

**Landscape, Territory and Culture: Case study of the Siriri Flor de Atalaia
dance group**

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SUMMARY

This article investigates the intersection between traditional cultural practices and the urban landscape, focusing on the cultural manifestations of Siriri and Cururu in the city of Cuiabá, Mato Grosso. The study highlights how these dance forms not only reflect but also shape the city's cultural and physical landscape, integrating in meaningful ways with urban life and local cultural heritage. The research specifically addresses the influence of these practices in public and free space, particularly in the courtyards used by the dance group Siriri Flor de Atalaia, which serve as vital stages for rehearsals and cultural presentations. The primary objective of this study is to analyze the transformations in the landscape of open spaces caused by the continuous interaction between the Siriri Flor de Atalaia group and its urban environment. This analysis seeks to understand how these spaces are used for the practice and dissemination of Siriri and Cururu culture, and how they contribute to the cultural dynamics of the city of Cuiabá. Through a detailed examination of physical and cultural changes in these places, the article explores the role of backyards and open spaces in perpetuating popular culture and forming a strong local identity. Methodologically, the study is based on a bibliographical review that addresses the themes of territory, open spaces, landscape and culture of the Siriri and Cururu dance. In addition, a case study of the courtyard of the dance group Siriri Flor de Atalaia is carried out, using direct observation and qualitative analyzes to capture the essence of cultural interactions and their impact on urban space. The results of the article provide an in-depth analysis of the cultural landscape formed around the Siriri Flor de Atalaia group, revealing how practice spaces not only serve as places for cultural activities, but also as elements that redefine the urban landscape. This investigation contributes significantly to debates about the importance of preserving and promoting cultural spaces within the urban environment, supporting the continuity of popular culture and informing public policies that value and promote traditional cultural practices in the city of Cuiabá. This study emphasizes the need for a more integrated and conscious approach to urban planning, which considers cultural practices as essential components of city development, not only for the preservation of heritage, but also as a vital strategy for enriching community life and strengthening local identity.

KEYWORDS: Cuiabá. Popular culture. Cultural landscape.

1 INTRODUCTION

The urban landscape is a dynamic stage where cultural and social interactions unfold, shaping and being shaped by the practices of the communities that inhabit them. Henri Lefebvre (1974) emphasized the crucial importance of open spaces, not just as physical locations but as active centers for the social process, essential in the creation and transformation of cultural landscapes. Arlinda Dorsa (2023) expands this perspective by highlighting that the meaning of a territory is constructed not only by its physical characteristics but primarily by what individuals create and how they identify with that space through their cultural practices.

This study adopts an approach focused on the "associative cultural landscape," as outlined by Duarte et al. (2023), which emphasizes the importance of the artistic, cultural, or religious connections of the inhabitants with their environment. This approach is reinforced by Ulpiano Meneses (2002), who sees the cultural landscape as a collective and dynamic construct, constantly formed and reformed by the interactions between people and the environment in which they live. Françoise Choay (2006) deepens this discussion by analyzing how Western cities structure their relationship with time and cultural identity, showing how these elements are integrated and reflected in the urban landscape.

Brazilian legislation, specifically Ordinance No. 127 of April 30, 2009, defines and establishes guidelines for the preservation of cultural landscapes, characterizing them as parts of the national territory that illustrate the interaction between humans and the natural environment and where the marks of human activity are evident. This legal framework not only recognizes but also promotes the protection of cultural landscapes, emphasizing their dynamic character and their relevance to sustainable economic and social development.

In this context, open spaces can be considered fundamental elements for the expression and perpetuation of cultural practices. Siriri and Cururu, cultural manifestations rooted in the history of Mato Grosso since the beginning of its colonization, exemplify how these practices can actively transform the urban landscape. These traditions not only enrich the cultural fabric of the region where they are inserted but also reconfigure the urban environment, making it a space of encounter, celebration, and collective identity.

This work not only documents the influence of these cultural practices on the urban landscape of Cuiabá but also seeks to provide a foundation for public policies that value and preserve these cultural expressions. In doing so, it points to the need for an urban planning approach that more proactively integrates cultural considerations, ensuring that cities not only meet economic and functional needs but also celebrate and sustain the rich cultural diversity of their communities. This expanded vision emphasizes the importance of cultural practices, such as Siriri and Cururu, not only as relics of the past but as vital and active elements in shaping vibrant and resilient urban landscapes that reflect and respect the complexity of their histories and peoples.

1.1 Siriri and Cururu

The traditions of Siriri and Cururu are intrinsically linked to the religious practices established by the Jesuits during the colonial period, marked by devout worship of saints and accompanied by community celebrations. In these festivities, which took place both in urban settings and rural communities, ceremonies included a solemn procession, the ritual of raising and lowering the mast—a symbolic act of veneration and celebration—followed by the Cururu dance, a cultural expression deeply rooted in these communities. These events were also occasions for communal meals, the nature of which varied depending on the time of day: morning tea with cake, a festive lunch, or dinner, reinforcing social bonds and community cohesion through the sharing of food. This integration of religious and cultural practices reflects the rich tapestry of traditions that characterize the celebrations of Siriri and Cururu, highlighting their vital role in preserving cultural identity and maintaining community heritage in the regions where they are practiced.

As described by Osorio (2018, p. 241), "in many saint festivals, the Cururu players sing, play, and dance in front of the saints' altars, and the processions are not accompanied by the prayers usually performed by prayer leaders or devout women, but by the sung verses of the Cururu players." In the form of a folk play, after the religious rituals and into the early morning, Cururu was performed by men who played the viola-de-cocho and ganzá, sang, and danced in toadas—improvised verses—in a tone of challenge to the other participants. During the festivities, there was the tasting of liqueurs, and Cururu could continue throughout the celebration. During the intervals between Cururu performances, Siriri was practiced as a freer expression in which women also danced.

As the author further describes,

On the other hand, Siriri is open to the participation of both men and women, who form pairs. The focus of the folk play is the dance, which, like Cururu, requires specific skills for its performance. However, participation in the dance does not require

mastery of technique or the handling of a musical instrument or the creation of improvised poetic verses. (OSORIO, 2018, p. 240).

Regarding the popular culture of Siriri, Guimarães (2013, p.112) describes it as "one of the typical folkloric manifestations of the Pantanal region, which invades the stages and revives the identity of its people," where the clothing is colorful, and in the dance, the skirts move joyfully, replicating the record of social life and the everyday culture, valuing its tradition.

Despite the development and expansion of the city, and the emergence of new rhythms and cultural formations, the traditional roots of Siriri and Cururu still remain, especially in the older municipalities of the Baixada Cuiabana¹, where the cities have not developed as much. An example can be seen in the city of Santo Antônio de Leverger, particularly in the locality of Varginha, which is a stronghold of Cururu culture.

Even though there are various active Siriri and Cururu groups throughout the state of Mato Grosso, more specifically in the southern part of the state where the oldest cities are concentrated, Cuiabá is the locality with the greatest concentration and diversity of these groups. Cuiabá has groups that have formed in recent years, a result of the 2000s when the tradition became officially recognized by the public authorities through the creation of the Cururu and Siriri Festival in the city.

1.2 Siriri and Cururu in the City of Cuiabá

The founding of the city of Cuiabá in the 18th century was marked by the discovery of gold at Lavras do Sutil, near the Prainha Stream, which became a catalyst for migration and the subsequent consolidation of the territory. This phenomenon is not unique to Cuiabá, as historically, many cities developed along the banks of rivers and streams to take advantage of essential water resources for subsistence and mining, as well as to facilitate logistics and defense (PÓVOAS, 2022).

This initial settlement led to the emergence of the first residences, churches, and squares, establishing an urban nucleus that would expand over the years. The construction of churches was particularly notable, reflecting the deep religious roots at the foundation of the city's social and urban structure. Among the oldest and most significant religious buildings in Cuiabá are the Senhor Bom Jesus de Cuiabá Cathedral, the Church of Rosário and São Benedito, the Church of Nosso Senhor dos Passos, the Church of Nossa Senhora Auxiliadora, and the Church of São Gonçalo. These churches not only met the spiritual needs of the early inhabitants but also served as community centers and defining elements of the urban landscape (SANTOS, 1996).

The churches of Cuiabá exemplify the significant role that religion played in the social and cultural formation of the city, acting as epicenters for the celebration of religious and social events, reinforcing community cohesion and local traditions. The presence of these institutions reflects how religious and cultural practices helped shape the character and identity of Cuiabá throughout its history.

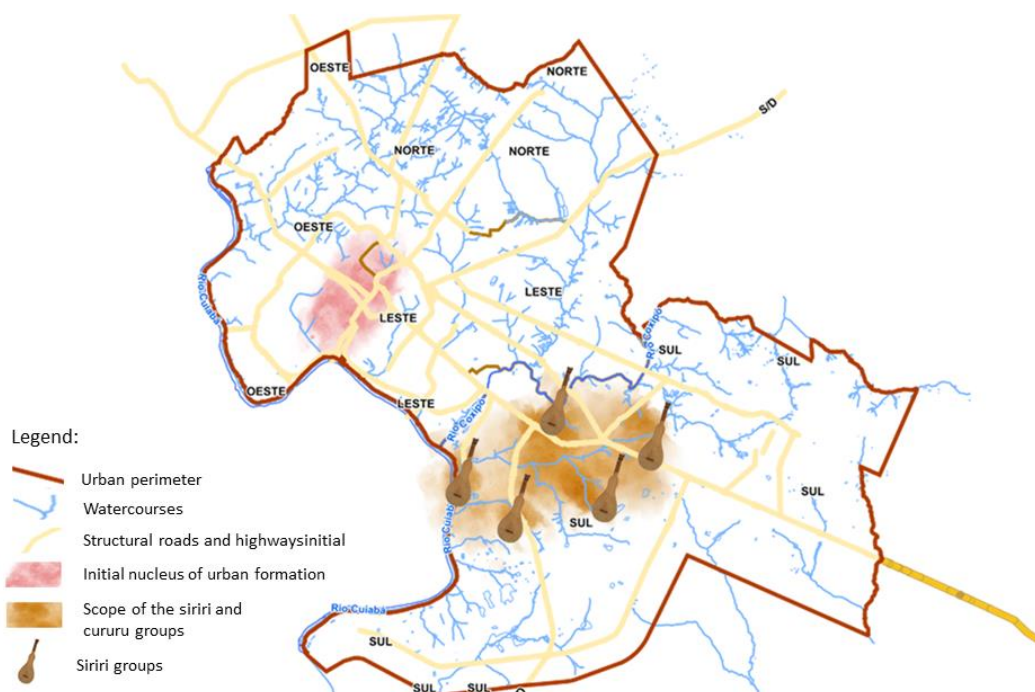
¹ Municipalities that make up the Baixada Cuiabana: Acorizal, Barão de Melgaço, Chapada dos Guimarães, Cuiabá, Jangada, Nossa Senhora do Livramento, Nova Brasilândia, Planalto da Serra, Poconé, Santo Antônio do Leverger, and Várzea Grande.

This historical and cultural influence of the churches in Cuiabá not only contributed to social and cultural formation but also shaped the physical structure of the city, as evidenced by current cartographic analysis.

In the map represented in Figure 1, it is possible to visualize the urban boundary of the city of Cuiabá showing the regional sectors (West, North, East, and South), the main structural roads and watercourses of the territory, as well as the areas that indicate where urban formation began (in pink) and the areas covered by the Siriri groups (in brown). It is possible to observe a greater concentration of these groups in the Southern region, just below the Coxipó Stream. The locations of the headquarters of five of the nine Siriri groups belonging to the Nandaia² Institute were added to the map. The following Siriri groups are highlighted on the map: Flor de Atalaia, Flor Ribeirinha, Voa Tuiuí, Siriri Elétrico, and Flor do Campo.

Figure 1 – Map of Areas of Urban Formation and Coverage Areas of Siriri Groups in Cuiabá.

Map of Areas of Urban Formation and Coverage Areas of Siriri Groups in Cuiabá



Source: SIG Cuiabá, 2024. Modified by Náiali de Paula.

As a driving force behind the popular music and dance culture of Mato Grosso in Cuiabá, such as Siriri and Cururu, festivals have played an important role in promoting these traditions. As Osório (2018, p. 239) analyzes, "it would not be an exaggeration to say that never in the history of Mato Grosso have Siriri and Cururu been so prominent. One of the platforms that promotes such visibility is the Cururu and Siriri Festival." This festival was promoted by the

² Social organization that promotes the strengthening of Siriri through collective work carried out by the associations of groups from Cuiabá-MT. Full bio from the institute's website. Available at: <https://beacons.ai/institutonandaia/quemsomos>. Accessed on April 15, 2024.

municipal government, which is why many of these new groups are active in the city. In addition to the festivals promoted by the municipality every year, participation in other dance and folklore festivals has been sought by cultural groups, such as the Folklore Festival of Olímpia-SP and the Dance Festival of Joinville-SC. It is evident that the pursuit of top places in competitions has led to greater development and professionalization of the groups.

With the urban transformations that have taken place in Cuiabá over the years, Siriri and Cururu have also undergone many changes since their origins. Whereas Cururu was previously the main manifestation at saint festivals, today, with the incorporation of popular dance in the form of "performances" at festivals, many changes have occurred, making Siriri more attractive from the audience's perspective. "Without a doubt, the audience appears more 'excited' during the Siriri group performances, while during Cururu performances, the audience remains silent in the stands, with the impatience of some being noticeable: 'Oh, that's enough! When does Siriri start?'; 'It's beautiful, but it gets boring'" (OSORIO, 2018 p. 241). Thus, even Cururu performances try to adapt to festivals by adding something more "attractive" to the audience.

According to Osório (2018), the Siriri performances at the Cururu and Siriri Festival:

[...] are performed with a minimum of eight couples. The groups believe that the performance looks "more beautiful" when the "group is large," providing greater harmony and visual appeal to the choreography. The dancers follow a standardization regarding their attire. The women wear long, floral, and shiny skirts, blouses with ruffles, and flowers in their hair. The men wear pants, shiny shirts, and hats. The Siriri dancers are mostly young people between the ages of 15 and 20. In addition to the dancers, the groups include musicians, often older men; a singer, either male or female; and a chorus primarily composed of female voices. (OSORIO, 2018, p. 240).

Additionally, in Siriri, there is the presence of regional folklore characters such as the *minhocão* and the *boi-à-serra*, in which the dancers "gather in pairs, holding hands, singing and moving in a circle, sometimes to one side, sometimes to the other" (Póvoas, 2022, p. 130), with a dancer dressed as a bull, adorned with many decorations and full of glitter, in the center.

As for the Cururu groups:

[...] are composed only of men over 40 years old. Another notable difference concerns the attire used. The *cururueiros* wear more discreet clothing compared to the bright and colorful outfits of the Siriri dancers: dark pants, long-sleeved light-colored shirts, dress shoes, and hats. The number of Cururu groups performing during the Festival nights is much smaller than that of the Siriri groups [...]. (OSORIO, 2018, p. 240).

The cultural manifestations of Siriri and Cururu have been undergoing changes due to several factors, including the change in audience, the participation of young people from communities, and the shift towards "performances" aimed at tourist attraction and spectacularization in events. Added to this is the fact that the groups' participation in festivals takes the form of competition, which increases the level of innovation in dance and music. According to Pinto (2016, p. 10), Siriri and Cururu "being folkloric manifestations, it is not feasible to make a purely aesthetic judgment of these hybridizations since they are part of a total social phenomenon with some pre-capitalist characteristics, taking into account the context of origin of Cururu and Siriri."

With participation in events and the use of culture as part of the creative economy, rehearsals are now more frequent than in the past, aiming for greater synchronization and professionalism. As Pinto (2016, p.11) states, it is necessary for analyses of changes in dance rituals to consider that these "aesthetic hybridizations are mainly part of the economic demands of the cultural industry and the entertainment industry in general."

Thus, as mentioned earlier, Cururu is more commonly practiced by men aged 40 or older, and the gatherings are not as frequent. On the other hand, Siriri has more frequent rehearsals, involves more people, and requires a location equipped with a hall or open space for dancing and the twirling of skirts, as well as, of course, water for hydration.

2 OBJECTIVE

The objective of this article is to conduct a detailed analysis of the transformations in the landscape associated with the Siriri dance group Flor de Atalaia, with a particular focus on the courtyard used for rehearsals. The aim is to understand how this specific space has been reconfigured and adapted to meet the needs of the group, facilitating not only the practice of dance but also promoting socialization and community interaction. In this regard, the study seeks to explore how these changes impact local culture and social development in the area, highlighting the role of cultural spaces in the urban dynamics of Cuiabá. This examination not only contributes to a deeper understanding of the interactions between culture, space, and community but also encourages the development of public policies that support the maintenance and growth of traditional cultural practices in urban environments.

3 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology employed in the construction of this article was carefully designed to address the cultural and landscape transformations associated with the Siriri dance group Flor de Atalaia in Cuiabá. Initially, a bibliographic study and primary documentation established a theoretical foundation, exploring concepts such as territory, open spaces, landscape, and the culture of Siriri and Cururu dances. References such as Dorsa (2023) and Ulpiano Meneses (2002) were essential for understanding the dynamics between space and cultural expression, highlighting how cultural practices shape and are shaped by the geographical environment.

To gain a practical and visual understanding of the changes that have occurred, the research incorporated in situ data collection, including a photographic survey and the production of detailed cartography of the Siriri dance groups in Cuiabá. This cartographic effort, inspired by the spatial analysis methodologies described by Choay (2006), helped visualize the geographical distribution and concentration of dance groups, providing insight into how local culture influences and is influenced by the urban structure.

The research was structured around the case of the courtyard used by the Siriri Flor de Atalaia dance group. The analysis of this specific space allowed for the exploration of landscape and cultural transformations induced by the practice of traditional dances. Using qualitative observation methods, the study interpreted how open spaces are utilized by the group, reflecting on how these uses reconfigure the landscape and shape local culture. The

observations were enriched by the theories of Macedo, Custódio, and Donoso (2018), which discuss the interaction between cultural practices and urban spaces.

By integrating bibliographic studies with practical observations from the case study, it was possible to interpret the impact of the group's activities on the cultural landscape of Cuiabá. The article's conclusions, based on this integrated analysis, aimed to document not only the physical changes but also the social and cultural implications of these transformations. The methodological approach adopted emphasized the importance of open spaces in the continuity of popular culture and the formulation of public policies, highlighting the crucial role these spaces play in preserving and promoting local cultural traditions. The case study of the territory of the Siriri Flor de Atalaia group was essential for understanding how the use of open space contributes to the reconfiguration of the landscape and the perpetuation of culture, corroborating existing literature and providing a replicable methodological model for similar studies in other cultural and geographical contexts.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Case Study: The Siriri Courtyard of the Flor de Atalaia Group

The Flor de Atalaia group was founded in 2013 and is located in the Parque Atalaia neighborhood (Figure 2). The space was provided by one of the group members to serve as the headquarters, where they conduct their activities and rehearsals. Like other groups, Flor de Atalaia grew out of the dedication of its members to carry out social work.

Figure 2 – Location of the Flor de Atalaia Siriri Group Courtyard and the Spatial Configuration of the Site.



Source: Google Earth, 2023. Modified by Nátali de Paula.

The courtyard occupies a plot of approximately 250 square meters³, with a large portion of the land taken up by buildings, leaving an area of approximately 100 square meters available for rehearsals. The courtyard was built and beautified by the group members themselves. The space is the result of ongoing construction and improvements made by the group members and the community, which always supports their efforts. In Figure 3, you can see how the space was built through volunteer work. Figure 4 shows an image of the landscape before the courtyard's construction, where a long wall forms a corner. There are trees within the plot, but the wall's landscape does not provide aesthetic and visual comfort.

Figure 3 – Collective Effort for the Construction of the Flor de Atalaia Group Courtyard.



Source: Facebook, 2014⁴.

Figure 4 – External View of the Courtyard Location Before Construction.



Source: Google Earth, 2011.

³ Approximate measurements based on the city's urban map in a .dwg file prepared by the Cuiabá city hall.

⁴ Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1130340541277805&set=pb.100029056085161.-2207520000&type=3>. Accessed on April 15, 2024.

Courtyards are of great importance for Siriri dance groups. These open spaces are where the group's belongings are kept, such as costumes, accessories, musical instruments, ledgers, attendance records, and more. In addition, they serve as spaces for weekly gatherings, which are necessary for socialization and rehearsals. Therefore, these dance territories must have large areas and provide suitable flooring for the artists to rehearse.

Some Siriri cultural groups have separate locations for storing items and costumes, rehearsals, and festivities. However, not all groups have a well-structured courtyard, as they often rely on the donation or loan of a space, leading them to use streets, church courtyards, community centers, and schools for dance rehearsals.

Figure 5 – Dynamics in the Flor de Atalaia Courtyard



Source: Facebook, 2022⁵.

In the courtyard of the Flor de Atalaia Siriri group, we can observe strong references to Cuiabá's painting and architecture (Figure 5). On the walls, you can see drawings of flowers, the Cuiabá River, fish, the viola-de-cocho, fruits, and animals. On the walls of the built area, the painting was designed to reference the architecture of old Cuiabá. The courtyard also features mango trees, which provide ambiance and shade in the space.

The courtyard is highly significant for community life as it also serves as a venue for other activities and festivities such as lunches, parties, bingo, card raffles, and other community events, often held to raise funds to support the group's operations and travel to participate in festivals. It is an open space that holds great cultural significance for Cuiabá, as seen in the walls and the fruit trees, which are commonly found in traditional courtyards of Cuiabá (Figures 6 and 7).

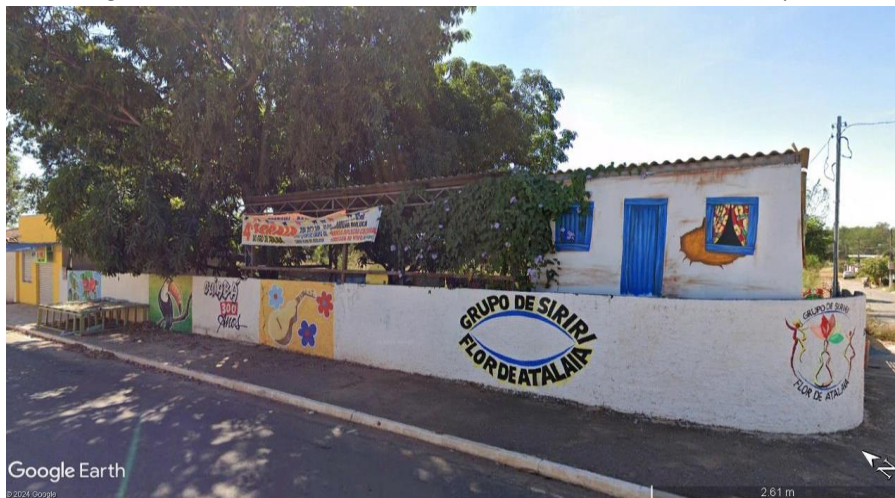
⁵ Disponível em: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=911155883196273&set=pb.100029056085161.-2207520000&type=3> . Acesso 15 abr 2024.

Figure 6 – External Wall of the Flor de Atalaia Siriri Group Courtyard.



Source: Google Earth, 2019.

Figure 7 – External Wall and Side View of the Flor de Atalaia Siriri Courtyard



Source: Google Earth, 2019.

Figure 8 – External Wall and Front Facade of the Flor de Atalaia Siriri Courtyard.



Source: Google Earth, 2019

The vibrancy of the paintings on the walls of the Flor de Atalaia Siriri dance group's courtyard stands out significantly in the neighborhood's landscape, which is predominantly characterized by closed walls and fences around residences. These vibrant colors not only beautify the environment but also reflect the importance of cultural landscapes in visually transforming and enriching the area. Located in a paved part of the neighborhood, surrounded by residences and small apartments, the space used by the dance group transforms the conventional urban aesthetic. The ongoing presence of the group, evidenced by the artistic paintings on the internal and external walls and the use of the space for cultural parties and gatherings, not only changes the visual landscape of the neighborhood but also embeds popular culture into the daily fabric of the community. This interaction between art and public space serves as a vibrant reminder of the area's dynamic cultural identity, promoting a sense of community and belonging among local residents.

5 CONCLUSION

The investigation into the cultural and landscape transformations undertaken by the Flor de Atalaia Siriri dance group in Cuiabá provides insight into the role that traditional cultural expressions play in the formation and reconfiguration of the urban fabric. The group not only keeps a historical tradition alive but also acts as an agent of transformation, integrating cultural heritage into the modern urban landscape. This duality between tradition and modernity exemplifies the capacity for cultural adaptation and resilience in the face of rapid urban and social transformations.

The active involvement of the Flor de Atalaia Siriri group in the urban life of Cuiabá demonstrates how cultural practices can become tools for community empowerment and urban revitalization. By utilizing public spaces for their performances, the group not only offers cultural spectacles but also claims urban space as a place for community gathering and expression. This action promotes greater social cohesion and encourages civic engagement while enriching the city's cultural life.

It is important to emphasize that the group's activities have significant implications for urban planning and cultural policies. They demonstrate that the recognition and support of local cultural expressions can be strategic for sustainable urban development. This suggests a more inclusive and integrative approach to urban planning that recognizes the value of cultural traditions and uses them as pillars to strengthen the character and identity of cities.

This perspective is reinforced by the growing demand for urban spaces that not only meet the functional needs of the population but also offer opportunities for the celebration of cultural and historical diversity. The example of the Flor de Atalaia Siriri group underscores the need for public policies that foster cultural integration, ensuring that cities are seen not only as centers of economic activity but also as living stages of human history and culture.

The analysis of the Siriri group's activities in Cuiabá, therefore, offers a reflection on the importance of urban policies that recognize and value the role of arts and culture in promoting urban development and improving quality of life. It encourages a broader dialogue

between urban planners, policymakers, artists, and the community at large about how cultural expressions can be more centrally incorporated into the city's development agenda.

In conclusion, the study of the Flor de Atalaia Siriri dance group reveals the transformative power of culture in urban contexts and highlights the need for greater attention to cultural dimensions in urban planning. By valuing and integrating traditional cultural practices into city development, we can aspire to create more inclusive, vibrant, and resilient urban environments.

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