


REVELRY IN THE STREETS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN PUBLIC POLICIES FOR CARNIVAL BLOCKS

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses public policies aimed specifically at carnival blocks prepared for the carnival of the year 2023 in the cities of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Belo Horizonte. These are the following notices: "Folia RJ 2023 – Bloco nas Ruas", "Award for Recognition of Cultural Trajectory of Street Carnival Blocks," and "Financial Aid for Street Blocks". The analysis goes through issues related to the definition of "carnival block", the budget foreseen for each notice, the conditions and requirements for registration, as well as expected counterparts. Finally, I carry out a comparative analysis between these initiatives.

Keywords: Carnival block. Street carnival. Promotion of Carnival. Public Policy.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to observe the different public policies that aim to safeguard, guarantee, and boost the work of street carnival blocks in several cities in the country. At first, my question was whether there were initiatives by governments in this regard. Once the existence was confirmed, I chose to survey some of them and compare them, an effort that I undertake along these lines. The issue arose due to the difficulties that agents in the artistic and cultural fields faced in the context of the pandemic, especially the decrease in financial resources for their practices, fostered, among other things, by the federal government, represented at the time by Jair Bolsonaro. As a consequence, the resumption of the street carnival proved to be a huge challenge for several agents in the artistic-cultural field, including the carnival blocks. It is from this context that my interest in knowing and analyzing such public policies arises. In this way, I will discuss in the next few lines how the carnival blocks are seen by the government, as well as some initiatives by governments in order to make the parades of the blocks feasible in the year 2023.

Given the profusion of carnival parties in the streets of thousands of cities in Brazil, I chose to analyze three capitals in the southeast region of the country: Belo Horizonte, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo. The choice was made because they are three cities that hold street carnivals and have public policies aimed at the blocks, each with specificities, similarities, and differences, which I will examine in the next few lines. To this end, each topic of this article deals with a specific initiative that serves the blocks of each municipality in question, which are: Block in the Streets, in Rio de Janeiro; Award for Recognition of Cultural Trajectory of Street Carnival Blocks, in São Paulo; Financial Aid for Street Blocks, in Belo Horizonte. In the final considerations, I present what I inferred from the analysis of the documents. The study of each of the public policies will seek to evaluate how each of them defines "carnival block", the budget reserved for its achievement, the strategies, and the counterparts established. In addition, I will highlight data that are pertinent to the discussion I present here.

RIO DE JANEIRO: BLOCO NAS RUAS

In November 2022, the State Secretariat for Culture and Creative Economy (Sececij) launched a package called "Folia RJ 2023". This package was divided into four notices, namely, Bloco nas Ruas RJ, Folias de Reis RJ, Bate-Bola Classes RJ, and Não

Deixe o Samba Morrer 2. Each public notice aimed to meet the demands of different social groups, but with action in carnival. In the case of the street carnival, the very name of the public notice indicated who it was intended for: Blocos nas Ruas. The document defined carnival blocks as follows:

A group of people who traditionally gather and parade through the streets of the city, during Carnival celebrations and festivities, in a semi-organized way, wearing professionally made, improvised costumes or just following a specific theme, singing and dancing to songs to the rhythm of marchinhas, samba and popular songs (RIO DE JANEIRO, 2022, p. 3).

The public notice aimed to financially reward the carnival blocks. It established two categories of awards. Category "A" referred to individual blocks, that is, blocks that would make their entries independently. Category "B" served associations, federations, and leagues, which had to bring together a set of at least 5 carnival blocks (RIO DE JANEIRO, 2022, p.4). In this category, the prize would be for R\$125,000.00 (one hundred and twenty-five thousand reais) for up to 15 groups, totaling R\$1,875,000.00 (one million, eight hundred and seventy-five thousand reais). For those contemplated in category A, the total amount would be R\$1,250,000.00 (one million, two hundred and fifty thousand reais), divided into up to 50 blocks, which means R\$25,000.00 (twenty-five thousand reais) for each one. Therefore, the initiative had a total value of R\$ 3,125,000.00 (three million, one hundred and twenty-five thousand reais) (RIO DE JANEIRO, 2022, p. 5). All proponents should be legal entities, "for-profit or non-profit, with cultural nature and purposes in their constitutive acts, and may be Individual Microentrepreneur (MEI)" (RIO DE JANEIRO, 2022, p. 2).

As it is a public policy developed by the State Government, the beneficiaries were not strictly located in the capital; 40% of the total amount would be destined to the city of Rio de Janeiro. The classification of the contemplated blocks would take place through the completion of an annex that proves the cultural performance of the proponent or carnival block interested in the funds. In addition, the resources used in the call came from the State Fund of Culture of Rio de Janeiro.

In return for the amount received, each group, at the time of registration, should present an action in return for the financial award, in order to "promote access to cultural goods, products and services, especially among the less assisted layers of the population". With this, it aimed at "the dissemination of cultural manifestations and

traditions in Rio de Janeiro and the qualification of the cultural production chain". The action should then be carried out in person, focusing on the public of public educational institutions or civil society organizations. The initiative could provide for "a workshop, lecture or exhibition of an educational nature to transmit the knowledge and practices of the **BLOCO DE CARNAVAL**" (RIO DE JANEIRO, 2022, p. 3; emphasis in the document). To prove the accomplishment of the activity, each group committed to sending a video of at least ten minutes that recorded the action. The record should be made available on a digital platform (*YouTube* or *Vimeo*), with free access for the population.

In short, the public notice "Folia RJ 2023 – Bloco nas Ruas" was aimed at individual legal entities or associations, federations, or leagues. In total, 65 awards would be awarded, in the total amount of R\$ 3,125,000.00 (three million, one hundred and twenty-five thousand reais). In return, each recipient should carry out an action, preferably of an educational nature, that transmits the knowledge and practices of the carnival block. In this way, in addition to the carnival, the blocos would produce and disseminate knowledge about their repertoires and actions.

SÃO PAULO: AWARD FOR RECOGNITION OF THE CULTURAL TRAJECTORY OF STREET CARNIVAL BLOCKS

In São Paulo, in October 2022, the public notice for "Award for Recognition of Cultural Trajectory of Street Carnival Blocks – 1st Edition" was launched, with the general objective of "supporting the culture of São Paulo's carnival and contributing to the repair of the impacts caused by Covid-19" (SÃO PAULO, 2022, p. 2). In what I understand the specific objectives to be, he pointed out:

- a) strengthen and enhance the relevant artistic and/or cultural practices of the street carnival blocks, with a recognized history of performance; b) to decentralize and democratize access to public resources; c) to support the continuity of the action of the carnival blocks together with their members, based in the city of São Paulo on the street in their localities; d) recognize and reward activities that value the Street Carnival in the municipality, raising its cultural, professional, social and economic level, as well as develop and promote them as a cultural, work and entrepreneurship instrument, directly and indirectly;
- e) guarantee the population's access to information and leisure promoted by the Street Carnival Culture (SÃO PAULO, 2022, p.2);

Regarding the definition of "carnival blocks", the public notice characterized it as follows:

They are blocks, bands, fanfares, cordões, cortejo or afoxés bringing together unpaid members, accompanied by hired or unhired musicians, in the form of a band, musical ensemble, drums or orchestra, who parade in a certain street circuit of the city, in an organized way, wearing costumes and/or just following a specific theme, singing and/or dancing (SÃO PAULO, 2022, p. 3)

As the purpose of the public notice was to reward the blocks for their trajectories, the conditions to claim the award referred, above all, to performances in previous carnivals. Therefore, the blocks should prove that at least two parades were held in the city. In addition, the call recognized blocks that had continued operation for at least six years and should be made up of at least five people (SÃO PAULO, 2022, p. 3). To prove such information, at the time of registration, the blocks should submit a kind of portfolio with the most diverse information, especially that which subsidizes relevant historical aspects of their trajectories and organizations.

The notice also provided for a specific quota for women, black women, LGBTQIAP+ people, and people with disabilities (PCD). The purpose of these quotas was to recognize the protagonism of minority groups in the production and organization of street carnival. Even though the document guaranteed this benefit for at least one block for each of these highlighted social groups. In all, up to 300 blocks could be awarded since the total amount foreseen for the notice was R\$ 4,200,000.00 (four million and two hundred thousand reais), and the award established for each block contemplated would be R\$ 14,000.00 (fourteen thousand reais) (SÃO PAULO, 2022, p. 3).

The city hall established 20 criteria with a score from 0 to 5 for each of them that would make up the final score of each block. The criteria were as varied as possible, some more objective and others more subjective. They evaluated the fulfillment of the requirements established in the public notice, the history of the groups, the initiatives already carried out, the insertion in their territories, the integration with the community, the time of existence, the generation of employment and income, whether citizenship was promoted, the musical repertoire (SÃO PAULO, 2022, p. 12). In short, the city sought to broadly evaluate all the work carried out by the groups in their trajectories.

Finally, regarding the conditions of participation, these restricted participation to individuals over eighteen years of age, residing in the city of São Paulo for at least two years. In addition, proponents could not register more than one carnival block in the notice. It is not uncommon for organizers and producers of blocks to act in more than one group.

BELO HORIZONTE: FINANCIAL AID FOR STREET BLOCKS

In October 2022, the Municipal Tourism Company of Belo Horizonte S/A – BELOTUR launched the Public Notice for Financial Aid for Street Blocks (BELO HORIZONTE, 2022a). This policy that was not exactly a novelty since it had already been implemented in the carnivals of 2019 and 2020. To participate in the call, the blocks had to register on Belotur's website before trying for financial aid. To guide the organizers of the blocks, a guide was published with general information about registering for the parade in the city of Minas Gerais and also about applying for the financial aid notice.

It is in this guide that Belotur's definition of "street block" is found:

The Street Block is a spontaneous and popular manifestation, of a cultural nature, which values carnival and artistic traditions. A block is open to all people, free of charge and respects all diversities, without distinctions. It is also a semi-organized group, which seeks a democratic occupation of public space, with broad popular participation, and has a social role. It is also a gathering of friends who come together to celebrate Carnival and bring joy and fun to people through music. From a "technical" point of view, the bloco has drums, a band or trio, has its own identity, with characteristic costumes, props and/or repertoire, performs a procession in the streets, that is, it does not stand still and also does not have any type of separation (with strings or *abadás*) (BELO HORIZONTE, 2022b).

Individuals and legal entities could register to parade in the street carnival of Belo Horizonte, as well as both are accepted in the funding notice. The amount of financial aid transferred to each of the blocks could vary from R\$ 7,000.00 (seven thousand reais) to R\$ 20,000.00 (twenty thousand reais), depending on the category indicated by the group. The notice provided for three categories (A, B and C), whose expected values were: R\$ 20,000 (twenty thousand reais); R\$ 12,000.00 (twelve thousand reais) and R\$ 7,000.00 (seven thousand reais). Up to 40 blocks would be contemplated in the category, totaling the amount of R\$ 800,000.00 (eight hundred thousand reais); in B, up to 45 groups, in the total amount of R\$ 540,000.00 (five hundred and forty thousand reais); while in C, the expected sum was R\$ 315,000.00 (three hundred and fifteen thousand reais), also divided among 45 blocks. Therefore, the final cost was R\$ 1,655,000.00 (one million, six hundred and fifty-five thousand reais) (BELO HORIZONTE, 2022a, p.2).

The notice provided for a classification order within each category and according to the score achieved by each of them based on an evaluation and score form that they had to fill out and supporting documentation. Divided into 11 points, the maximum score was 33 points and would be disqualified if it did not reach 14 points. Each item of the form dealt with a specific aspect of the block, that is, it requested information about the history

of the group; if, when and how it participated in the Belo Horizonte carnival, actions had been carried out during the pandemic to keep the block active during the Covid-19 pandemic period; if it made partnerships with entities and local businesses in the place of its parade; if there was any inclusion initiative; as well as whether there was any action in favor of environmental sustainability; if in 2022 it had a presence in digital media; if he had authorial work; if it was an Afro block; if the parade was scheduled for the Center-South region of the city or in the Santa Tereza neighborhood, the block would not score, while in any other part of the city, it would accumulate 2 points; Finally, the detailing of the entire planning of the block could guarantee up to 6 points. The public notice was also clear in stating that in each of the criteria, clarity, objectivity, coherence and sufficiency of the requested information would count in the appraisal.

In return, the Public Notice of Financial Aid for Street Blocks determined that the contemplated carnival blocks should convey the "brands of the City of Belo Horizonte, BELOTUR and tourist brand, in the publicity pieces of the Street Block parade, object of this aid, under the seal of "Sponsorship", as is customary in initiatives that have the support of the public power (BELO HORIZONTE, 2022a, p. 14).

CARNIVAL BLOCKS: A CONCEPT UNDER CONSTRUCTION

A first observation from the analysis of the documents from Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Belo Horizonte, is that each document defined "carnival block" in a different way, emphasizing distinct characteristics. There are similar elements in each of the cases. In all conceptualizations, the idea that the carnival block is formed by a group of people who get together to skip the carnival in the streets of the city is present. It is also common to characterize that the blocos do not stand still, in the definition presented by Belo Horizonte, this element is emphasized: "it carries out a procession in the streets, that is, it does not stand still" (BELO HORIZONTE, 2022b), while in the public notices of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo this dimension is suggested by the use of the verb "parade". Music, dance and costumes are also underlined in the three texts, as properties of the carnival blocks.

In the cases of Rio de Janeiro and Belo Horizonte, there is an affirmation that the gathering of people takes place in a "semi-organized" way, while in São Paulo it is presented as "organized". Also only in the São Paulo text is it mentioned that some members of the bloc can be paid, in the other two, the idea that the blocos meet

spontaneously is further explored. Rio de Janeiro and Belo Horizonte also coincide in highlighting tradition as one of the attributes of the blocos, while in the characterization of São Paulo, it is not even mentioned.

Belo Horizonte's definition of "carnival block" presents some common representations in contemporary discourses in favor of street carnival. It states, for example, that "a block is open to all people, free of charge and respects all diversity, without distinctions". In this sense, the idea is sold that the bloco is a space where everyone is accepted, without discrimination, it is the place of inclusion. In the following excerpt, he assures: "It is also a semi-organized group, which seeks a **democratic occupation of public space**, with broad **popular participation**, and **has a social role**", the highlighted expressions reveal an appreciation of the carnival block as an agent of society that promotes democratic occupation of public space popularly. This movement is done in a joyful and fun way. And it ends with: "it does not have any type of separation (with ropes or abadás)", reiterating the open and inclusive character of the blocks.

The challenge of conceptualizing "carnival block" is not new, on the contrary, it is already present, for example, in the *Dictionary of Brazilian Folklore*, by Câmara Cascudo, published in 1954:

In the vocabulary of carnival it is a group with uniform clothing having a hymn-march, composed for the revelry, and which is displayed during the three days of the revelry, singing any popular song. The block wears the same costume or changes it each day. There is a block exclusively of girls, boys and girls, and only boys. Sometimes a banner appears and the block gets some fame. They are improvised groups on the eve of carnival, without major demands, although even private dancing, performed by the components, is dirty. They confuse it with the cordões and ranchos and the name is used interchangeably. In the past, only blocs took on the burden of political and social criticism and satire. Today it's just a group that has fun. The blocos are always accompanied by a small musical ensemble, saxophone, guitars, banjos, tambourines (CASCUDO, 2005 [1954], p. 162).

Given the definition elaborated by Câmara Cascudo, by the conceptions presented in each of the three documents, it is possible to infer that the way people understand the "carnival block" varies according to points of view, which are determined by issues that can be historical, social, political and geographical.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this last topic of the text, my reflection continues to demonstrate approximations and particularities of each of the public policies presented here. Perhaps the most salient correspondence between the public notice of Bloco nas Ruas, in Rio de Janeiro; the Award for Recognition of Cultural Trajectory of Street Carnival Blocks, in São Paulo and the Public Notice of Financial Aid for Street Blocks, in Belo Horizonte; or the fact that all of them use the same strategy of financial transfer so that the blocks can carry out their activities, especially their parades in the streets during the carnival period.

The amount foreseen for each of the notices was different. In Rio de Janeiro, the amount for the initiative was R\$ 3,125,000.00 (three million, one hundred and twenty-five thousand reais) for the State of Rio de Janeiro, and 40% of the total amount foreseen would be for the city, that is, about R\$ 1,250,000 (one million, two hundred and fifty thousand reais). In São Paulo, the City Hall had a budget of R\$ 4,200,000.00 (four million and two hundred thousand reais). In the municipality of Belo Horizonte, the estimated amount was R\$ 1,655,000.00 (one million, six hundred and fifty-five thousand reais). There were also differences in the granting of this money, in the case of Rio de Janeiro, 65 groups would be contemplated in the State of Rio de Janeiro, however, of this number, 15 awards were for associations, federations and leagues, composed of number 5 carnival blocks, so it is not possible to specify how many blocks would effectively receive the money. In principle, 140 blocks would benefit, at least, however, it is not possible to guarantee this data. The São Paulo award was the most objective, the one that served the most blocks and the most expensive, R\$14,000.00 (fourteen thousand reais) for 300 blocks. The Belo Horizonte public notice included 130 blocks divided into three categories according to their financial needs.

There are differences between the three notices also regarding who could claim financial resources, in Rio de Janeiro, the notice accepted only legal entities, while in São Paulo, only individuals, while in the Belo Horizonte notice, individuals and legal entities could apply to receive financial aid. This is also revealing of how each public manager in each location understands the organization of the carnival blocks.

Each public notice built a metric in order to classify the blocks and thus make payments. In the case of the Rio de Janeiro public notice, interested parties only needed to prove the cultural performance of the proponent. In São Paulo and Belo Horizonte, several criteria were established in order to assign points to the history and practices of

the blocos, but they also valued social aspects of the initiatives. It scored more, for example, those who had some inclusion action or the block that had diversity as one of its agendas. Another criterion valued in both notices was belonging to the parade locations of the blocks, that is, territoriality was an element to be considered.

Finally, with regard to counterparts, only in the São Paulo award notice no counterpart was foreseen. The Belo Horizonte Financial Aid Notice also did not require greater counterparts, only that the blocks include the brands of the City of Belo Horizonte, BELOTUR and tourist brand, in their disclosures, demonstrating the financial support received. The most elaborate counterpart was contained in the Public Notice of the Block in the Streets of Rio de Janeiro, which required an educational action, preferably for people from public educational institutions or civil society organizations, to promote the culture of Rio de Janeiro and Carnival in the State, in addition to knowledge and practices of the carnival blocks.

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