

## **Samba Schools Management: A Historical Approach**

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**Abstract.** The parade of Samba Schools of Rio de Janeiro is a cultural event that has enormous economic and social importance for the local and national tourism economy. For the event to continue important, the samba schools need to innovate according to the political and economic context. From the first groups formed to celebrate the carnival to modern shows of today, the samba schools had different ways of fundraising, from the patronage of gambling bankers to the sponsored plots. The evolution of the samba school affected the way they are organized and managed. This study aims to evaluate the historical evolution of the samba schools as organizations that nowadays require strategic marketing and financial direction.

**Keywords:** samba schools, fundraising, management, marketing

### **1. Introduction**

The Rio Carnival and especially the parades of the Samba Schools are events of great importance and large audience. Both are studied by different areas of knowledge, such as sociology, history, etc.

However, it is also important for other areas such as economics and business management, since it generates income and employment and requires organizational effort for its realization.

Thus, this study aimed to discuss the organization of parades and samba schools, from its historical evolution, especially in light of the ways to raise funds to finance the Carnival projects.

### **2. Origin and Evolution of the Parades**

The samba schools appeared in Rio de Janeiro around 1920. As described by Cavalcanti [1] were the institutions responsible for the street carnival which clearly showed the stratification of Rio society in the second half of the nineteenth century. There were the “Grandes Sociedades” (Great Societies), organized by the richer layers, which paraded to the sound of opera with political storylines, luxurious costumes and floats. The “Ranchos”, organized by the urban petty bourgeoisie, also paraded with a storyline in the rhythm of a marching carnival using costumes and floats. And the “Blocos” (carnival blocks) that were made by the poor, slum residents and suburbanites. It was from such blocks that emerged now known Samba Schools.

The name "samba school" derives from the presence of a teacher training school in the same neighbourhood of the first samba school "Deixa Falar" (Let talk). One of the founders, Ismael, said "Let talk about us, we are also teachers" because, that group met the composers who were pioneers in teaching rhythm.

The first parade of samba schools in competition format was held in 1932 in the famous Plaza 11, organized by a sports newspaper. The “Mangureira” was the champion. The following year, the school was bi-champion on this occasion the O Globo newspaper organized the competition.

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According to Almeida [2] in 1933, the mayor of Rio (Pedro Ernesto) chaired a samba contest in Joao Caetano theater. This led the samba to fear the intervention of government. Thus in 1934 it was founded the UES (Samba School Union) aimed at reconciling the interests of government with the interests of samba.

In 1935, the samba schools began to receive government subsidies for their show.

Initially, the shows were performed on the street without any support infrastructure. In 1962 bleachers began to be assembled and sold tickets.

In 1983, the Association of Samba Schools made the first contract to broadcast the show by a television network. [1]

In 1984, Governor Leonel Brizola opened at Marques de Sapuca í Avenue, Sambadrome, initially with a runway 700 meters long and with a capacity of 60,000 spectators.

The most recent and relevant event related to the Rio carnival is the Samba City, inaugurated by the Rio municipality in 2006. This space aims to be a carnival factory, a place to build the floats and fabricate costumes. The City of Samba allows extend the Carnival calendar, including this site as a tourist attraction.

### **3. Animal Game Patronage**

It is not possible narrate the history of the samba schools, without taking into account the involvement of animal game patrons' ("jogo do bicho" - an illegal gambling pastime in Brazil).

The beginning of this relationship happened in 1946 when President Dutra banned gambling. 'Bankers' and bookies began to seek the periphery where there were the samba schools. [1]

As bankers enriched and as the game expanded, they began to provide personal assistance and public improvements in return for loyalty of the population. The expansion of the animal game in town filled the gaps left by the government.

Over time, the bankers also began to contribute to the samba schools in the geographic area that had dominated. Their financial contributions allowed grandiose parades, attracting the interest of tourists and media channels.

Bankers were getting prestige in the communities, reducing the negative perception of the population due to their illegal activities.

In the mid-1970s, due to the funding of patrons, poorer schools (Beija-Flor, Mocidade de Padre Miguel, Imperatriz Leopoldinense) have become strong competitors of the most famous samba schools (Mangueira, Portela, Salgueiro).

After the inauguration of Sambadrome 1984, the relationship between bookies and the carnival grew stronger. Starting from the Sambadrome, parades have been economically viable. The bookies dissatisfied with the carnival managed by the government, founded the League of Samba Schools. This League has contributed to the full privatization of the great schools parade.

The Public Prosecution in the 1990s kept the bankers under siege. This fact combined with a new trend of reorganization in the administrative structures of schools, have contributed to reduce the influence of bookies in the carnival. According to the magazine *Época* [3], the bookies made use of the samba schools for money laundering.

### **4. Plot and Samba-Plot**

The relevance which theme plot got in the preparation of a parade nowadays was also derived from countless changes that the samba schools have experienced over time.

Although some sambas linked to plots have emerged in the 30s, its presence has become crucial, from the 40s. [4]

Because of Brazil's entry into World War II, the samba schools have adopted plots and sambas-plot with the patriotic nationalism as a central element of the parade. During the years 1943, 1944, 1945, the parades of the samba schools were called 'War Carnival' ("Carnavais de Guerra").

Another political context that has shaped some sambas-plot was the military dictatorship (1964-1985). On the one hand, there were plots that criticized the regime on the other, there were plots that exalted, as was the case of the Beija-Flor that paraded in 1975 with the theme 'The Great Decade' ("O Grande Decênio"). [5]

Although the plots have wide variety, the most common are related to the following types: historical themes, literature, folklore, homage to personalities and social criticism with elements of humour

Currently, the selection of a plot is influenced by a new trend of attracting financial resources through large corporate or government institutions sponsorships.

The first sponsored plot that won a championship was in 1995. The "Imperatriz Leopoldinense" was the champion with the plot about the State of Cear á sponsored by its government.

The first case of big failure with sponsored plot was the Porto da Pedra in 2012. Sponsored by the multinational company Danone, the plot about yogurt was criticized by the press, even before parade. The school was ranked among the last placed in the championship and was demoted to access division.

## 5. Current Configuration of the Parade

The parades and schools were continually being changed over time, with regard to: visual magnificence, the show places, the competition rules, cadence of drummers and samba beat. [6]

The samba schools are constantly changing, innovating to adapt to demands for new choreography, costumes and floats.

The current regulation of parades given by Samba School League, establishes the minimum and maximum times for a school parade. During the show, schools receive grades in ten judgment categories:

- Percussion band ("Bateria") - The percussionists must keep pace throughout the show. The judges look for regularity and continuity of the beat;
- Samba song ("Samba enredo") - Lyrics and melody are evaluated separately, also out the inclusion of the plot in poetical form;
- Harmony ("Harmonia") - This category evaluates the fusion of music, rhythm and singing;
- Flow and spirit of the participants ("Evolução") - This category assesses the progression of dance in samba rhythm, marked by the rhythm of percussionists. Participants must dance the samba with vigor and spontaneity;
- Theme of the year ("Enredo") - It is the artistic development of theme or concept, the balance must be maintained from design to realization. Penalties can be imposed in the improper use of advertising;
- Overall impression ("Conjunto") - It is an attribute where the school is evaluated for its musical, dramatic and visual uniformity. It is the category where the overall impact of school parade is considered;
- Floats and props ("Alegorias e adereços") - This category judges the originality and quality of the artwork found in the floats and props. Judges should observe how effectively they deliver the theme plot;
- Costumes ("Fantasias") - The judges in this category, should check the plot of the narrative, through the good taste and creativity of the costumes. Costumes should not hinder the mobility of components;
- Vanguard group ("Comissão de frente") - Group of ten to fifteen components that makes the opening of the parade, greeting the public, presenting the school and the plot. The judges should also assess the costumes and choreography;
- The flag carrying couple ("Mestre-Sala e Porta-Bandeira") - This category evaluates the first dancing master and his partner, the flag carrier lady. Commonly the couple wears dazzling costumes. The judges should consider their dance, elegance and grace.

Parade's simplified structure is shown in the following figure.

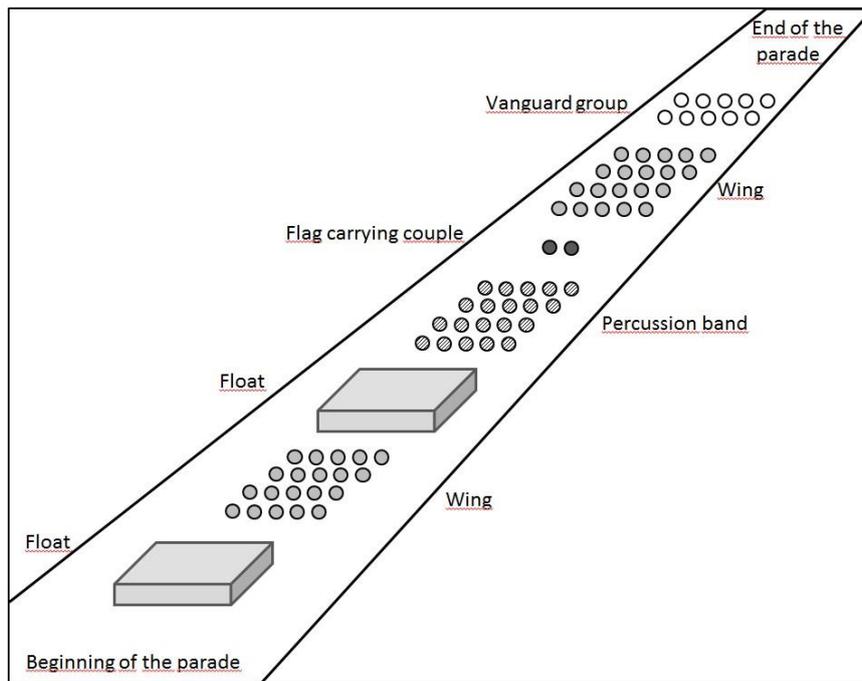


Fig. 1: Parade's structure

The regulation also defines the awarding of the six best-placed schools. 95% of revenue with ticket sales are divided among them.

## 6. Samba Schools Inc.

Carnival can no longer be considered only as a manifestation of popular culture. The parade nowadays is a real spectacle, which depends even the presence of celebrities. This is a major undertaking, with objectives similar to those of any traditional organization. [7]

Many authors, like Rego and Melo [8], consider the samba schools as large companies, which work in a structured way, all year long, not just on the dates of the Carnival itself. Like any business, the samba schools have strategic objectives, organizational structures, technology and human resources.

There is a great division and specialization of labor. The previously mentioned carnival factories ("Barracões"), serve as true production lines of a modern factory. Even light and motion control software can be found in the manufacture of floats.

Given the decline of patronage, the Samba Schools have adopted a more professional organizational structure, which includes marketing and fundraising departments.

The total cost of the parade for a single school can be 6 to 8 million dollars. It is increasingly relevant a choice for a plot as a way of raising funds to supplement the amount coming from subsidies that are an average of 4 million dollars. Other revenues comes from shows, selling T-shirts and costumes for the parade.

## 7. Concluding Remarks

One can conclude that the samba schools from time to time are adapting to the reality of each historical period. At present, the main perceived change is the way in which schools are raising funds to realization of their parades.

The samba schools tend to organize both in terms of their forms of fundraising, as the realization of the elements considered in the competition.

There are basically two administrative structures which vary in importance depending on the time of year (closer or farther from the Carnival). The first one is more related to marketing and finance activities, and the other relates to the production and logistics of the parade itself.

Some samba schools have already outlined their administrative structures through charts. The comparison and the evolution of these charts can be sources for future works.

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