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**Spatio-temporal distribution of movie theaters in the neighborhood of Copacabana, Rio de Janeiro (1909-2021)**

**Distribución espaciotemporal de los cines en el barrio de Copacabana, Río de Janeiro (1909-2021)**

**Distribuição espaço-temporal das salas de cinema no bairro de Copacabana, Rio de Janeiro (1909-2021)**

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**Abstract**

In this research, based on an analysis of the movie theater as an urban form that can be understood from its locational aspects, it was investigated how the spatio-temporal distribution of Copacabana theaters occurred throughout the period of activity in the neighborhood (1909-2021) and what his trajectory was like. To this end, the characteristics of Copacabana cinemas were surveyed (time in operation, capacity, and location) based on data obtained on Gonzaga (1996) and additional data from the National Library's newspaper collection. With this, a periodization of the cinematographic commercial activity in the neighborhood was constructed and an analysis of the axes along which it was spatially concentrated was also made.

**Keywords:** Movie theater; Copacabana; Rio de Janeiro; Urban space.

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**Resumen**

En esta investigación, a partir de un análisis de la sala de cine como forma urbana que puede entenderse desde sus aspectos locacionales, se investigó cómo se produjo la distribución espaciotemporal de los cines de Copacabana a lo largo del período de actividad en el barrio (1909-2021) y cómo fue su trayectoria. Para ello, se coleccionarán las características de los cines de

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Copacabana (tempo de funcionamento, capacidade y ubicación) a partir de datos obtenidos del catálogo de Gonzaga (1996) y datos adicionales de la colección de periódicos de la Biblioteca Nacional. Con esto, se construyó una periodización de la actividad comercial cinematográfica en el barrio y también se hizo un análisis de los ejes a lo largo de los cuales se concentraba espacialmente.

**Palabras clave:** Cines, Copacabana; Rio de Janeiro; Espacio urbano

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### Resumo

Nesta pesquisa, a partir de uma análise da sala de cinema como uma forma urbana passível de ser compreendida a partir de seus aspectos locacionais, foi investigado como se deu a distribuição espaço-temporal das salas de Copacabana ao longo do período da atividade no bairro (1909-2021) e como foi a sua trajetória. Para isso foi levantado as características dos cinemas de Copacabana (tempo de atividade, capacidade e localização) a partir dos dados obtidos no catálogo de Gonzaga (1996) e dados adicionais do acervo hemerográfico da Biblioteca Nacional. Com isso, foi construída uma periodização da atividade de exibição cinematográfica no bairro e foi analisado os eixos pelo qual esta se concentrou espacialmente.

**Palavras-chave:** Salas de cinemas; Copacabana; Rio de Janeiro; Espaço urbano.

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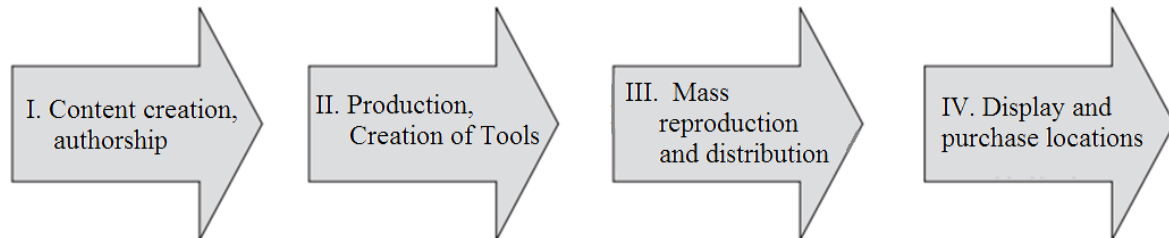
### Introduction

The cinema is a place. If we start from a more comprehensive meaning in which cinema is understood as a set of material and symbolic processes of cinematographic practice that has the film as the final product of these processes (FIORAVANTE, 2016), we add to this that the term cinema also consists of the physical space conceived for the projection and sensorial experience of films by an audience. Thus, in the same way as other urban forms, the rooms are located and arranged in the urban space according to the logic of the internal organization of cities.

Since cinema is a cultural industry, which presupposes the mass consumption of cultural products, it is possible to represent it based on its chain processes (Table 1), which, in a simplified way, Pratt (2011) divided into four stages. The first refers to the processes of intellectual creation of cultural products, authorship, and design creation. The second stage consists of realizing the product, at which point the infrastructure for execution is set up and it materializes. In the third, the necessary

tools for mass reproduction and distribution are built. The final stage corresponds to the moment of exposure of this cultural product in locations intended for the purchase or consumption of these products by an audience.

**Chart 1** - Production chain of cultural industries



**Source:** Prepared by the author (2023) based on Pratt (2011)

In this way, it is possible to observe that from the perspective of the production system of cultural industries, cinemas are part of the set of processes in stage IV, at the end of the chain, being the moment in which films are shown to the consuming public. It should be added that, until the emergence of technologies for domestic film consumption, movie theaters were the only commercial way of presenting films to an audience, being indispensable for the perpetuation of the chain. We then understand that this economic need for film distribution acts in the production of urban space while spatial forms are constructed whose primary function is cinematographic exhibition. By form and function, we refer to the categories of analysis of geographic space proposed by Santos (1985), in which the form is the visible or external aspect of a geographic object, and the function would be the attribution given to that form.

Following this line, it is possible to see that the spatiality of cinema, both as a physical space and as a set of processes of cinematographic practice, is configured as one of the potential themes of geography. According to Sousa (2014), human geography in general works on cinema from two perspectives. The first analyzes the filmic space, that is, the diegetic setting where the events of the films, their images and representations occur. The second examines cinemas as fixed spatial objects, integral to urban space and making up the city's economic circuits. Fioravante (2016),

in his bibliometric analysis of academic production on the subject, indicates four main lines of research through which geography works on cinema: cinema and the teaching of geography; film industry and geography; geopolitics and cinema; and geography, humanism and cinematic representations. We believe that the present investigation fits into the second perspective pointed out by Sousa (2014) and within the studies regarding the geography of the film industry indicated by Fioravante (2016), since, as explained previously, we intend to study movie theaters as urban forms. It is also of interest to highlight, as Fioravante (2016) points out, that the geographic tradition was more associated with the study of images produced by films and their geographic meanings than with the locational perspective, of the movie theater as a place. Therefore, we believe that this is possibly a still neglected area in the study of the relationship between geography and cinema.

Moving on to the object of this case study, since the end of the 19th century, the city of Rio de Janeiro has presented itself as a relevant center for the dissemination of cinematographic exhibition activity in Brazil. As Sousa (2019) shows, the beginning of activity in the metropolis was characterized by the concentration of activity in the center. In a second moment, there was a decentralization in the diffusion of new rooms, with the expansion of the urban network and the emergence of neighborhoods in the south and north zones and, later, in the west zone. And in recent dynamics, we see the migration of cinemas to shopping centers under the multiplex format, which consists of an integrated set of rooms that allows multiple films to be shown at the same time. However, there is currently a constant reduction in the number of cinemas in operation, indicating a decline in activity in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

As we have indicated, although the initial spatial diffusion of cinemas occurred in the city center, later on, the expansion of the activity reached significance in other parts of the city. In this new scenario, some neighborhoods stood out for their concentration of cinemas, such as Tijuca, which formed the main nucleus of

cinemas after Cinelândia (FERRAZ, 2009), and Copacabana, a neighborhood that little by little became an important commercial sub-center of the city. city.

The cinematographic exhibition in Copacabana therefore appears as a significant case to be studied. Marked by the incorporation of cinemas into an already effervescent cultural life of the neighborhood (O'DONNELL, 2011), the group of cinemas in Copacabana had 16 theaters operating simultaneously at its peak, a notable number, second only to Tijuca (SOUSA, 2019 ). Just like the neighborhood itself, the spatial distribution of Copacabana cinemas was changing and taking on new characteristics. However, it subsequently experienced a gradual decline in the number of theaters and, with the closure of the Roxy cinema in 2021, Copacabana no longer has active cinemas in its extension.

The end of the activity in a neighborhood so notably marked by its cinemas, symbolizes not only the advancement of the perpetration of cultural changes that film consumption has experienced in recent decades, but also a change in the uses of the neighborhood's urban space, whose real estate dynamics changed and these spaces took on new functions. Therefore, the objective of the investigation is to analyze the period in which the activity was carried out in the neighborhood and understand its spatial patterns and how they changed over time.

The data for the analysis were extracted from the Gonzaga catalog (1996), namely: the names of the cinemas, the addresses, the opening and closing dates of the theaters, the operating periods and the audience capacity of each theater. Sousa (2019), who also used data from Gonzaga (1996) as the main source, warned about some limitations that this database has. This is due to the heterogeneity of the origin of the data, based on fifteen different sources, such as the Statistical Yearbook of the Federal District of the IBGE, telephone directories for the city of Rio de Janeiro, cinema registers from Embrafilme and clippings from the most widely circulated newspapers in the city. . Thus, there are some discordant data and missing information at different points in the catalogue, which were corrected with other bibliographic sources when possible, but due to the richness of the initial

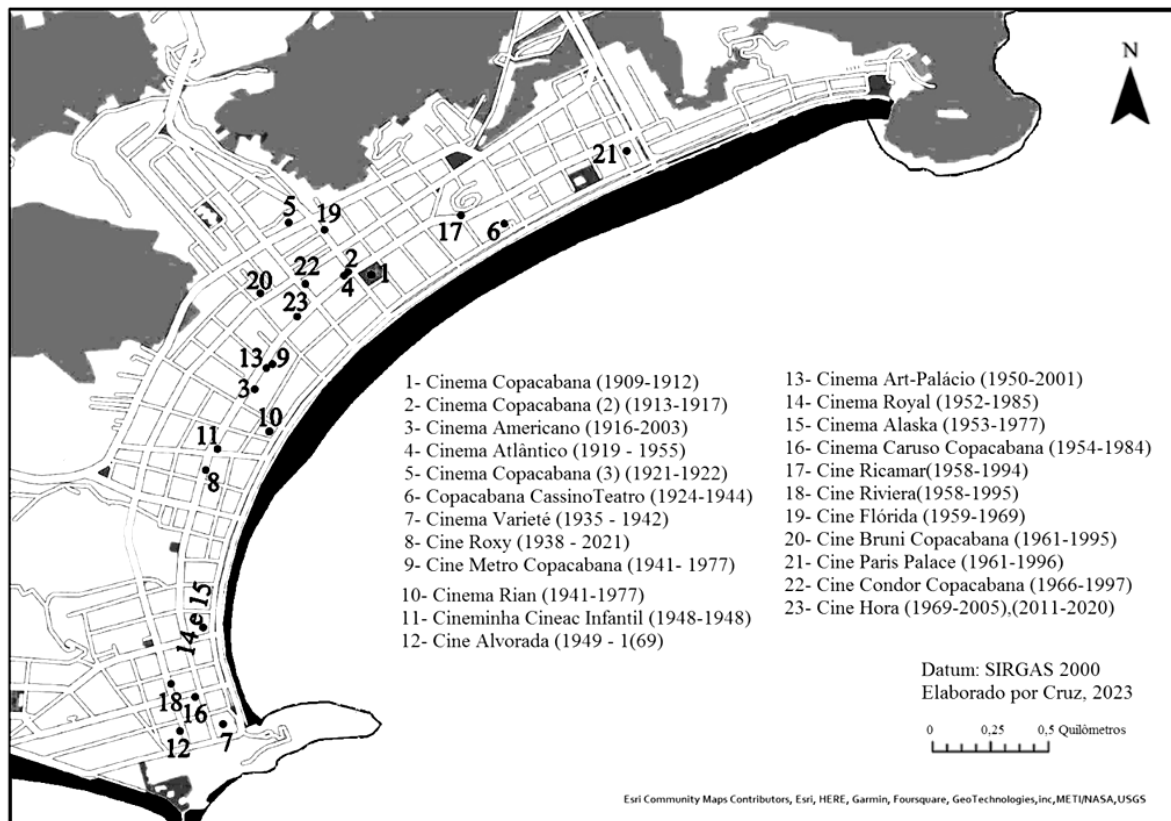
compilation, this source is still the main database on technical information about cinemas. from Rio de Janeiro. These data, however, only extend up to 1996, the year of publication, and it was necessary to complement them with subsequent information on openings or closings to fully reach the time frame aimed at here. These were obtained from the National Library's hemerographic collection, starting from 1997 to 2021. For this, the names of cinemas that were still open in 1996 were used as keywords to check these collections when the closure of the theaters was announced.

With the organized data, a periodization of the evolution of the group of cinemas in the neighborhood was carried out, using information on the number of cinemas per year and the sum of the theaters' audience capacity per year. Another procedure carried out was the identification of cinema concentration axes throughout Copacabana's urban network. In this way, we used as parameters to define the clusters of theaters, in addition to spatial proximity, the audience capacity and the period of simultaneous activity of the cinemas forming part of each axis.

### **The spatio-temporal patterns of cinemas in the Copacabana neighborhood (RJ)**

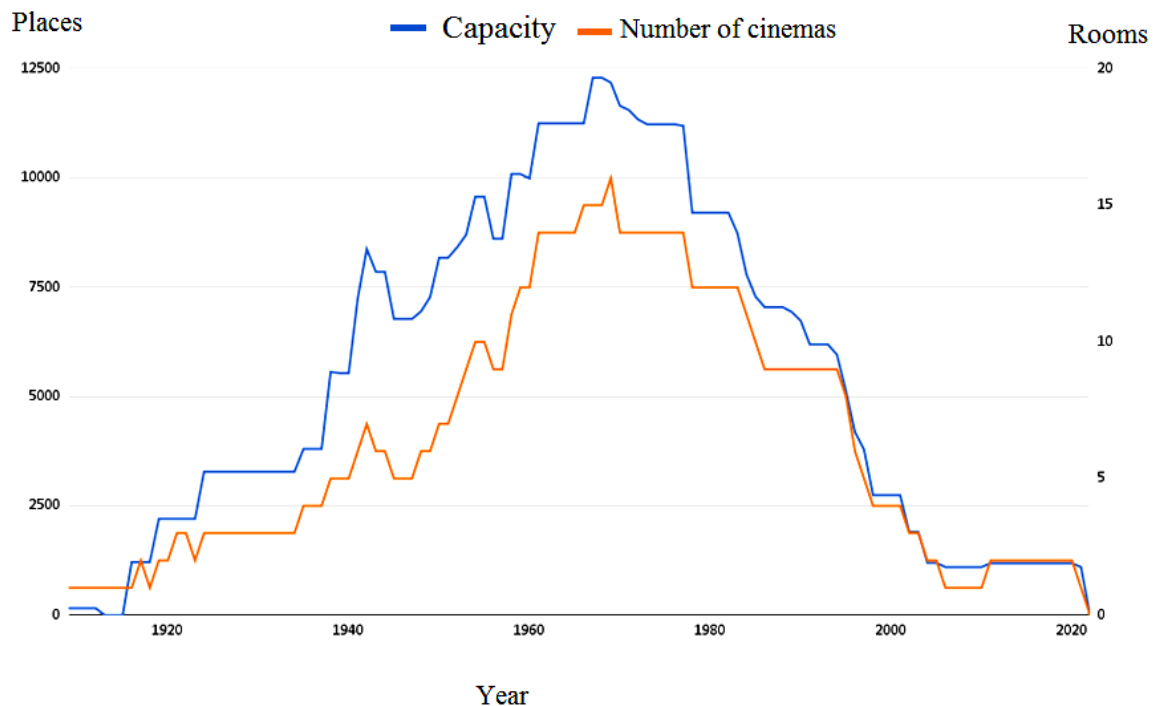
As results found, firstly, we have the location of cinemas in Copacabana (Map 1), presented in ascending numerical order, according to the year of opening. It is possible to see that the majority of rooms (16 of the 23) were located close to the center of the neighborhood, with some other points with small clusters of rooms.

**Map 1** - Spatial distribution of cinemas in the Copacabana neighborhood (1909-2021)



**Source:** Prepared by the authors (2023)

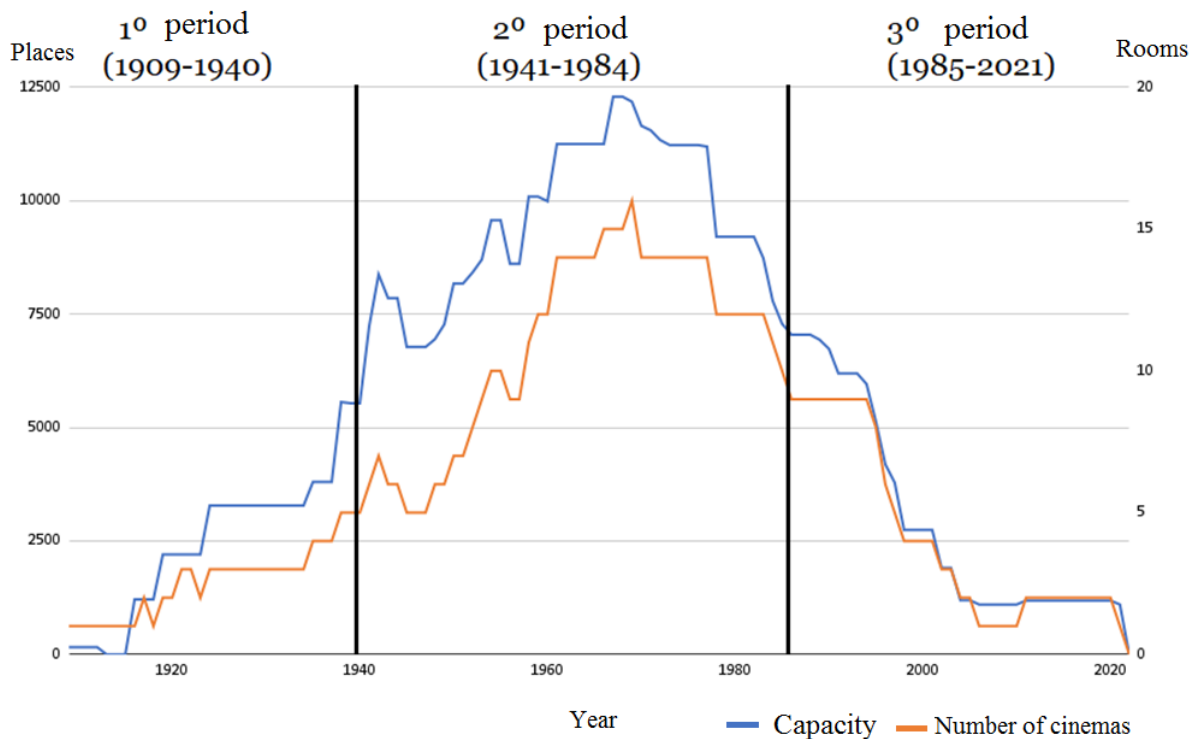
Next, we present the temporal trajectory of the group of rooms based on two variables: the number of rooms open and the audience capacity of the group, in each year (Graph 1). We can see, in general, that the activity had a very evident, and almost symmetrical, rise and fall, both in capacity and in the number of active rooms. The graph's inflection point, that is, the peak of activity, was in 1969, the only year in which it reached 16 theaters. From then on, there was a gradual decline, which became more pronounced in the 1990s and 2000s.

**Graph 1** - Capacity and number of cinemas in Copacabana per year (1909-2021)

**Source:** Prepared by the authors (2023)

We were then able to arrive at a periodization of the evolution of the group of cinemas in the neighborhood (Graph 2). Thus, we have three periods distinguishable by key events: 1909-1940, which begins with the inauguration of Cinema Copacabana in 1909 and ends with the inauguration, in 1941, of Metro Copacabana, which consolidated, together with the Roxy opened three years earlier, a new moment of activity with an imposing set of recently opened cinema palaces. In the period from 1941 to 1985, the largest number of active cinemas was recorded, reaching 16 simultaneous cinemas in 1969. The last period began after the closure of three of Copacabana's cinema palaces: Rian, Caruso Copacabana and Royal, in which, from this milestone onwards, closures became frequent in the 1990s and 2000s, until the end of cinemas in the neighborhood in 2021, with the closure of Roxy's activities.



**Graph 2 - Periodization of Copacabana cinemas (1909-2021)**

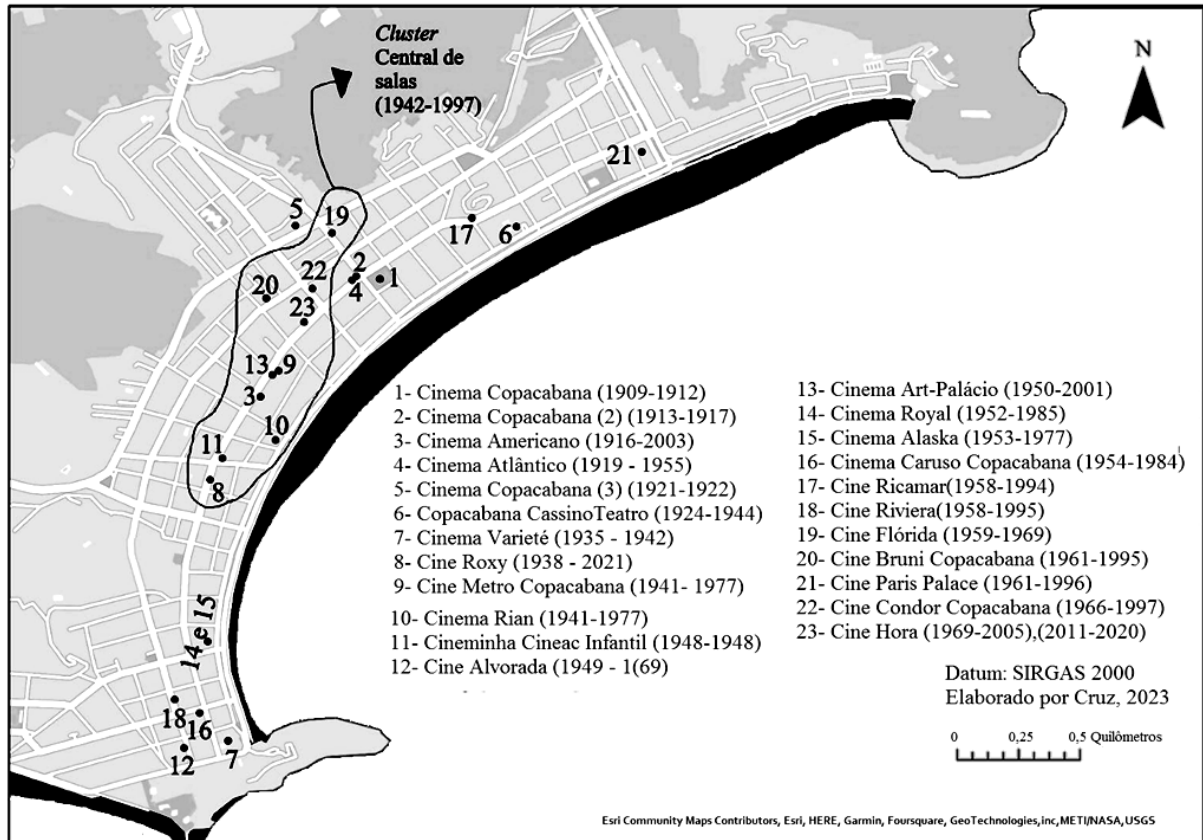
**Source:** Prepared by the authors (2023)

We noticed that the three periods exhibit distinct characteristics and inform us about changes in activity. In the first, it had cinemas that were generally unsuccessful and closed after a short time. The second is equivalent to the period of consolidation of the activity, which starts to grow rapidly, with a high number of openings and maintenance of existing rooms. It was during this period that the neighborhood reached its peak of simultaneous cinemas with 16 cinemas in 1969. The last period accelerated the cooling trend that had been occurring since the 1970s, and presented a gradual decline, which was accentuated at the end of the 90s. with no opening of theaters and the closure of active cinemas.

However, we would like to highlight that the activity did not spread uniformly throughout the urban fabric of Copacabana, but rather along two main axes, which spatially concentrated a notable number of rooms at different times. Firstly, the most evident and relevant is that of the neighborhood's commercial center

(Map 2), which from 1942 onwards became a consistent cluster, which had 8 active rooms, and at a given peak (1950) reached 82.1% of the public capacity of the entire neighborhood, and was configured as a cluster until 1997.

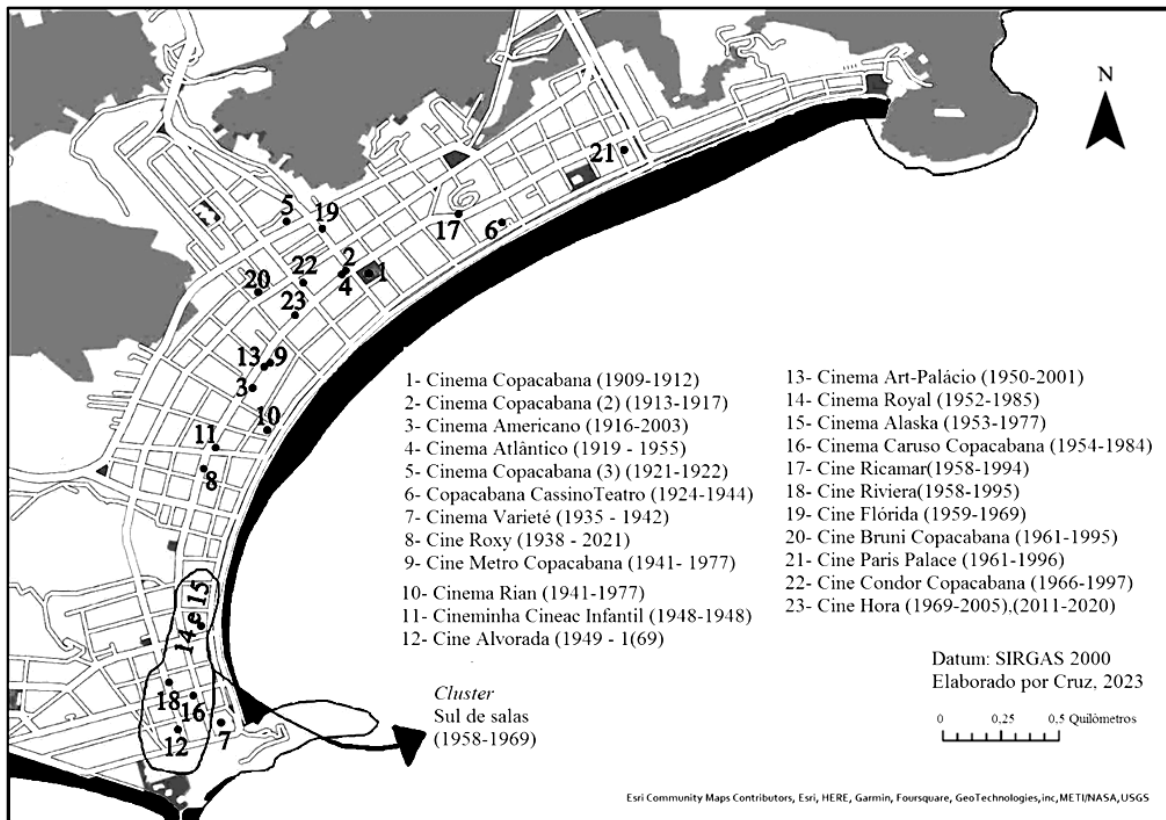
**Map 2 - Central Cluster of Copacabana cinemas (1942-1997)**



Source: Prepared by the authors (2023)

The other relevant cluster was located in the south of the neighborhood (Map 3), close to Ipanema, and was closely related precisely to the appearance of rooms in the neighboring neighborhood. It had 5 rooms, although for a much shorter period of about a decade (1958-1969), being an essential part of the heyday of the second period seen previously.

Map 3 - South Cluster of Copacabana cinemas (1958-1969)



Source: Prepared by the authors (2023)

We also understand here, in general, that the evolution of the collective of cinemas in Copacabana took place mainly from the central axis. There was also, in the second period (1941-1984), an ephemeral subcentrality in the neighborhood with Ipanema. When the decline in activity began, it first occurred in the rooms located at the ends of the neighborhood, close to the borders with Ipanema and Leme, and the rooms that lasted during this period were in the shopping center, in a centripetal movement in the logic of closures.

Pondering the transformations that led to the end of activity in the neighborhood, it is possible to identify some factors in the spatial dynamics of the city and Copacabana that may be responsible for this gradual slowdown in activity. Firstly, we have the changes in Copacabana at the end of the 20th century, such as real estate saturation, which did not keep up with the neighborhood's growth rate,

causing devaluation due to issues such as overpopulation, the drop in housing standards, the proliferation of traditional urban problems (atmospheric and noise pollution, intense traffic, violence, etc.) and the incorporation of the popular classes (RANGEL, 2003). As a result, Copacabana progressively lost residents: it went from 239,256 inhabitants in 1970, to 216,699 in 1980, 169,680 in 1991 and 161,201 in 2000 (VELHO, 1999). Thus, the loss of elite status and the relative population loss are indicative of the change in Copacabana's consumer profile and desired urban functions, causing a loss of commercial attractiveness in maintaining the neighborhood's cinemas.

We also point, based on Sousa (2019), to the emergence of a new centrality for cinematographic exhibitions in the city: Barra da Tijuca. At the turn of the 80s to 90s, Barra da Tijuca experienced a considerable quantitative increase in the opening of rooms while the rest of the city's areas were experiencing opposite trends, of stability or decline. This was largely due to the opening in 1999 of a large multiplex in the New York City Center mall with 18 rooms, the largest in the city. Together with other shopping cinemas such as Via Parque, Downtown Shopping and Casa Shopping, Barra became the new area that still brought dynamism to the activity. In this way, old centralities such as Copacabana and Tijuca progressively stopped being targeted axes for the opening of new rooms.

### **Final considerations**

Therefore, when analyzing the cinema hall as an urban form from its spatio-temporal dimension, we were able to perceive the possible spatial patterns in the organization of the activity, as well as its specific type of evolution of the activity, which may be common to other locations. We also indicate here how the trajectory of a commercial activity can be sensitive both to local aspects, in a given neighborhood recognized for its relevance in the sector, and to more general changes specific to an entire industry.

Furthermore, this research presented, based on the focus on the spatio-temporality of cinematographic activity, how a neighborhood changes over time to adapt different functions and how its forms follow these processes.

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Author Contribution

Author 1; Preparation, discussion of results, bibliographic research, text review

Author 2: Supervision, final analysis of results and review of the text