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IN SEARCH OF PUBLIC SPACES FOR
PLAYING: A STUDY OF
CONTEMPORARY CHILDHOODS IN
THE CITY OF VITÓRIA-ES

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¹It is important to note that we use the term "large cities" to cover both "medium", "large" and "metropolitan" cities, characterized by similar socio-spatial problems. According to data from IBGE (2010), about 50% of the Brazilian population lives in cities with more than 100 thousand inhabitants.

ABSTRACT

This article is part of the postdoctoral research "*Children's playful spaces: from Barcelona/Spain to Vitória/Brazil (PPGAU-UFES, 2015-2016)*", whose field study developed in Vitória - ES constitutes its empirical basis. The critical thinking here exposed is developed by interrelating fields of knowledge adjacent to Architecture and Urbanism, such as urban planning, urban culture, education and the sociology of childhood. The work approaches the real object - the subjects-children - through the childhood in Vitória - ES, using its playful spaces. In the interrelation between contemporary city and urban childhood, the objective is to introduce some perspectives about the place of the child in the city: in space and in society. More specifically, it seeks to construct a transdisciplinary reading to understand the potential of the public spaces of the large Brazilian cities¹, the social dynamics and children's practices about the city, and the real role it plays in the development of childhood, in its sociability and construction of citizenship.

KEYWORDS

Public space. Playful space. Childhood. Citizenship. Vitória - ES.

DOI: [HTTP://DX.DOI.ORG/10.11606/ISSN.2317-2762.v25i45p102-117](http://dx.doi.org/10.11606/ISSN.2317-2762.v25i45p102-117)

Pós, Rev. Programa Pós-Grad. Arquit. Urban. FAUUSP. São Paulo, v. 25, n. 45, p. 102-117, jan-abr 2018

EM BUSCA DOS ESPAÇOS PÚBLICOS DE BRINCAR: UM ESTUDO DAS INFÂNCIAS CONTEMPORÂNEAS NA CIDADE DE VITÓRIA-ES

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RESUMO

¹É importante pontuar que utilizamos o termo “grandes cidades” para abarcar tanto as cidades “médias”, quanto as “grandes” e as “metrópoles”, caracterizadas por problemáticas socioespaciais semelhantes. Segundo dados do IBGE (2010), cerca de 50% da população brasileira vive em cidades com mais de 100 mil habitantes.

Este artigo é parte da pesquisa de pós-doutorado “*Espaços lúdicos infantis: de Barcelona/Espanha a Vitória/Brasil (PPGAU-UFES, 2015-2016)*”, cujo estudo de campo desenvolvido em Vitória - ES constitui sua base empírica. O pensamento crítico aqui exposto se constrói a partir da articulação entre campos do conhecimento adjacentes à Arquitetura e Urbanismo, como planejamento urbano, cultura urbana, educação e sociologia da infância. O trabalho se aproxima do objeto real - os sujeitos-crianças - através da infância de Vitória - ES usuária dos seus espaços lúdicos. Na inter-relação entre cidade contemporânea e infância urbana, o objetivo é introduzir algumas perspectivas acerca do lugar da criança na cidade: no espaço e na sociedade. Mais especificamente, busca-se construir uma leitura transdisciplinar para entender o potencial dos espaços públicos das grandes cidades brasileiras¹, as dinâmicas sociais e práticas infantis sobre a cidade, e o real papel que desempenham no desenvolvimento da infância, na sua sociabilidade e construção da cidadania.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Espaço público. Espaço lúdico. Infância. Cidadania. Vitória - ES.

I. CONTEMPORARY URBAN CHILDHOOD

Childhood is relatively recent object of historiographical study: its concept as a sociocultural device, as we know it today, did not exist until the end of the Middle Ages, being an invention of modernity, as a result of the constitution of public instances of socialization (POSTMAN, 1999). According to Philippe Ariès (1981), the “feeling of childhood” did not exist until the beginning of modernity, establishing itself in the context of the objective and subjective transformations that coincided with modern individualism.

In the construction of this society, there has been a progressive “educational institutionalization of childhood”, provided by the State on a basis of formal separation, intergenerational protection and fight against idleness, with an inculcated epistemology, ideology, homogenized knowledge, ethics and mental discipline (SARMENTO; CERISARA, 2004). Since then, the educational function has been delegated primarily to school institutions - a trend that deserves to be reconsidered, since, according to Michel Foucault’s (1993) critical thinking, these correspond to the historical institutionalization of childhood “disciplining” processes, of “training” the adult future, with educational purposes inherent to the maintenance of the dominant social order.

If, in the past, it could coexist and acquire knowledge from relations with others in urban spaces, it has undergone a gradual process of exclusion from social spheres, such as work, living with adults outside the family circle or participation in political and community life. With the specialization of the family roles and the new educational institution, the child became an “individual”, whose role is progressively explicit and specialized as a spare part, waiting to be incorporated into the cogs of the contemporary socioeconomic way of life.

At the same time that modernity introduced the school as a condition of access to citizenship, it carried out a separation of the children from the public space. Children are seen as the citizens of the future, but at the present time, they are far from the collective interaction, except in the school context, and protected by families from full presence in life in society (SARMENTO; FERNANDES; TOMÁS, 2007, p. 188).

In approaching childhood from a sociological perspective, it is worth noting that it is understood not only as a period of human life, but as *childhoods*, since in reality it is a question of multiple, plural and diverse sociocultural worlds, with own values, and that assume different traits in different contexts, including in their way of life and of experiencing and appropriating the spaces.

According to analysis of Bauman (2001), in the 21st century there is a reversal of the historical role of the city. The war against insecurity, risks and dangers, against the feeling of “fear”, is present in the heart of the cities. Our society sees the city through the filter of the “culture of fear” - created by political and economic interests, and supported by the mass media - that, more than a concrete dimension, is a discursive practice. Our post-industrial, capitalist and urban life results in social isolations that need justifications. One of them is violence, fear of the other, seen as something insolvent (DEBORTOLI; MALIK; MARTINS, 2008). The daily reaffirmation of this culture produces mixed feelings in relation to the city, that cultivates individualism, hedonism and consumerism, to the detriment of social interactions and the contact with nature.

2. URBAN SPACES TO THE CHILDHOODS

After all, what is the role of playing in the cities? Which are the places of the contemporary urban childhoods? What is the real potential of recreational/public spaces in the development of the children and their citizenship? These questionings guide the research, that understands playing as basic activity of childhood - the very nature of childhood culture -, capable to transform the lived space into affective space and citizenship space (VYGOTSKY, 2007).

Playing is the expression of the child, basic in its development. It constitutes its first form of learning, with processes of creativity, capacity of rationalization and domain of the language. It configures a privileged and natural form to explore, to know the world and to solve problems, beyond fomenting the development of cognitive and symbolic structures, physical-motor and emotional abilities and social dimension. By playing, the child establishes relations with the other, with objects and with the place: the child creates a world to its own measure, with relations of equal for equal. The game - symbolic representation of the reality - is connected to both the fun, evasion, fantasy and creativity such as adaptation to the environment, the social relations and the cultural tradition, the learning and the maturity processes, and still to the expression of emotions (VYGOTSKY, 2007).

Nowadays, playing is understood as an anthropological activity - innate and inherent to the human being, with universal character (HUIZINGA, 2012) -, biologically inherited, essential to the development of subjects-children, and characterized as spontaneous, enjoyable and free. Playing is an end in itself.

Meanwhile, playing is often relegated to a secondary plan. Our capitalist society, which is pressed by the utilitarianism and pragmatism of the economic activities, outlined by production and competitiveness values, demarcates traditional conservative principles as the most "efficient". From educational, social, economic objectives and predetermined politicians, these principles seek to "optimize" these values through the accumulation of contents and uncritical reproduction of knowledge. As a consequence, playing is "rationed" and "shaped", aiming at the future adult life and educational, social, economic and political objectives, which denaturalize the proper playful and gratuitous character of playing (LANSKY, 2012) and disregard the necessities and desires of the child. A reflection of this attitude is the absence and/or precariousness of urban public spaces for free playing.

Understood as shared experience and socially constructed, the instance "city" is a multifaceted reality that is presented as the *locus* of the diversity: a physical space filled with identity that is converted into a symbolic potential space of construction and exercise of citizenship (CASTELLS, 1998). In this context, the public spaces are elements that support life in common, in which demonstrations and conflicts occur, but also meetings, exchanges, parties, experiences and learnings.

Retrieving the previous questioning, which are the proper places of childhood in the cities (contemporaries)? When dealing with the relations between the city and the child, the spaces to be perceived, exploited, felt and experienced by childhoods, it is essential to discuss the creation of specialized spaces, suitable for each function and social group, that have arisen with the urban planning developed from the 19th century (LEFEBVRE, 2009). This type of planning has created the children's public spaces², which had the German and North American versions as reference.

Their origin retraces to the yards of *kindergarten* idealized by the educator Friedrich Fröebel (1837) and spread out in Germany by Emil Hartwig. Its diffusion was favored by the social exchanges of the time and by the advance of the pedagogical theories, when it was confirmed the narrow relation between playing and learning. The term *playground* appeared in 1868, when the doctor Marie Zakrewska took the idea to the United States, incorporating toys to these spaces (NIEMEYER, 2002). Throughout the 20th century, this model of children's playing area spread over several countries of the world. Decades later, in the years 1960, Jane Jacobs (2000) would corroborate the need for safe places for children, due to their "expulsion" of streets/sidewalks.

In Brazil, the first children's public areas had been created in São Paulo in years 1930 with the Director of the Culture Department, Mário de Andrade. Such spaces have been influenced by ideals of culture and citizenship for all, through the New Education Fellowship³ and health principles of the time, which placed great emphasis on physical health aspects; these principles have emerged to attend a growing proletarian population, ensuring children from three years of age the opportunity to play, develop recreational activities and socialize with other children. The spaces had a variety of recreational appliances and equipment geared to the practice of physical education (MIRANDA, 1941). The paradigmatic Children's Playground⁴ program of São Paulo served as a model for the dissemination of these spaces across the country up to the present.

Eight decades later, it is a consensus that society and the cities are in constant transformation. It is, therefore, imperative that the urban spaces are flexible, adapting and promoting the connection between the city and the subjects-citizens - at the same time, restraining the current trend to the social isolation. Much of the adults still remember a childhood in which the street/sidewalk was the meeting place of the children. It is not a dweller look that reflects the desire to return to a non-existent time and space. It is a fact that childhoods are distinct in the contemporary, according to the socio-cultural transformations. What remains, therefore, is the relevance/urgency of perceiving the temporal-spaces and sociocultural changes to understand its consequences and the needs of contemporary urban childhoods.

In Brazil, it is observed that the intensification of the urbanization process experienced in the few last decades - with an exaggerated growth of new buildings and without the due accompaniment of free spaces, indispensable to the equilibrium of the city-, occurred associated with problematic of traffic, pollution, noise and scarcity of areas for leisure. However, in cities of passage, of reduced areas, of private and specialized places, and of ephemeral relations, the free public spaces - squares, parks, playing spaces, *etc.* - have lost its value and

² In this article, the terms "children's public space" or "children's playful space" are used to designate the areas designed and intended for childhood and outdoor playing. In Brazil, these areas can receive several names, according to each region.

³ Emerged in the end of the 19th century in Europe, it was a renewal movement of the education inspired by the politician-philosophical ideas of equality between the men and of the universal right to the education. The Italian doctor, Maria Montessori (1870-1952) was one of the pioneers of the preschool education and the New Education Fellowship. In Brazil, a state system of public education, free and open, was seen as the only effective means of combating the social inequalities of the nation.

⁴ The Children's Playground of São Paulo gave birth to the kindergarten, which were non-existent in the early 20th century. Many of these playgrounds had been shouldered by the Secretariat of Education in the 1970s, with the deployment of the Preschool education (NIEMEYER, 2002), today called Early Childhood Education.

playful potential in the daily life of the children for the private and commercial spaces. The lack of investment has made the urban unattractive, with little offer and quality of leisure and of recreational, playful, cultural, natural and large spaces, losing the dimension of the public space as a place of meeting, conviviality, experiences, learning, free games and pranks place and contact with nature, which are so important to the development and bio-psycho-social well-being of the children (MALHO, 2004).

Thus, the contemporary city ends up:

restricting the autonomy of the children, limiting the spaces, threatening the security, inducing globalized forms of colonization by consumption and enhancing inequalities (notably in the access to spaces, goods and urban services) (SARMENTO, 2008, p. 4).

In recent years, cities have been suffering the consequences of their submission to the real estate market and to the big companies. The free public spaces ended up being “symbolically reclaimed, cleaned and made safe in the sweetened, luminous and timeless urban cartography of the shopping centers” (GARCIA, 1996, p. 21). In the context of the large Brazilian cities, it is observed that children have their freedom of movement reduced, hindered in the possibility of developing their particular ways of perceiving the city. For the sake of alleged security, they become “hostages”, confined in specialized spaces, with “privatized” times, conditioned and controlled by adults: environments without diversity, which end up curtailing their own childhood. Also the spontaneous time, the unpredictable, the adventure, the risk and the meeting with the natural environment, gave way to the organized time, the planned, the uniformed (ALMEIDA, 2012).

Zygmunt Bauman (2001) clarifies that the current “liquid modernity” imposes a “changeable” relationship between space and time, characterized by public emptiness, expansion of the private and increased sociospatial segregation, promoting social relationships, cultural models and citizenship practices which are different from the traditional. This reality imposes important questions for the approach of urban spaces, which assume consumption and segregation as structuring values.

In an inversion of the capitalist logic, it is worth resuming the proposal of Henri Lefebvre (2009) to the right to the city, sociability and meeting in urban environments, opting to a model of an integrated urbanism:

The use (the use value) of places, monuments, differences, escapes to the exchange requirements, the exchange value [...]. At the same time it is a place of meetings, convergence of communications and information, the urban has also become what it has always been: a place of desire, permanent imbalance, thirst for the dissolution of normalities and coactions, of playful and unpredictable moments (LEFEBVRE, 2009, p. 84-85).

As evidenced by Milton Santos (1996), by its organization and instrumentalization, the urban territory can and should be used to achieve an egalitarian social project. In this line of thought, it stands out the defense of a city for all, realizing that urban life is not restricted to its geopolitical and spatial limits, and that it must unfailingly include the social dimensions and therefore the need and urgency to democratize the access to playfulness to all children,

without socio-economic distinction - where the public ceases to be "space of anyone" to be "space of all".

A public policy of playful equipment must also take a role in reducing social and economic inequalities. Both the formation of the elite and the marginality are not only explained by the opportunities for education, health and access to work. They are justified, also, for the opportunities to play (GARCIA, 1996, p. 121).

The potential of urban/playful spaces in the development of the children is extraordinary, although often devalued. Promoting children the right to the city, to urban life and to leisure, through the right to play in the public space, plays a key role in the reproduction of social life, strengthens the community bonds, contributing to the construction of children's culture, besides being an important tool to forge a culture of peace and the construction of a new citizenship. Connected to their community, through these experiences, the children develop their self-esteem and autonomy as authors of transformations, becoming able to intervene positively in the future development of the city.

The children which live in these places and are strengthened by them, children become "another" - citizens - through the experience of urban space, to meet the different and the diversity, the complex social and cultural relations developed there. The playful appropriation of the spaces creates a sense of security, the bond of identity, the belonging and the bond of affection. Such spatialities are constantly transformed and redefined, since the space depends on the actions it receives and, the value of the actions and social practices depends on the space where they are developed. From this, there is social construction of space and the spatial construction of social practices (LEFEBVRE, 2013; SANTOS, 2006).

In fact, citizenship is a principle that seeks to embody the values of freedom, equality, justice, diversity, tolerance, respect and participation in democratic life (LOUREIRO, 2010). This citizenship, not as a natural data, but as a basically social learning, can become a state of mind, rooted in the culture (SANTOS, 1996). Perhaps it is even better to understand citizenship not as a natural data, nor as learning, but as a concept to be built, at the same time, in an individual and collective way.

As you can see, public spaces have become the only possibility of social relations and interactions, of outdoor games and plays for children of most major cities⁵. This gives them an important role and converts them to a necessity, whose planning requires a comprehensive study. The role of children's public spaces is - or should be - to promote the well-being and integral development through outdoor play, in contact with nature, uniting its benefits of health, leisure, culture, education, socialization and citizenship.

The playful public space:

must act on its socio-economic, affective, physical, natural and free-time deprivations and, at the same time, try to mitigate its character of dependence and lack of autonomy. It should also seek ruptures with the massive, warm, consumerist and stereotyped daily life by the cultural industry and the media. [...] The new playful spaces need to take on a provocative air, be able to instigate curiosity and raise challenges in the child (GARCIA, 1996, p. 28).

⁵ Coastal cities can be considered exceptions, such as Vitória, where the beaches are also spaces for playing.

It must make it possible to play with a high level of interactivity, where all its elements raise in the child a strong attraction in being experienced: touched, manipulated, climbed or traced. It should be open to a variety of interpretations and include a diversity of challenges, avoiding being too neutral or sculptural. It must be dynamic, alive, “playable” (LIMA, 1989).

3. VITÓRIA-ES AND THEPLAYING PUBLIC SPACES

In the case of Vitória (+/- 358.875 inhabitants; 96,5 km²)⁶, capital of the State of Espírito Santo and empirical object of this work for children’s public spaces, it is worth understanding its physical-geographical and socioeconomic context. The city highlights a strong relationship with the sea, with its coastal landscape and rocky hills - spatial and cultural references to its population. In addition to considering that much of the municipality represents the island of Vitória, geographically, it is worth highlighting the Massif Central, the mangroves and the successive landfills, which contributed to the current diversity and sociospatial segregation of the city.

⁶ According to data of IBGE, 2015-2016.

Vitória was one of the first urban centers founded in the country, dating from 1551. However, until the 1970s its defining process has remained balanced. From the 1970-1980s, it has established itself as an important steel exporting center and an industrial labor attractive pole, with consequent intensification of its urban growth. The city, which until then preserved its configuration of colonial village, has expanded with the formation of a qualified middle class on the East side and with a low-income population in the West-Northwest-North regions, originating mainly from the informal market. Many of the popular districts that emerged during this period on the shores of the Bay that surrounds the city of Vitória are the result of invasions and occupations of garbage landfills on the mangrove (ALMEIDA; GOBBI, 1983).

From the 1990s, the urbanization of the cost line, with the removal of stilts and the installation of decks, boardwalks, bicycle paths, parks, squares, soccer field and/or multisport courts and viewpoints, has significantly changed the lives of the Northwest Bay communities. Currently, although characterized by the low-income population and with high level of violence, the region consists of urbanized neighborhoods with public leisure spaces.

As for public spaces and equipment, there is an undeniable inequality in the supply and distribution of the city’s territory. In the case of playful areas, in addition to the scarcity near the beaches and massifs, while the east Coast has a high level of life quality and several spaces and equipment for leisure and culture, the Northwest coast, facing the Bay of Vitória and the mangrove, presents great economic and social disparities, where the public power has been distant for decades with regard to the promotion of these public equipments, including for childhood (SARTÓRIO, 2015).

Figure 1: Children's public spaces, Vitória, ES, Brazil.
Source: <http://google.com.br>
(prepared by the author),
2016



⁷Reality that can also be observed in small cities.

Considering location, coverage of service, articulation with the urban surroundings and diversity of equipment, there is a shortage in the quality of the public spaces projected for the childhood of Vitória, limited to minimal - more sharply in the West-Northwest zone of the municipality -, and are frequently used in the late afternoon and on weekends. As an alternative to this unsatisfactory reality, through creativity and adaptation to the environment and to the means, communities find other ways of appropriating the public space.

According to the tropical climate with high temperatures throughout the year and due to scarcity of vegetation, there is a clear preference of the child population for the shaded areas, even without any supporting equipment, instead of equipped squares that are close, but without vegetation (MENDONÇA, 2007; FORNACIARI, 2011). Along these lines, it is proven that the needs programs - very similar between itself - and the environment solutions adopted by the local government of Vitória are inadequate.

As for the use of the street, as general rule, its multi-functional character has been lost: playing in the street is an increasingly less frequent activity in most of Vitória. However, it is still creatively appropriate for the population of popular⁷ neighborhoods for leisure, recreation and child playing. Studies have verified this preference of families, since playing in the street, close to home, under the eyes of relatives and neighbors, children would be more protected than in specific spaces of leisure, since they are away from the residences (MENDONÇA, 2007; FORNACIARI, 2011). Less busy areas - street, sidewalk, alley, backyard, wasteland, soccer field, or beach - offer possibilities of inventions, adventures, experiences, with traditional pranks, creation of toys, enjoying the natural environment and socialization (FREIRE, 2014).

On the other hand, especially in the Northwest Zone, the current environmental degradation resulting from urbanization - silting and pollution of waters, sewage

Figure 2: Aterro St., Bela Vista, West Bay of Vitória. Source: Author's own collection (2016).



⁸ Calculation made according to data of the children's population in Vitória, ES, Brazil. [<http://cidades.ibge.gov.br/painel/populacao.php?codmun=320530>].

disposal on mangroves and landfills - end up to set barriers and induce changes in playful practices, as the loss of importance of tricks next and inside the mangrove (FREIRE, 2014). Also on the East Zone of Vitória, a large reach of its beaches are unsuitable for bathing, restricting itself significantly as recreation area for children.

The research identified the existence of 95 children's areas in the city, distributed in squares (85%) and parks (15%), being eleven municipal spaces and one private park for public use. However, although regarded as children's areas, four of them are characterized by abandonment and absence of any equipment. In this way, there is 91 playful areas in Vitória and the ratio of one to about 3,943 inhabitants, or one for each group of about 650 children⁸ and for each 0,94km² of its territory. Although found in virtually all the parks and/or neighborhoods of Vitória, we perceive the irregular distribution of children's playful spaces through the territory of the city, with scarcity near the beaches and rocky massifs.

Eighteen children's spaces have been analyzed in detail, with varied typologies, distributed throughout the city. The field work consisted of visits to playful areas with observation, notes, photographic and audiovisual records, interviews with users (children and adults) and survey of characteristics and physical aspects, use and appropriation of spaces (location, surroundings, accessibility, enclosure, permeability, lighting, vegetation, floor, microclimate, furniture, playful equipment, conservation status, hours of operation, users).

Most of the playful spaces of Vitória - 80% - are restricted to the same model found about 80 years in Brazil: standardized parks, with traditional configuration and toys, surrounded with fence and with sand soil. The toys - slide, swing, jungle gym, tubular-steel teeter-totter -, are unpersonalized, functional and monotonous; feature rigid and stereotyped materials and forms that do not



Figure 3: Dom João Batista Square, São Pedro, Vitória.
Figure 4: Moscoso Park, Downtown, Vitória.
Figure 5: Pedra da Cebola Park, Mata da Praia, Vitória.
Source: Author's own collection (2016).

stimulate the children's curiosity and imagination. The toys restrict the playing, with repetitive motions, little freedom to exercise the creativity and expand children's skills.

It is concluded that, although found in virtually all the districts of Vitória, the playful areas are quite precarious. Without proper identity and with reduced spaces, there are few elements of nature, as well as the environmental quality is scarce. They have little variety of equipment, floors and materials, colors and textures, and they lack the invitation to play, to fantasy and to interact and to play collectively. They often have problems of convenience, maintenance and security, with potential risks of crashes and blows to small users. Besides far from the residential areas and school institutions, the access is restricted by controls and timetables. In practice, they are mainly used on weekends. The age group encompassed by its playful equipment is very limited (approximately 4-7 years), excluding other children and those with special needs. In this way, even though they have a socializing function, these spaces fall short in terms of their playful potential and integral development.

It was observed that, although there is no significant quantitative lag compared to other Brazilian capitals, the children's areas of Vitória have important problems of qualitative order. With the exception of some playful areas, for example: *Ciência* Square (Enseada do Suá), Luis Coser Filho Square (Itararé), Tancredo de Almeida

⁹The Botanical Park of Vale is a case apart because it is a private park for public use and free access. Interestingly, it is the playful space that receives more visits from the municipal infantile schools.

Neves "Tancredão" Park (Mário Cypreste) or Botanical Park of Vale⁹ (Jardim Camburi), that stand out for their distinctive and attractive typologies.



Figure 6: Botanical Park of Vale, Jardim Camburi, Vitória.

Figure 7: *Ciência* Square, Enseada do Suá, Vitória.

Figure 8: *Saudável* Tancredo de Almeida Neves (“*Tancredão*”) Square, Mário Cypreste, Vitória.

Source: Author’s own collection (2016).

Finally, it should be pointed out that despite the existence of deficiencies, the child population asks their families to use these public spaces, attend and enjoy them, regardless of their quality as playful equipment. This awareness of the local playful spaces was highlighted by the observations and speeches of the subjects-children heard in interviews carried out *in situ*. However, a paradoxical situation exists: on the one hand, there is a concern of the Municipal Government with the creation of new children’s areas and its requalification in the last decade - this also reveals a tendency to enhance the playful spaces and, consequently, the interest of the public power with the present and future childhood of the Espírito Santo State. On the other hand, new or newly requalified playful areas continue to receive the same traditional equipment.

Being the city of Vitória signatory of the International Association of Educating Cities (AICE)¹⁰, it is worth emphasizing the concept of Educating Cities, which seeks social participation, inclusion and equal opportunities in the cities. “Educating cities” are those which transmit information and culture, which provide reinvention and the resignificance of their spaces (ALDEROQUI, 2003), which value non-formal learning and take an active role in the education and training of children, youth and adults. Thus, a city that has a structured urban project, with adequate public spaces, educates by ensuring the access and quality of its services. At the same time, it contributes to the construction of a more democratic and safer city, more enjoyable and welcoming, more humane, giving a growing margin of responsibility and autonomy to all its citizens, including and especially to children.

¹⁰ Created in Barcelona in 1990, the AICE counts today with about 500 cities, including 14 Brazilian cities. [www.edcities.org].

4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The urban transformations that occurred in the last decades – as in Vitória - have created cities with a shortage of children's playful spaces. More and more the private replaces the public through the logic of economy and consumption while the public power installs the infrastructure, spaces and minimum equipment for leisure and culture, or non-institutionalized child education, in a quantitative and qualitative analysis, in located, poorly planned and poorly equipped areas. These playful equipment, with rare exceptions, predominantly promote individual playing and present obsolete proposals.

Similar to the reality of so many other cities in the country (BORGES, 2008), the study of the playful spaces of Vitória reveals that our cities still have a long way forward in the development of attention to children, through the supply of appropriate playing spaces and equipments suitable for the childhood of the 21st century. In this context, it is worth reflecting on the possible ways of building a more humane city, through the democratization of access to leisure and culture. The answer to these problems is in our capacity as a whole, as a society, to build a new city model that allows us to redeem the citizenship lost from the actors' hands and the economy rules and its cumulative logics. It is about reversing - subverting - the situation and put the city, its spaces and equipment, in the service of a citizenship project that includes especially childhoods: it is about creating playing territories.

It is important to consider the limitation not only of space, but also of time for children's leisure - which is usually restricted to the weekends -, in a daily life filled with commitments, as in the major Brazilian cities. It is observed that the vast majority of children's spaces do not have a close relationship to schools and are disconnected from the residences by streets of vehicle traffic. To circumvent these limitations and to get the practice of playing to be part of everyday life, in urban and landscape terms, it is worth resorting to the implantation of these playful areas close to the residences or adjacent to public schools of child and/or fundamental education, facilitating logistics and their daily use after school hours.

Moreover, other factors influence this urban and socio-cultural dynamics, and should be rethought: -feeling of urban insecurity; -significant socioeconomic differences; -ample domestic/residential spaces in the districts of higher purchasing power; -inadequacy between labor and school schedules (absence of all-day school in the public system); -low playful quality of children's spaces; etc. This set of factors conflicts with the development of a culture of public spaces, which if it is overcome, would help to foster greater use of the playful areas and the construction of a new child citizenship.

As planners, we must consider that in the (re)qualification of urban environments, it is necessary to recover not only the residual and interstitial spaces for all, for the city itself, but mainly to create new playful spaces integrated and articulated in the urban fabric, with the surroundings and the landscape, creating urban vitality and providing meetings, experiences, participation and interaction. In this way, a cultural exchange is promoted, in which the playful space ceases to have a sporadic use and creates a daily habit, from the offer of renovated children's public environments.

In this way, the playful spaces must be planned not depending on the parents or the interest of the adults, but according to the needs and subjectivities of those who will use the space: the children. This process implies knowing the community's background, since it must be the result of a planning that is actually able to attract childhood and its family through complex and stimulating solutions. Its project should be specially developed for the place where it will be inserted and for the community that it will attend. Taking into account the physical characteristics of the site, the needs, interests and desires of future users, there will be more possibilities to be accepted, valued and appropriated.

It is urgent to break the architectural and urban barriers of the surroundings and provide spaces for the experience of the city, the collective, where the children - both of the higher classes and, especially, the popular ones - can play with freedom, safely, and have accessible and quality spaces. In this sense, it is difficult to devise a healthier, rich and stimulating environment, to arouse the curiosity and children's imagination than an accessible and inclusive urban space, with the presence of landscape and nature: sand, land, trees, flowers, animals, water, sun, shade and wind, reliefs, textures, colors, sounds and aromas, and, still, playful quality equipment (DIAS; FERREIRA, 2015). It may have unlevels, corners and nooks, contrasts, sunny and shaded areas, collective toys that foster the child-child interactions and the environment, which rise in the children strong interest to touch them, manipulate them, scale them, know them and that force them to organize each other (OLIVEIRA, 2004).

¹¹ Many parks and children's areas, as well as the beach, are also used for the celebration of children's birthdays.

It is also important to understand that public playful areas may be different from those widespread throughout Brazil, without a greater cost. It is enough to devote knowledge, interest and creativity to its planning, conforming more stimulating spaces for the diversity of Brazilian urban childhoods. The research, care and respect for the socio-cultural singularities of the communities, allied to the characteristics of their surroundings and landscape, can be the key to creating spaces that preserve their cultural identity and guarantee their appropriation. As limited as economic conditions may be, we should not underestimate the possibilities of the future children's area, as minimal interventions can encourage excellent playful experiences.

Recovering the connection between child, public space and city, it will be possible a playful transformation, where the playing is the activator engine of the interactions between the subject-children and the space-city, enriching its sensorial, emotional and contextual baggage (MARTÍNEZ, 2013). In this dynamic conception of the landscape as a living, the subjects interact, modify their trajectories, articulating in the phenomenological and existential space of the urban.

Thus, when properly planned, not only as to the quality of its design, but also as to its location and articulation with the urban environment, the playful spaces generate the habit of use by families and their appropriation by the children¹¹. They become spaces lived by childhood, full of meaning, that create identification and a new identity from the feeling of belonging. As a consequence, there is both the construction of a child citizenship for a society that is more harmonious, democratic and responsible, as well as the integral development of children, reinventing their childhood in the here-now.

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Acknowledgments

The research was developed in Architecture and Urbanism Post-Graduation Program of the Federal University of Espírito Santo. It was supported by CAPES/CsF, with the supervision of Dr. Eneida Maria Souza Mendonça and had the collaboration of the scholarship holder Bruna Ramos Ferreira, a psychologist and a graduate student in Pedagogy (UFES).

Editor's note

Date of submission: 02/29/2016

Acceptance: 05/30/2017

English revision: Luiz Felipe Vieira P. A. Figueira

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