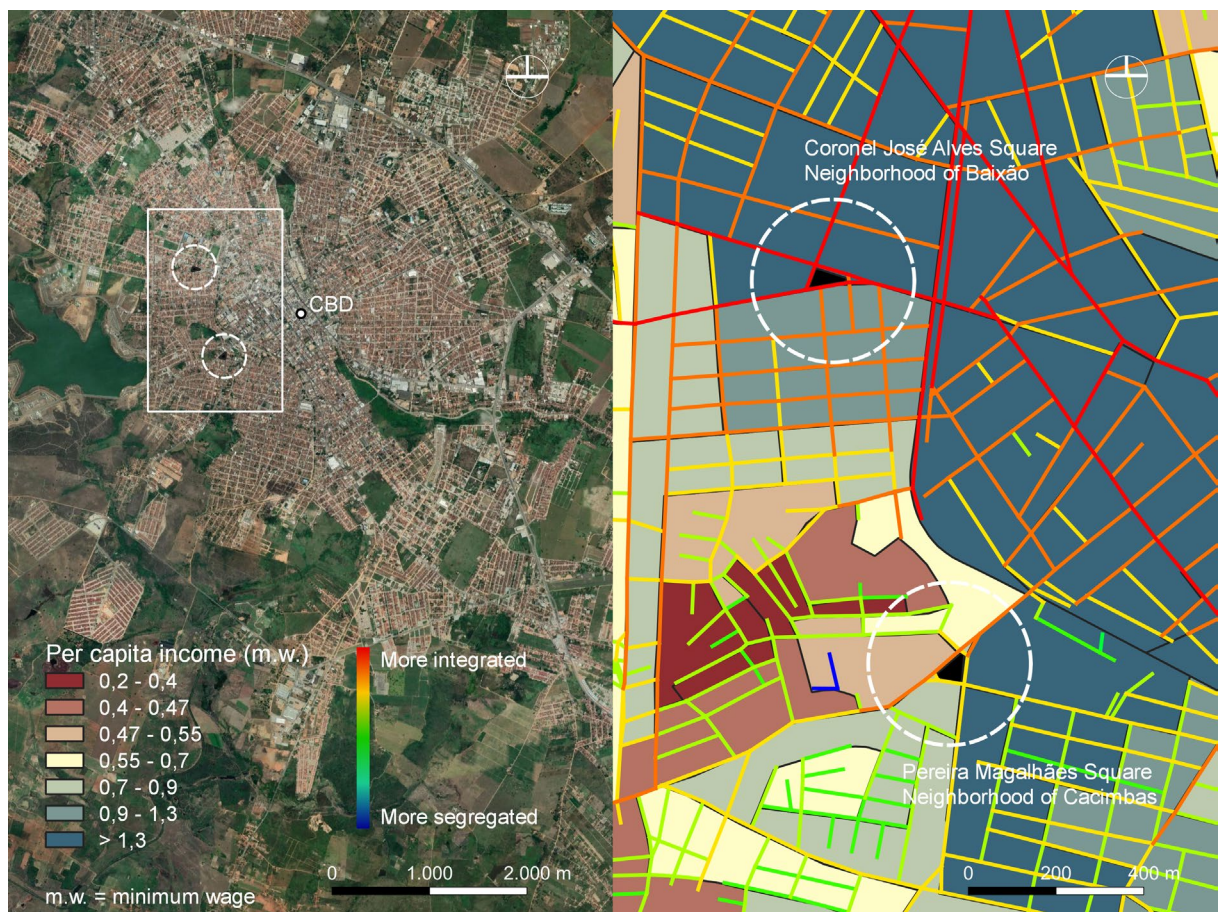
3 Methods

We used as case study the city of Arapiraca in the interior of Alagoas state. The city is 135 km from the state capital of Maceió and has 230,417 residents, in an area of 600,00 Km², according to IBGE (2010). The study only considered the urban zone, which is subdivided into 38 neighborhoods. As a criterion for exclusion, we did not work with the downtown part of the city, which has dynamics that would make it

difficult to study the restriction of contact associated to location of residences and their adjacent public spaces.

To choose the two squares included in the study, we overlaid data on income from the census conducted by IBGE (2010) with measures of integration from Space Syntax to identify two areas with similar positions in the urban fabric, but with different income diversities. The position in the urban fabric was determined using the measure of global integration, which analyses how close or distant a space is, on average, to all the others. In this way, we avoided comparing a square in a central region with another in a peripheral region, thus comparing two squares with similar levels of integration, and therefore with similar levels of potential of movement and encounters caused by the configuration of the urban grid (HILLIER et al., 1993; HILLIER; IIDA, 2005). Figure 1 shows the relationship between the two areas.

Figure 1: Choice of areas – neighborhood of Baixão and the Cacimbas neighborhood.



Source: Developed by the authors using IBGE data (2010) and an axial map prepared by Daniel Paim.

We then mapped all the squares in these regions, based on the criterion of not being located within housing projects or condominiums, to facilitate use by various individuals. Area 1 corresponds to the Baixão neighborhood, which has a higher mean income and lower variation in income of the census tracts in the surroundings. The chosen square is called Coronel José Alves and is the only one in the neighborhood. Area 2, in turn, includes the Cacimbas neighborhood and has a lower mean income and higher range of incomes in the neighboring census tracts. The neighborhood has three squares, but the only one that has similar characteristics in terms of global integration to the previous square is the

Pereira Magalhães square.

We then examined their urban forms to determine the influence on the restriction of contact among different social groups. This process followed a multi-methods approach of a quantitative nature (closed questionnaire) and a qualitative one (field mapping and semi-structured interviews).

The quantitative procedure was a closed questionnaire whose objective was to identify the types of relations established in the squares and characterize the users' profiles. This tool had 13 closed questions about gender, age, marital status, profession, education level, place of residence and means of transportation used to reach the square, to establish who they are, if they are different or similar in social and economic dimensions and, finally, how and why they use the squares. There were a total of 220 respondents in the Coronel José Alves square and 295 in Praça Pereira Magalhães.

The qualitative procedures, in turn, sought to provide more in-depth data through a more careful analysis of behavior in the space, as well as interviews with users, improving the understanding about the relations established and identifying possible restrictions. They involve the following activities:

- Analysis of the spatial attributes of the squares, through a filed survey comprising the distribution of land uses in the surroundings and in the interior of the squares;
- Analysis of the operation of uses and appropriations in the squares with the realization of a space-centered behavioral mapping. The application of this instrument took place in two phases in each square, in which it was possible to strengthen the understanding of the main flows through the identification of the most used spaces in the interior, according to gender, and to deepen the knowledge about the existing relationships. The format and position of the main leisure spaces, masses of vegetation and flowerbeds, furniture, kiosks and position of paths and sidewalks were recorded, as well as their relationships with the surrounding fabric;
- Identification of possible restrictions to social contacts by conducting semi-structured interviews. This tool included 15 questions related to the characterization of the subjects; actions and attitudes that assist social contacts and their restriction; the degree and reasons for restrictions and the characteristics of the squares that reinforce the contact and its restriction.

Forty interviews were conducted, 20 in each square, with 10 female and 10 male users in each, all older than 18. The procedure was recorded in audio and was approved by the ethics committee of the institution at which it was conducted. The data from the interviews were handled with a set of techniques known as Content Analysis, which, according to Bardin (2011), analyzes contributions of communications, using a systematic perspective of procedures, whether quantitative or not. Câmara (2013, p.182, our translation) emphasizes that, in this analysis, "*researchers seek to understand the characteristics, structures or models that are behind the fragments of the messages considered*". Based on this principle, we highlighted passages and coded them with keywords that later allowed us to group them and support the emergence of categories of analysis of the statements of those interviewed, which were then used to structure the results section.

For space reasons, we focused on the presentation and discussion of the results of the interviews, using the previous steps only for a general characterization and contextualization of the areas of study.

4 Results

The results were grouped in three explanatory categories, derived from the results of the interviews: contacts restricted by morphological attributes, contacts restricted by socioeconomic attributes and contacts restricted by individual attributes. Before describing and commenting on them, we offer a brief

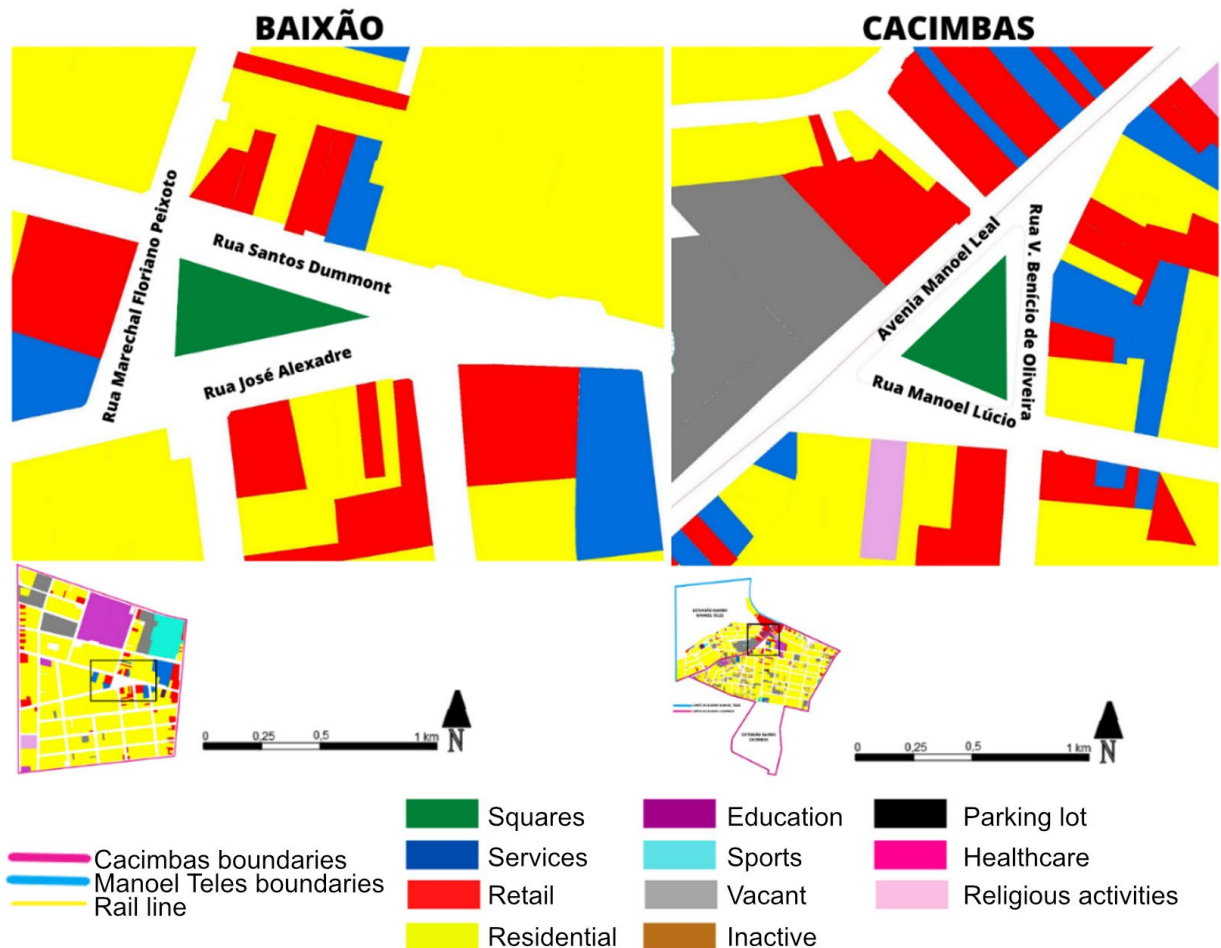
characterization of the squares.

4.1 The squares: contacts and appropriation

The town squares Coronel José Alves (in Baixão) and Pereira Magalhães (in Cacimbas) were created in the 1970s when the city of Arapiraca had its main historic moment of populational and economic growth. Later, the squares structured the development of each neighborhood by facilitating the main routes between them and the downtown region of the city.

The Baixão neighborhood of Coronel José Alves square has a strong presence of more general uses, aimed to serve the entire population of the city, as well as neighboring municipalities, like hospitals, offices of professional entities, interior design stores, private companies, pharmacies, and sporting activities, because the municipal stadium Coaracy da Mata Fonseca is in the neighborhood. Meanwhile, the Cacimbas neighborhood, where the Pereira Magalhães square is located, has activities to serve the demands of the local population, such as small markets, luncheonettes, bakeries, and beauty parlors, among others. Figure 2 shows the distribution of land use in the immediate surroundings of the squares.

Figure 2: Land Use and distribution in the neighborhoods of Baixão (left) and Cacimbas (right)



Source: Developed by the authors from data from the municipal government of Arapiraca (2019)

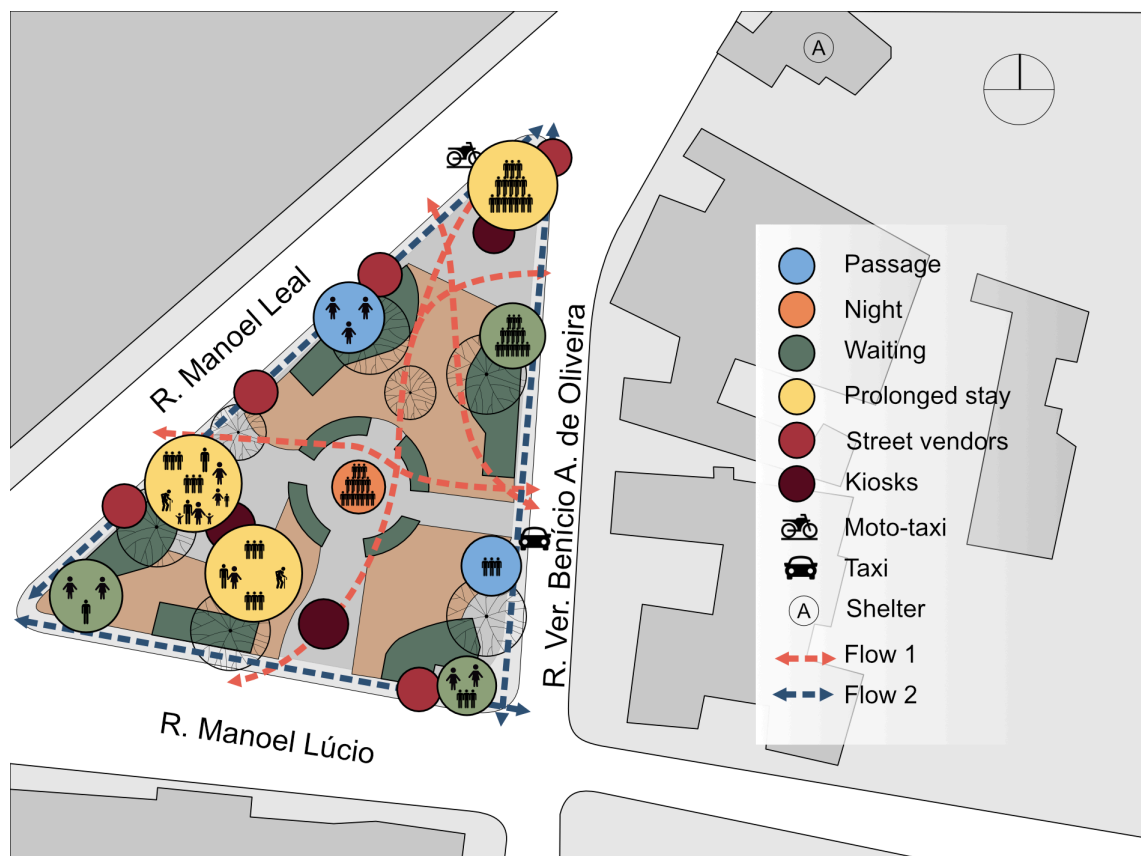
In relation to the internal uses, Coronel José Alves square is used daily for leisure activities because it has good facilities such as benches, trees, and a children's playground. There are no food uses within it

because it does not have the facilities needed for this and does not have vendors making informal sales. The Pereira Magalhães square, however, is used daily for various recreational, religious, educational, leisure, commercial and food services activities, because it has kiosks along its perimeter. Around the square, informal activities stand out, and street vendors come daily to sell fruits and vegetables, and snacks such as sandwiches and juices.

The data collected in the Pereira Magalhães square, in Cacimbas, demonstrates a socioeconomic similarity among the female and male genders, classified as low income or in a situation of social vulnerability. Meanwhile, the majority (72%) of the users of Coronel José Alves square in Baixão (with a higher average income and more homogeneous surroundings) are socioeconomically similar, and classified between low and middle income, thus higher than those of the users of Pereira Magalhães square in Cacimbas. Among the most important differences, it can be identified that the users of Coronel José Alves square have a higher educational level, a variety of professions, live in neighborhoods with similar or better socioeconomic conditions, and have transportation means, such as cars and motorcycles, which they use to reach the square.

Based on this recognition, we identified how users appropriate each square. Figure 3 presents data for Pereira Magalhães square in Cacimbas, which has lower mean income and more socioeconomically heterogeneous surroundings.

Figure 3: Behavioral mapping of Pereira Magalhães square



Source: Developed by the authors (2019).

The yellow sector has the locations that are most utilized. During all hours of the day, it is common to

have prolonged permanence of both men and women, whether in groups or alone, who establish some type of contact. In the green sector, we also find a high frequency of use by both genders, however, for more temporary actions, such as waiting for a bus, taxi, or moto-taxi. The blue sector is an area of passage, and it is very rare for a user to remain in it without a specific objective. Finally, the orange sector is classified as one of prolonged stay. However, its use is quite specific, and it is only used after 5 pm by men and women who attend a collective shelter located near the square. At this time, the occupants who come to spend the night in the shelter stay in this location until the institution opens at 6 pm. For this reason, it is called the night sector.

The mapping of Coronel José Alves square, in Baixão, showed in figure 4, has the same sectors as the other square.

Figure 4: Behavioral Mapping of Coronel José Alves square



Source: Prepared by the authors (2019).

The sectors for prolonged stay (yellow) are on the sides of the square and are the most used spaces, due to the shade provided by trees in each location. A predominance of relations of contact between the two genders in all the time periods is observed, especially of the elderly who gather in the morning and afternoon and speak with each other for hours. Meanwhile, the sectors of waiting (green) have rotating uses by both genders, seeming to involve users who use the square before and after work. The sectors of passage (blue), as the name suggests, involves only fast actions and it is common to find both genders in all parts of these areas. Finally, the night sector (orange) is essentially occupied by students from the state high school Quintela Cavalcante. There is a permanence of a group with men and women in constant conversation, while there are also couples who only interact with each other. It is a totally homogeneous group that rarely speaks with people of other profiles, when they are also

present in this sector.

After this brief characterization, the next items will discuss the establishment of the relations and restrictions, obeying the categorization that emerged from the interviews.

4.2 Restricted contact because of morphological attributes

This category focuses on understanding how the space and its morphological attributes act to restrict contact between different socioeconomic groups. As presented in the behavioral mapping, the Pereira Magalhães square, in Cacimbas, has some spaces that are more used than others. Through the interviews, we found similar responses by the participants, who refuse to use the center of the square, because of the low visibility due to the bushes that interrupt the view from most of the perimeter of the square, as seen in figure 5.

Figure 5: Aerial View of Pereira Magalhães Square, indicating the low visibility at its center



Source: Google Earth (2022) and authors (2019).

Due to this characteristic, it is an area used by members of the collective shelter (Night sector – orange – in the behavioral mapping) located at the edge of the square. According to the responses, this sector is avoided because it is considered a place of drug users, so someone who does not want to be “labeled as a user” is unlikely to go there. All those interviewed warned against using the sector at night. The low visibility also increases the sense of insecurity, discouraging its use.

It is thus clear that there is a subjective but strong association between a space and its users, to the point of directly influencing behavior for social avoidance. The “place of others” is avoided because one may be perceived as the other, and this is not wanted. The physical space and the “other” are so intrinsically linked that they are considered as a single thing when users express the reasons for this

avoidance. In this case, the rejection is of both the space and the people who use it.

I do not advise you to stay there after six at night, because it is dangerous, there are all kinds of people [...] Drug users, thieves, people who drink, you know, people different from us [...] when I need to stay here in the luncheonette at night, I am always afraid, even if my father is also here [...] [Sixth woman interviewed, 22, a student, resident of the neighborhood of Santa Esmeralda – Our emphasis]

4.3 Contact Restricted by socio-economic attributes

In this category we analyze how the socioeconomic position of those interviewed influences the formation, effectuation, and restriction of social contact with other individuals of similar and different social profiles in the squares studied.

In the first case, some people interviewed in Pereira Magalhães square, which has more heterogeneous socioeconomic surroundings, reported that they experienced some situations of restrictions because of socioeconomic factors, but that were also shaped by spatial factors. They are adolescents, students and residents of locations that are stigmatized and who believe that living in these locations interferes in the progress of relations engaged in at the squares, such as dating and work opportunities. Below we highlight some examples of how they describe these restrictions.

Here in the square I speak with my girlfriends and acquaintances, while I wait for the bus [...] **I have made friends here, almost a boyfriend, but he did not want to go there to Pau Ferro¹ and we broke up [...]** Last month I spoke with a girl at the snack bar about a job, but since I need to go home at night, I would have to leave earlier and she did not agree [...] I can't wait to leave Pau Ferro, I wind up losing lots of things because I live there, both friends and opportunities. [Second interviewee, 18, student, resident of Vila Pau Ferro, Arapiraca-AL. Our emphasis].

I spoke with people known and from other places, we meet on Facebook and Instagram and agree to meet here after school [...] **but twice I was talking, here in the square, and I said that I am from Brisa², and the person suddenly changes [...]** I think that this happens because no one wants to date someone and go there at night, you know? It's dangerous [...] one of these people was more than me [*had different socioeconomic conditions, in this case, better*] so I think that living there in Brisa complicates this part of dating, not only here in the square, but in general. [First interviewee, 18, a woman who is a student and lives in the neighborhood of Olho D'Água dos Cazuzinhos, where the Conjunto Habitacional Brisa do Lago is located. Our emphasis].

¹ Located in the rural zone of Arapiraca, 5 Km from the Pereira Magalhães square.

² Brisa do Lago is the first housing complex of Arapiraca built under the federal program Minha Casa Minha Vida in 2010 for more than 2,000 low income families. It is located in the neighborhood Olho D'Água dos Cazuzinhos, 3 Km from the Pereira Magalhães square.



Like the other square, some users of the Coronel José Alves square emphasized the discourse of restrictions because of the place of residence. They are also students who live at the housing complex Residencial Jardim das Paineiras³ in the neighborhood of Senador Nilo Coelho, adjacent to Baixão, who had a relationship limited due to stereotypes about residents of the housing complex.

You see, I always use these clothes, for me it is normal, but they always look at me different and judge me for this. They say to me: **she must be from Paineiras** [...] Everyone who stays here knows where the students are from, either from Paineiras or Zélia [...] **People with better conditions than we have** [*she refers to herself and to the group with five other girls*] **they never want to get serious with us, they think that because we are from there, it is easier to hook up and leave us.** [Ninth person interviewed, 20, a student, resident of the neighborhood Zélia Barbosa. Our emphasis].

I think that the **fact of being me does not help much** [...] You know the song by Criolo that says that people pass and look at each other and do not speak, and use the excuse that not even Christ pleased them, that's how it is, but this only happens because **I live in Jardim das Paineiras, I wear these clothes, I do not have money, and I have always lived like this. No one from outside speaks with people like me, because they know right away where I am from, even people from the same neighborhood who live farther up.** [13th person interviewed, 18, student, resident of the neighborhood Senador Nilo Coelho, in the housing complex Jardim das Paineiras. Our emphasis].

The discourses of the students from both squares extended to other dimensions, beyond the restricted relations of conversation. When encouraged to better explain the situations described, they included aspects of restriction due to the poverty of the family, which automatically places them in conditions of limited consumption of clothes, food and education. According to what the students said, it is as if their appearance reflects these factors. That is, there was a formation of contact and then a restriction, with this restriction suffering partial influence from the space, even if indirectly. It is not the space of the square itself, or even its position in the urban grid or how accessible it is to different groups, but the space from where people come, revealing restrictions placed on them daily. It does not only involve the establishment of social contacts, but opportunities for growth, such as looking for work, study, and leisure.

In the second case, the restriction takes place by people who decide to not maintain contact. Generally, they are middle class men and women who work around the square, but feel disturbed to respond to or to begin any relation with other people who also frequent the square and who are classified as different or low income. One student, for example, said that she avoids staying in the same sector as other students, due to her knowledge of where these people come from, more precisely residents of the housing complex Jardim das Paineiras. The student also lives there, and when asked about this, emphasized her preference to keep a distance, especially when in other neighborhoods with greater visibility.

³ This housing complex was created in 2000 for families removed from some favelas in downtown Arapiraca. It now has more than 500 low income families or those in a situation of social vulnerability who use educational, leisure, commerce and more general services of the Baixão neighborhood.



We usually stay in all the places here in the square, but at times there are people we know, who are close, and we move away, because they have a bad reputation, but we don't do anything, but some do, and I know who they are [...] It's bad to think like that, but I know most of them, and I do not trust [them] and I prefer to stay here farther away and never over there. [Eighth person interviewed, 18, student, resident of the neighborhood Senador Nilo Coelho, in the housing complex Jardim das Paineiras. Our emphasis].

The statements of the other two people interviewed in the Coronel José Alves square, transcribed below, support the statements of the students mentioned previously from the perspective of the other side and indicate how this model of restriction takes place.

Here in the square I have spoken with some unknown people, but they are unimportant conversations, both for me, and for the other person, at least that's what I recall. **But of course if I am sitting here and a man or woman who looks strange comes by I don't pay attention [...]** People like that come, it's good that I wasn't alone and soon I left [...]. **I didn't have any contact [...]. I think that it was the group there above** [referring to the *Jardim das Paineiras* housing complex]. [Seventh person interviewed, 36, lawyer, resident in the Baixão neighborhood. Our emphasis].

All kinds of people stay here in the square, at all times, I have spoken with some people, but not too much, they are conversations with someone who ask for information, the time, banal conversations, and I respond [...] **they are people who you can talk to [...]** this happens when I am on a break from work, because when I go out, it's nearly night, I don't speak with anyone, because there are people here who cause concern. **If I see these people, I probably won't talk to them the way I do with a retiree who is always here.** [Interviewee 17, 29, nurse, resident of Centro de Arapiraca. Our emphasis].

Meanwhile, in Pereira Magalhães square, the statement of another person interviewed indicates that in addition to social conditions defining issues of communication, they also influence relationship issues as mentioned by the students. When encouraged to better explain the situation, he changes the subject, but leaves it understood that he did not want to prolong a relationship for a few reasons, among them the condition of the other person.

It affects the relationship, today everything affects it [...] I get together with my employees here, and I think that it affects it because I am speaking with those who work for me [...] **I have spoken with other people, got involved, but it did not work out well because of the incompatibility of locations of residence of the two [...]** and there are other things common to people that need to be in harmony with the other person to have something [...] I still study, I work a lot, to have someone who does not have this complicates a relationship, **generally the girls here do not have this, so it doesn't work.** [Interviewee 18, 26 years old, civil engineer, resident in the Centro neighborhood of Arapiraca-AL. Our emphasis].

Another interviewee emphasized the aspect of age as another factor that restricts contact among different people:

I know many people who use the square in the morning, because pretty often I am here, waiting for the bus, and also there are many people there from Brisa, so we get to know each other and talk, say hello, talk of many things [...] yes **there are people from other places here, there are always people here, you can see students, people playing, but they are unlikely to talk to me, but you can see that the young people only like other young people.** [Interviewee 10, 52, unemployed, resident of the neighborhood Olho D'Água dos Cazuzinhos, in the housing complex Brisa do Lago. Our emphasis].

The statements of these interviewees, and of those not mentioned, present particularities that reveal both the personal conditions of each one and the influence of the square on the establishment of social relations or their avoidance. Thus, the interviews support the understanding that socioeconomic condition is an important factor for social relations established in these spaces, as discussed by Giddens (2008), Goffman (1963) and Netto (2014). In our case, we see that there is spatial avoidance because of a hesitancy to be associated to another social group that is different and frequently uses a space. There is, therefore, an association between the space and its users: "I will not use the same space, so I won't be confused with them".

4.4 Restricted contact due to individual attributes

As seen in the two other categories discussed, the restricted contacts between different social groups is materialized in various forms in the squares studied, whether by prejudice or in preferences for determined spaces to avoid the other. The main objective of this category is to understand the roots of this restriction, given that it is intrinsic to each interviewee, in a way that is relatively independent from their socioeconomic condition (such as the fact of having a personality that is more or less open to social interaction, or to a routine that impedes these encounters). The results show that a restriction by individual attributes takes place mainly through three main groups of reasons: personal characteristics of shyness or introspection, routines, and moral conduct.

To illustrate the first case, we have the following statements:

I am the quietest one at home, I was always one to stay silent, we get used to not having much contact with someone who is not our friend, one thing is to speak with your own people, who live there with you, study with you, live close to you, another thing is to come to someone and know that person is different and you have a long talk with them [...] I think this only happens at parties that I went to in the Bosque, in Ceci Cunha, because I am with friends and a girl comes along and we talk, but not to date or anything like that. [Interviewee seventeen, 18, student, resident of the neighborhood Olho D'Água dos Cazuzinhos. Our emphasis].

Look, I don't know anyone that well, **I am not going to start a conversation, because it's too annoying, I keep to myself, when someone speaks, I will speak [...]** It's really bad when you speak with someone and the person



doesn't respond to you [...] it never happened to me, but it's because I don't go up to anyone. [Interviewee thirty, 22, student, resident of the neighborhood Zélia Barbosa. Our emphasis].

The routine is very rushed, to get here and talk for hours and hours, beyond the breaks that we need, it's not very common [...] for example, I am on my break, and when I can, I go take the chance to speak with someone I know or do some tasks, **so, it's something about me that I don't want to talk with other people and take my time alone or with someone I know** [...] yes, and there is the whole conversation, the person, what to talk about [...] so it's easier to avoid it. [Interviewee twenty-seven, 36, a woman, lawyer, resident of the Baixão neighborhood. Our emphasis].

Some people interviewed, both men and women, consider their routines in the squares as responsible for the restricted contact with other users, making clear that it is not an aversion to a specific social group, only to the incompatibility of schedules. According to Giddens (2008), the typical patterns of movement of individuals can be represented as the repetition of routine activities over a few days or longer periods of time-space.

In addition, moral conducts also appear to define some relations and directly influence restrictions. The statements below reinforce Goffman's (1963) understanding, that a social relation is only established through a positioning of individuals, within a social space of symbolic categories and ties. In this case, we see that symbolic rules for women seek to restrict contact with men, because the image that they may pass by initiating an engagement can be perceived negatively.

If it is necessary I speak, if not, I am not one to speak with someone I don't know **because it's not good for a woman to speak with just any one, especially if it's a man.** [Fifth person Interviewed, 37, nursing assistant, resident of the neighborhood Primavera. Our emphasis].

I speak, but I avoid speaking because I stop here to eat and it's very fast, if I were to speak to someone it would interfere with my snack and it will take more time and I'll be late, I've seen it [...] if it's a man, I don't dare, **because if you smile here people think that you want something and I have a husband.** [Interviewee eight, 28, receptionist, resident of the neighborhood Padre Antônio de Lima. Our emphasis].

The position adopted by these people to justify the lack of contact with others follows what was discussed during this study. In terms of quick routines that take place in squares and that impede the establishment of some contact, we understand that much of the daily conduct is not directly motivated, but takes place as a non-intentional flow of action, a fact highlighted by Giddens (2008). The routine and the moral rules appear, in this situation, as factors that strongly influence relations, because they are manifest as bridges to a restriction. Finally, in this category we perceived that the restriction of contact is established in the squares studied for reasons not exclusive to socio-economic aspects, despite being the main manifestation. The social and cultural construction of each participant appears to be intrinsic, related in this way with the squares that each one uses.



5 Final thoughts

In this study we analyzed restrictions to social contacts between different social groups in two squares of Arapiraca, Alagoas. Of those interviewed, three types of mechanisms associated to these restrictions emerged: morphological, socio-economic, and individual.

Restrictions related to morphological attributes are revealed to be less determinant in the context of the squares analyzed, judging by the statements given by those interviewed. This is probably because the squares are located in areas well integrated to the fabric of the city, with easy access to different social groups and good diversity of uses that attract and reinforce the presence of these groups in the spaces. In one of the squares we found an area of low visibility that discouraged some social groups from using it, generating a type of micro-segregation. In general, however, the squares studied are small and highly permeable spaces, whose designs, in principle, are not apparently responsible for significant restrictions in the relations between members of these groups. To the contrary, they create conditions for the copresence and spatial crossing among them, which was evident by the profusion of statements about contacts effectively established between members of different groups. This emphasizes the importance of copresence, reinforced by the recurrence created by the daily routines of users, as a fundamental condition for deeper relations, as in fact transpired in the interviews (conversations, flirting, dating, job hunting, and others).

Meanwhile, the restriction by socio-economic attributes proved to be more relevant and appeared with greater strength in the statements of those interviewed, indicating that the potential for copresence can often be minimized or even neutralized by the absence of a predisposition to contact caused by non-spatial or morphological conditions. This type of restriction occurs in at least two different contexts in both squares. The first concerns the homogeneous profiles who, even with similar conditions, and even living in proximity to the housing projects, do not establish relations between each other. To the contrary, they do not recognize each other, or avoid each other. The second concerns people with higher income who do not want to have contact with other users of the square due to prejudices. In these cases, the space influences only indirectly, by means of the stigma that living in certain locations in the city brings to its residents.

The third form of restriction, for individual attributes, demonstrated that the social and cultural construction of the people interviewed is a determining factor in the restriction to contact, by placing moral rules and conduct in the foreground. In this case, the capacity of the space is also limited, even if it continues to be essential to its ability to bring different people together. Even if stereotypes continue to be active and influence behaviors of avoidance, physical proximity and copresence can be at least a first step for deconstructing prejudices, as Rasse (2015) shows. After all, as Goffman (1963) argues, copresence alone makes a person accessible to the other, by establishing a communication between both, even if nonverbal or conscious. In the specific case of this study, relations more long lasting than a casual encounter in the square are born from this copresence and even if they do not advance, may have contributed to breaking down pre-existing prejudices and mistaken interpretations.

Social routines also appear as bridges for social relations, reinforcing the findings of Cattell (2008), to the degree to which daily needs place individuals in constant movement, which serves to intermediate opportunities for contact and restriction. Beyond these factors, the squares mediate contact, but behavioral interests, engendered in social, economic, and cultural conceptions of users, make a difference in the establishment of a relation or in its restriction.



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