Public Spaces for Leisure: Green area use in Presidente Prudente - SP

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Espaços Públicos de Lazer: a utilização de áreas verdes no município de Presidente Prudente - SP

RESUMO

Objetivo - O presente trabalho tem como objetivo conhecer e caracterizar os espaços públicos de lazer, associados ao meio natural, mais frequentados pela comunidade de duas escolas localizadas em bairros periféricos da cidade, além de compreender as motivações para essa escolha.

Metodologia – Pesquisa bibliográfica e documental, levantamento dos espaços públicos de lazer em Presidente Prudente, visitas in loco para caracterização das áreas, além de consulta à população amostrada para conhecer o grau de envolvimento, as preferências e a frequência da comunidade escolar aos locais.

Originalidade/relevância - Essa pesquisa foi motivada pela discussão acerca da importância das áreas verdes destinadas ao uso público em Presidente Prudente, em especial, de estudantes de escolas públicas e da comunidade, em geral, de escolas periféricas.

Resultados – O Parque do Povo é o espaço público mais frequentado por jovens de escolas públicas e membros da comunidade escolar em Presidente Prudente (SP), sendo utilizado principalmente para passeios em família. No entanto, observa-se que esses jovens raramente visitam os espaços públicos analisados, sendo a distância o principal fator que os impede de frequentar essas áreas de lazer.

Contribuições teóricas/metodológicas - Contribuir para a compreensão dos principais fatores que influenciam a escolha e a frequência da população à espaços públicos de lazer, com destaque para a relevância social dessas áreas para suprir a necessidade de lazer dos cidadãos. Esses espaços podem contribuir para a prática de atividades físicas e interações sociais e assim, colaborarem para melhoria da saúde física, mental e espiritual.

Contribuições sociais e ambientais - Colaborar para a compreensão das relações entre espaços públicos de lazer e motivações da população, a fim de subsidiar políticas públicas eficazes e integradas, que possam contribuir para a promoção de estilos de vida mais saudáveis, a valorização dos espaços verdes urbanos e o fortalecimento de uma cultura de cuidado com o meio ambiente, resgatando valores tradicionais de convivência harmoniosa entre o ser humano e a natureza.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Urbanização. Meio natural. Áreas verdes. Espaços públicos. Lazer.

Public Spaces for Leisure: Green area use in Presidente Prudente - SP

ABSTRACT

Objective – This study aims to identify and characterize the most frequently visited public leisure spaces associated with the natural environment by the community of two schools located in the outskirts of the city, as well as to understand the motivations behind these choices.

Methodology – Bibliographic and documentary research, a survey of public leisure spaces in Presidente Prudente, on-site visits to characterize the areas, and consultations with the sampled population to understand the level of involvement, preferences, and frequency of visits to these places by the school community.

Originality/Relevance – This research was driven by the ongoing discussion about the importance of green areas designated for public use in Presidente Prudente, particularly for students of public schools and the broader community of schools located in peripheral neighborhoods

Results – The *Do Povo* Park is the most frequently visited public space by youth from public schools and members of the school community in Presidente Prudente (SP), primarily used for family outings. However, it was observed that these young individuals rarely visit the analyzed public spaces, with distance being the main factor preventing them from frequenting these leisure areas.

Theoretical/Methodological Contributions – This study contributes to the understanding of the main factors influencing the choice and frequency of public leisure space usage by the population, highlighting the social relevance of these areas in meeting citizens' recreational needs. These spaces can promote physical activity and social interaction, thus contributing to improvements in physical, mental, and spiritual health.

Social and Environmental Contributions – This research helps to understand the relationship between public leisure spaces and population motivations, aiming to support the development of effective and integrated public policies

that promote healthier lifestyles, enhance the value of urban green spaces, and strengthen a culture of environmental care, reviving traditional values of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

KEYWORDS: Urbanization. Natural environment. Green areas. Public spaces. Leisure.

Espacios Públicos de Ocio: el uso de áreas verdes en el municipio de Presidente Prudente - SP

RESUMEN

Objetivo – El presente trabajo tiene como objetivo conocer y caracterizar los espacios públicos de recreación, asociados al medio natural, más frecuentados por la comunidad de dos escuelas ubicadas en barrios periféricos de la ciudad, además de comprender las motivaciones para dicha elección.

Metodología Investigación bibliográfica y documental, levantamiento de los espacios públicos de recreación en Presidente Prudente, visitas in situ para caracterización de las áreas, además de consultas a la población seleccionada para conocer el grado de involucramiento, las preferencias y la frecuencia de la comunidad escolar en dichos lugares. **Originalidad/Relevancia** – Esta investigación fue motivada por el debate sobre la importancia de las áreas verdes destinadas al uso público en Presidente Prudente, especialmente por parte de estudiantes de escuelas públicas y de la comunidad en general de escuelas periféricas.

Resultados – El Parque do Povo es el espacio público más frecuentado por jóvenes de escuelas públicas y miembros de la comunidad escolar en Presidente Prudente (SP), siendo utilizado principalmente para paseos en familia. Sin embargo, se observa que estos jóvenes rara vez visitan los espacios públicos analizados, siendo la distancia el principal factor que les impide frecuentar estas áreas de recreación.

Contribuciones Teóricas/Metodológicas — Contribuir a la comprensión de los principales factores que influyen en la elección y frecuencia de uso de los espacios públicos de recreación por parte de la población, destacando la relevancia social de estas áreas para satisfacer la necesidad de ocio de los ciudadanos. Estos espacios pueden fomentar la práctica de actividades físicas y las interacciones sociales, y así contribuir a la mejora de la salud física, mental y espiritual.

Contribuciones Sociales y Ambientales — Contribuir a la comprensión de las relaciones entre los espacios públicos de recreación y las motivaciones de la población, con el fin de apoyar políticas públicas eficaces e integradas, que puedan promover estilos de vida más saludables, la valorización de los espacios verdes urbanos y el fortalecimiento de una cultura de cuidado del medio ambiente, rescatando valores tradicionales de convivencia armoniosa entre el ser humano y la naturaleza.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Urbanización. Medio natural. Áreas verdes. Espacios públicos. Ocio.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Urbanization is considered one of the greatest global phenomena. Since the Industrial Revolution, which occurred in England in the 18th century and later spread to several other countries, urbanization has grown unevenly in different regions of the world. In Brazil, the process was intensified from 1940 onwards. Thus, in the following 40 decades, the Brazilian population tripled, and the urbanization rate increased from 26.35% to 68.86% in 1980 (Santos, 1993). This population continued to grow in the following years, reaching 81.25% in 2000 and 84.35% in 2010, according to the demographic census carried out in the respective years (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, 2012).

In this sense, accelerated urban area increase, without adequately proportional monitoring of infrastructure and services growth, often results in numerous problems experienced in cities. And such problems are not limited to structural aspects alone. In addition to the lack of services to meet basic social needs, there are other problems of everyday urban life, such as the lack of suitable places for the population's well-being, which can trigger a series of adversities related to socio-emotional aspects. Urban chaos is also represented by hours lost in traffic; huge lines at supercenters; audiovisual, atmospheric, and noise pollution; lack of thermal comfort, among other situations, that residents of medium and large cities face almost daily.

On the other hand, it is undeniable the urban way of life has brought countless benefits to society. However, it has brought with it limitations to the benefits contact with nature can occaision, not only of a physical nature, but also linked to mental and spiritual well-being. In this context, public spaces intended for leisure are essential to meet this need, in part, and to contribute to improving the population's quality of life.

Leisure is something that must satisfy the individual's needs, most importantly those of social value and rest. This statement is present in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed by the United Nations (UN) in 1948. The document already considered leisure as a right to be guaranteed: "Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay." (United Nations, 1948, Art. 24). It is also included in Article 6 of the Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988 (Brazil, 1988).

Reflections on the importance of leisure in society are not recent and have been around since the birth of industrialization. Among the aspects that characterize this phenomenon are: the liberatory character – resulting from a free choice, that is, freedom from a certain type of institutional obligations; the disinterested character – free from profitable, professional, utilitarian or ideological intentions; the hedonistic character – evidenced by the search for satisfaction and the personal character, directed to the individual's own interest and needs (Dumazedier, 1999). From the perspective of leisure functions, rest, fun and physical-emotional development stand out (Dumazedier, 2001). Camargo (2001) adds that the advent of labor laws and the reduction of working hours to 40 to 44 hours per week enabled an increase in time outside of work, highlighting the need to modify public and private spaces to cater to leisure.

Based on these ideas, it can be said that there are countless benefits of leisure spaces in cities, including stimulating social relationships. For Leite (2011, p.159), "squares, streets,

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gardens and parks, in their multiple functions, constitute the core of the system of open spaces in cities, and in them sociability cannot be relegated to a secondary level". Therefore, they are places of human interaction and social mediation. In this context, urban green areas represent favorable environments, bringing elements of nature into urbanized spaces and contributing to improving several aspects of quality of life. Among them, benefits for the physical and mental conditions of the population, through the possibility of practicing physical activities and contact with the natural environment (Wood et al., 2017). In addition, there are environmental benefits, which include improving the microclimate, reducing rainwater surface runoff and greater infiltration, contributing to recharging aquifers and reducing flooding, retaining polluting elements, among others (Anguluri; Narayanan, 2017; Tucci, 2008).

Thus, considering what was presented, this research was motivated by the discussion about the importance of green areas intended for public use in Presidente Prudente, especially by public school students from public schools and the community in general from peripheral schools. Therefore, the present work aims to understand and characterize the public leisure spaces, associated with the natural environment, which are most frequented by the community of two schools located in periphery neighborhoods of the city. And furthermore, understand the motivations for this choice.

2 THE CITY OF PRESIDENTE PRUDENTE

Presidente Prudente is a Brazilian municipality, located in the western countryside of São Paulo state. It is approximately 558 km from the state capital (Figure 1). Its population is 225,668 inhabitants, according to the 2022 demographic census (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, 2022).



Figure 1 – Location of Presidente Prudente in São Paulo state.

Source: IBGE. Org.: Cardoso, 2012

In 2010, Presidente Prudente was ranked 25th nationally, with an HDI of 0.806, a value considered high compared to the national average of 0.724 (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, 2010). It is the main city in the region, also known as the "Capital of Western São Paulo state" because it is the largest and best structured and, thus, has established itself as a

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service, industrial, and cultural hub. Its influence covers not only the west of São Paulo state, but also includes municipalities in the north of Paraná state and the southern Mato Grosso do Sul state, making it, therefore, the city with the largest and best urban infrastructure in the region. There are public spaces, such as parks, squares, a spa, cultural centers, as well as private places intended for the population's leisure, such as shopping centers, clubs, and others. There are also several cultural events promoted by City Hall (Presidente Prudente, 2023).

3 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

To prepare this research, the following methodological procedures were adopted: bibliographical and documentary review, survey of public leisure spaces in Presidente Prudente, on-site visits to characterize the areas, in addition to consulting with a sample of the population to find out the degree of involvement and preferences and the school community's attendance at the locations.

The bibliographic and documentary review, in turn, sought to substantiate and understand the importance of urban green areas, as well as to characterize the municipality of Presidente Prudente and its public spaces intended for the population's leisure. The survey of these areas was initially carried out, based on a list made available by City Hall, containing all public spaces above one square meter considered "green areas" and/or "leisure areas". From there, official Municipality websites, Google Earth images and representatives from the municipality's public authorities, particularly the Tourism Department, Environmental Department, Urban Planning and Development Department, were consulted to select the locations that would be part of this research. Thus, six areas were selected, due to their high degree of importance within the municipality, demonstrated by publicity on official websites and social networks, thus denoting them as the best known among residents. Furthermore, these are the spaces that host various events in the city, which contribute to making them attractive places for the most diverse age groups.

Another procedure was visits to the selected locations. They took place from March to May 2023, with the aim of characterizing the areas, mainly regarding infrastructure and equipment intended for leisure, as well as observing the state of conservation of the sites. A Google Maps tool was also used to survey the straight-line distance from schools to the areas analyzed.

A survey was also carried out among the population, using questions prepared on Google Forms, containing five questions, and in some cases essay answers were possible. The form was disseminated through social networks, covering the community linked to two schools in the public network of state schools in Presidente Prudente. One, located to the east, in Jardim Bela Dária, and the other, to the north, in the District of Montalvão. The respondents included students and educators, as well as parents and guardians. In total, 89 responses were obtained, which were organized and analyzed to meet the study objectives. In Figure 2, it is possible to observe the location of the schools and public spaces that were studied.

LOCATION MAP - PRES. PRUDENTE/SP

LEGEND
- Roads
- Northside school
- Eastside school
- Amizade Artificial Lake
- Cidade da Criança
- Do Povo Park
- Nelson Bugalho Ecological Park
- Vale Square
- 9 de Julho Square

Source: Bases de Faces da Logradouros por UF Afunicicipios (IEGE, 2015)
Universal Transverse Mercator Projection - (UTM)
Datum - SIRGAS 2000, zone 22 south
Date: Oct/2023

Figure 2 – Location of state schools and leisure areas.

Source: Authors, 2023

4 CHARACTERIZATION OF THE PUBLIC SPACES STUDIED

Based on bibliographic and documentary research, satellite image analysis, as well as on-site observations, the public spaces studied in this work were characterized and are presented as follows:

Do Povo Park

The area is the result of major interventions by local public authorities at the end of the 1970s, in an area at the bottom of a valley, considered problematic to the city. According to Spósito (1983), the expansion of the municipality's urban network occurred between the 1940s and 1980s, with the area around Do Povo Park being occupied more effectively between the 1960s and 1980s. By means of a "reurbanization" project of the area, the existing Veado stream was canalized, infrastructure implemented, and two paved thoroughfares were constructed, 11 de Maio Avenue and 14 de Setembro Avenue, connecting two important avenues named Brasil Avenue and Manoel Goulart Avenue (Hora, 1991).

The urbanization and channelization of the stream give rise to public space, where City Hall, in 1976, launched the "Valley Floor" project (O Imparcial, 13/08/1976: 1, apud Vaz, 1999), proposing the creation of a linear park. The site needed to recover the degraded area that had become a physical barrier between the central region of the city and the neighborhoods beyond it, towards the Raposo Tavares highway (Sawada et. al., 2007). In this way, after justifying all the necessary transformations, approximately 330 properties were expropriated. This situation generated some tension between the municipal authorities and the resident population, but despite the initial impasse generated, the work began on October 31, 1976 (Silva, 1994).

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Following the expropriation of areas occupied by the lower income population, there was a greater appreciation of new properties and commercial establishments that were emerging. And so, economic interests led to local transformations, giving a new social identity to the space.

Since its inauguration in 1982, the park has become an extensive green leisure area (Figure 3), which has added value to this region of the city. The space currently has several attractive resources for the population, such as kiosks, multi-sports courts, pet area, a synthetic grass field, an outdoor gym, a tourist service center, a skate park and an Olympic Center, which attracts different audiences, as observed during an on-site visit.



Figure 3 – Green of Do Povo Park in the urban area of Presidente Prudente - SP.

Source: Google Earth, prepared by the authors, 2023

Surrounding the park are a variety of commercial establishments, such as snack bars, restaurants, gyms, clinics of different specialties, in addition to being a region of real estate growth, where residential and commercial buildings are being built. The place is the stage for various cultural and sporting activities throughout the year, such as races, half marathons, a street parade for the city's anniversary, an electronic waste campaign, June festivals, musical performances, LGBT+ parade, animal adoption fair, curbside vaccination, and various other events. It is characterized, therefore, as a diverse use space, which has a certain urban centrality in the municipality, high real estate speculation, high density of buildings in its surroundings, evident verticalization, and an intense flow of vehicles at different times of the day.

Despite the progress and rise demonstrated in the region, the closed Veado stream channelization resulted in a chronic problem, which challenges public authorities: the frequent floods in the rainiest months, in different parts of the park, which cause recurring material losses and even risk to the lives of the population.

Vale Square

In this space, popularly known as Vale Square, there are concrete embankments channelizing the Veado stream. The site was opened on December 22, 2008, in what was

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previously a valley floor abandoned by the public authorities. This space was named Oscar Figueiredo Filho Square, by Municipal Law N. 6,864, on October 24, 2008 (Presidente Prudente, 2008). It is a small extension of Parque do Povo, after Avenida Manoel Goulart, next to the largest shopping center in the city. The space has an theater stage with seating and some park benches and trees, as shown in Figure 4. Initially there was a fountain and a light source, but both are deactivated. The square underwent revitalization in 2017

Figure 4 – Arena Theater in Vale Square.

Source: Authors, 2023

On the theater stage and in seating area, cultural demonstrations take place periodically, developed by young people from peripheral communities, who organize themselves to promote Hip-Hop culture, through so-called rap battles. Participants communicate through social networks and have the support of the Municipal Department of Culture. The meeting, which takes place on Friday nights, usually around 8pm, is known as Vale Battle.

This battle, characterized by the use of rhyme between its participants, takes place in competition between MCs, with the objective of beating the opponent. A circle is formed among the audience and two participants are in the center, where the rap battle is carried out through alternating pairings. For Marques (2011), the young people who participate in Vale Battle have Hip Hop as a cultural manifestation and share their values in various activities, such as dance groups, rap battles and social projects, being an alternative to predominant cultures. According to the author, these young people from the periphery have the opportunity to affirm their identities, share their life trajectories and claim their rights. In this way, Vale Battle and the space itself represent, at the same time, free leisure carried out in a public space, and the opportunity for political and cultural action (Marques, 2011).

Despite the lack of physical structure and few public facilities, Vale Square is a space for strong artistic expression among the city's peripheral youth. In this sense, it is a space for interaction between young people who are often at the mercy of other cultural events, which are apparently distant and inaccessible, both physically and economically. Although the current state of conservation can be considered precarious, due to graffiti observed during on -site visits, the site was clean, and the pruning and gardening services were considered in adequate condition on the date the visit was carried out.

Amizade Artificial Lake

Amizade Artificial Lake is located on the banks of the dam formed by the Limoeiro stream, at the western tip of the municipality, bordering the municipality of Álvares Machado (SP). This dam was created in 1978, through Decree nº 3,266, of July 6, 1978 (Presidente Prudente, 1978), and is used as a spring, which supplies the municipality, in emergency situations (Companhia de Saneamento Básico do Estado de São Paulo, 2023).

The site underwent a major recovery and revitalization project in 2011 and the cost of the work was estimated at approximately one million reais. The space had not received improvements for 30 years (Presidente Prudente, 2011). The work extended and involved new investments in the surrounding area, with the aim of transforming the space and enhancing the location as a tourist attraction. The revitalization was officially delivered in 2015, with an approximate cost of five million reais. (President Prudente, 2015).

The area is currently fenced with an entrance gate and has kiosks, a walking track, football and volleyball courts, bathrooms, bicycle racks, trash cans, drinking fountains, signposts, a gym and a playground. Furthermore, an access lane connects the sidewalks and equipment (Figure 5) and allows access for handicapped people or wheelchair users. It is open every day from 7am to 7pm and, during the December and January holidays, it opens until 9pm, including Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays.



Figure 5 – Walking Track located in Amizade Artificial Lake.

Source: Authors, 2023

During the on-site visit, it was observed that the existing equipment was in excellent condition. However, the dam was closed to primary contact recreational activities, those involving direct and prolonged contact with water (Brazil, 2000). In terms of cleaning, gardening, sidewalk maintenance and accessibility, it was considered the best maintained place among the public spaces studied.

Nelson Bugalho Ecological Park

Popularly known as the São Matheus/São Lucas Park, the Nelson Bugalho Ecological Park is an area at the bottom of the valley, along the Colônia Mineira stream. The space is fenced, has some entrance gates and is open daily from 6am to 8pm. The initial project,

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according to the news published on the City Hall website, was for a "new ecological park that will be a national reference in terms of structure". The proposal to interfere in a green area, measuring approximately 100 thousand square meters, included an initial investment of 2 million reais, which also aimed to increase the value of the surrounding real estate (Presidente Prudente, 2012).

The Park was opened in 2016 and attracted more than 10 thousand residents from adjacent neighborhoods. It involved investments of around 3.5 million reais and the pilot project comprised several public facilities, such as: a playground, a bike path, ecological trails, an official BMX track, a skateboard park, gym equipment, a sand volleyball court, a five-a-side soccer field, in addition to an entrance gate, with a building to house the park's administration sector (Presidente Prudente, 2016). In Figure 6, it is possible to observe some equipment.



Figure 6 – Exercise equipment located at Nelson Bugalho Park.

Source: Authors, 2023

During an on-site visit, it was observed that the equipment was not well maintained, some were rusty, and others were even broken. The gardening service was considered satisfactory, although in some regions, the weeds were relatively tall. In front of the entrance gate, garbage bags and abandoned furniture were detected, probably left by the surrounding population. No administration sector was noted.

Cidade da Criança

The Cidade da Criança Ecological Park is located at Km 561.5 on the Raposo Tavares highway (SP-270), from where it is possible to observe the entrance arch (Figure 7). It is located approximately 8 km from the center of Presidente Prudente and is not located within the city's urban perimeter. It is a large green area that presents cultural, environmental, sporting and leisure attractions. Among the attractions are cable cars, a go-kart track, a playground, a lake with pedal boats, an astronomical observatory, a planetarium, a zoo, an aviary, a walking track and restaurants. By conserving remnants of the semideciduous Seasonal Forest, that is, the region's native vegetation, there is a considerable diversity of fauna and flora.

During an on-site visit, it was observed that the highest frequency of visitors occurs on weekends and holidays, as the space has opening hours from Tuesday to Sunday, from 9am to 5pm, with a concierge to control visitation.

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Figure 7 – Entrance Arch at Cidade da Criança, as seen from Raposo Tavares Highway, in Presidente Prudente – SP municipality.



Source: Authors, 2023

Inside the space, in December 2011, the Water Park was opened, which quickly became a tourist attraction, receiving more than 1500 visitors on weekends, shortly after its inauguration (Presidente Prudente, 2011). Despite having undergone renovations and improvements, the water park is currently deactivated.

9 de Julho Square

This square is located in the city's commercial center, in front of the São Sebastião Cathedral. From there, the promenade begins, where the main area of Presidente Prudente's commerce is located. It was the first square to be installed and inaugurated in 1918, shortly after the city's founding. Since then, it has been seen as a symbol of the city's centrality, considered by residents to be one of the city's main postcards.

This space was initially called Passeio Público, being the first with an intense flow of people. Afterwards, it was renamed 5 de Julho square and, finally, its name was made official as 9 de Julho square, in honor of the Constitutionalist Revolution of 1932 (IBGE, s/d). It underwent extensive renovation in 2013, which lasted seven months. And the priority was the remodeling and modernization of the space. Since it was built, it had not received any comprehensive structural renovations. The estimated value was 1.7 million reais. Among the improvements, we highlight compliance with the Accessibility Standards Law, renovation of the Lighted Fountain, bathrooms, modernization of the Military Police station and the arena theater stage, installation of Wi-Fi to attend the population, new banks and restructured landscaping (Presidente Prudente, 2013). Figure 8 shows the Lighted Fountain, which is the main reference in the square.

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Figure 8 - 9 de Julho square.

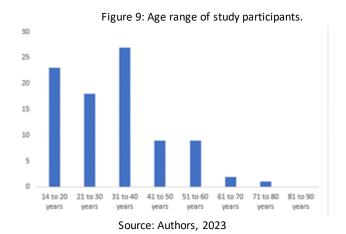


Source: Authors, 2023

The fountain also underwent a revitalization process, where it was equipped with new lighting and paint. The surroundings are wooded and have several flower beds with ornamental plants, as well as posts to ensure lighting. Nearby, there are several commercial establishments. Furthermore, street vendors occupy some parts of this space.

5 PREFERENCES AND ATTENDANCE OF THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY TO THE PUBLIC SPACES SELECTED IN THE STUDY

The results obtained in this study on the preferences and frequency of attendance of the school community to chosen public spaces, based on the 89 responses collected through digital media, are presented below. The research participants ranged in age from 14 to 80 years old, as shown in Figure 9.



Adults, between 31 and 40 years old, participated most in the research, representing a total of 27 people. This data revealed the collaboration of students' parents and guardians in evaluating the spaces analyzed. Next is the age group between 14 and 20 years old, accounting for 23 participations, which indicates the participation of young people and teenagers in the

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study. For the age group between 21 and 30 years old, there were 18 responses. Nine participants between 41 and 50 years old and 9 participants between 51 and 60 years old. For the age groups between 61 and 70 years and 71 and 80 years, 2 and 1 responses were recorded, respectively. These data show significant community participation in the research.

The second question asked about the spaces that the respondent usually frequents. Six locations were made available in the research form, namely: Amizade Artificial Lake, Do Povo Park, Vale Square, Nelson Bugalho Ecological Park, 9 de Julho Square and Cidade da Criança. They were advised that it would be possible to select more than one option if they so desired. The answers are presented in Figure 10.

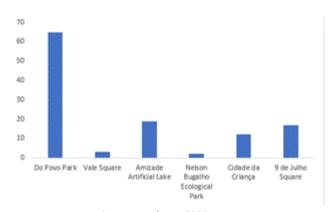


Figure 10: Public spaces that research participants usually frequent in Presidente Prudente.

Source: Authors, 2023

With 65 responses, Do Povo Park was the space most highlighted by those interviewed, as the one they frequent the most. Next, Amizade Artificial Lake was highlighted, with 19 responses; 9 de Julho Square, with 17; Cidade da Criança, with 12; Vale Square, with 3, and Nelson Bugalho Ecological Park, with 2 answers. Do Povo Park was identified as the most frequented, probably because it is a more centralized and large space. It is a public area known and frequented by a large part of the local and even regional population. Amizade Artificial Lake was the second most mentioned place by interviewees with 19 responses, which represents a third of the responses, in relation to the first most mentioned space. The area, revitalized and handed over to the population in 2015, has infrastructure and equipment aimed at leisure and recreation.

Amizade Artificial Lake's nomination as the second most frequented location was surprising, given the distance of 4.1 km from the eastside school and 11.5 km from the northside school. And, based on this finding, two interpretations can be raised: the first is that Amizade Artificial Lake attracts visitors even from more distant regions, due to its good infrastructure and diversity of equipment, enabling various leisure and recreation activities, as the area was revitalized in 2015, with the aim of becoming a leisure space for the population. The second is related to the potential of aquatic environments to attract and bring together people, which has already been demonstrated in works such as that of Granado, Ribeiro and Lopes, published in 2015 and the document "Water Resources Notebook: tourism and leisure and its interface with the water resources sector", from the National Water Agency (2005).

9 de Julho Square was the third most indicated area. It is located in the central region,

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next to the main commercial area of the center, along the city's commercial promenade. It is a well-treed square, where there are some street vendors, and is also a place that frequently hosts cultural events. Next, Cidade da Criança appears, with 12 mentions; Vale Square and the Nelson Bugalho Ecological Park, with fewer mentions. Cidade da Criança has a considerable variety of equipment for leisure and recreation activities, such as a mini zoo, go-kart track, snack bars, playground, planetarium, among others, which can attract different types of audiences. However, the fact that it is far from the urban area may contribute to the fact that the population's attendance at the site is not as significant.

Vale Square is very popular with the city's youth on weekends. The place becomes a meeting point for a cultural event, considered by the creators as an independent cultural movement, according to social networks (Batalha do Vale, 2023). This initiative gave rise to the Vale Battle Circuit and Education Project, alongside public schools in Presidente Prudente (O Imparcial Digital, 2022). However, only three survey participants reported visiting the place frequently, even though the respondents, aged between 14 and 20, were the second largest group. The distance to the square is 2.7 km from the eastside school and 9.3 km from the northside school.

Finally, the Nelson Bugalho Ecological Park, with its extensive area, has activities and equipment more related to the practice of physical activities, such as a cycling path, a walking track, and an outdoor gym, not attracting the research public, due even to the distance of approximately 4 km from the eastside school and 8.1 km from the northside school.

The reasons why research participants frequent the spaces were also surveyed. The family aspect was the most mentioned (45 times), that is, the possibility of carrying out leisure activities with the family is the main motivation for visiting and frequenting the chosen places. The second most cited reason was "meeting friends" (32 times); thirdly, the practice of sporting activities (18 times) and, fourthly, participation in cultural activities (8 times). The data is presented in Figure 11.

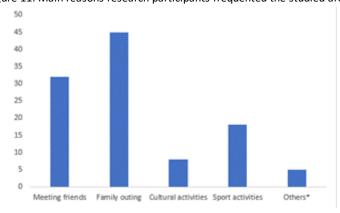


Figure 11: Main reasons research participants frequented the studied areas.

Source: Authors, 2023

In this aspect, it is worth highlighting the relevance of green areas for socialization. These are spaces that compete with video games, computers and especially smartphones. These places provide social interactions, as demonstrated in the data obtained. Guzzo and Cavalheiro (2000) corroborate this by mentioning the social aspect among the three main functions of

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these spaces, along with ecological and aesthetic factors. In addition to these, Andrade (2010) considers that green areas also play a role in improving the educational and psychological functions of individuals. Such considerations contribute to highlight the relevance of these places in an urbanized society, as they contribute to improving the quality of life by providing conditions for socialization and the practice of physical and/or sporting activities, in an urban and increasingly sedentary society. Another highlight is cultural activities, which, to a lesser extent, were also mentioned by interviewees.

Although these spaces are essential in urban areas, there is a lack of specific studies in the urban planning and green area management fields, highlighting the need for more research in these subjects. Such an initiative is crucial to improve both the creation and management of these occupied spaces in cities (Santiago; Godoy, 2017).

The interviewees were also asked regarding the reasons they did not frequent the places they did not select. This information is presented in Figure 12.

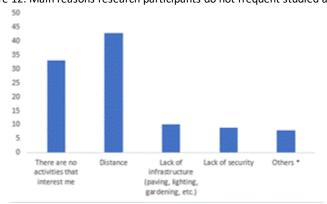


Figure 12: Main reasons research participants do not frequent studied areas.

Source: Authors, 2023

The main factor was the distance from leisure spaces, indicated by 43 research participants. In this sense, it is necessary to reflect on the areas chosen to serve as green and leisure spaces for the population, which must be accessible to residents through better management of urban mobility and the public transit system. It is not enough for local authorities to create green leisure areas, they must be arranged in the urban area, in a way which allows population access.

Another pertinent discussion is about the implementation/revitalization of spaces to make them more attractive, especially on the outskirts of cities, where social problems are often aggravated by the lack of areas that allow leisure for different age groups. In this study, the option "There are no activities that interest me" was the second most selected, with 33 responses. This reason is related to the availability of attractions and individual preferences. In this way, the lack of interest in what the spaces offer demonstrates that the creation of green areas for leisure is important, but they are not always attractive and represent the real needs of residents. This finding is in line with what was found by Bernardini and Carmo (2021, p. 257), in their work on the public spaces foreseen in subdivision projects, on the outskirts of Campinas, in the state of São Paulo: "The "two" outskirts investigated in the municipality of Campinas suffer from the same problem: leisure areas little or poorly used, with insufficient urban and

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landscape quality."

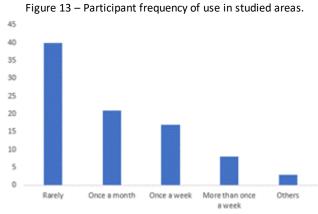
In this context, the public authorities must listen to the population and gather information to understand their needs, which can be diverse, depending on countless different variables that, according to Queiroga (2001,) are conditioned by specific realities.

The lack of infrastructure, such as paving, lighting, gardening, kiosks, was also mentioned, but to a lesser extent by the participants in this research (10 responses). Through on-site visits, it was found that Amizade Artificial Lake has a caretaker, which certainly means that the space is better maintained and, therefore, well-frequented by residents, despite the distance. Furthermore, it is the space where diverse infrastructure was found with accessibility for people with some type of physical limitation. Also noteworthy is the water attraction which, although currently not available for leisure activities, due to issues linked to water quality for primary contact recreation, still seems to attract this public from more distant regions, as in the sampled population.

For eight participants, the "lack of security" was a reason for them to stop visiting the spaces mentioned. Thus, it can be seen that the lack of security, despite being highlighted, was not one of the main factors preventing interviewees from visiting the leisure spaces reported in the survey. According to the 2021 Brazilian Public Security Yearbook, prepared by the Brazilian Public Security Forum (FBSP), the homicide rate in the State of São Paulo is 7.9 per 100,000 people, the lowest in the country, while the national rate was 22.3 per 100,000 people. Compared to other regions of the country, São Paulo state enjoys a certain level of security, as the national homicide rate is high and a cause for great concern for Brazilians.

Knowing the main factors that influence parkgoers' choice of urban parks provides information that makes it possible to more accurately identify the care that should be taken in relation to these terrestrial ecosystems (Régis et al., 2020). Furthermore, Carasek et al. (2017) emphasize that the success of implementing green infrastructure in cities depends on both medium- and long-term action planning and immediate actions.

An analysis of participant attendance to the spaces showed that: "Rarely" was selected by 40 participants. Next, there were 21 responses for "Once a month"; 17 for "Once a week" and 8 for "More than once a week". The option "Others" was selected by 3 participants, including answers such as "Almost never", "Twice a month" and "Every day" (Figure 13).



Source: Authors, 2023

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Therefore, it is clear that, as attendance in green areas increases, adherence among participants decreases. Frequency may be related to numerous variables, including distance or ease of access, different preferences for the attractions available or the simple lack of time, caused by urban way of life.

Lack of knowledge, or negligence about the benefits that greater frequency in contact with nature brings, in various aspects related to health and well-being, can be harmful to society in general. Therefore, this must be taken into consideration in issues involving public health and greater investment in maintenance, conservation and population awareness, by government circles. Further studies are needed to identify, understand and quantify the relationships between public leisure spaces and physical, mental and social health indicators, in order to support effective and integrated public policies. Such initiatives can contribute to the promotion of healthier lifestyles, the appreciation of urban green spaces and the strengthening of a culture of care for the environment, rescuing traditional values of harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Public spaces are responsible for balancing fundamental aspects of quality of life in urban areas, among which three can be highlighted: aesthetic, environmental and social. Thus, they have the role of bringing natural elements to an artificial setting, harmonizing it and collaborating to minimize urban environmental problems and reduce the distance and disconnection between current society and nature.

In this sense, the social relevance of these public areas is highlighted in meeting the leisure needs of local populations. Their existence represents possibilities for practicing pleasurable activities, which can contribute to improving physical, mental, and spiritual health. Among them, physical and/or sporting activities and social interactions stand out, which appeared as the main motivations in the responses of the participants in this study, which are so necessary in an increasingly digital society.

However, the existence of public leisure spaces, in adequate quantity and quality, is insufficient in most Brazilian cities, especially in peripheral areas, which is one of the challenges for municipal public management. Thus, it becomes relevant and pertinent to discuss the implementation/revitalization of spaces so that they are attractive to residents, especially on the outskirts of cities, whose social problems are often aggravated by the lack of areas that allow for leisure for different age groups.

Among the spaces selected in this study as most representative in the city of Presidente Prudente, Do Povo Park was identified as the most frequented, among different age groups but, particularly, among young people and adults, who main seek activities with family or friends, which demonstrates the importance that the place has in terms of socialization. However, the results also showed that attendance is not satisfactory, being hampered mainly by the distance, which was cited as the main reason for not attending the places. The second reason was because they did not present activities or public facilities of interest to the interviewees.

In this context, public authorities must seek to meet the population's desires, through understanding their realities and needs, which can be diverse, depending on numerous different variables, which are conditioned by specific regional and cultural contexts. In this way, the importance of more studies that investigate the topic and deepen it is highlighted so that they can collaborate with public administrations towards the promotion of health and quality of life in urban areas.

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DECLARAÇÕES

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- Curadoria de Dados: Profa. Dra. Danielli Cristina Granado; Luan Moreira Ulloffo e Angelika Franklin de Lima.
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DECLARAÇÃO DE CONFLITOS DE INTERESSE

Nós, Luan Moreira Ulloffo, Angelika Franklin de Lima e Danielli Cristina Granado, declaramos que o manuscrito intitulado "Espaços Públicos de Lazer: a utilização de áreas verdes no município de Presidente Prudente - SP":

- 1. **Vínculos Financeiros**: Não possui vínculos financeiros que possam influenciar os resultados ou interpretação do trabalho.
- 2. **Relações Profissionais**: Não possui relações profissionais que possam impactar na análise, interpretação ou apresentação dos resultados.
- Conflitos Pessoais: N\u00e3o possui conflitos de interesse pessoais relacionados ao conte\u00fado do manuscrito.