

## CULTURE, TRADE FAIR AND SPACE IN PAU DOS FERROS, RN

*Cultura, feira de negócios e espaço em Pau dos Ferros, RN*

*Cultura, Feria y Espacio em Pau dos Ferros, RN*



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### SUMMARY

The objective is to describe and explain the spatial changes in the Praça de Eventos “Nossa Senhora da Conceição”, through the Intermunicipal Fair of Business, Education, Culture and Tourism of the Alto Oeste Potiguar (FINECAP). This square undergoes significant changes in the period leading up to the fair, especially through the actions of municipal management. A mixed survey was carried out, with interviews with the idealizing subjects and the organizers and questionnaires for regulars. In this context, it was found that the fair's spatial objects are built with multiple intentions, seeking to value culture and stimulate the growth of the local and regional economy. It was also observed that FINECAP, by altering the spatial dynamics of the square, contributes to the enhancement of the local culture.

**Key words:** Culture. Party. Objects. Spatial Changes.

### RESUMO

Objetiva-se descrever e explicar as mudanças espaciais na Praça de Eventos “Nossa Senhora da Conceição”, mediante a Feira Intermunicipal de Negócios, Educação, Cultura e Turismo do Alto Oeste Potiguar (FINECAP). Esta praça passa por mudanças significativas no período que antecede a feira, especialmente mediante as ações da gestão municipal. Realizou-se uma pesquisa mista, com entrevistas junto aos sujeitos idealizadores e aos organizadores e aplicações de questionários para frequentadores. Nesse contexto, constatou-se que os objetos espaciais da feira são construídos com múltiplas intenções, buscando valorizar a cultura e estimular o crescimento da economia local e regional. Observou-se, ainda,

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que a FINECAP, ao alterar a dinâmica espacial da praça, contribui para a valorização da cultura local.

**Palavras-chave:** Cultura. Festa. Objetos. Mudanças Espaciais.

## RESUMEN

El objetivo es describir y explicar los cambios espaciales en la Praça de Eventos “Nossa Senhora da Conceição”, a través de la Feira Intermunicipal de Negócios, Educação, Cultura e Turismo do Alto Oeste Potiguar (FINECAP). Esta plaza sufre cambios significativos en el período previo a la feria, especialmente a través de las acciones de la administración municipal. Se realizó una investigación mixta, con entrevistas a los sujetos idealizadores y los organizadores, y cuestionarios para a quienes participan en la feria. En este contexto, se encontró que los objetos espaciales de la feria se construyen con múltiples intenciones, buscando valorar la cultura y estimular el crecimiento de la economía local y regional. También se observó que la FINECAP, al cambiar la dinámica espacial de la plaza, contribuye al realce de la cultura local.

**Palabras-clave:** Cultura. Festividad. Objetos. Cambios espaciales.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The antiquity of the fairs, their physical and functional transformations over time, gradually incorporated by different functions, such as free fairs, allows us to identify that it has always been a relationship between ways of cultural life, reproduction of human species and trade development. What emerges as a culturally situated symbolic exchange of products for others, after these products for a general exchange equivalent, remains symbolically in contemporary cityscapes.

Thus, more and more, fairs are a space for the reproduction of social groups, even though they appear as a space for the reproduction of our worlds of cultural life (AUTOR, 2014). This is the case, for example, of business fairs, however, we understand that even in this type of fair, in which the market dictates the rules, culture can be a cog in the system.

The Intermunicipal Business, Education, Culture and Tourism Fair of Alto Oeste Potiguar (FINECAP) is part of this context, an event that takes place in the municipality of Pau dos Ferros, in the interior of the state of Rio Grande do Norte (RN). At the fair, culture is initially the central theme of the local lifeworld, considering the origin of this festive tradition, which consequently becomes a political discourse.

Thus, FINECAP takes place annually in the first days of the month of September, during the celebrations alluding to the anniversary of the aforementioned city. It emerged under the name of “Cultural Fair of the Municipality” (FECUM) and was held in the former “Largo da Cultura”, in the urban center, in front of the Igreja da Matriz, later going to be

called FINECAP in 1997. Currently, the fair takes place at the Praça de Eventos “Nossa Senhora da Conceição”, inaugurated in 2008. the occupation of the northeastern region.

In this way, the fair was created with the objective that the institutions of Pau dos Ferros, such as the National Department of Works against Droughts (DNOCS), Banco do Brasil (BB) and Caixa Econômica Federal (CEF), in a joint action, work around entrepreneurship and collaborate for its realization, thus enabling local economic development.

In this path, FINECAP is in its 25th edition, 2019, with several public and private sponsorships that allow its realization. During the event, the square receives people not only from the state of Rio Grande do Norte, but also from neighboring states, such as Paraíba and Ceará. Considering all the public, the numbers can oscillate between 50 and 60 thousand people per night, participating in the fair.

In this way, the event held in September is also intended to commemorate the political emancipation of the municipality, which took place on September 4, 1856. FINECAP's organization includes: commercial stands, food stalls, amusement park, cabins and attractions different musical styles (forró, sertanejo, etc.). Over the time of its realization, the space in which the fair takes place has undergone significant transformations. Thus, the square, with its transformed spatial form, gained a new social function, motivating real estate speculation, development of commercial activities and services in its surroundings.

That said, in this work, we sought to answer the following question: how does the development of the Business and Culture Fair of Pau dos Ferros contribute to the spatial transformations in the square “Nossa Senhora da Conceição”? According to Santos (2008a), space is always changing in its physiognomy, in its structure, in its appearances and in its relationships. The speed of changes is due to the multiplicity of vectors that run through it, the speed of their replacement, the novelty of the forces they carry and their impact on objects, these objects, even recent ones, being quickly exchanged, revalued or devalued.

In this way, the square undergoes a transformation in its functionality every year, motivated by the holding of the grandiose regional fair, enabling different types of personal relationships. Therefore, the main objective of the study is to describe and explain the changes caused by the Business and Culture Fair, FINECAP, in the space of the “Nossa Senhora da Conceição” Events Square, in the municipality of Pau dos Ferros, RN.

It is important to highlight that this study is an expansion of our Course Completion Work, defended in 2018, which was developed from the research project entitled “Production

and material and symbolic reproduction of space”, financed with scholarships from the Institutional Program of Scientific Initiation Scholarships (PIBIC), between 2015 and 2017, when we acted as scholarship holders. The project is associated with the Research Group on Space, Teaching and Human Sciences (GEPEECH), certified by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), of the Geography Department of the Advanced Campus of Pau dos Ferros (CAPF), of the University of State of Rio Grande do Norte (UERN).

Mixed type research was used (CRESWEL, 2010), in which we included qualitative and quantitative approaches and techniques. In this way, data collection activities were carried out in the field, at the Praça de Eventos “Nossa Senhora da Conceição”, in Pau dos Ferros – RN. Creswell (2010) mentions that this type of research is essential, as the researcher takes field notes and conducts face-to-face interviews with the subjects.

As part of the aforementioned PIBIC research project, in 2017, questionnaires were applied to 20 people, divided into two groups: one aged between 17 and 29 years old and the other between 30 and 60 years old, both participating in the fair, with questions open and closed. The questionnaires were applied to the 02 groups in order to know their degree of relationship with the fair and, specifically, the construction of territorial identity with the square.

In addition, in 2018, interviews were conducted with the event organizers, in turn, women, who will be referred to here as Organizer 01 and Organizer 02; both were creators and organizers of FECUM in 2004. In addition to the informed collaborators, we have Informant 01, that is, an employee of the City Hall, to collect data on cultural matters; and with Informant 02, in this case, the mayor of the city during the first edition of the fair. It is important to point out that all interviewed subjects freely accepted, signing the free consent term for the use of their speeches. Thus, for these cases, we used the interview as a data collection technique, since it is useful, according to Vergara (2012), as a resource in itself, as part of a process when the chosen method is fed by phenomenology or root method or by dialectics, but, above all, when one wants to obtain information that is within the individual, that is, his lived experiences, or when one seeks to capture the inherent subjectivity to every human being. Data were updated, in turn, in 2019, in secondary sources (FECOMÉRCIO, 2019), the year of the last edition of the fair.

Observations were also made and photographic records were made of the square and the surrounding space, records that show the before, during and after the fair, between 2017 and 2018. Observation was chosen because, as Vergara (2012) points out, this

method complements the application of the interview or the questionnaire. Following the recommendations of this author, we opted for Structured, Participant Observation, Direct Team and Real Life. In this sense, Cervo and Bervian (2002) emphasize that observation, regardless of the modality, must be attentive, exact, complete, precise, successive and methodical. In addition, they record the importance of using photography to compare, remember reports and facts that happened in a given period. As a result of this step,

In view of the literature, a regional deficiency of studies involving this theme is perceived, which is of paramount importance for the municipality of Pau dos Ferros and neighboring locations. According to Bezerra (2008), parties reflect the way in which social groups think, perceive or conceive their environment, therefore, the very relations between society and the environment. In this way, parties can become a “meeting point” for social groups that come together for work or for fun. In this perspective, the present study is a contribution to the population of Pau dos Ferros - RN, as well as to the entire region, in addition to being for the reader in general, in the sense that he can understand the changes that occurred in space, more precisely in Praça of Events.

## **2 THE CREATION OF FECUM/FINECAP IN PAU DOS FERROS – RN**

Located in the state of Rio Grande do Norte, approximately 410 km from the capital Natal, the municipality of Pau dos Ferros, popularly known as “Princesinha do Oeste Potiguar”, has approximately 29,954 inhabitants, based on the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2010).

Classified as a B<sup>1</sup> sub-regional center (IBGE, 2020), it exerts influence in the region Alto Oeste Potiguar, in Rio Grande do Norte, and in municipalities in Ceará and Paraíba, by providing services such as hospitals, schools, universities and street markets, contributing to the local economy and commuting, as many people depend on these services. As for the management of the territory, public services, financial institutions, higher education and health are available.

Taking advantage of this context, FINECAP was created by the Secretariat of Culture, in partnership with the City Hall, on September 7, 1994, under the name FECUM. The aim was to promote culture and develop the local economy. At the beginning, as

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<sup>1</sup> “Sub-Regional Center B - formed by 256 Cities with a large participation of the Southeast and Northeast Regions, it has a national average of 70 thousand inhabitants, larger in the Southeast (85 thousand) and smaller in the South (55 thousand)”. (IBGE, 2020, p. 11).

mentioned in the introduction, the event was located in “Largo da Cultura” (Figure 1), in the center of the city, in front of the Igreja Matriz.

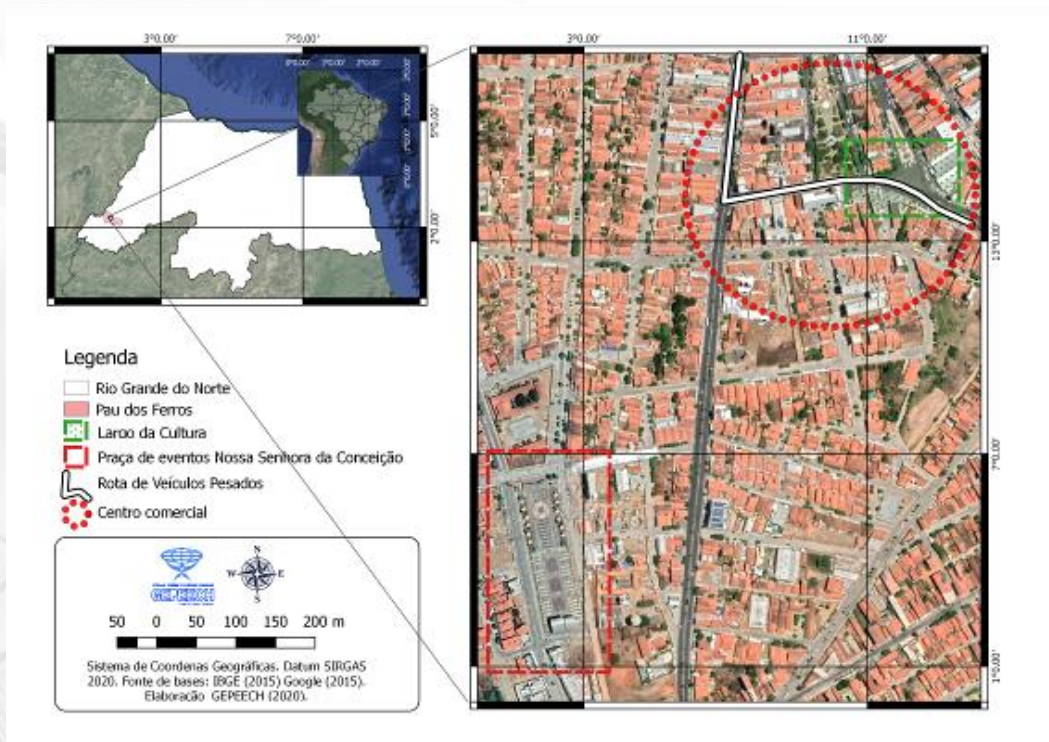
Thus, the event began in the public space of the street, in the center of the city, in front of the Igreja Matriz, in a smaller area compared to the current Praça de Eventos. Despite this, the event allowed several local merchants to participate, contributing to the growth of the fair. At that moment, it occurred to us to know about the objectives of the creation of the business fair by the city of Pau dos Ferros. According to the speech of Organizer 01:

There were other parties. However, this was created to be a spectacular party, in which all people could and wanted to participate, as we believed it would be a very great contribution to the culture and local economy, as from then on the municipality would be known, the stands would grow, in addition to business exchanges, as everyone wanted to contribute. (ORGANIZER 01, 2018).

Still on the fair, the speech of Organizer 02 reinforces that:

Pau dos Ferros was growing a lot, it was always a commercial point and, because of this culture, it continued to perpetuate for the fair to be the main reference of the municipality. FECUM was created with the cultural and educational objective of trying to strengthen the cowboy culture, which has everything to do with the emergence of the municipality. (ORGANIZER 02, 2018).

**Figure 1 – Relative location of Largo da Cultura and the “Nossa Senhora da Conceição” Events Square**



**Source:** Prepared by the authors (2018)

In the speeches above, the connection, since the origin of the fair, between the economy and the local culture is observed, therefore, elements of tradition are resumed, as evidenced in the speech of Organizer 02, such as the cowboy culture. Etymologically, “Pau dos Ferros” is a toponym that comes, according to oral tradition, from the branding of cattle with red-hot irons by traveling cowboys who passed through there, and who had the practice of branding cattle on the trunk of a tree. quite common in that sector, an oiticica, which was located on the banks of a lake (CASCUDO, 1968).

According to the speech of Organizer 02:

It was working, because culture was highly valued and the economy was growing gradually, because not only businessmen profited, but also street vendors, from the person who sold mineral water on the street, to the person who owned a commercial point. However, from FECUM, a beauty salon, restaurants, inns and clothing stores emerged. (ORGANIZER 02, 2018).

Although it has not been possible to measure, there is a relationship between the emergence and evolution of the fair and the growth of commerce in the local urban space, whose mobilization factor was certainly the cultural dimension of its realization, inserting

elements of popular culture and mass culture. New objects and new actions incorporated into the local space ended up creating an urban expansion movement in the city and, specifically, around the square, with bars, restaurants, steakhouses and pizzerias.

Taking place, symbolically, on the anniversary of the political emancipation of Pau dos Ferros and in the “Largo da Cultura”, a geosymbol of the city, FECUM sought to strengthen itself and, with that, the appreciation of local culture, as expressed by Organizer 02, because the “Largo da Cultura”:

It was a lagoon with large oiticicas where the cowboys, on their way, stopped to rest. In this sense, the choice to carry out FECUM was in the sense of valuing the local culture. At that time, this space was considered sufficient for the event, as space was limited, with only school presentations and cowboy decorations. (ORGANIZER 02, 2018).

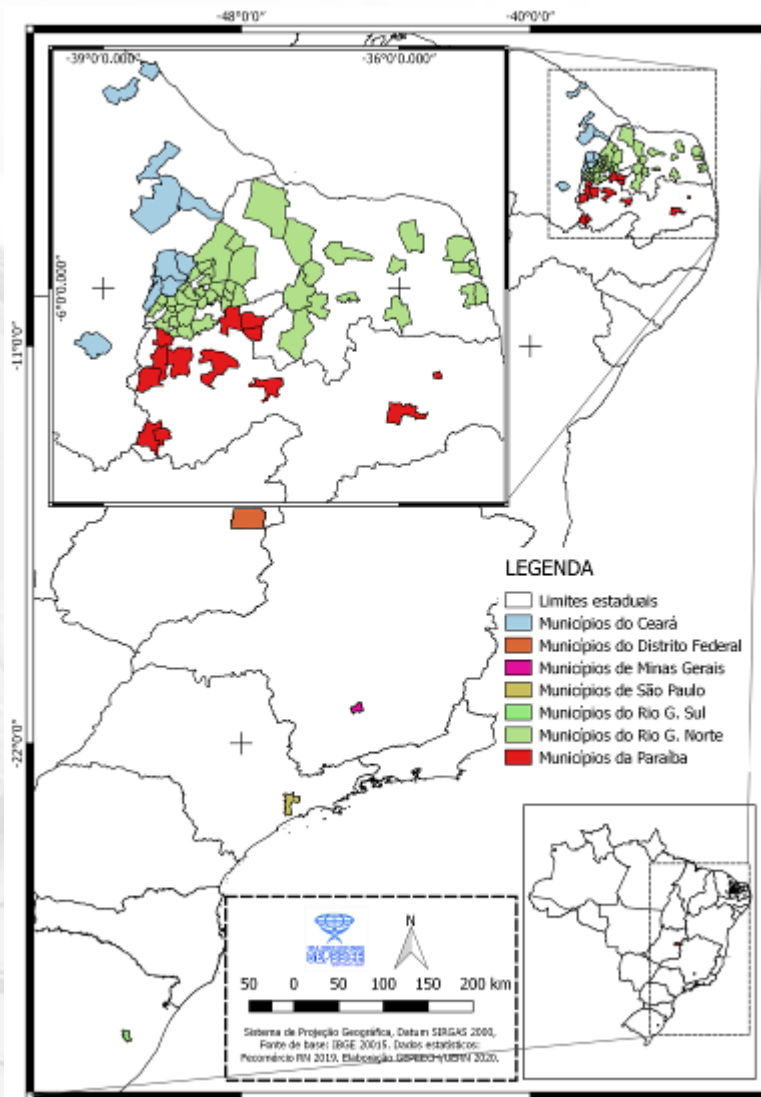
This passage is significant, as the social processes that continue to be guided by local political power ended up not contributing to this original purpose. In recent years, if the political date of emergence of Pau dos Ferros is always highlighted, this geosymbol of the world of local life, the Largo da Cultura, seems to appear as something apart from the cultural tradition that is the culture fair.

In this context, we understand why the name FECUM is later replaced by the name FINECAP, that is, the word “culture” is replaced by the word “business”. In the same way, the fair started to take place for 4 consecutive days, providing a new spatial dynamic to the municipality, in which entrepreneurs can sell everything from handicrafts to cars, taking advantage of the high flow of tourists (ALVES, 2014).

As for the audience, there are people from different municipalities, states and regions of Brazil (Figure 2). Using the field research of the Federation of Commerce of Goods, Services and Tourism of Rio Grande do Norte (FECOMÉRCIO RN), which interviewed a total of 601 people at FINECAP 2019, it can be verified its population and geographic dimension.



**Figure 2 - Spatial origin of people who attended FINECAP in 2019**

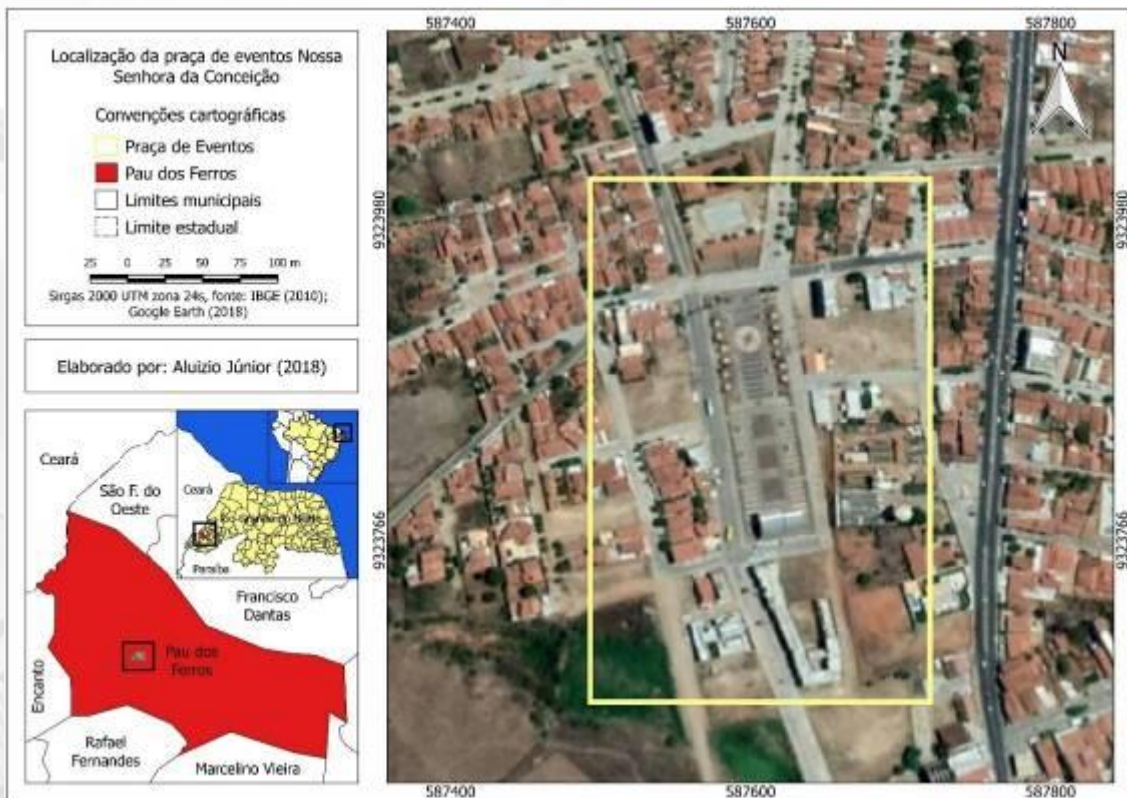


**Source:** Prepared by the authors (2019)

Thus, FINECAP started to be held in the current Praça de Eventos, officially designated as “Praça Nossa Senhora da Conceição” (Figure 3), which was inaugurated on June 25, 2008. When asked about the main purpose of building the Praça of Events, Informant 01 listed an associated set of themes, such as leisure, coexistence, employment, income and also an environmental content of spatial renewal:

The objective of creating the Praça de Eventos was to provide a space for leisure and also for coexistence. To propitiate job and income generation for the fathers and mothers of families who appropriated the commerce that is offered in the square. Another important point was to clean up a space that, before, was a pond that received waste from nearby houses, that is, to give life to that particular space, which is considered the heart of the municipality. (INFORMANT 01, 2018).

**Figure 3** – “Nossa Senhora da Conceição” Event Square, where FINECAP is currently held



**Source:** Prepared by Aluizio Júnior (2018)

It is highlighted, in the speech above, the spatial variable as a strategy for choosing the new location of the square, which should be able to host the fair annually, as FINECAP enabled the municipality of Pau dos Ferros to have greater visibility in the state and regional scenario. According to Informant 01 (2018): “The Events Square was created due to the logistical, touristic and, mainly, the commercial issue”.

Thus, the construction of the “Nossa Senhora da Conceição” Events Square took place through a process of material production of the space through instrumental action, resulting in a reconfigured landscape (Figures 4 and 5).

**Figures 4 and 5 – Space area before (2007) and after the construction of the Events Square in Pau dos Ferros - RN (2018)**



**Source:** Personal elaboration from Google Earth (2018)

Inaugurated in 2008, the square and FINECAP are one of the largest spaces/events in Rio Grande do Norte. For that, people worked and work collectively for its reproduction, as happens, for example, with the installation of festive objects, the cabins, the amusement park, the sales tents and the commercial stands. Therefore, according to Creator 02:

It was with the promotion of local and Upper West culture, as well as the dissemination of the house's artists, FINECAP began to be recognized intercity and in Brazil, being considered one of the biggest parties in Rio Grande do Norte. I never imagined that a small event like FECUM would become a huge and successful fair. (IDEALIZER 02, 2018).

Bezerra (2008) mentions the importance that events with this dimension play in the city, in its cultural, economic and social development. In fact, FINECAP began as an event considered by its creators as “small” and gained a larger dimension, becoming appropriated by municipal managers, transforming itself into a spatial brand.

Certainly, this spatial marking was reinforced by the continuity movements of this festive tradition invented by the municipal administration. The spatial dynamics of the square can be seen, then, primarily by the material organization and its 2007 2018 functioning. And then by the relationship between culture, identity and space. In the latter case, it implies recognizing that the transformation of space goes beyond the limits of the square and

extends to the scale of the municipality itself.

### 3 SPATIAL TRANSFORMATIONS AND “NOSSADAS DA CONCEIÇÃO” SQUARE

During the FINECAP period, the Events Square undergoes significant transformations in its appearance and functioning, as various objects are located in the space and, with them, various functions. During the fair period, these functions replace those that are frequently present, such as physical activities and meetings of social groups, young people and families for conversations or get-togethers during the week and at night, when the kiosks are open. Thus, during the organization and realization of the fair, we have a space with the spatial presence of cabins (Figure 6), amusement parks, stands (Figure 7) and, even after the event, restaurants, pizzerias, among others.

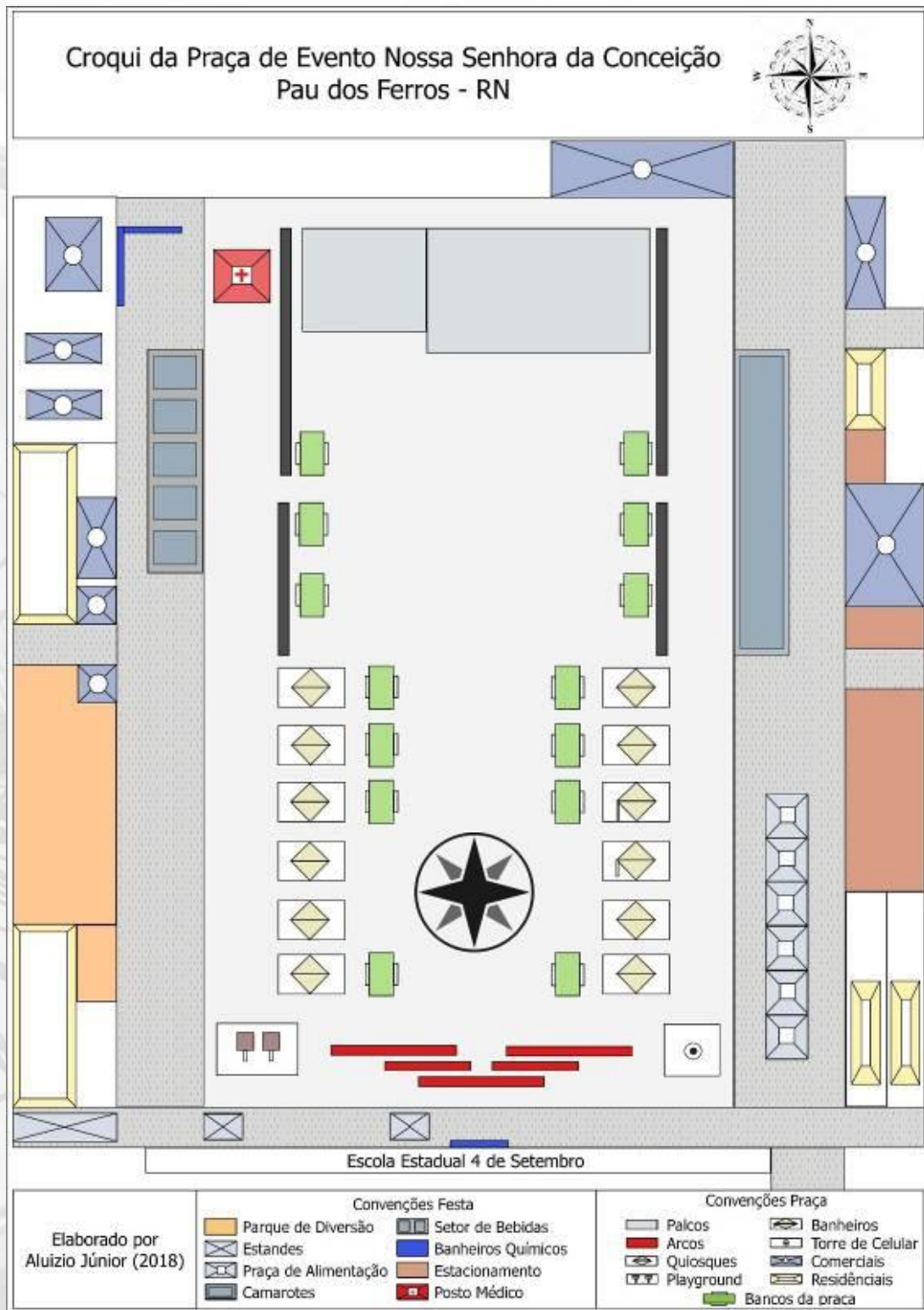
**Figures 6 and 7 –** Spatial modifications with the insertion of objects



**Source:** Authors' collection (2018)

In this perspective, Santos (2008a, p. 61) understands that “the fixed elements fixed in each place, allow actions that modify the place itself, new or renewed flows that recreate the environmental conditions and social conditions, and redefine each place”. Therefore, it is possible to observe the spatial transformations caused by new and old objects in the Praça de Eventos (Figure 8).

**Figure 8 – Sketch of the Events Square during the FINECAP period**



**Source:** Prepared by Aluizio Júnior (2018)

Still according to Santos (2002, p. 164), “in order to act, men do not leave the world, but, on the contrary, it is from it that they take the possibilities to be realized in places”.

Therefore, subjects can modify their space according to their needs and possibilities, as is the case of the Praça de Eventos, transformed to hold the business and culture fair. In the proportion in which these transformations occur, the possibility of a certain portion of spatial actors to obtain income increases, such as street vendors with carts of popcorn, drinks and food points, as well as big businessmen.

It should be noted that, during the period of the fair, there is a separation of social groups, that is, it is possible to perceive in the space a differentiated distribution between the visitors of the sales stalls and food points, as well as the social groups that enjoy the party occupying the cabins and most of the population accompanying it on the ground of the square.

These transformations, from the point of view of the social materiality that accompanies them, can be analyzed in a broader way. From the symbolic point of view, important changes took place, notably with the construction of identity, cultural and territorial feelings.

#### **4 CULTURAL IDENTITY AND THE EVENT SQUARE IN PAU DOS FERROS**

FINECAP gained a larger dimension than was imagined at the beginning of its creation. A large part of this development took place after the construction of the Praça de Eventos. Thus, we argue that the fair produced the need for space, and the space produced the identity of the population with the party, with the square, with the city itself. In this way, the Municipality of Pau dos Ferros, using specific sponsorship notices, stipulates minimum bid amounts every year, which reached R\$ 20,000 in 2019 for cold drink companies, with a guarantee of exclusivity in return (CITY HALL OF PAU DOS FERROS, 2019).

Thus, during the field research, we applied questionnaires to the public that participated directly in the event. Therefore, in addition to the cultural and economic bias, the Praça de Eventos came to be recognized as a spatial form of identification by people. Thus, when asked about the places they most identified with in the municipality, 16 collaborating subjects stated that they identified more with Praça de Eventos, which may be associated with the realization of FINECAP. We asked Interviewee 01 about her conception of Praça de Eventos and what culture would be. According to the interviewee's statement:

For me it is very good to be in Praça de Eventos, it was a construction that really paid off in Pau dos Ferros, because people have somewhere to have

fun at night and it is a space where children, young people and adults can feel at ease, as it is quite spacious. (INTERVIEWEE 01, 2018).

As Haesbaert (1999) points out, identity refers both to people and to objects and things. Soon, the person grows in his life world (HABERMAS, 2012) and is socialized through language and culture. Thus, it starts to share customs and traditions. Therefore, he knows and builds his identity from others and from the bonds of affection he creates not only with other people, but also with spatial objects.

In this process, material symbolic forms, such as the square, non-material ones, interpersonal relationships and people's relationships with spatial forms create and maintain identity. As Santos (2008b) confirms, the fixed elements enable actions that will modify the very space in which the subjects are inserted, allowing the modification of the place according to the imposed need.

In this sense, FINECAP has contributed to the formation of the territorial identity of the people who participate directly and indirectly in the event. In this regard, Luchiari and Isoldi (2007, p. 167) state that:

[...] [the] construction of territorial identity also involves consideration of an inheritance and the preservation of a socio-historical heritage. The ability to remember, preserve and perpetuate a past is part of an identity feeling. In this way, the occupation of places, over time, allows for the rooting and creation of a sense of belonging.

For Interviewee 04 (2018), "The creation of the Praça de Eventos was one of the best things that happened in Pau dos Ferros – RN, because in addition to being a huge space, it also developed the culture and economy". Interviewee 05 (2018) highlighted: "I really like the square, for me it is a cultural form, because, above all, it is from here that I can increase my family income".

Corrêa and Rosendahl (1999; 2008) report the challenges and difficulties for understanding the importance of culture for geographic studies, based on the space in which cultural forms are carried out. In this context, it is important to understand FINECAP not only as the material production of space, in the case of Praça de Eventos, but also from a cultural point of view, as it is an event that has been perpetuated for over a decade and is recognized by society. Corrêa and Rosendahl (1999, p. 63) also state that "[...] what is discovered is that men, groups and places are variable realities, constructed at a specific time and place. Its nature is at the same time material, historical and geographical".

It is worth mentioning that it was from the comparison with the fair that we understood FINECAP not only as a place of commercial exchange, but a place of symbology, culture, identity, economy, productions that are carried out individually or collectively. According to Author (2014, p. 49):

The public space advocated here is essentially communicative, it is thus directly linked to the use of communicative action and communicative reason, as capable of producing a spatial nature at the service of those who live, produce and reproduce from the lived world, from the world shared by emotions and desires similar in essence.

In this way, an analysis of the spatial modifications in the Praça de Eventos, especially related to the realization of FINECAP, allows us to better capture our object of study.

In summary, during the period in which the trade fair takes place, the Praça de Eventos “Nossa Senhora da Conceição” is modified to enable its realization and its annual repercussion, allowing, through the insertion of new objects, that the fair continues to be expanded and developing the local and regional culture and economy.

## 5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

With the descriptions made about the origin and organization of the Intermunicipal Fair of Business, Education, Culture and Tourism of Alto Oeste Potiguar (FINECAP), in the municipality of Pau dos Ferros, in Rio Grande do Norte, the objective was to describe and explain the changes spaces in the “Nossa Senhora da Conceição” Events Square, through its organization and the arrangement of objects, such as stands, boxes, parks, etc.

The square, built in 2008, undergoes significant changes in its organization and functioning in the period prior to the fair, in September, especially due to the actions of the municipality. The fair's spatial objects are built with multiple intentions, seeking to value culture and stimulate the growth of the local and regional economy. This tradition is originally associated with the first intention and has been superseded by the second.

Important spatial changes have taken place in the city of Pau dos Ferros since the origin of the Culture and Business Fair in the 1990s. From being held on the street, it required the construction of its own space, the Events Square. From a local event, today it is a regional event of proportions that go beyond the limits of Rio Grande do Norte.

Even so, despite its economic and political dimension, the research demonstrated,



through interviews with the creators, organizers and fair-goers, that FINECAP, by changing the spatial dynamics of the square, has contributed to the appreciation of culture local and regional. The very territorial identity of the people with the city of Pau dos Ferros was visibly altered.

In view of this, FINECAP gained proportions that exceeded the locality and became a successful event, also influenced by the spatial transformations of the municipality, such as the construction of the Events Square, one of the largest in the state. Therefore, they are political strategies for valuing culture and encouraging the local economy, necessary in times of weakening public investment.

## THANKS

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