

"BECAUSE WE ALSO HAVE OUR RIGHTS": PHYSICAL-SPATIAL TRANSFORMATION WITH CHILDREN FROM MORRO DO PAPAGAIO

*"PORQUE A GENTE TAMBÉM TEM NOSSOS DIREITOS":
TRANSFORMAÇÃO FÍSICO-ESPACIAL, COM CRIANÇAS DO MORRO DO PAPAGAIO*

*"PORQUE TAMBIÉN TENEMOS NUESTROS DERECHOS":
TRANSFORMACIÓN FÍSICO-ESPACIAL, CON LOS NIÑOS DEL MORRO DO PAPAGAIO*

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ABSTRACT

Although child participation in decision-making is a recognized right, children are often excluded from decision-making processes that will affect the quality of their lives, including those related to urban issues. In the Brazilian context, there is a lack of studies aimed at understanding child participation in the transformation of public spaces. This study aims to explore the repercussions of a physical-spatial transformation involving children aged 9 to 10 years, residents of the Morro do Papagaio favela (Belo Horizonte, Brazil). To this end, interviews, photo-elicitation, and participant observation were conducted. Inductive thematic analysis of the data revealed the value of physical-spatial transformation as a practice that enables the exercise of children's rights to participation, sociability, play, freedom, education, use of public spaces, beauty and well-being. Identifying how children experience public spaces in the favela became crucial to understanding how transforming spaces with children can promote their citizenship.

KEYWORDS

Participation; Childhood; Physical-Spatial transformation; Favela

RESUMO

Embora a participação infantil nas tomadas de decisão seja um direito consagrado, as crianças são frequentemente excluídas dos processos decisórios que afetarão a qualidade das suas vidas, incluindo àqueles direcionados para questões urbanas. No contexto brasileiro, há uma carência de estudos que visam compreender a participação infantil na transformação de espaços públicos. O presente estudo tem como objetivo explorar as repercussões de uma transformação físico-espacial com crianças, entre 9 e 10 anos, moradoras da favela Morro do Papagaio (Belo Horizonte, Brasil). Para tal, foram realizadas entrevistas, foto-elicitação e observação participante. A análise temática indutiva dos dados revelou o valor da transformação físico-espacial enquanto uma prática que permite o exercício dos direitos infantis à participação, sociabilidade, brincadeira, liberdade, educação, uso dos espaços públicos, beleza e bem-estar. Identificar o modo como as crianças experienciam os espaços públicos da favela se tornou crucial para entender como transformar com crianças pode promover a cidadania destas.



PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Participação; Infância; Transformação físico-espacial; Favela

RESUMEN

Aunque la participación infantil en la toma de decisiones es un derecho consagrado, los niños suelen ser excluidos de los procesos decisorios que afectarán la calidad de sus vidas, incluidas aquellas dirigidas a cuestiones urbanas. En el contexto brasileño, existe una carencia de estudios que busquen comprender la participación infantil en la transformación de los espacios públicos. El presente estudio tiene como objetivo explorar las repercusiones de una transformación físico-espacial con niños, entre 9 y 10 años, residentes de la favela Morro do Papagaio (Belo Horizonte, Brasil). Para ello, se realizaron entrevistas, foto-elicitación y observación participante. El análisis temático inductivo de los datos reveló el valor de la transformación físico-espacial como una práctica que permite el ejercicio de los derechos infantiles a la participación, sociabilidad, juego, libertad, educación, uso de los espacios públicos, belleza y bienestar. Identificar la manera en que los niños experimentan los espacios públicos de la favela se volvió crucial para entender cómo transformar con niños puede promover su ciudadanía.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Participación; Infancia; Transformación físico-espacial; Favela.

1. INTRODUCTION

Urban growth implies increasingly urban experiences in childhood. It is estimated that 68% of the global population will be urban by 2050 (ONU, 2022), and specifically, the number of children in Brazilian cities has been gradually increasing (IBGE, 2015). The impacts of global urbanisation on children's development have justified the development of initiatives and programs involving children at international, national, and local levels (UNICEF, 2018). These experiences, which propose to transform public spaces with children, are supported by the recognition of children as rights holders since the National Constitution of 1988 (Brazil, 1988), supported by the Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente (ECA) (Brazil, 1990), which endorses children's rights to education, play, community life, inclusion, and participation. Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 1989, emphasises the right of children to participate in decision-making processes affecting their quality of life (ONU, 1989). Despite the increase in initiatives incorporating child participation in decision-making processes, in the Brazilian context, there is a lack of studies focusing on child participation in the transformation of public spaces (Ruas, 2023).

The 2030 Agenda proposed an action plan with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to achieve a better world for all peoples and nations by 2030 (ONU, 2015). Among these goals are to make cities inclusive and sustainable (SDG 11) and to ensure participatory and representative decision-making processes (SDG 16.7). Therefore, it is understood that to achieve these goals, all social groups must participate in decision-making, including children. This paper seeks to advance discussions on how public space transformations with children can contribute to ensuring the rights of children living in favelas. By closely examining what these children say about their relationship with the city and how they perceive the transformation of their immediate spaces, we are interested in "that children can speak 'in their own right' and report valid views and experiences" (Alderson, 2000, p. 243).

This article explores the views of children who transformed the stairs at São Jorge Alley at Morro do Papagaio, one of the oldest and biggest favelas of Belo Horizonte (Brazil). This small-scale physical-spatial intervention was called the Escadaria dos Artistas by a participating child. This intervention was part of the co-design studio PRJ057, Espaço Protótipo, held in the second semester of 2023, with children enrolled at the

Escola Municipal Ulysses Guimarães (EMUG), architecture and post-graduate students, lecturers from various fields of knowledge, as well as the authors of this work. During this period, mosaics were collaboratively created and installed on the steps of the stairs at São Jorge Alley, henceforth referred to as the Escadaria dos Artistas.

To understand more deeply how the transformation of public open spaces with children can contribute to promoting their rights, this study aimed to reveal how children experienced the physical-spatial transformation of Escadaria dos Artistas. To this end, participant observation, interviews, and photo elicitation with children were conducted. An inductive thematic analysis was chosen for analysing field notes, testimonies, and photos. This paper is organised into six sections. The second section presents the theoretical framework underpinning this research. The methods of data collection and analysis are described in the third section. The fourth section details the obtained results, and the discussion will constitute the subsequent section. The sixth section contains the final considerations.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 The right to child participation

When discussing child participation, it is necessary to consider the contexts in which children are embedded, including cultural, social, and economic contexts (Rizzini; Pereira; Thapliyal, 2007). Cultural deprivation theories that emerged in Brazil in the 1970s presumed that children and youth from oppressed classes lived in destabilised family environments marked by violence and aggression (Patto, 1997). This stigmatising narrative was thought to affect their cognitive, intellectual, and affective-emotional development (Gouvea, 1993). However, this assessment was based on criteria that denied any cultural specificities belonging to lower classes (Patto, 1997). In contrast to this elitist narrative, it is understood here that all children, including those living in the most impoverished areas of cities, possess the competence and ability to express opinions on matters concerning them, as enshrined in Article 12 of the CRC (ONU, 1989):

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

"Participation" is a process that combines different perspectives, ideas, and interests negotiated between adults and children, resulting in a balanced decision-making process (Tomás, 2007). In meaningful participatory processes, children are recognised as active citizens able to contribute to society (Liebel; Saadi, 2012). Chawla (2002) highlights three main reasons for involving children in processes of urban planning: (i) they will have the opportunity to engage in active democratic citizenship practices; (ii) they are experts in identifying environments that may or may not meet their needs; and (iii) they can develop habits of caring for these environments. However, involving children in decision-making processes related to urban planning, management, and design continues to be a challenge within the academic sphere. Despite the growing number of initiatives that incorporate child participation in decision-making, there remains a lack of studies in the Brazilian context that focus on children's perspectives regarding their involvement in the transformation of public spaces (Ruas, 2023).

So, how can child meaningful participation be actualized? Manzini (2008) defined promising cases of social innovation as those that not only transform traditional processes but also incorporate more sustainable practices and behaviors. According to the author, social innovation "refers to changes in the way individuals or communities act to solve their problems or create new opportunities" (Manzini, 2008, p. 61, translated by the authors). It is reiterated that listening to children is not enough; their meaningful participation in urban transformation processes must be facilitated.

2.2 Being a Child in the Favelas

The right to the city means ensuring the right to participate in urban transformation processes (Harvey, 2014). From this perspective, children have the right to participate in urban planning and architectural design processes that will transform those public urban open spaces that impact the quality of their lives. Furthermore, children's

point of view can help create more accessible and safer cities for all inhabitants.

Through play, children can enhance their social, physical, cognitive, and emotional skills (Ginsburg, 2007). High-quality public urban open spaces are crucial for child development because they offer opportunities for these developmental experiences. Furthermore, through play in these spaces, children build their self-identities, sense of belonging, and social responsibility (Owens, 2020). Children from Morro do Papagaio play outdoors, flying kites, climbing on gym bars installed in urban squares, cycling, etc. (Lansky, 2012).

Although children from Morro do Papagaio are more used to spending time and playing outdoors than children from middle-class neighbourhoods surrounding the favela, it is necessary to highlight that their experiences are permeated by a "state of violence" (Lansky, 2012). Young people from poorer layers of society suffer the impacts of violence that extend beyond their physical integrity and are observable through the violation of various human rights, such as job guarantees, quality education, and social inclusion (Rizzini; Limongi, 2016). Children living in favelas are exposed to violence even when processes of favela upgrading are put into practice (Lansky, 2012).

Beyond a merely spatial concept of what is periphery, "peripheral subjectivities" are constructed by individuals through an awareness of their urban living conditions and socio-spatial realities (D'Andrea, 2020). As they become part of an urban environment, children's relationships with public urban open spaces are influenced by personalization, in which their spatial affections and aversions are mapped, primarily through their movement (Sarmiento, 2018). This process aligns with Tuan's concept of place, where space becomes a place as it is known and endowed with value (Tuan, 1977).

In summary, we may say that deeply-loved places are not necessarily visible, either to ourselves or to others. Places can be made visible by a number of means: rivalry or conflict with other places, visual prominence, and the evocative power of art, architecture, ceremonials and rites. Human places become vividly real through dramatization. Identity of place is achieved by dramatizing the aspirations, needs, and functional rhythms of personal and group life (Tuan, 1997, p. 178).

Hence, children's identities are intertwined with their affective bonds with spaces (Coelho; Duarte; Vasconcelos,

2013). Children can experience the conversion of urban open spaces into places by participating in urban transformation processes. This study explores, from children's perspectives, whether urban transformation collaborative processes offer opportunities for them to exercise their rights.

3. METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This study adopted a qualitative approach to reveal how children (i) perceive the urban open spaces that structure the favela Morro do Papagaio, and (ii) experience opportunities to transform these spaces with adults. This research was conducted in the context of the co-design studio PRJ057 — this co-design studio has brought together architecture students and children to learn from each other how to transform urban open spaces collectively through hands-on learning experiences of co-design with children. A qualitative approach was adopted because it is suitable to understand phenomena from the participants' perspectives; it provides an in-depth understanding of the meanings associated by people with their everyday experiences (Denzin; Lincoln, 2006).

To achieve the research aims, various data collection methods were applied: unstructured interviews, photo elicitation, and observant participation. The textual data was analysed using inductive thematic analysis.

3.1 The geographical context

Morro do Papagaio presents alleys and streets shaped by irregular constructions built by the local community with cheap materials. It is a pedestrian-friendly area with a significant cultural production. However, as many other slums in the country, overcrowding and problems associated with crime, education, health, sanitation, and housing are common.

Morro do Papagaio is surrounded by middle and upper-middle-class neighbourhoods (e.g., São Bento, Santa Lúcia, Cidade Jardim, and Santo Antônio). The Municipal Human Development Index (MHDI) of this favela is 0.683, whereas the surrounding boroughs have MHDI values ranging from 0.939 to 0.951 (PNUD; IPEA; FJP, 2022) (Figure 1). This disparity reflects the inequalities that have permeated the history of Belo Horizonte and many other Brazilian cities.

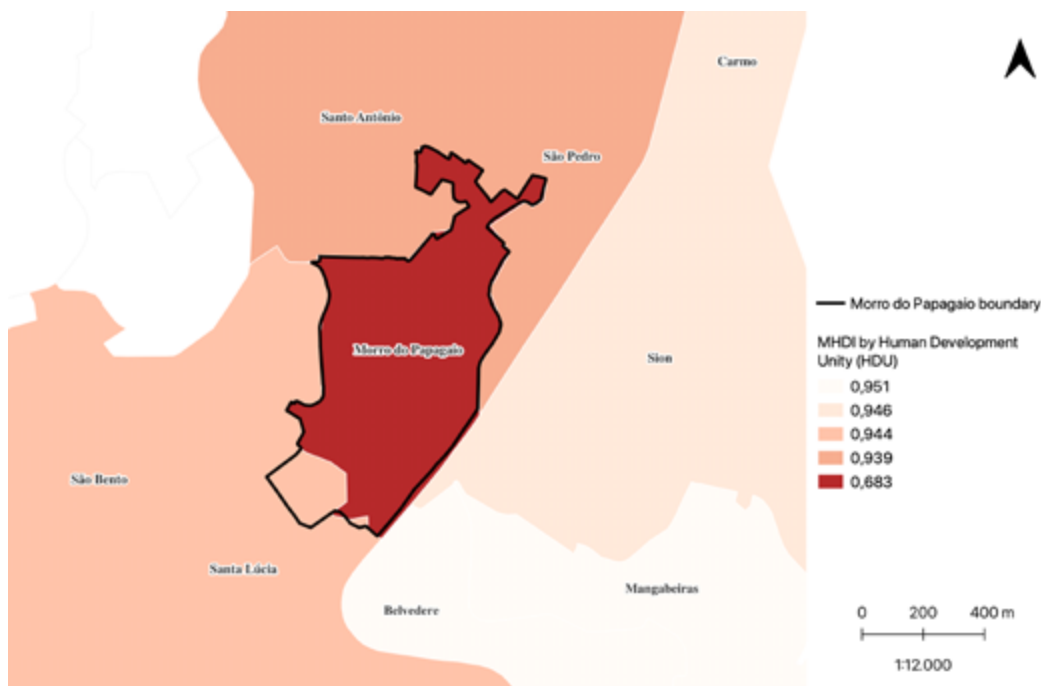


Figure 1: MHDI of Morro do Papagaio and surrounding neighborhoods.
Source: PNUD; IPEA; FJP, 2022.

Nearly 15,700 people live in Morro do Papagaio, a favela consisting of four vilas: Vila Estrela, Vila Santa Rita de Cássia, Vila Santa Lúcia, and Vila São Bento (URBEL, 2020) (Figure 2). Vila Santa Lúcia (or Vila da Barragem) is the most populous vila, with 2,503 households and an estimated population of 8,627 inhabitants, followed by Vila Santa Rita de Cássia, the second most populous

vila, with 5,029 residents in 1,485 households, as shown in Table 1 (URBEL, 2020). Morro do Papagaio has a household density of approximately 3.43 residents per household. Among the four favelas, Vila Estrela has the highest concentration of inhabitants per household, with 3.5 occupants per residence.

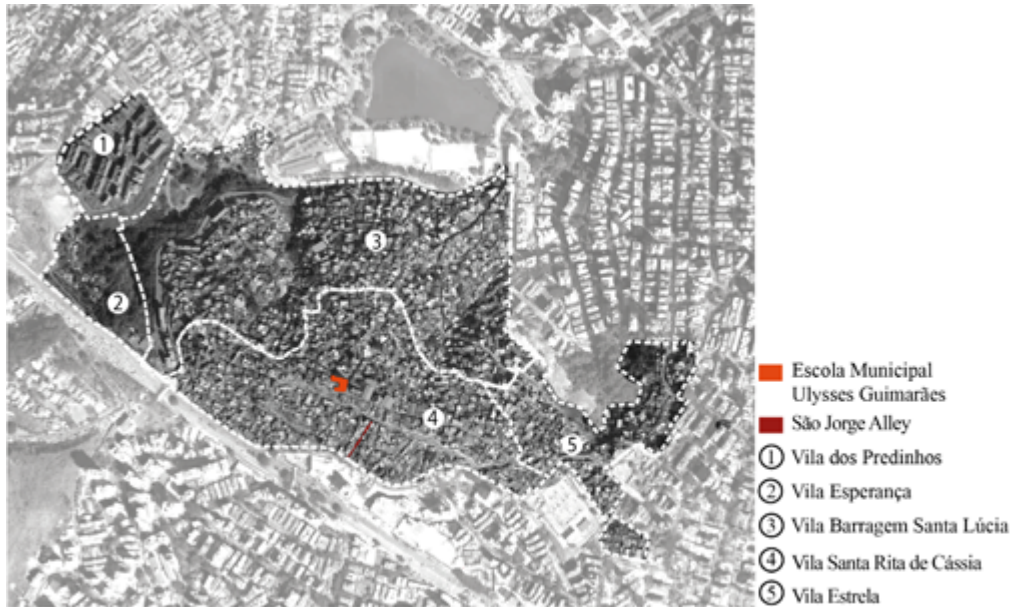


Figure 2: map of Morro do Papagaio.
Source: the authors, 2024.

Favela	Residents	Hoouseholds	Area (m ²)
Vila Barragem Santa Lúcia	8.627	2.503	231.296,00
Vila Santa Rita de Cássia	5.029	1.485	151.679,00
Vila Estrela	1.616	457	63.626,00
Vila São Bento	425	121	32.995,00
Total:	15.697	4.566	479.596,00

Table 1: favelas of Morro do Papagaio (total population, households and area).
Source: URBEL, 2020.

3.2 The educational context

This research was developed in articulation with the co-design studio PRJ 057 at the Escola de Arquitetura, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. This pedagogical approach was chosen due to the awareness that through hands-on learning experiences of co-design with children, a more enriching and socially engaged learning experience can be achieved with returns to the community. Approximately 15 architecture students and 40 children (9-11 years old) attended PRJ057. The course plan of PRJ 057 comprised the following stages: (i) research and contact with the urban open space to be transformed; (ii) research on techniques for producing and installing mosaics (iii) generation of drawings by children; (iv) selection of the drawings to be transformed into mosaics, (v) test of different techniques (Figure 3); (vi) installation of the mosaics. Figure 4 succinctly describes each stage of the co-design studio.



Figure 3: test of different techniques.
Source: the authors, 2024.



Figure 4: stages of the thematic workshop.
Source: the authors, 2024.

3.3 Data collection

Approximately 40 children were given information about the research in understandable language and invited to participate. Before the data collection, informed consents were obtained from those children who wanted to participate in this research (N=7) and their parents. To gather data, this study applied unstructured interviews, participant observation, and photo elicitation, before and after the transformation of the Escadaria dos Artistas. Interview is often used to explore children's perceptions and conceptions about a particular event; however, it is essential for the adult to establish a good rapport with the child to obtain high-quality data (Carvalho et al, 2004). It is necessary to consider that children may withhold information or lie, either due to shyness or to provide answers they think adults want to hear (Punch, 2002). Clear language should be used to maintain a horizontal dialogue (Punch, 2002).

Including photos in interviews (photo-elicitation) is valuable because it allows children to record their experiences, feelings, and sense of place (Barker; Weller, 2003). Photos are communicative mediators and a means to deepen areas of interest (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004). In this study, mobile phones were used by children as data collection tools. Following a pre-defined route, children took photos prompted by the following questions: "What do you like about this place?" and "What do you not like about this place?" (Figure 5). By taking photos and pasting "emojis", children mapped which elements evoked affection and aversion in the route. When using photo-elicitation, exploring the meanings of these records for the children is essential, thereby avoiding imposing adult-centric views on the photographs (Barker; Weller, 2003).

The researchers' participation in all co-design studio sessions as lecturers or students allowed for participant observation. Here, researchers immerse themselves in the social space of other participants to maintain a direct relationship, generate data, understand the research context, and empathise with the participants as they relativise their own social space (Minayo, 2007) Participant observation allowed for recording various situations for later analysis in conjunction with other data generation methods. Mobile phones and audio transcriptions facilitated rapid and effective note-taking in situ.



Figure 5: route undertaken by children to capture photographs.

Source: the authors, 2024.

3.4. Data analysis

This study used inductive thematic analysis (data-driven), as Braun and Clarke (2006) proposed, to identify patterns (themes) in the textual data. This flexible analytical approach can generate unexpected insights (Braun; Clarke, 2006). The authors performed multiple data readings to familiarise themselves with the data (stage 1). Relevant information was highlighted in different colours and associated with preliminary codes (stage 2). Recurring codes were grouped into themes (stage 3). These themes were reviewed to check if they adequately represented the data set (stage 4). Finally, the last stage involved writing the results (stage 5). In the following section, pseudonyms were used to ensure participant anonymity. This research was approved by the Ethics Committee of UFMG (CAAE 59886022.4.0000.5149).

4. RESULTS

4.1 Children's voices: the right to be heard

The thematic analysis revealed children associate the urban open spaces that structure Morro do Papagaio with several fears—fear of crime (e.g., theft), fear of strangers (e.g., kidnapping), fear of diseases, fear of accidents (e.g., falls), and fear of flooding. Fear of crime has reduced their autonomy to explore the outdoors. João mentioned he fears robbery while walking to school; however, when asked if he had ever witnessed such an incident, he said: "[...] only in pictures, basically." Although João has not witnessed any crime, he feels insecure. This fear have prevented children

from performing activities more independently, such as walking to and from school. Laura reported:

Interviewer: [...] if today she [your mother] came to you and said, "You can go to school alone," would you like that?

Laura: No. Interviewer: Why not? Laura: Because I'm afraid (interview excerpt, 2023).

Garbage, waste, and construction debris evoke fear in children because these are associated with a high risk of accidents, flooding, and disease transmission (Figure 6). Júlia mentioned that the garbage "clogs the drains and causes the houses to flood, leaving many people without food or shelter." Children view the presence of these elements in public spaces as indicative of neglect:

Ana: Some people don't care for the world properly, so we have to treat it as well as possible.

Interviewer: And how do we take good care of the world? Ana: By not throwing trash on the street and not cutting down trees (photo-elicitation excerpt, 2023).

Children perceive the urban open spaces that structure Morro do Papagaio as a place to play and interact with other children (Figure 7). However, they seem to experience a sense of safety when they are under the supervision of a known adult (e.g., mother). João said, "[...] every Friday I stay there (at the square) playing and seeing my friends because I invite them to play," and "Sometimes my father shows up [...] to see if everything is okay." The play involves other children, but some family members occasionally join in. It is primarily the opportunities to interact with other children that make the public urban open spaces from Morro do Papagaio be perceived as spaces adequate for playing:

Interviewer: [...]. Can you think of something in Morro that you find really cool?

Ana: Yes.

Interviewer: What?

Ana: The street (interview excerpt, 2023).

Graffiti and other artistic interventions were highly appreciated by children (Figure 4). When asked how she would feel looking at the stairs full of drawings, Júlia said she would feel safe and happy: "Because when I'm alone, I'm a bit scared, but when I'm alone and see beautiful things, I get distracted and wouldn't be as scared." Children associated artistic expressions with feelings of

safety, well-being, beauty, and joy. More colourful urban open spaces are evaluated as joyful and attractive:

Interviewer: And what do you think about the stairs? [...]

Ana: Beautiful.

Interviewer: Beautiful? Tell me what is beautiful about the stairs.

Ana: The paintings on the wall.

Interviewer: The paintings? What do those paintings convey to you?

Ana: Joy. [...]

Interviewer: What do you find nice about the alleys where we walked?

Ana: First, that people paint the houses, and I think that's pretty. Some houses are very nice to see because some are colorful.

Natural elements are the category with the highest number of records, followed by artistic elements. Like artistic interventions, natural elements evoked a sense of happiness and security among the children. "I feel happy and also safe," declared Júlia when talking about the photo she took of the plants. Children enjoy contemplating plants, the sky, and mountains (Figure 8). Lorena said: "I like plants, I feel happiness; at least people are planting something to help our breathing so we can survive". The children appreciate the vistas they can contemplate from the alleys and streets that define the urban fabric of Morro do Papagaio:

Júlia: The view, I think it's very beautiful.

Interviewer: What's in that view, tell me?

Júlia: There are some mountains, buildings, and houses.

Interviewer: And what's the most beautiful thing about it?

Júlia: The mountains in the background and the blue sky.

Interviewer: How do you feel when you see the mountains in the background and the blue sky?

Júlia: I feel like I'm in a forest full of cute little animals.



Figure 6: photographic records of garbage and debris.
Source: the children, 2023

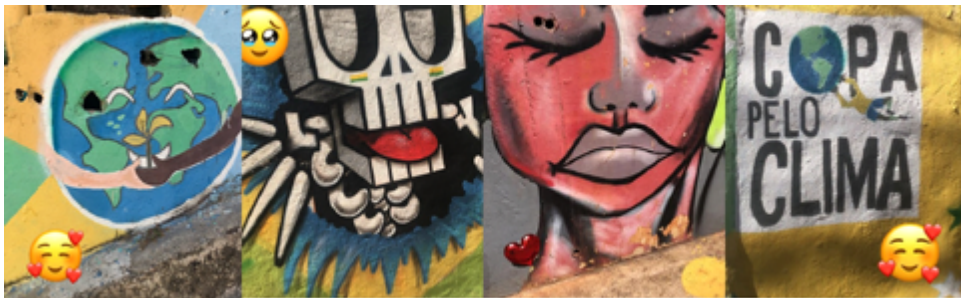


Figure 7: photographic records of artistic interventions in alleys.
Source: the children, 2023

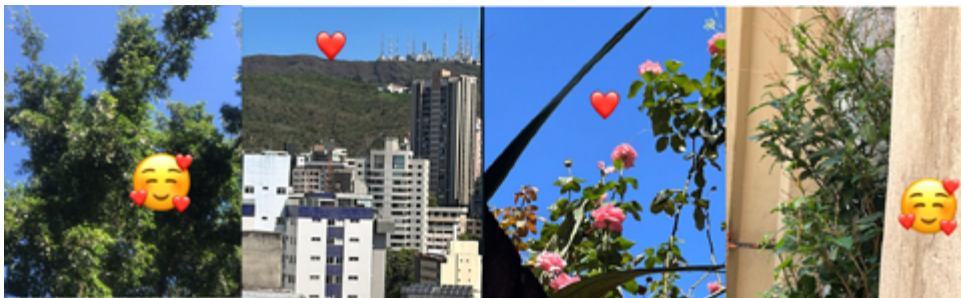


Figure 8: photographic records of natural elements.
Source: the children, 2023

4.2 Enabling children's rights: participation, play, freedom, access to public spaces, community life, education, beauty and well-being

The children valued participating in the urban transformation of the Escadaria dos Artistas as part of the co-design studio PRJ057. Lorena said: "I want to thank you for letting me participate." When asked if she preferred to work together or alone, Ana responded: "Working together with you [...] we can ask for everyone's opinion." When questioned if the children could transform other places in the city, she said, "Yes... because we also have our rights." The data suggest that children associate collaborative work with listening to everyone's opinions and understand their right to participate in urban transformation processes. The name "Escadaria dos Artistas", which in English means "Stair of the Artists", indicates that children see themselves as artists with enough expertise to participate in processes of urban transformation.

Interviewer: [...] if the mayor came to you and asked, "João, what name should we give to this stair?" What name would you give it?

João: Escadaria dos Artistas.

Interviewer: And who are the artists?

João: Everyone who participated.

The collective transformation of the stairs also stimulated play. When asked if he would like to add anything to the transformation, Caio said he would like the participants to meet again "because it was very fun

when they came." Beyond tangible marks (e.g., mosaics), participant observation revealed intangible impacts of the physical-spatial transformation, such as freedom and leisure. The children decided what to do; some preferred to sing, and others chose to help install the mosaics. The freedom to choose what they wanted to do led to enjoyment and well-being during the execution process, removing the obligation to complete predefined tasks. The children visibly enjoyed singing, placing mosaics, or making mortar as the material ran out.

Sociability also occurred between participants (children and adults) and passersby (children and adults), who expressed support, enthusiasm, and curiosity about the transformation. Some children who participated in the stairs intervention and suggested ideas for additional mosaics were not EMUG students. The thematic analysis showed that children saw themselves as active co-designers who were able to contribute processes aiming to enhance the aesthetic quality of urban open spaces that feature cities.

Interviewer: Do you think children could talk more about this with other people?

Caio: Yes.

Interviewer: Why?

Caio: Because they would have more ideas.

Interviewer: What did you think of the stairs with the tiles? With the mosaics?

Laura: Beautiful! I liked it.



Figure 9: Photographic records of the physical-spatial transformation

Source: the authors, 2023

5. DISCUSSIONS

The abandonment of urban open spaces as places for play, social interactions, and learning has been intensified by urban automobilization (Sarmiento, 2018). The conversion of parks into parking lots and streets into areas for vehicle circulation has motivated using these almost exclusively as channels for movement (Sarmiento, 2018). As a result, many children are progressively confined to indoor spaces. This confinement is associated with the "urban islands" (Zeicher, 2003), which characterises the relationship between children and the city in large urban centres. The islands correspond to spaces designated for children and controlled by adults, such as homes, schools, and shopping malls.

In contrast to this reality, the findings of this study indicated that urban open spaces in favelas are still perceived and used as spaces to play, explore, learn, meet friends, etc. However, different types of fear permeate their outdoor experiences.

The leading causes of external deaths among Brazilian children aged 1–14 in 2022 were accidental drowning/submersion and traffic collisions (DATASUS, 2024). However, when in the urban open spaces of the favela, the fear of crime and strangers prevails among children. Fear of crime and strangers has reinforced the absence of children and their caregivers in urban open spaces (Gill, 2007). Bauman (2008) describes fear as a feeling generated by a potential threat arising from our survival instinct. For the author, this fear is shaped by our perception of the world, which is increasingly seen as unsafe and viewed with suspicion.

Children appreciated the presence of art and natural elements at Morro do Papagaio; these evoked well-being and feelings of safety and happiness. This confirms the results obtained by the study conducted by Norðdahl and Einarsdóttir (2015): environments feature with these elements were described by the children as more colorful and enjoyable. The demand for more colourful spaces was also revealed in the research by Ertle et al. (2015), though these colours were present in natural environments. Children have the right to enjoy beautiful spaces. The National Plan for Early Childhood (PNPI) highlights that "subjecting the child to spaces where aesthetic is disregarded, places overwhelmed by ugliness and sensory aggression, is to deny the child the right to beauty" (Brazil, 2020, p. 211).

Through the physical-spatial transformation of the Escadaria dos Artistas children could exercise their right

to freedom and education, established by the ECA (Brazil, 1990), as well as their right to play, have fun, participate in community life, express opinions, express themselves, be in public places, and engage in cultural and artistic creation. In addition, Fattore, Mason and Watson (2009, p. 64) suggest that children consider "important to their wellbeing to be involved in more formal decisions about their lives" (Fattore; Mason; Watson, 2009, p. 64). When adults encourage and respect children's ability to make decisions and act independently, while also acknowledging their rights, children feel more valued, which contributes to an enhanced sense of well-being (Lloyd; Emerson, 2017). By naming the action "Escadaria dos Artistas," the children positioned themselves as protagonists of this process, revealing the empowerment that can result from their meaningful participation in urban transformation processes. The inter-relationships between children and the urban open spaces of Morro do Papagaio reinforce the difference between places for children – those assigned values and meanings by them, as Rasmussen argues – and places for children – created by adults (Rasmussen, 2004).

The physical-spatial transformation studied provided children with the necessary experiences to exercise citizenship. Among the basic criteria for the exercise of children's citizenship, it is essential that urban public spaces be accessible for children's use and appropriation, while also evoking a sense of belonging (Dias; Ferreira, 2015). Since urban open spaces are fundamental for child development, enabling their participation in their transformation can contribute to creating safer and more suitable spaces for their needs.

6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Understanding how children experience and construct a sense of place is crucial for engaging them in transforming urban open spaces (Christensen; O'Brien, 2003). The physical-spatial transformation of the Escadaria dos Artistas with children left tangible marks, such as beautifying the space with colorful mosaics, and intangible ones, such as strengthening their sense of belonging. The transformation also afforded opportunities to experience freedom, social interaction, beauty, education, enjoyment, well-being and play — all rights stated by CDC (and ECA).

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