



Meanings in motion: A semiotic essay on the surroundings of a social sports project



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ABSTRACT

This semiotic essay investigates the surroundings of a social sports project located in a peripheral area, exploring the symbolic interactions and cultural meanings present in this context. Using a reflective approach, the study examines how social dynamics are influenced by urban structure and local socioeconomic conditions. The analysis combines direct and documentary observations to offer insights into the complex reality faced by the individuals involved in the project.

Keywords: Semiotic essay, Social sports project.

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INTRODUCTION

"Connecting today means leading to the intersection of two types of mobility, the mobility of our body in the physical spaces we inhabit and the mobility of the informational spaces we visit. Everything moves in connection."

Lucia Santaella

Ethnomethodological studies emerged as an influential sociological current in the 1960s in the United States, inaugurated by Harold Garfinkel with his work "Studies in Ethnomethodology" (1984). This fundamental approach challenges traditional conceptions by exploring how the development and understanding of a society is shaped by the daily interactions of its members. The essence of ethnomethodological studies lies in the detailed analysis of ordinary social practices, seeking to unveil the meanings underlying the actions of each individual within a group.

At the same time, this perspective echoes the concept of dynamic interpretant in Peirce's semiotics, which proposes a continuous process of interpretation and signification. The dynamic interpretant represents the path through which the semantic investigation develops, seeking to achieve a "final interpretant" that encapsulates as much meaning as possible for a concept or idea (Santaella, 2010). Although it is a theoretical ideal, this concept guides the search for a deeper understanding of social and cultural practices, encouraging constant reflection on the knowledge produced.

The ethnomethodological approach is not limited to simple observation; It seeks to reveal the implicit norms and underlying assumptions that govern social interaction. By studying how individuals construct and maintain social order through their daily behaviors, ethnomethodological researchers challenge dominant narratives about the functioning of society, highlighting the importance of everyday practices in shaping social reality.

In the contemporary context, the applications of ethnomethodological studies have expanded to several areas, from detailed microsocial analyses to studies on technology, organizations, and communication. This approach continues to influence sociology and related disciplines, offering a robust method for exploring the complexity of human interactions and the meanings these interactions carry for individuals and social groups.

In short, ethnomethodological studies and Peirce's concept of dynamic interpretant offer powerful *frameworks* for social analysis, encouraging a deeper understanding of everyday practices as fundamental to understanding social and cultural life. These perspectives continue to challenge and enrich our understanding of contemporary and historical social dynamics.

With the current reality (non-performance of actions due to the global pandemic) presenting itself as an obstacle to direct observations and contact with the daily lives of the actions, it was decided to safely insert oneself in the surroundings (not foreign to the researcher, given their

peripheral origin), in order to obtain a portion of this reality to be analyzed. Since the educational themes of Olympism could be a positive path of search, and that the concept of social inclusion offered concrete objectives for the evaluation of a possible change in a given reality, the question is, what is this reality? The documentary analysis (Perovano-Camargo et al., 2022) showed positive intentions of the social sports program, but it is known that the reality of the graduates goes beyond the smiling photos of the reports and social networks.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In the process of inquiry to approach an adequate analysis of the walk around the social sports project, we will use as a theoretical and methodological reference authors who enable us to understand the meanings of the realities experienced by people considered "vulnerable".

Since the social sports project is certified as an Olympic Education, it seeks to understand more deeply how this methodology could dialogue with the territory. The author Binder (2012), who deals with the educational themes of Olympism, cites, in her studies, the cultural difficulties of educational communication, given the clear differences of European values in other geographical regions, as well as determinants of religious beliefs, political impositions and even issues of personal and subjective orders of various members of different societies. The Olympic educational theme of "respect for others" has perhaps been the most accepted globally, finding equivalents in other realities, such as the concept of "ubuntu", from African culture. From the vision of ubuntu, a society cannot be whole if there is no respect for all its members, because "I am only one because of the others". Based on this premise, this value can be related to the practice of social inclusion, in which Bailey (2005) systematizes inclusive thinking into four categories: Spatial/Economic, Relational, Functional and Power; being able to relate to the classes to which Donnelly most focused in his studies: social, gender and ethnicity.

In the design of social sports projects, there is a need to understand how to work from its participants. Nichols (2007) used the classifications of Brantingham and Faust (1976) to state that there would be the following forms: primary (participants without social risk), secondary (participants at social risk – vulnerability) and tertiary (participants who have already transgressed the law). Nichols adds that the design of the project would be the sum of the risk with the mechanisms (distraction, retention and pro-social development) and their ways of evaluating results in relation to the objectives.

In advance, it is known that Olympic educational values are Eurocentric, re-signified in the curricula of the programs – Binder's (2012) studies make clear the processes of constant signification and resignification, which can be allied to the concept of semiosis of Peircian semiotics – and,

finally, resignified by each participant, which may or may not impact their life trajectories. In addition, these values can also include, exclude, or be indifferent to its practitioners.

The process of inquiry (PEIRCE, 2003) of the study seeks, by means of indications of social inclusion, the sensations (semiotic firstness) of the experiences, the facts (semiotic secondities) and the meanings perceived by the practitioners (reflections or semiotic thirdness), to be evaluated in another study.

In relation to the indicators of exclusion (health, education, unemployment, etc.), they would not be changed if the processes of their cause were not addressed. The dimensions of social inclusion systematized by Bailey (2005) are related to possible effects that sports practices could generate in this process, presented in Chart 1:

Table 1 – Dimensions of social inclusion/exclusion

Dimension	Concept	Possible effects of sports practice
Spatial	To bring together the economic and social differences and distances of individuals.	To unite individuals from diverse economic and social backgrounds in a shared and valued interest.
Relational	Generate a sense of belonging and acceptance.	Offer a sense of belonging to a team, club, or program.
Functional	Increase the knowledge, skills, and understanding of individuals.	Provide opportunities for the development of valuable skills and competencies.
Power	Change the location of power control.	Increase "community capital" by spreading social media and increasing community cohesion and civic pride.

Fonte: (Bailey, 2005, p. 76).

We see that the practice of sports, based on the thought of Bailey (2005), could change a certain reality by uniting individuals from different social origins, providing opportunities for coexistence in the construction of relationship networks or even forms of economic improvement resulting from the situations posed by the practice. It could also offer an improvement in social relations by improving the sense of collectivity around a social sports program; develop skills, capacities, functionalities and competencies, which would then be used to transform the participants' life stories; and to refine critical capacities and worldview exposure, changing the place of power and improving the emergence of leadership, social and community cohesion for decision-making.

There is also a doubt regarding the "transfer of sporting virtues" to other contexts of life. There is the question of whether the courage required to make a tackle in *rugby* or the sense of obligation that a player acquires by rearranging the game by observing the rules are qualities that he would also bring to the difficulties or confusions of human moral life. This analysis of transference, if tested empirically in a cold form, could be taken into a behaviorist or atomistic theory that would become blind to the complexities of human motivation. If the view of morality were restricted only to the combination of rule-abiding and the idea that sport is independent of morality, we would be

opening ourselves up to deeply questionable and even barbaric forms of competition – from free-fist boxing to gladiatorial fights to the death – without any moral censure or even debate (CARR, 1998).

Nichols (2007) argues that the role of sport in social programs can generate positive impacts, depending on planning and evaluation of evidence, bringing a categorization of the typology of reduction based on the level of risk of the participants based on the thinking of Brantingham and Faust (1976), presented in Chart 2:

Table 2 - Participants' risk level typology

Level	Concept	Objective
Primary reduction	Promotion of conditions that avoid negative behaviors and encourage positive ones.	Improve the community.
Secondary reduction	Identification of vulnerable territories and intervention towards prevention.	Prevent risk groups.
Tertiary reduction	Work with those already identified as transgressors of the law.	Re-educate and prevent recidivism.

Source: Brantingham and Faust (1976).

Based on this typology exposed in Chart 2, Brantingham and Faust (1976) relate the design of sports programs to the risks of the participants, emphasizing the importance of identifying and categorizing the levels of risk in order to effectively design and implement social programs that respond to the specific needs of different groups.

PERIPHERAL REALITIES: REFLECTIONS ON DAILY LIFE AND SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

I allowed myself, in an essayistic character, to position myself in the first person from this paragraph, of course leaving open to stylistic criticism for the continuity of the work. But my interpretation, as a non-neutral point of view, I believe can contribute to reflection.

The Knowledge Station is located at the beginning of a planned neighborhood (COHAB style, Social Interest Housing implemented by the Housing Companies), called Continental City (in the Europe Sector, its zones are named with mentions to the continents of the globe), built in the mid-90s. However, the previous formation of this geographical territory dates back to the history of its bordering neighborhood, Novo Horizonte, at the end of the long Avenida Brasil.

On a specific day, October 28, 2020, during what could be considered a pre-second wave period of the Covid-19 pandemic, I get ready, putting on my mask, and leave the house. I greet Mrs. Lúcia, my elderly and black neighbor, who lives alone and works as a caregiver for a bedridden elderly person. I navigate a long street in my peripheral neighborhood, Carapina Grande, ranked 234th out of 238 neighborhoods in Greater Vitória by the Atlas of Human Development in Brazil, behind even notoriously challenging areas where I once worked as a coordinator and social educator in the National Program for Public Security with Citizenship (PRONASCI).



Path to a significant leisure spot: a bar frequented intensely in the evenings, next to a large green area and a meticulously maintained official football field, complete with bleachers, changing rooms and a barbecue area - benefits resulting from the political influence of a local councilman with a passion for the sport. I pass by several houses of all kinds, from the rare and majestic, usually protected, to the most common and simple, open and colorful with clotheslines and children playing in the street.

My journey continues as I cross the BR-101, which crosses Brazil from north to south, connecting Touros, in Rio Grande do Norte, to São José do Norte, in Rio Grande do Sul. To shorten the way to the Knowledge Station, an area I have known well since childhood, I pass through a small favela, prostitution spots and drug trafficking hotspots.

Arriving at the Novo Horizonte neighborhood, ranked 173rd out of 238 in the ranking of neighborhoods in Greater Vitória by the Atlas of Human Development in Brazil, I dive into the history of this place that originated in the 50s as a rural subdivision. Until 1967, the center of Vitória was home to the coffee-growing elite of Espírito Santo and prostitution zones, resulting in notable class conflicts. The government's response was the forced expulsion of the prostitutes to a remote area, called São Sebastião, known locally as Carapeba (which from the "Tupi akará péua" means "noisy music played by various instruments in complete dissonance", a description that matches the testimonies of the regulars of this old red-light area that I talked to, several brothels glued to each other in complete disorder). This neighborhood, initially devoid of infrastructure, depended mainly on the income generated by brothels, which continued to serve the elite of downtown Vitória and the workers of the port of Tubarão.

Cigana Street, which was open 24 hours a day, was the epicenter of the activity, with all buildings transformed into brothels. Today, these structures have become residences, maintaining their original architecture, often without current residents, merchants, and even religious leaders imagining what happened inside their own homes in the past. The former Nightclub Atlântica, an icon of the 70s frequented by politicians and high-income people, now houses a private clinic for drug addicts, as detailed in the research coordinated by professor Rossana Mattos (2014). This exploration reveals not only the physical evolution of the neighborhood, but also the persistent social challenges faced by its communities over the decades.

BETWEEN CONTRASTS AND CHALLENGES: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE NOVO HORIZONTE NEIGHBORHOOD

Currently, the Novo Horizonte neighborhood stands out for an urbanized main avenue full of commercial establishments, often serving as a passage corridor for the resorts of Serra. This road extends through branches that reach marginal regions, where large pockets of poverty are



concentrated. At the entrance to the neighborhood, a large supermarket shares space with a gated community, contrasting with adjacent areas such as a dirt field, a busy health clinic and a church that offers social assistance services. Varied shops and a second large supermarket chain mark the extremes of the neighborhood, limited to the entrance to Cidade Continental, where the Knowledge Station is located — a sports complex that stands out as an oasis in the middle of the periphery, located near the former area of a prison.

At this geographical point, once known as São Sebastião, a police station emerged as a response to crimes associated with prostitution in an isolated region lacking infrastructure. In 1983, near the Novo Horizonte police station, a custody house was established which, over time and the overcrowding of state prisons, became a prison unit. In May 2006, in the face of extreme overcrowding, metal cells, known as "microwaves", were installed to expand the already exceeded capacity. These inhumane conditions resulted in riots, mass escapes, and fires, sparking terror in the vicinity and requiring the intervention of the Special Missions Battalion. Only in November 2009, by determination of the National Council of Justice (CNJ), the cells were deactivated after housing more than 3 thousand prisoners, revealing a scenario of degradation comparable to few in the history of humanity.

In addition to these extreme conditions, the National Council for Criminal and Penitentiary Policy (CNPCCP) had requested federal intervention in Espírito Santo due to complaints of torture, dismemberment and precariousness in prison units. Overcrowding, lack of basic infrastructure such as water and power, and unsanitary conditions were just some of the documented atrocities, showing a blatant disregard for human rights.

After these impactful reflections, I remember the words of a manager of sports social programs about the investment needed to transform young lives, comparing it to the cost of keeping young people in socio-educational measures. This comparison not only questions the basic humanity involved, but also highlights the effectiveness and value of humanized approaches in youth.

Walking along the bike path, I observe the sports facilities of the Knowledge Station through the railings, where a well-kept field and worn signs coexist in an unusual silence since March 2020. As I leave the perimeter of the complex, I see the image of Coubertin adorning one of the structures, contrasting with a footvolley field and a bar nearby.

Upon returning to Carapina Grande, my neighborhood of origin, I remove my mask and sanitize my hands, reflecting on my field day. The experiences, although impactful, are a daily reflection of a reality that I know well, marked by social contrasts, injustices and stories of resistance that transcend generations.



REFLECTIONS ON SOCIAL CONTRASTS AND RESISTANCE: A CRITICAL LOOK

After an intense day of immersion in the Novo Horizonte neighborhood, it is inevitable not to reflect on the complexities and contradictions that permeate this community. As I observed the urbanization of the main avenue, full of varied shops and modern establishments such as gated communities and supermarkets, I could not help but contrast this reality with the marginal ramifications that reveal pockets of poverty and social inequality.

The absence of activities in sports complexes since the beginning of the pandemic reflects not only a temporary pause in the possibilities of social inclusion initiatives, but also raises questions about the sustainability and impact of these programs on affected communities. The discussion about investments in social sports programs versus socio-educational measures resonates as a powerful reminder of the importance of humanized and preventive approaches to youth.

By revisiting the neighborhood through the memory of its transformations and resistances, from the days of São Sebastião to the contemporary challenges faced by residents, we are led to contemplate not only the visible aspects of urbanization and development, but also the hidden narratives of marginalization and adaptation. The history of Novo Horizonte is marked by a complex legacy of social conflicts and struggles for rights, reflecting an intricate web of cultural identities and collective aspirations.

As I documented my observations, the residents' life stories echoed in the streets: from the fleeting prosperity of the brothels of old São Sebastião to the persistence of today's residents in the midst of ongoing challenges. These narratives not only humanize the barren landscape of statistics and reports, but also highlight the resilience and solidarity that shape the social fabric of the neighborhood.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In concluding this reflection on the surroundings of the social sports project, its social dynamics, and the intersection with semiotics, it is essential to reaffirm the crucial role that these approaches play as agents of transformation and social inclusion. The journey through these neighborhoods revealed not only the stark contrasts between urban development and marginalization, but also the stories of resilience and hope that permeate their streets and communities. The social sports project under analysis has its mailing address in Cidade Continental – Sector Europe, a residential complex that is extremely influenced by Novo Horizonte and its history. The intention of this essay was only to initially recognize the territory, the current realities and dynamics will clearly be different.

Semiotics, through Peirce's concept of dynamic interpretant, reminds us of the complexity of the interpretations and meanings that permeate the social and cultural practices of the region. Each



interaction, whether on the sports field, in urbanized public spaces or in the historical remnants of a deactivated prison, carries with it layers of meaning that can only be fully understood through a sensitive and contextualized look.

Physical education, in turn, emerges as a powerful tool to promote social integration and community health. While observing the sports facilities that, even paralyzed by the pandemic, continue to symbolize an oasis of opportunity in the midst of adversity. It is not just about teaching athletic skills, but about fostering values such as respect, cooperation, and self-determination that are fundamental to building a more just and equitable society.

The social issues raised, from the history of São Sebastião to the contemporary challenges faced by residents, echo as a call to action. It is imperative that public policies and community initiatives are aligned not only with mitigating inequalities, but also with promoting a culture of respect and dignity for all. Physical education, inserted in this context, has the potential not only to provide opportunities for physical and mental development, but also to strengthen social bonds and empower individuals to face the obstacles that come their way.



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