

## Leisure on the urban rivers of Triple Frontier Region: transformations, contradictions and meanings

Lazer nos rios urbanos da Tríplice Fronteira: transformações, con-  
dições e significados

Ocio en los ríos urbanos de la Triple Frontera: transformaciones, con-  
tradicciones y significados

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**Abstract:** The discussion about urban rivers, in its interface with leisure, is the theme of this research, focusing on the Brazilian city Foz do Iguaçu, located in the Tri-Border Region as well as Puerto Iguazú (Argentina) and Ciudad del Este (Paraguay). The general purpose of this research is to identify and discuss the social appropriations and leisure experiences that happen on urban rivers Paraná and Iguaçu and their banks. The present study also aims to understand their transformations and the contradictions, and also how locals give meaning to these fluvial environments. The methodology of this qualitative research included documentary research, observation and interviews with 23 inhabitants of Foz do Iguaçu. Through this study, it is possible to see that the appropriations and leisure experiences have become punctual due to urban and environmental changes that overlooked an inclusive dimension between the city and its fluvial environment. There is still, in the rivers and their banks activities such as recreational fishing and adventure sports, which assign different meanings to these rivers through ludic, contemplative, spiritual, and interactive experiences with the waters. A privileged look focused on tourists has been prioritized and this has had an impact on public and democratic leisure areas for dwellers near rivers and its banks.

**Keywords:** Leisure. City. Environment. Tourism. Three-Border Region.

**Resumo:** A discussão sobre os rios urbanos, na sua interface com o lazer, foi o tema desta pesquisa, com foco na cidade brasileira de Foz do Iguaçu – localizada na Tríplice Fronteira que reúne, ainda, Puerto Iguazú (Argentina) e Ciudad del Este (Paraguai). O objetivo geral foi identificar e discutir as apropriações sociais e vivências de lazer realizadas nos rios urbanos Paraná e Iguaçu, e suas margens. Procurou-se entender suas transformações e contradições e, ainda, de que maneira os moradores significam esses ambientes fluviais. A metodologia desta pesquisa qualitativa contou com estudo bibliográfico, observações e entrevistas com 23 moradores de Foz do Iguaçu. Nesse trabalho, verificou-se que as apropriações e vivências de lazer tornaram-se pontuais à medida que as mudanças urbanísticas e no meio natural praticamente desprezaram um sentido integrativo entre a cidade e o ambiente fluvial. Restam, no entanto, nos rios e nas suas margens, práticas como pesca por lazer e esportes de aventura, que imprimem múltiplos significados, por meio de vivências lúdicas, contemplativas, espirituais e interativas com as águas. Houve, no município, uma opção pelo olhar privilegiado voltado

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ao turista, fato que impacta diretamente nos espaços públicos e democráticos de lazer, para os moradores, como os localizados nos rios e suas margens.

**Palavras-Chave:** Lazer. Cidade. Meio ambiente. Turismo. Tríplice Fronteira

**Resumen:** La discusión sobre los ríos urbanos, en su interfaz con el ocio, fue el tema de la investigación, con foco en la ciudad brasileña *Foz do Iguaçu*, ubicada en la Triple Frontera, que reúne, aún, Puerto Iguazú (Argentina) y Ciudad del Este (Paraguay). El objetivo general en esta investigación fue identificar y discutir las apropiaciones sociales y las vivencias del ocio en los ríos urbanos de *Foz do Iguaçu* y sus orillas. La investigación también buscó sus transformaciones y contradicciones, aún cómo los residentes significan los ríos y sus orillas. La metodología en esta investigación cualitativa involucró un estudio bibliográfico, observaciones y entrevistas con 23 residentes de *Foz do Iguaçu*. Esta investigación verificó que las apropiaciones y las vivencias de ocio son puntuales, dado que los cambios urbanos en el medio natural prácticamente no dieron cuenta del sentido de integración entre la ciudad y el medio fluvial. Todavía hay en el ambiente fluvial y en sus orillas prácticas como pesca para el ocio y deportes de aventura, los cuales imprimen distintos significados por medio de vivencias lúdicas, de contemplación, espirituales e interactivas con las aguas. Hubo, en la municipalidad, una opción por la mirada puesta al turista, lo que impacta directamente en los espacios públicos y democráticos de ocio para los moradores, como los ubicados en los ríos y sus orillas.

**Palabras clave:** Ocio. Ciudad. Medio ambiente. Turismo. Triple Frontera.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The image of the city of Foz do Iguaçu as the “Land of the Falls”, or as the “Destination of the World<sup>3</sup>”, appears in the tourism slogans in Brazil and abroad. Those tag lines were tattooed throughout the history of the city, located in the westernmost limit of the state of Paraná, and part of the Triple Frontier. This border integrates another two cities, Ciudad del Este, in Paraguay and Puerto Iguazú, in Argentina. The borders between Foz do Iguaçu and those cities are natural and established by the Paraná River and the Iguazu River, respectively.

The highest density of people is on the banks of the Paraná River, if compared to the Iguazu River. Called “Paraná” (Big Paraná), the Paraná River has a course of 4,800 km and is the main contributor to the La Plata River Basin, one of the most important transnational basins of South America. The Iguazu River, on its part, has a direct association to tourism, particularly due to the Iguazu Falls, located in the Iguazu National Park, which operates through public-private partnerships. It is clear, thus, the fluvial-centered character of the Triple Frontier region, whose cities are linked through the river environments which, according to Oliveira (2012, p.37),

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<sup>3</sup> Foz do Iguaçu, became known as “Destination of the World” due to an advertising campaign which emphasized the Wonders, Emotion, Comfort, Flavors, Events, and Shopping aiming to change the image of Iguazu, and positioning it as a quality tourism destination for leisure, events, eco-adventure, and shopping. The campaign appeared in 2007, as part of a strategy of Integrated Tourism Management, involving Itaipu, the Municipality of Foz do Iguaçu, the Municipal Council of Tourism, the Institute for Tourism Promotion of Iguazu (Convention Bureau), the Sindihotéis, the ICMBio, the Institute Polo Iguazu, to “disseminate, promote, qualify, improve the infrastructure, and strengthen the image of the destination Iguazu. (...) From then on, all actions became integrated as well as the organizations of the trade.  
(Source: [www.fozdoiguacudestinodomundo.com.br](http://www.fozdoiguacudestinodomundo.com.br) – accessed April 3, 2015).

[...] correspond to inter and transnational systems whose social plasticity lies on the relationships between people and cultures in constant and discontinuous movements inside and outside the borders between the three national states delimited by volatile, diffuse, and intriguing borders, literally liquid and fluid...

The above-mentioned author draws the attention, in this citation, to the singularities and complexities which gravitate around a municipality known for harboring people coming from various places in Brazil, and for being a crossing point for Brazilians, Argentinians, Paraguayans, Chinese, and Arabs, among others nationalities. Within this setting a diversity of relationships and identities between the inhabitant and the city of Foz do Iguaçu are generated.

In the Triple Frontier, behind the characterization of a singular urban unit, is the movement in the Friendship Bridge – and the activities taking place there, marked by the trade and, often, as Rabossi (2011) points out, by illicit activities. That bridge is the land connection between Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este and was built over Paraná River.

Considering this tri-national environment with highly significant tourism receptivity, the questions arising is: what is the quotidian relationship between Foz do Iguaçu dwellers and the rivers, and what are the leisure activities taking place in that environment? This is the guiding question of the study. To find the answer, we defined as specific objectives to identify and discuss the transformations and contradictions occurring in the urban rivers of the Foz do Iguaçu, affecting the residents' experiences of leisure. Also, we sought to understand the way the subjects give meaning to the river spaces, which mark the identity of that municipality of Paraná. The methodology followed in order to meet the objectives is presented next.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative and descriptive study, insofar as it tried to understand the practices and experiences, as well as the context and the way the subjects apprehend the fluvial environment. Besides observation and documentary methods, this research carried out interviews with 23 inhabitants of Foz do Iguaçu, aged between 18 and 73, of whom sixteen were male and seven female. The respondents were kept anonymous, and were given an assumed name, based on their jobs, origins, age or type of activity they do on the river. The documentary research looked into studies which could contribute to the topics of research, such as leisure, appropriation of the public spaces, urbanization, environment, and rivers. This research also looked into the context of the Foz do Iguaçu and its rivers, in order to apprehend the paths of change in the urban structure, key issues to understand leisure on the city's urban rivers.

To carry out the interviews, we first identified dwellers that have a close connection with the river or a leadership role, either by engagement, leisure activities, or work developed in NGOs linked to the river and to the environmental education. Also, we looked for

residents experts on river environments. The subjects should also be adults and living in Foz do Iguaçu. At that stage, ten persons meeting the criteria were interviewed.

By the urban rivers of Foz do Iguaçu, two spaces were selected to carry out the observation and interviews: the 'Marco das Três Fronteiras' (Obelisk Triple Frontier), wherein six persons were interviewed; and in the 'Prainha' (Little Beach), formed from the Itaipu Lake, where another seven statements were collected, totalling 23 interviews. The reason to select these points of observation is the fact that they are spaces of the Paraná River located in the urban area of Foz do Iguaçu and they are places open to the population with free access. These locations are in two peripheral areas of the city: South and North, respectively. The location in urban spaces is justified to the extent that the research tries to understand possible relationships between the rivers and the city/urban population of Foz do Iguaçu.

The definition of these locations was justified, particularly, by the first interviews. Another reason for choosing these points of observation was their conditions for leisure activities, due to the access – physic or visual –, or also for interactive practices on the river or its banks. The visits occurred on weekends, of an Iguaçu's sunny summer, between November 2014 and February 2015.

The analysis of the information was carried out based on the interpretation of the interviews and documentary research, through coding which, for Gibbs (2009), is "a way of indexing or categorizing the text in order to establish a structure of thematic ideas in relation to it" (p.60). Bodgan & Biklen (1994) look into the coding analysis steps, running data looking for regularities and patterns, topics present and, next, writing down words and phrases – coding categories -, which represent those topics and patterns. The choice of the categories of analysis was made based, mainly, on the questions and objectives of the research.

#### **4 PARANÁ RIVER: TRANSFORMATIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS**

The urban development of Foz do Iguaçu separated the residents from the river environment, due to a straining process between the natural and the built environments. The tensions have deepened particularly due to the process of occupation and housing disputes, particularly on the riverbanks. Thaumaturgo (2012) points out that in 1960 the small urban centers were distributed along a small strip of 1.82 km<sup>2</sup>. In 1995, the urban fabric of Foz do Iguaçu reaches 130 km<sup>2</sup> and, in 2007, 191 km<sup>2</sup>. IBGE data indicate that, in 2010, the city had a population of 256,088 people (99.2% living in the urban area), and a population density of 414.58 people per km<sup>2</sup>.

In this context, there are spaces over which there are tensions and disputes, especially due to processes that pushed the poorest to precarious and makeshift dwellings on the riverbanks, especially of the Paraná River. This river arm still shows its magnificence, similarly to the Friendship Bridge, built on it in 1965, to be the link between Ciudad del Este and Foz do Iguaçu. In the urban setting, the Paraná River and its tributaries flow in a uni-

verse of strained society-nature relationship. An indelible mark on this river was the construction of the Itaipu hydroelectric dam, which caused the disappearance of the natural scenery of the Seven Falls<sup>4</sup>, in the Paraná municipality of Guaíra.

Due to the dam, it was necessary to change the natural route of the Paraná River and build a reservoir occupying 1,350 km<sup>2</sup>, submerging an area of 780 km<sup>2</sup>, on the Brazilian side, and 570 km<sup>2</sup> in Paraguay. As a direct consequence, eight Brazilian municipalities in the West of Paraná<sup>5</sup> were hit, including Foz do Iguazu. The submerged portion in this town was 49,538 ha affecting 5,609 persons. The total space committed to the Itaipu Dam, the lake and bank reforestation covering an area with an estimated population of 42,444 people of which 38,445 were countryside inhabitants and 49.93% of employed persons, i.e. doing some kind of work (Germani, 2003). Most of this contingent was forced to abandon their land, between 1978 and 1982.

According to Catta (2009), during the construction of the dam, the population of Foz do Iguazu increased dramatically from 33,970 inhabitants in 1970, to 136,320 in 1980, when the works were in full swing. The majority lived in the urban area. The construction of Itaipu in the 1970s, as well as the growth of trade – strongly driven by the creation of a free zone in Ciudad del Este – are considered milestones, or cycles of the city, for the more official and memorial history of Foz do Iguazu. The landmarks of early tourism stem from this perspective, resulting mainly from visits to the Iguazu Falls. And, also, the cycle of the 1980s and early 1990s, in which shopping tourism in Paraguayan city reached its peak – particularly due to the intensification of the activity of so-called ‘sacoleiros’ (bag carriers), carrying products for resale through the Bridge of Friendship, from Ciudad del Este to Brazil.

González (2005) recognizes the importance of studies envisaging the history of the Foz do Iguazu from the perspective of these cycles. However, according to the author, this perspective overlooks other fields of memory about the city, other social subjects, and their struggles for the city within culture - of representation, of values and of construction rights. The author emphasizes that the expansion of the urban fabric in the city cannot be taken as an exclusive work of capital, but also as a result of a struggle between different social groups, and their use of urban land.

Pressures from marginalized populations have created a movement, since the 1970s, which led to major setbacks in the urban projects of political and business interests, in addition to answers of the Government on the issue of housing - especially in central areas. I.e. "urban occupation moves were, in a sense, the very engine of urban development of the city, and not a 'reflection' of it" (González, 2005, p. 61).

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<sup>4</sup> The Seven Falls was a set of nineteen cascades and ninety drops, with 100 meters height. The disappearance of this landscape was not peaceful and was marked by movements such as the "Goodbye Seven Falls", which brought together musicians, writers and other artists, in addition to people linked to the ecological movement, against this natural disaster, causing irreversible environmental damage.

<sup>5</sup> Apart from Foz do Iguazu, the other municipalities affected by the Itaipu Dam were Guaíra, Terra Roxa, Marechal Cândido Rondon, Santa Helena, Matelândia, Medianeira, and São Miguel do Iguazu.

Especially in the 1980s, many of the urban plans and projects carried out by the public and corporate powers can be interpreted as a response to the movements of urban occupations. The claims of these groups were important for the construction and the definition of the new social spaces, for political mobilization and survival of the people of Foz do Iguaçu. With the population growth, besides housing and sanitation, leisure spaces arise as a demand, born of this new urban structure that should meet the rights of their dwellers. Today, the main point of leisure in the city – at least in the eyes of foreigners - is the Iguaçu National Park, an issue that will be discussed in the following topic.

#### 4.1 “Land of the Falls” – How about the residents?

Documentary research and the survey on the official websites aimed to contextualize the research subject have shown that the tourism “brands” of Foz do Iguaçu, particularly related to Iguaçu River, are all over the national and international promotional advertisements. That “role” of the city has an effect on the residents’ everyday life, becoming more important when it intertwines in a complex network of actors and a social, political, economic, and cultural structure of the city. Foz do Iguaçu, in fact, is directed to tourism: in 2011, the total number of accommodation facilities was 133 - between hotels and guesthouses -, a number that does not include the increasing amount of hostels<sup>6</sup>. The much-touted tourist vocation, placed as if it were determined by a “natural condition”, has a history of discursive construction by the dominant class of Foz do Iguaçu. In this sense, the waters of the city, especially the Iguaçu River, are the subject upon which the imaginary of the city was built, intended to the “foreign look”. Thus, reducing the past of the city to the tourist vocation, according to Souza (2009, pp. 10-11) “was an important strategy of legitimation of the interests of the supporters of this proposal: the dominion over the past, or rather, on its meaning in the present.”

The river, with its beauty and energy, sets the tone of the city’s postcard, displaying its treasures for the outside view. But how about the residents’ perspective? What are their perceptions, actions and stories that are also printed in Foz do Iguaçu? Souza (2009), in her research, looked into the city workers’ “silenced” voices – and their vision on tourism, which unfolds contradictions and tensions in Foz do Iguaçu. As a result of this work, the researcher considers:

Any “touristy” or “sea resort” city relies on the efforts of an army of people, who make it work as a “leisure city”. Thus, the “leisure”, “recreation”, “relax”, and “fun” are structured as a business. That’s how tourism appeared, in the words of the workers. Tourism, as enjoyment, was an activity for others. Hotels, restaurants, roads, avenues, squares, taxis, airport, hospitals, media, everything in the city, is

<sup>6</sup> Data from the Municipal Secretary of Tourism, retrieved from the report “Economic data from Foz do Iguaçu 2011”. (Source: Prefeitura Municipal de Foz do Iguaçu. Available: <http://www.pmfi.pr.gov.br/ArquivosDB?idMidia=62501> - Accessed in April 6, 2015).



organized on the basis of ensuring a proper standard of service to the tourist. The city where tourist pass should be well signposted, clean, green, paved, accessible (Souza, 2009, pp. 193-194).

Conflicts involving the ownership and the daily production of the city raise questions about the urban planning of Foz do Iguaçu, insofar that the interaction between people in democratic spaces for residents was not prioritized in the set of transformations already highlighted. In this sense, it is worth mention that there is not a “resentful” attitude towards tourism; however, there are issues about the targeting of investments, the silencing and “blindness” of certain areas and various strata of the population. In this batch, there is a lack of public and democratic spaces of leisure for the residents of the city that, despite the privileged environment, its landscapes are not integrated with the population. A contradiction evident in a city that has somehow turned its back on the abundance of river environments, which stand out mainly on account of tourism in Iguazu National Park. A network of forces acting in this mosaic imbued with complexities, contradictions, and social clashes affect the construction of the municipality and its residents. Including its public spaces, neglected from the perspective of the city as a tourism product. The understanding of the public space, as posited by Vainer (2000), is the place of political discourse and debate. This dialogue takes place through communication. Today, the challenge for this communication is "to take up the public space as a place of active participation, regulated, and re-founded it as a political space." (P. Gomes, 2012, p. 161.) The public space, in this sense, as pointed out by P. Gomes (2012), cannot do without the physical dimension that, in the city, promote the encounter with the other, the co-habitation, the dialogue and communication, the debate, and sociability.

The origin of the cities, the idea of the polis, arises, according to Rolnik (2000), from the principle of equality and difference, founded on the possibility of people living together with the different and diverse; a coexistence stemming from a political contract among them. The debate about space, therefore, has its importance in understanding the interconnection between river-town-democratic leisure, to the extent that this debate contributes to the debate on issues such as social relations, power, identity, and material and symbolic appropriations. This cited triad, in Foz do Iguaçu is the theme that follows in the discussion.

#### 4.2 Recreation on urban rivers

In this research, leisure is understood as

[...] the need to enjoy, recreationally, the countless social practices culturally constituted. This need materializes in recreation and can be fulfilled in many ways, according to the values and interests of the subjects, groups and institutions in each historical, social and cultural context. Therefore, leisure must be addressed as a social, political, cultural and historically situated phenomenon (Gomes, 2014, p. 12).

In this sense, the triad river-city-leisure in Foz do Iguaçu possessed a mark that goes through the formation of the historical identity of the population, the vicinity of waters to their residences were embraced with a sense of belonging and ownership, as can be noticed in these accounts:

*"In the beginning of the 1970s, people from this time, when my father arrived and just when and I was born, they enjoyed the river a lot. People from the Foz, born here, have this inheritance that comes from our parents, they have a very close relationship with the river, even those who didn't live so close to the river. The main recreation back then has always been the river." ("Adventurer")*

*"Here, in Foz do Iguaçu and region, we are known as man of the river, because when the colonizers arrived, the shed, the house, they always camped in the riverbanks or by a stream, so the river became very important for the water and difficulty. Shower was in the river, washing clothes was in the river. (...) It is regrettable today, our rivers and streams so contaminated, polluted here. The city has grown and that is the price of progress." ("Guarani").*

A space in Foz do Iguaçu that has lost its characteristics due to the "progress", or rather, is been fading over time, are called "areiões" (sand gravel) or river "beaches", places where leisure activities took place. Today, these natural spaces have been virtually erased from the landscape of Foz do Iguaçu, due to the commercial activity of sand mining - still present - and, also, of the changes in the course of the rivers.

*"In the old days people went to the river for recreation. We went, we'd sat, and there was beach sand. You'd sat on the sand, the kids in the water. There were fathers thinking they were fishing, kid stuff - squealing in the water - and caring mothers, and sometimes there was little stoves, snacks, drinks. (...) Here we have the same problems of San Francisco (River). If you notice, little beaches vanishing. When a dam is built, it holds the sand. The color of Paraná today, you see it's bluish, that's because sand is not coming and it will not form a sand beach. (...) If you are up on the wall, look down, when it (the water) rises and falls, it's still dark, when it stops the whole mess, it's blue; that is lack of sand. I protest against this loss of beach." ("Canoeist")*

The protest of the "Canoeist" is against the loss of one of the main public leisure spaces in Foz do Iguaçu. Another point of contact with the river which is disappearing are the ports, closed or privatized over time. The road option to connect the cities of the triple frontier is evident, at least on the Brazilian side. The old Official Port was shut down in the same period of the opening of the Friendship Bridge, in the 1960s. Today some tour boats and commercial navigation travel in the river environment. The river traffic of residents of the Brazilian city, therefore, has been decreasing over time, as well as the link, as subjects report.

*"Back in the old days there was increased use of the river, because the access, the streets were the rivers. And now there are lots of paths, streets everywhere, and so people stopped using the boat so much and began to get to places by land. (...) There were outboard motor boats, you pay, of course. And there were rowing*



*boats, slow and very cheap, but you get to the destination, too. From Argentina to Paraguay, from Paraguay to Argentina, from Argentina to Brazil and from Paraguay to Brazil and vice versa” (“Guarani”).*

In the relationship between Ciudad del Este and Foz do Iguaçu, the existence of several illegal ports turn some riverside spaces of these two cities in territories mediated by survival and by illegal activities. These are forces that, by prevailing, were pointed out by the interviewed residents as the main reason for abandoning leisure activities on the Border Rivers.

*“Trafficking is old, came in steps. First the smuggling of yerba mate and timber, it was called green gold. There wasn’t much risk of attending the river. It became dangerous with the traffic of wheat flour, in the early 70s, from Argentina to Brazil, the era of the white gold. Then started the smuggling with gunfire, the Federal Police against smugglers. Then came drugs and arms trafficking, and it became dangerous. It began on a large scale in the early 80s. Then came contraband goods from Paraguay. That’s what hit the most the leisure on rivers. People still go, but am I going or not? Am I going and will I come back? ...” (“Guarani”).*

The city, whilst built environment, created for the reproduction or survival, requalifies elementary problems and introduces new and complex issues, such as urban violence, which must be understood within this interconnected context, and not as an individual or isolated case.

The playful interaction with the river has lost ground since the river and the residents became at odds with each other, a clear contradiction between the potential and abundance of river resources and the use of it. Another contradiction is the potential of the river banks for recreational public spaces, with private investment, generating niches of users of rivers, for example the clubs along the Paraná River. In this sense, what is being discussed is not simply the public-private dichotomy, or the condemnation of these private enterprises. And yes, to some extent, a contradiction and, surely, a discrepancy between what was privately appropriated in public spaces and, and public indifference about what could potentially be leisure spaces democratically appropriated for the population of Foz do Iguaçu. The access to these spaces is one of the problems pointed out by the interviewees. The so-called “areiões”, cited at the beginning of this chapter, were a way to access the rivers.

*“The issue is that we’ve been creating other habits. Today there are many resorts, little beaches. So you prefer to pick up your family [...] because going down to the river is uncomfortable, trails full of stones, steep tracks, it’s not like you get... and you get other ways, right? With the family, you can’t go, only with kids, but with wife, the children, the girls, it’s difficult. My daughters will go swim on Sunday, come down to swim in the big Paraná, but formerly it was more ... filled you know, there were many people, people roasting meat on a riverbank. It had sand, but the guys are taking all the sand...” (“Braziguaió”).*

*“There are several aspects that make it difficult for the population to enjoy the river. A good part is in the National Park and the National Park does not allow you to bathe, transport, or fish. You can’t, right?! Another part of the river gets some rural*

*areas, which are private properties. So, only if you know these residents you'll go there. And then the other part that skirts the border offers border risks, where there's no proper surveillance, which has contraband, which also affects. I guess that's why the possibilities reduce. People go more to the lake (Itaipu) ... to the clubs, to the Yacht Club, to Maringá (Club), the elite that have boat." ("Climber").*

In Foz do Iguaçu, the model of a city which values the encounter of diversity in the public space is not promoted. Furthermore, as highlighted before, the city is organized taking into account the tourist perspective. These contradictory issues, historically built, do not prioritize the social appropriations of the resident.

*"First you have to build for the resident. From the moment that you have room for residents, tourists will enjoy it also, I think this is the right way. That is missing a bit. Tourism is the main industry of the city, then on these forums it ends up being too much... too much talk about access for tourists, the roads for tourists, there's this error of interpretation, it should be the other way around. The environment should be built thinking about the resident's good quality of life, then the tourist will enjoy all there is for the resident. Then the tourist ends up getting involved with the city, ends up spending more. We see the young tourist, the foreign tourist, the backpacker, this new profile of tourist is coming to town. They ask: but what do the townspeople do?" ("Adventurer").*

The contradictions that emerged throughout the interviews and the survey made clear that some respondents consider Itaipu Binacional as the main actor searching for a "sustainable development" of the city, even if not all subjects agreed:

*"If you ask me who, today, thinks about the environment in the municipality in a conscious way, if we thoroughly analyze it, it's Itaipu. It caused a major alteration in the environment, but at least they are thinking about the environment, they think about sustainable development. Nowadays, the municipality has the responsibility for issuing the environmental licenses. What we are seeing is negligence, it's as if we've given the pen to a mad person, because we don't see any criteria. There isn't such a thing as an economic sustainable thought." ("Sportsman").*

Regarding the impacts of Itaipu Binacional, we follow the approach of a space imbued with the contradiction of being one of the main places of leisure, which arises from the damming of the Paraná River: the 'Prainha de Três Lagoas' (Little Beach Three Lagoons). The river and 'Prainha' stood out, also, as free remaining spaces to the population who cannot afford to pay for leisure activities in the city. In the places where there is the element water for recreation, the private options are the majority, for example resorts, paid fishing activities, or the National Park of Iguazu. In the case of 'Prainha', despite the squares in the region of 'Três Lagoas', the local was considered by those attending it – some residents in the region –, as the only option for leisure in Foz do Iguaçu.

*"I bring my sons, my daughters, my granddaughters now. The whole family. Their leisure is here, not just mine. The majority of population of Foz comes here, there is no other place to go. I'm not saying poor, rich, you know. That doesn't divide people around here, it's for everybody, for yellow, pink, black. Leisure is here, see? If you go to a swimming pool... When my children were little I'd go to the pool, with less than*

*R\$ 500 we couldn't go out, because there you pay to go in, pay the car, pay per child. There are places to where you can't take a soda, a beer. At a club, a pool, in a resort. Not here, after having the kids, every Sunday I'd go to the market buy my meat, beer, the soda to my children, the wafer, chips and I'd come here, see? Here they'd play, played ball, and in the evening we'd leave. It wasn't just me, it's up to every family till today, right? ("Flora").*

The sense of belonging to "Prainha", a place of the city with different leisure appropriations, mixes with outrage for the neglect of the place: garbage, suspicion of the lake water, and lack of adequate infrastructure, were some of the complaints.

*"The situation doesn't compensate, take a look at the situation here, bad. You may come back a year from now to see if they'd clean this up, here they would have to do the same as in Santa Helena (little beach), build beautiful little kiosks, lawns, put sand, put up stores, arrange it and make it beautiful. But nothing happens. They're going to do it and they don't. (...)" ("Ex-fisherman")*

This neglect is also patent in another area of the city – the 'Marco das Três Fronteiras' (Obelisk Triple Frontier). Despite the abandonment, the site has potential for leisure given the presence of the river. However, the leisure appropriations are punctual. The place is known for being one of the postcards of the city. In a viewpoint located in the Obelisk Triple Frontier, it is possible to see the spot where the Iguaçu and Paraná Rivers meet, and the other landmarks, represented by obelisks, in Ciudad del Este (Paraguay) and Puerto Iguazú (Argentina). Therefore, it represents the meeting of three nations, symbol of the city that stands out in the eyes, in the Brazilian case, especially to tourists. The idea of a setting for "tourists' eyes" appears again in the interviews with residents, in relation to the sense of belonging to the place.

*"Even tourists, they come because they hear about the Obelisk Triple Frontier and they think it's a big deal. They come and it's not... come here and see that it's nothing, really. And the price of the handicraft is expensive, mainly for residents. Because a tourist is travelling and has plenty of money but for residents... (...) For the kids there's nothing. They arrive here and say: 'I thought it was cool, but we're going to stay here long?' They don't like. (...) There is very little investment in public spaces, places where you don't pay get little investment, and almost nothing draws attention. A good place is where you pay" ("Resident").*

This statement refers to the relationship between the city and leisure, in which emerges, according to Rolnik (2000), antagonist concepts of the use of urban land, of leisure, of promotion, quality of life, and the model of the city that every society is building and consuming. On the one hand, the idea of urban space reduced to a medium to connect points, i.e. a simple access place to get to recreational locations – both the domestic spaces and those of sport or cultural consumption. Another perspective envisages the leisure more connected to the city, where there is a closer relationship between citizens and, therefore, with social and personal functions more identified with the public dimension of the city.

In the 'Marco das Três Fronteiras', despite the neglect of the space, a group of climbers appropriated the so called 'Espaço das Américas' (Space of the Americas), an abandoned and depleted structure, built to be a political and cultural space associated to the integration of the peoples. That group uses the wall of the 'Espaço', made of stones, to practice "artificial" urban climbing on a natural material. Although this practice is not on the river, it happens on its banks, with direct interaction with that river environment.

*"There are sport climbers that want marks, want to climb a lot and such. And there are the adventurers, who really enjoy nature, and climb to be in the nature, climbing is part of the package, right? Climbing alone in a room doesn't work. So is the setting that makes the whole thing look good. (...) The blue water, the green vegetation, and the red, brown, orange from the rock, that's what makes this magic. The water alone wouldn't be so beautiful. Let's imagine a river and a ravine, that's also ugly. But the river with green banks is wonderful, right? So, this combination is what makes everything beautiful. (...) We feel that is still very contemplative. ("Climber").*

Other groups of sportspeople linked to nature are also present on the rivers and banks for leisure activities: the so-called adventure sportspeople. Rafting, wakeboarding, canoeing, and the trendy stand up paddle. These sports, like climbing, require high cost equipment, therefore, they are restricted to specific groups, with higher purchasing power. These leisure activities, in Iguassu and Paraná rivers, are practiced literally on the border. In this immersion, emerged, to some extent, a counterpoint between these two rivers, with respect to safety of leisure activities.

*"On the Iguazu River, which is where I go, the border is much closer too, because the river is smaller. The people live peacefully there, the Brazilian, the Argentinean, there are the Brazilian and Argentinean vessels. The Argentina Navy doesn't bother, the Brazilian Navy also doesn't bother the Argentineans. The Argentineans practice a lot of sport too. There is a lot of people kayaking, because they have a good access on their port, which is right in front of our (Porto Meira), they have an easier access." ("Adventurer").*

*"You can't talk, you don't have contact with them (Paraguayans). Sometimes they curse, sometimes the guys from here tease them. They swear in guarani, offend. (...) Fishing, there's nothing to do, sometimes people keep offending the other there, speaking in Spanish, guarani and they answer back and curse too, back and forth. In Argentina that happens too. Only in Argentina is calmer, without violence. ("Kayak").*

The statement from "Kayaq" about the relationship with the Paraguayans directs to the context that Haesbaert (2011) underlines when he discusses the trans-territoriality issue, inserted in the universe of distinct and hybrid identities, which not always are positively articulated, especially in the border regions. The increasing danger, cited by many, moved the residents away from the river, even if there is still a "survival" group, which keeps enjoying their time by the river: the amateur fisherman.

A particularity when observing recreational fishermen, is the meeting of people of various age groups and an environment that assumes, often a contemplative silence. In fishing environments there are the lonely, duos, and groups. Although mostly male, there is a diversity of people that show that this leisure activity crosses generations, despite the border tensions.

*"I remember I wanted to go, but he (dad) didn't always took me. Sometimes he'd take me and sometimes not. I liked it, watched while he'd took those big fishes. So does my son, it is passing from father to son, right? If I didn't come to the river, my son wouldn't even care. It was from generation to generation. Sometimes my son ... I have a son who likes to fish with me, I'm sure he's going to fish too when he grows up. He will like it because he loves to fish. It goes from father to son. Fishing is very good, a hobby, it's entertaining. Sometimes you're so fed up with the working routine, you go fishing, right? You go to the riverbank, sometimes you don't even have to catch fish, you're there, and you look at the river and such, the walk in the woods, that's already relaxing. ("Kayak").*

This feeling of "relaxing", referred by "Kayak", is accompanied by various representations and imaginary present in the statements of the interviewees. They have emphasized that, even if the residents have turned their backs to the urban rivers, their "dead" would bring loss of meanings vital to human life, as we can observe in the following statements:

*"The river means everything to me. It's Nature, survival, leisure." ("Sailorman").*

*"To me it means everything because there wouldn't be life without the river. The city of Foz do Iguaçu itself has grown around the rivers. Not only Foz, also several other cities in Brazil. First as a mean of transportation when all region was covered in forest, the river transported people, they've always been natural roads. And second it is a source of food, you can fish in the river and have fun. ("Sparrow").*

*"The river is renewable, is relaxing... The water activities bring back this childish side, the playfulness, the joy, it's different, and we're there climbing and relaxing, but it's a sport that needs focus, serious, but when you get in the water is fun, right? It's play in the water, the funny side of water." ("Escaladora").*

*"Here everyone, not only me, it's the whole Foz do Iguaçu. Drinking a mate, or tereré, a beer. Here you seat down and look at the scenery, gaze at the world, the nature...it's just nature and quiet. ("Flora").*

*"It's just like a religion, it's a moment, a place where I can meditate, relax, pray. Specially, a cascade is where I feel more connected to God, I don't go much to the church, and I don't follow a religion. My religion is nature, being in contact with nature, so it's kind of sacred." ("Adventurer").*

*"It means leisure, life, sometimes sorrow sometimes, emotion, but more positive things." ("Guarani")*

For the interviewees, the holistic meaning of the river - that "is everything" - appeared often about the river environment in Foz do Iguaçu. Statements revealed awareness of water dependency for survival and health – with leisure permeating these paths. The riv-

ers were also perceived as sources of livelihood and as potential space for transportation: the ways of everyday life, work and the meetings with the "other", on the other side of the border, or as sources of body and soul renewal, environment for interaction, contemplation and a sense of togetherness between man and nature.

Therefore, the urgent need to think about the built environment and the river environment in Foz do Iguaçu, entails the understanding of senses and meanings of the river environment and the context of hybrid identities. A reflection within issues that bring "sorrows", as pointed out by the "Guarani", as well as potential – the "emotion and the part more positive" as he added. These possibilities of rivers, loaded with vital representations, also direct to a vision about the waters, within the context of human rights, in the context of the city and the environment.

**Table 1** – Main aspects identified in the relation river vs leisure

Leisure activities	Main activity: sport fishing. Others: adventure sports such as rafting, wakeboard, canoeing, stand up paddle; In the riverbanks, climbing.
Transformations	The river was identified, formerly, as the main leisure space of the city. Changes in that situation due to the following transformations: - Loss of the little beaches ('areiões'); - Migration to private spaces of leisure; - Prioritization of land over river transportation; - Urbanization and new urban dynamics (housing conflicts, sanitation issues, pollution of rivers, the construction of Itaipu, intensification of trade and tourism, traffic at the border, violence, sense of fear in fluvial spaces).
Contradictions	- Being at odds with the river environment; - The tourist is privileged to the detriment of the residents' closer relationship with the river; - Discrepancy with greater appropriation of public space by private power and neglect of the public spaces for leisure; - Closure of legal ports and emergence of illegal ports on the border.
Meanings of the river	- Holistic (health, survival, leisure...); - Place of relaxation and meditation; - Place of memories – sorrows and joys.
Potential	- Rivers as spaces which mark the identity of the city and the sense of belonging; - Leisure on the rivers raises ecological awareness; - Rivers as spaces of socio-cultural encounters, recognition of the the other, of other identities and other cultural values, besides environments with an inclusive potential.

Gorski (2010) verifies, in projects of recovery of rivers in the cities, the importance of leisure inserted in this process, whether by means of bike lanes, access for pedestrians, a set of parks in the riverbanks, linear parks, multipurpose areas for cultural activities, community areas or facilities for water sports. These ideas are connected with community involvement actions and accompanied by interventions for cleaning up and revitalizing waters, its banks and the ecosystem. The researcher calls attention to the multiple possibilities and functions of rivers:



Rivers, creeks, streams and water courses in the collective imagination are predominantly associated with the springs, but they have other features, such as demarcating the territory, food producers, corridors of movement of persons and commercial and industrial products, corridors of fauna and flora, power generators, free public spaces of conviviality and leisure, tourism and landmarks character references elements determinants of geomorphologic features. (Gorski, 2010, p.31)

The link city-nature, the river, the creeks, the streams, the springs, the urban water-courses are privileged links for leisure appropriations. In this sense, Gandara (2008) understands the river as an analysis category representing an indicator system of spatial situation, based on the relationships between nature and society.

They are builders of "social worlds" and bind together a good amount of representations as "place of signification". They are benchmarks almost mythical for socio-cultural strategies. They are much more than geographical features on maps. The rivers are not simple physical support. It is landscape, place where people open to the mysteries of nature, the symbolic heritage, enabling the interpretation as ground of cultural creation, passage of forces, and encounter of individuals (Gandara, 2008, p.18-19).

In this sense, thinking about the encounter of individuals and integration in the Triple Border region requires political and economic decisions and also the understanding that, from the socio-cultural encounter with the "stranger", arises and develops the recognition and respect for other identities and cultural values.

## 5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research aimed to identify and discuss some appropriations and leisure experiences in Foz do Iguaçu, on urban rivers. The knowledge organized throughout the study pointed to sporadic leisure practices, which have become rare due to the urban and natural environmental changes undertaken by the city. This direction of changes is not disconnected from an intertwined context: historical, socio-political, environmental, and cultural. These dimensions compose a set of references, forces, and social clashes which have influenced – and still do – the changes in the natural and built environments, impacted and transversely touched by leisure.

The analysis of the relationship of residents with the urban rivers reveals that the relationship between the fishermen and the river is the one which remains and is more visible in the surveyed context. Leisure, on the river and on its banks, survives through sports – interactive and contemplative with the waters – or, also, carried out through the appropriation of riverbank's facilities, as was the case of climbing. These leisure activities may be envisaged as promoting – or boosting - the encounter and the communication between people and the diversity. These practices and experiences of democratic leisure should, therefore, be considered from the value of use (of encounter), to the detriment of the value of trade (of goods).

The rivers and “green” regions are symbols of separation and union between countries (Brazil, Argentine, and Paraguay), wherein the leisure experiences are still possible and visible. The look and the interactive and contemplative experience on rivers survive mediated by fear, insecurity, and controversy, within a context of social and environmental injustices.

The perceived contradictions depart from a focus on the tourist to the detriment of a closer and attentive perspective to the resident of Foz do Iguaçu and this group’s claims; or, also a dominance of the private spaces over the public spaces. Furthermore, there is a vision that balances the relationship between nature and capital. The claim for democratic spaces, revival, and environmental conservation of rivers entails a criticism of the clashes of forces, classes, rationalities and the search for legitimation build hegemonies and invisibilities.

The leisure contributes to this debate by offering perspectives of integration for populations of the border; between society and environment; between urban and natural environment; between residents in the region and the representative spaces of their city. The awareness and questioning about how the river becomes meaning, represented and appropriated through various social practices, including leisure, is urgent.

Make invisible that tie in Foz do Iguaçu, that sense of belonging, arising from its relationship with their spaces and nature, is to destroy a history, or, many histories of emotional ties between their dwellers. It is to close the eyes on an urgency that claims for “insurgence” in a fight for the waters.

In this way, we are moving towards the public right to the water: a debate which encompasses the human survival, health, housing, and leisure. It flows and embraces, also, other debates on the right to the city and to the democratic spaces, to the encounter with other situations, besides sports, cultural, spiritual, and contemplative activities.

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