

Curbing Coastal Pollution: Informal Workers' Critical Role

Key Points

- Salvador's marine ecosystem is particularly vulnerable to plastic pollution from waste material generated by revellers at the Barra-Ondina Carnival, which forms part of the Brazilian city's annual Bahian festival. The Barra-Ondina Carnival, which before COVID-19 drew about 2.5 million participants, takes place over a few days along a boulevard that directly overlooks the beach and ocean.
- While the festival is in full swing, waste pickers (*catadores*) who are members of cooperatives as well as those who are independent collect recyclable materials, mostly aluminium. Some vendors also collect materials, as well as selling drinks and food. As a result of the limited time for cleaning and collecting during the event, some waste material inevitably ends up on the beach. It has become apparent that, although municipal cleaners successfully gather consumer waste, there are too few waste pickers and engaged street vendors to ensure adequate collection of recyclables. Thus, an abundance of these materials are thrown into garbage trucks or find their way into the ocean.
- The interviews conducted for a case study on the management of waste during Carnival in the Barra neighbourhood of Salvador da Bahia in 2017 revealed that more engagement has taken place between the municipal government and waste pickers than between the municipal government and unlicensed vendors. Several study interview participants emphasized that their primary goal is to be recognized as official workers so as to secure spaces for work and licences to protect their economic opportunities.

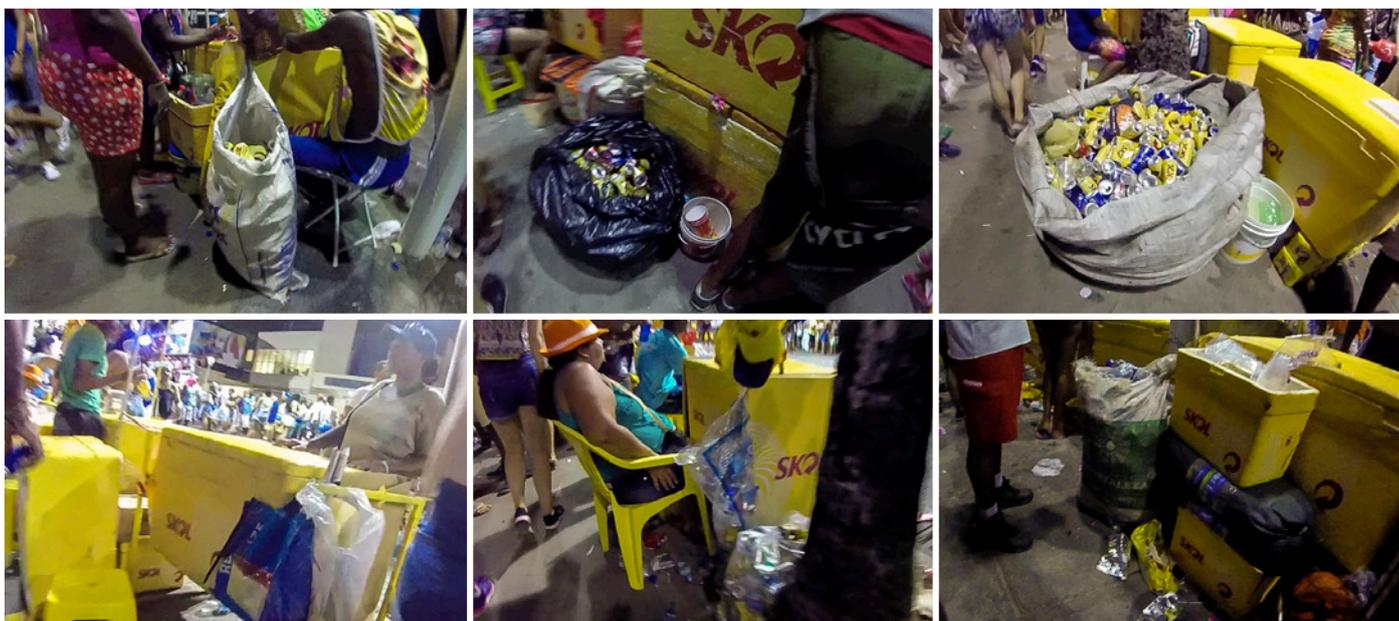


Throughout the festival, waste pickers (*catadores*) collect recyclable materials. Photo courtesy of Cata Bahia

Waste pickers have experienced wide-scale legal recognition in Brazil and are acknowledged for their value as environmental stewards. However, it is important to acknowledge that the legal recognition they have gained in recent years may differ from the actual recognition they receive from businesses and individuals.

The study described in [WIEGO Resource Document No. 18–Ecosystem of Waste: The Role of Waste Pickers and Street Vendors](#)

[in Curbing Coastal Pollution at Carnaval in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil](#)—illustrates that there may be potential to give more recognition to the role of street vendors as supporters of environmental stewardship. Many street vendors make a considerable contribution to the collection of recyclable materials and maintenance of the consumer environment during the event, before the deployment of the municipal waste collector force when the festivities are over.



Examples of licensed vendors who voluntarily collect recyclables. Photos courtesy of Cata Bahia

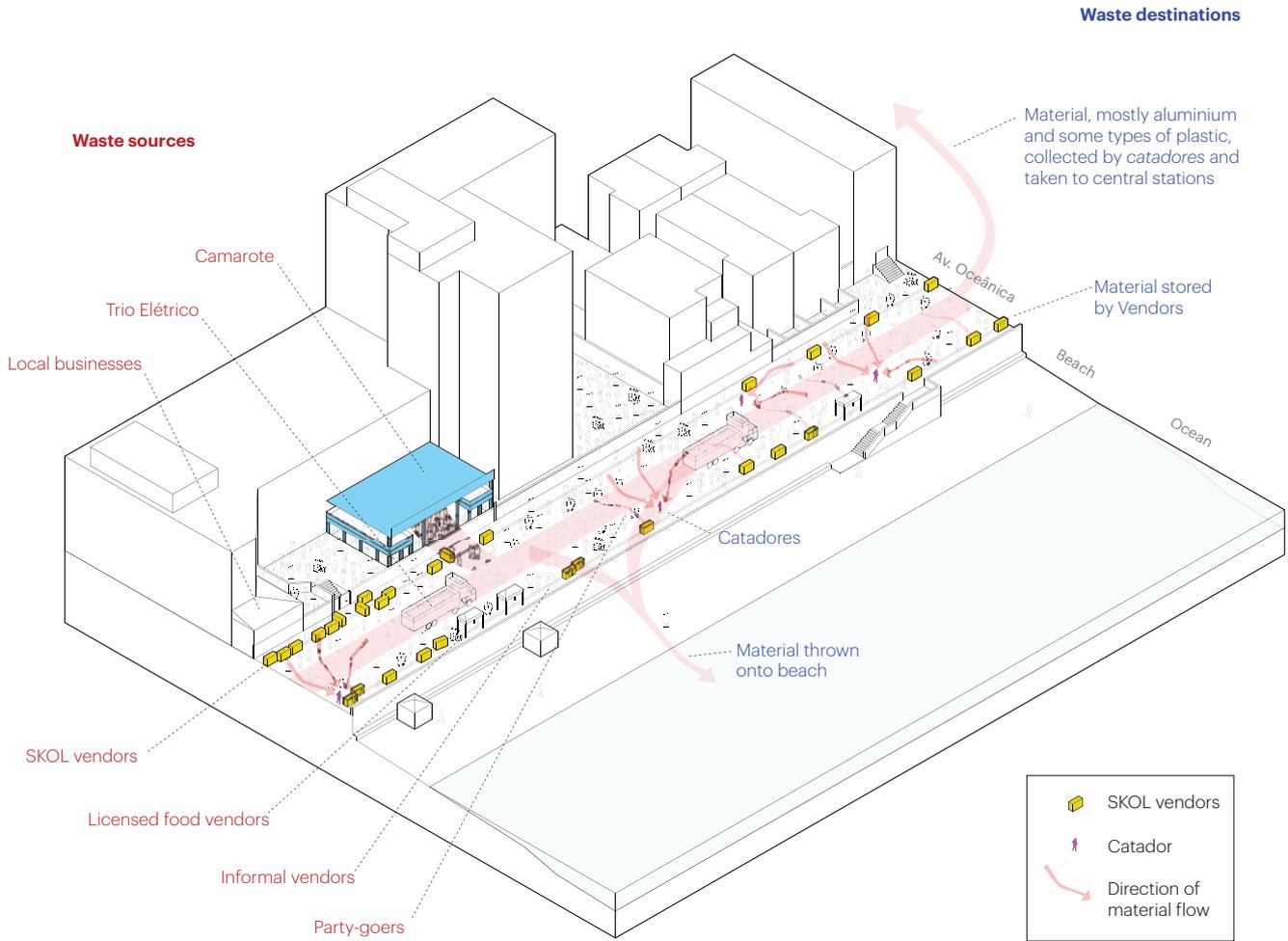
In the run-up to the festival, an association of recycling cooperatives enters into an agreement with the Salvador municipal government to collect aluminium cans and recyclable materials during the event. The city provides some infrastructure, such as central material drop-off sites, outdoor shower facilities, and some financial support. During Carnaval, public sector representatives enter a complex fray with all those involved in the generation and collection of waste material: representatives of SKOL and other businesses; independent vendors and waste pickers; and party-going consumers.

During the festival, waste is generated by party-goers on the streets, at local businesses, in trios *elétricos* (trucks bearing parade floats and dance floors) and in *camarotes* (exclusive viewing boxes). The material mostly comprises beer bottles sold by vendors of SKOL (a Brazilian

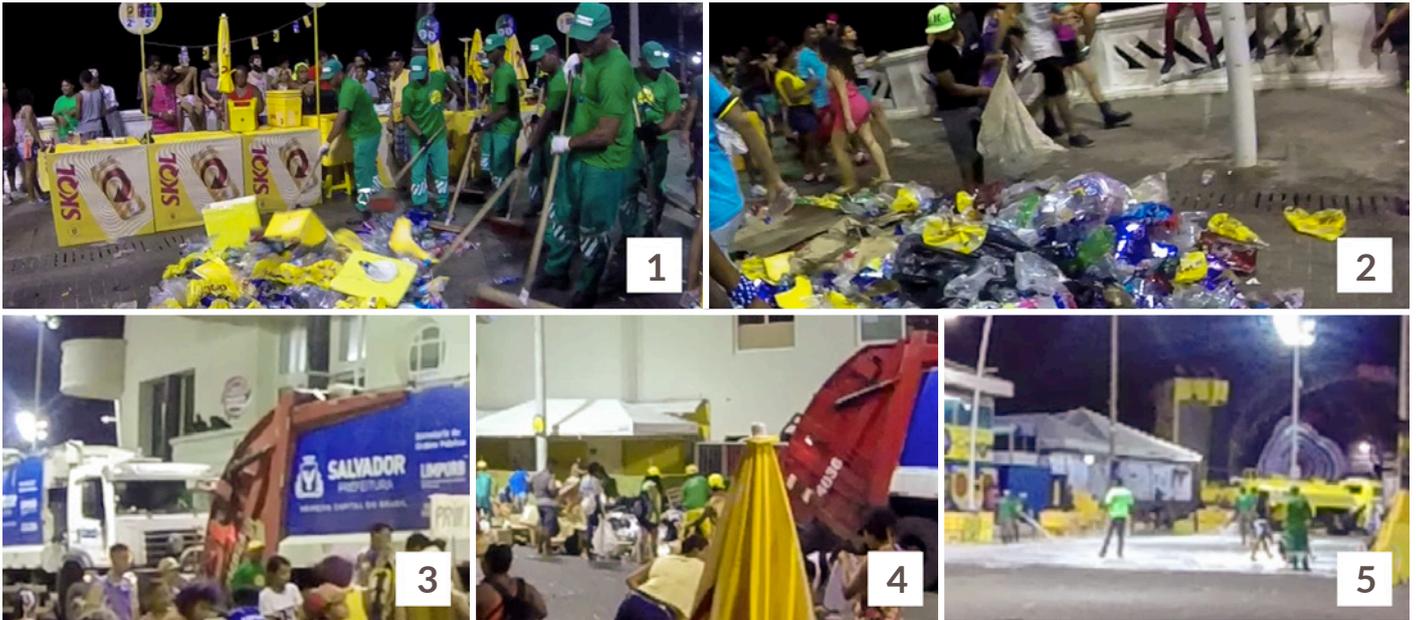
beer company), containers and other products for food and drinks sold by independent vendors, local businesses and *camarotes*.

After each day's celebrations wind down, *garis* (formal waste workers employed by the municipality's LIMPURB urban sanitation department) arrive to sweep waste into piles. *Catadores* collect recyclables from these piles until the sanitation department trucks arrive to remove remaining waste material. Those who are members of the cooperatives that have an agreement with the city bring their collected materials to the central LIMPURB drop-off points for redemption, while independent waste pickers must store and redeem materials elsewhere. At nearly all times of the day and night, material actively flows to and from the main parade street.

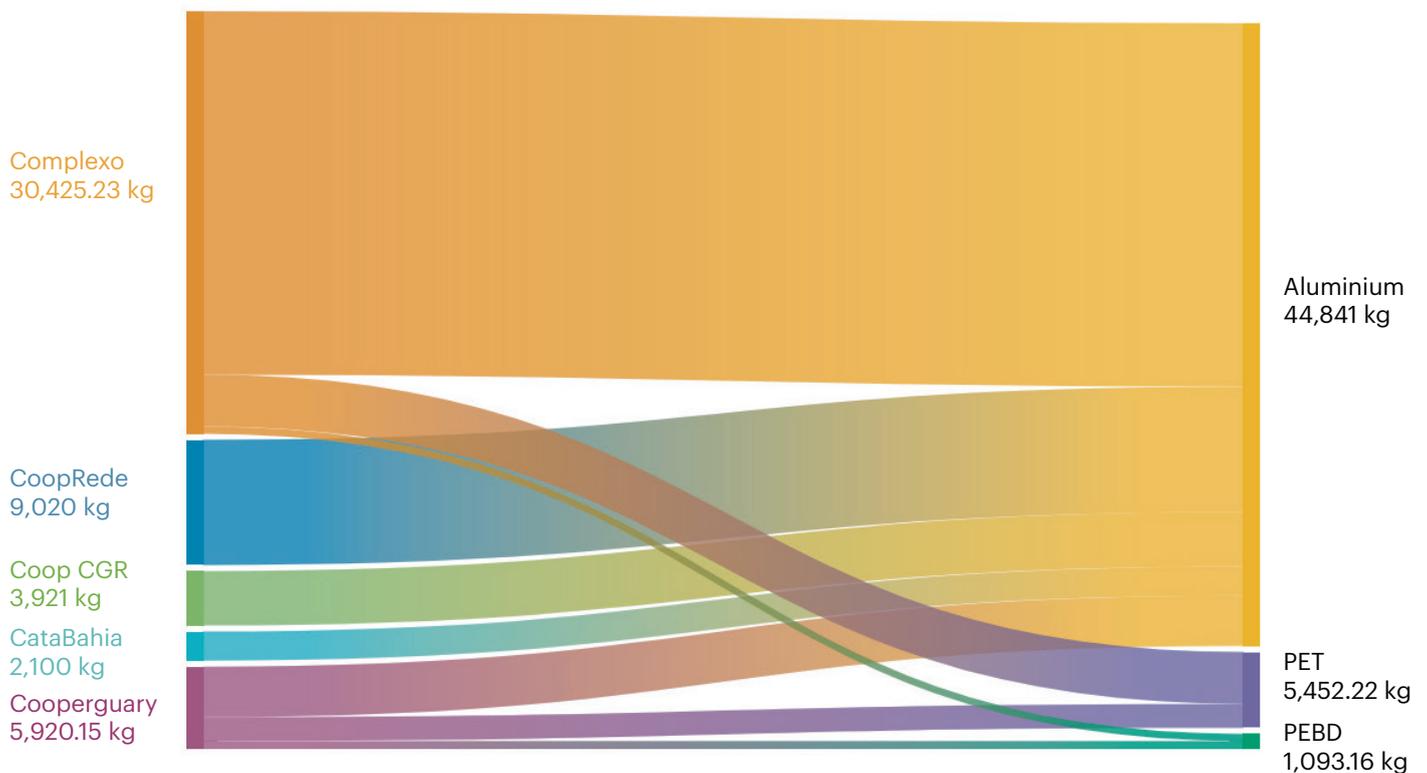
Marine-Life Threat: The Life of Waste at a Coastal City Festival



Spatialization of Waste Actors: Carnaval 3pm-6am



Cleaning up after the party: 1) Municipal waste managers arrive; 2) Waste pickers sort and collect recyclables; 3) Garbage trucks arrive; 4) Waste pickers continue sorting; municipal workers deposit the remains into the garbage trucks; and 5) Water trucks enter and municipal workers hose down the boardwalk area. Photos courtesy of Cata Bahia



Material collected by cooperatives (Graphic generated with app.flourish.studio)

Recommendations

- Efforts should be made to bring waste picker and street vendor groups together so they can strategize on how best to cooperate in fulfilling their environmental role in curbing plastic pollution in the coastal city of Salvador.
- Improved safety and secured income are important goals of cooperation between these two groups of informal workers at the Barra-Ondina Carnaval.
- To enable a more thorough collection of recyclable materials during the festival, additional waste pickers should work at the event and there should be increased facilitation of street vendors' collection of waste.
- Advocacy efforts should be made to improve the relationship between the municipality of Salvador and unlicensed vendors to support the recognition of these vendors as official workers. This would help to stop their frequent penalization by police and other officials.
- With Brazil's economic crisis and the difficulty many mobile vendors face in their daily work environment, researchers and others should seek ways to support informal workers' opportunities while prioritizing occupational health, appropriate food preparation techniques, and access to vending licences.
- The 2021 street parades were cancelled because of COVID-19 concerns, but planning for 2022 should start now. Municipal leaders, industry, and civil society organizations should start deliberations on how to improve the work conditions of both waste pickers and vendors; and set up health protocols, adequate infrastructure and educational campaigns.

This report is based on [WIEGO Resource Document No 18](#), by Brittany A. Thomas, Sonia M. Dias, Cynthia Deng and Mariana Pereira Guimarães.