

REPORT ON THE FOCUS GROUPS

Based on the Bourdieusian theory of class as multidimensional and the homology of social, symbolic, and geographic spaces, we investigate the participation of the cultural dimension in the construction of relational proximities and distances between groups and classes in the city of São Paulo. We seek to apprehend whether certain (cultural) practices demarcate belongings, exclusions, and hierarchies, asking if and how cultural capital is nowadays defined and if it plays a role, and if so, which, in the current dynamics of class in São Paulo.

Our research has, nevertheless, aspects in its backgrounds that complexify the Bourdieusian framework, such as the growing global circulation of goods, people, practices, and meanings, the expansion of the means of cultural production and circulation linked to the dissemination of ICTs, the importance of social markers of difference (such as race, gender, etc.) in the formation of groups, the recent transformations in the Brazilian educational system, and the very expansion of what is considered culture. In this regard, the research can be taken as a part of an international effort to update and revise the Bourdieusian legacy (Bennett *et al*, 2009; Coulangeon and Duval, 2013 - to cite just two works of groups recently dedicated to the same task).

Under this theoretical framework and within a broad multi-method research, we carried out six focus groups, with about fifty people in total, between April and June 2022, in a face-to-face format using mirror rooms in the city of São Paulo. To construct a filter and define the profiles to be recruited, we started from the occupational classification, as condensation of cultural and economic capitals, as proposed by Will Atkinson (2017), but incorporating other variables: neighborhood; genre; age; occupation; employer or company name if company holder; labor situation; children and age of children; schooling; level of education; attended course and university/college, in case of higher education; if parents had access to higher education; how many people in the household has a college degree; if social/racial program beneficiary; if attended to any public program of access to culture; if children drop out school or not in age-appropriate school grades; if children attend any state-run program of access to culture; household income; the number of residents in the household; per capita income; race/color; gender identity; sexual orientation; Facebook, Instagram and/or LinkedIn links (to qualitative analysis).

Each variable had a score, and the sum of the scores allowed us to assess if the person would match the profiles we outlined to approach the symbolic space of the city. Therefore it was not only a matter of applying the classifications proposed by Atkinson to the São Paulo reality. As classes are relational entities, according to the Bourdieusian perspective we adopt, the occupations were understood taking into consideration the respondent's score on the other variables. This method allowed us to position each respondent relationally to another, partially reproducing São Paulo's social space. Also, we considered some qualitative dimensions of participants via his/her social network information.

We then designed three major social strata depending on the volume of capital they presented: higher, intermediate, and lower. Each of them was then divided into two fractions, defined according to the structure of these capitals, whether more economic or cultural. Based on this methodological procedure, we had the following groups:

- Profile 1: Lower professional stratum with low economic and cultural capital: seamstress (2), caregiver for the elderly, security guard, day laborer, app driver, bricklayer, house painter; educational agent. One participant is attending higher education; age between 28 and 45 years; household income per capita between R\$1,000 and R\$ 2,000¹ (about 1 - 2 Brazilian minimum wage). 5 men and 4 women; 5 white and 4 black/pardo (Group 5).
- Profile 2: Lower professional stratum with higher cultural capital than economic capital: plastic artist, cultural producer, dance teacher, library assistant, nursing assistant, guitar teacher, graffiti artist, child development assistant. One participant had a higher degree, two attended higher education, and two had incomplete higher education; age between 30 and 40 years. household income per capita between R\$ 1,000 and R\$ 2,500; 3 women, 5 men; 3 white, 5 black/pardo (Group 3).
- Profile 3: Intermediate professional stratum with higher cultural capital than economic capital: music teacher, violinist, guitar teacher, photographer, language teacher, artisan; All with complete higher education; age between 25 and 39 years; household income per

¹ In 2022 the Brazilian minimum wage was around 1100 reais, which corresponded to US\$220 or €200.

capita between R\$ 1,300 and R\$ 4,600. 5 men, 5 women; 5 white, 2 yellow, 3 black/pardo (Group 1).

- Profile 4: Intermediate professional stratum with economic capital higher than cultural capital: administrative manager, support analyst, small shopkeeper, purchasing manager. Complete higher education in low-prestige colleges; age between 28 years and 40 years; household income per capita between R\$ 2,500 and R\$ 6,000. 5 women, 4 men; 5 white, 4 pardo (Group 2).
- Profile 5: Upper professional stratum with higher cultural capital than economic capital: director of photography (cinema and TV), journalist-editor, university professor, lawyer, film director, teacher and audiovisual producer, cultural manager and actress, theater teacher and actress, musician; graduate at public university; age between 31 and 49 years; higher education with parents with higher education; household income per capita between R\$ 4 thousand and R\$ 14 thousand. 5 women, 2 men; 6 white, 1 indígena (Group 4).
- Profile 6: Upper professional stratum with higher economic capital than cultural capital: sales executive, general director, engineer, manager (3), public servant (Economist), lawyer, dentist. Higher degree in private universities and parents with higher education; age between 36 and 52 years; household income per capita between 6,000 and 16,000. 5 men, 4 women; All white (Group 6)

Since one of the hypotheses of the research is the homology of social, symbolic, and physical (urban) space, it is relevant to mention the geographic distribution of the respondents. The respondents of the lower strata live mainly in the outskirts of the metropole or less valued areas of the city center. Those of the intermediate strata live closer to more valued areas of the city and the participants of the upper strata live in the West and Near-South (the richest regions) of the city. The maps below show this distribution and also the structure of capitals: in blue are the neighborhoods where those with more cultural capital dwell; in red, those with more economic capital; in green where both fractions dwell.

Image 1: Housing location of lower strata

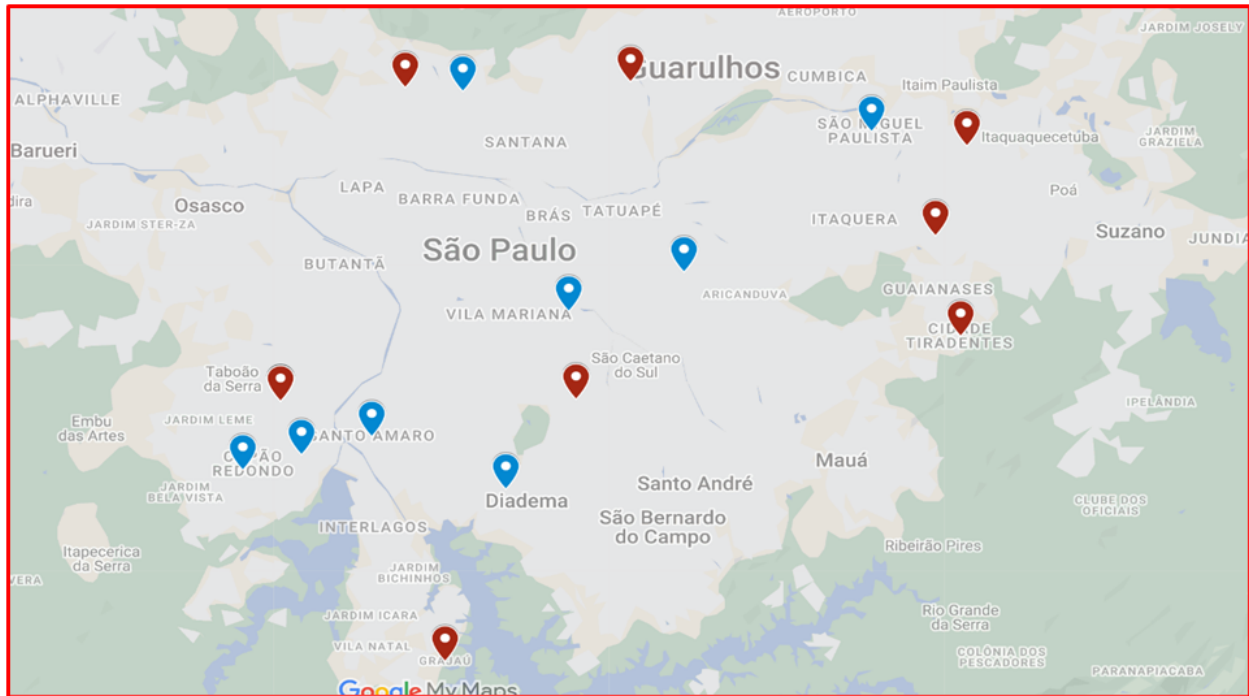


Image 2: Housing location of intermediate strata

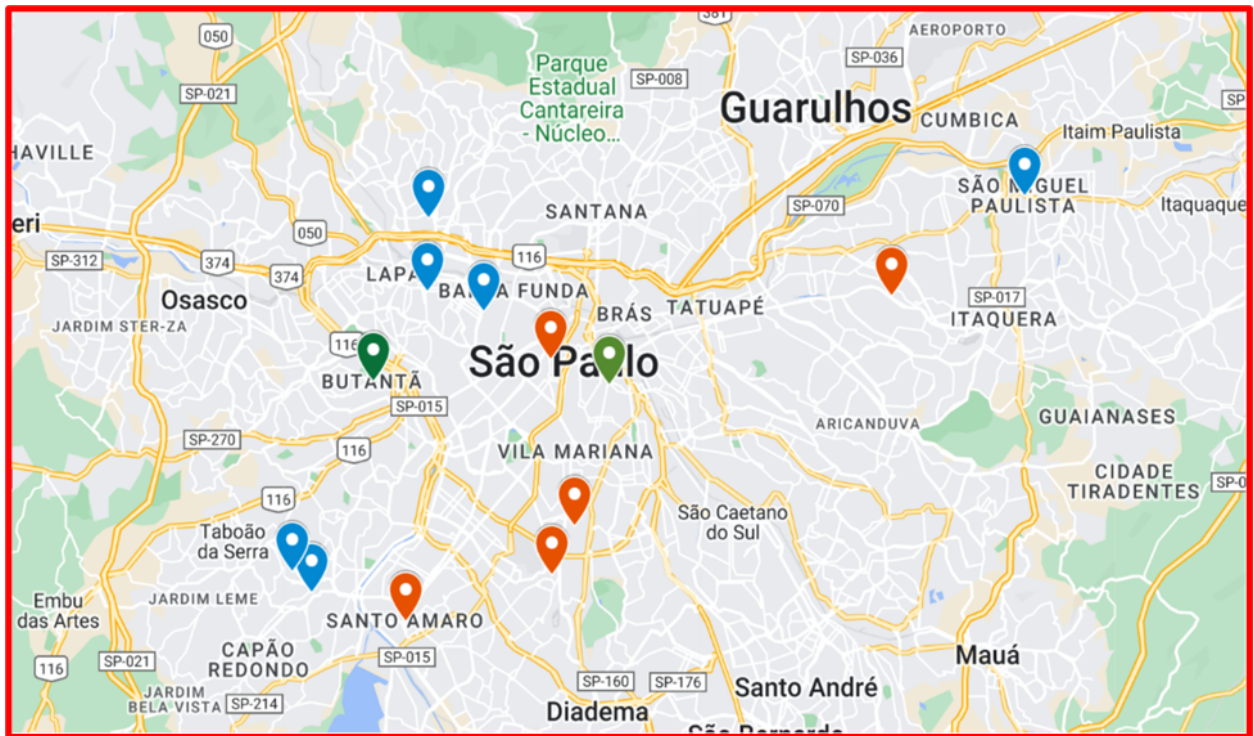


Imagem 3: Housing location higher strata



All the focus groups were held in the same place (the busy region of Av. Doutor Arnaldo). It is important here to highlight the limitations of our use of the focus group technique. We could not recruit the “extremes” of the inequality in São Paulo: the profiles that concentrate the most capital and the most destitute of capitals. In addition, we recruited only adults with paid occupations, excluding the unemployed, retirees, and people under 25 years old.

The dynamic of the sessions began with the introduction of the participants and a first round of “spontaneous” talk about “activities during the free time”. The most cited activities of each group were deeper explored in the conversation. After that, we presented four topics for discussion, showing previously selected images to stimulate the chat. The themes were “eating”, “living”, “dressing”, and “traveling”. These topics were addressed because they constitute aspects of “lifestyle”. The images were selected based on how they symbolically opposed each other (each theme had four images). For example, raw and fresh foods were opposed to long-cooked dishes; “clean” décor was opposed to colonial style furniture; form-fitting fast-fashion clothes made of synthetic fabric were opposed to wider pieces made of natural fabrics; popular and crowd destinations versus more unknown and not busy places. The selection of images was based on the founts of “*Distinction*”, of more recent research works on tastes and practices in Brazil and on our research hypothesis regarding class lifestyles in São Paulo.

With the technique of focus groups, we could grasp the practices and tastes people of different classes have, and the adjectives and social classifications they give to their tastes and practices. This technique allowed an inductive approach to understanding the distinction in the city of São Paulo. It was an important step in the construction of the questionnaire.

Lower/ popular strata groups

In both groups, children are very central. In the group with more cultural capital, there is an emphasis on training and formation. In the one with the lowest cultural capital, children strongly influence shopping-mall visits.

The group with more cultural capital values “territory” and “authenticity” and seeks to mobilize “knowledge” linked to the idea of tradition, roots, and authenticity, both local and

exogenous/exotic. They demonstrate a greater repertoire than those with less cultural capital and are much more critical in their choices.

The group with less cultural capital prefers to go to shopping malls and to shop for electronics and home appliances. The participants demonstrate knowledge of prices, comparing prices and "disputing" this knowledge and strategies to pay less.

In this group, male dominance is more evident: women refer to their husband's professions when talking about themselves and men make jokes about the supposed homosexuality of models depicted in the pictures.

Different amounts of cultural capital indicate internal symbolic borders between fractions in the lower occupational strata. The fraction with more cultural capital tends to develop a critical and politicized posture, pointing to the direction of subverting current distinctive consumption dynamics. As well as those with greater cultural capital among the intermediate strata tend to reject media productions and behaviors judged as standardized/massive. The group with less cultural capital, in turn, values relaxation and the release of emotions (laughing and talking loudly) in leisure and sociability spaces (restaurants, parties, concerts), approaching what Bourdieu called the "popular ethos". This was also found in the fraction with less cultural capital in the intermediate strata. They tend to reproduce logics of distinction in consumption according to their objective possibilities.

A very reasonable hypothesis is that the lower strata with higher amounts of cultural capital were the most impacted fraction by the intensification of internationalizing flows, diffusion of ICTs, and expansion of access to the university in Brazil. The possibilities of diverse paths have been increased in these strata.

Intermediate strata groups

Training and occupation are central in the definition of practices and preferences of these groups, marking significant distance and building boundaries to other classes or class fractions.

The fraction with more cultural capital tends to more legitimate practices, such as theater and cinema. The majority of participants in the group with more cultural capital (78%) work directly with culture and/or art. The fraction with less cultural capital chooses practices related to entertainment, such as going to bars and clubs/parties (*baladas*).

The way they consume, and how they justify their practices, and those of others, are also illuminating. At this point, the discussions around the theme of “dressing” are enlightening. While the group with more cultural capital shows some concern with the origin of the clothes, externalized by the purchase in thrift stores and by the regret of one of the participants in having to buy in department stores, in the group with less cultural capital the purchase in fast-fashion is not accompanied by this sort of criticism.

Music was the most important topic of discussion in these groups. Particularly, the “trap” genre works as a “barrier” between them and the popular groups. The group with more cultural capital makes aesthetic criticisms of the genre and points to the “poor quality” of trap music, which reveals a greater musical repertoire. The group with lower cultural capital makes a moral judgment of the genre and condemns the behavior of its public. However, it is also necessary to analyze whether the group with more cultural capital does not also make a moral judgment when criticizing the trap, in a kind of “racism of intelligence”, to use Bourdieu's term.

Upper strata groups

The distances in these groups were conditioned by training/formation area, type of occupation, but also type of cultural capital. In higher positions, there is a clear opposition between culture and money. The fraction with more cultural capital tries to oppose itself to those with less cultural capital (and more economic capital), classified as “people who only have money”. They demonstrate an effort to accumulate cultural capital (learn, develop...). As in all the other fractions characterized by more cultural capital, people who have it in good amounts oppose themselves to people who they consider do not value culture, and do not take it seriously.

In the group with more cultural capital, the *process* of cultural choices was crucial. The choice process seems to distinguish as much or even more than the cultural practice/good itself.

The quality of the cultural intermediates (institutions, sites, influential individuals...) was decisive.

There is also a naturalization effort: an attempt to demonstrate the incorporation of cultural knowledge in the fraction with more cultural capital, and geographic knowledge (how to move around by car), in the fraction with more economic capital. The group with more economic capital tries to avoid the shame of not incorporating cultural knowledge by mentioning their “bad memory” as a joke, (“we all have a bad memory”) and by mobilizing details regarding the ways to get to cultural institutions by car.

The group with more economic capital put more emphasis on gender divisions. Nevertheless, the discussion is not politicized in any of the upper strata groups, unlike what happens in the lower strata groups, within the fractions with more cultural capital.

There is also an important difference in the ways these two groups talk about urban space, public safety, and the ways they move around the city. The group with more economic capital expresses more fears, moves by car and their choices seem to be more conditioned by the avoidance of what they consider “dangerous”.

Final remarks

Even though the focus groups were only one of the methods of our research, it has been crucial to the construction of the questionnaire. Although preliminary, it reaffirms class as a reality beyond income and schooling. Also, they demonstrate a relationship (homology?) between cultural choices and social positions. Formation and occupation demarcate distances and draw boundaries. Cultural capital distinguishes fractions of the same strata and can approximate fractions of distant strata. The fractions characterized by more cultural capital try to oppose themselves to those with less cultural capital and demonstrate an effort to accumulate cultural capital. Disposition to culture has been opposed to not taking culture seriously.

Cultivating and *consuming* appear as different orientations to culture, as two modalities of distinction via culture. On the one hand, culture is seen as an asset, acquisition, investment, and cultivation; on the other, culture is seen as consumption, entertainment, and leisure.

The place of the economic dimension was also evident. In the upper groups, the economic/cultural opposition is clear. In groups with more cultural capital, there is a constant effort to build value refuting the *economic economy*. In groups with more economic capital, the price of things (programs/venues) seems to be one of the distinguishing variables. Know first (“before the boom”) and know how to buy or find better things versus being able to buy and afford high prices. In the lower groups, the fraction with less cultural capital demonstrates detailed knowledge of product prices, comparing values, and “disputing” the best strategies to pay less. The group with the more cultural capital seeks, in its practices, to express its interest in “knowledge”, linked to the idea of tradition, roots, and authenticity.

Household composition is also very important in the practices. Existence, number, and age of children, as well as marital status in cultural choices and the definition of free time activities. Male dominance (and the issue of gender more generally) is probably greater in fractions with less cultural capital, it doesn't matter which strata.

We also noticed an opposition between aesthetic judgments versus moral judgments, especially in music (funk and trap especially, but also “sertanejo” [“country”]). That made us question if those with cultural capital draw boundaries via culture, whereas those without tend to draw boundaries via morality and money. But could it be that simple? To posit it, we need to investigate the normativity of aesthetic discourse.