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# VIRUS

## MULTILATERAL DIALOGUES PRAXIS INTERLOCUTIONS CONFRONTATIONS

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MULTILATERAL DIALOGUES: PRAXIS, INTERLOCUTIONS, AND CONFRONTATIONS  
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DIÁLOGOS MULTILATERALES: PRAXIS, INTERLOCUCIONES Y CONFRONTACIONES

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## **CHILDHOODS IN THE CITY: TENSIONS, RIGHTS, AND INCLUSION PRACTICES** **INFÂNCIAS NA CIDADE: TENSÕES, DIREITOS E PRÁTICAS DE INCLUSÃO** **SAMANTHA PEDROSA, ELIANE PEREIRA**

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## Abstract

This theoretical-critical essay reflects on how childhood is recognized in the production of the city and on children's active role in transforming urban spaces. Drawing on Critical Social Psychology and on authors such as Milton Santos and Francesco Tonucci, it is argued that the right to the city must encompass children's participation in the present, rather than rely solely on their imagined futures. Methodologically, the essay is inspired by Walter Benjamin, assembling a theoretical-critical montage to weave together fragments selected through close, critical reading of the literature. The invisibility of children in urban planning is discussed, along with play as a counter-hegemonic practice and strategies to enhance inclusivity for children in cities. Three fronts of action are presented as ways of expanding children's protagonism: tactical urbanism, exemplified by the *Mais Vida nos Morros* program in Recife, in northeast Brazil; participatory budgeting, with attention to initiatives that meaningfully incorporate children into decision-making processes; and university outreach projects that bring academic and community knowledges into dialogue. The study's findings indicate that ensuring children's rights in urban environments necessitates a departure from hegemonic practices that have historically marginalized them. It emphasizes the importance of implementing inclusive public policies and acknowledging children as legitimate agents of social transformation. This essay contributes to the ongoing discourse on praxis, dialogues, and confrontations by elucidating the diverse experiences, knowledge, and agents involved in the production of urban space.

**Keywords:** Childhood, Right to the City, Urban planning, Play, Territory.

## 1 Introduction

*Children thus produce their own small world of things within the greater one.* (Walter Benjamin, 1979, p. 53)

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Cities have historically been planned by and for adults. Their rhythms, forms, and logics follow productive rationalities that give little consideration to the modes of existence of subjects who fall outside the hegemonic pattern: children, older adults, people with disabilities, women, and marginalized populations. This exclusion is not merely physical; it reveals structural inequalities in the ways urban spaces are conceived, organized, and experienced. The very notion of the city is complex and encompasses multiple meanings, reflecting the social, technological, economic, and environmental transformations occurring globally. Although the city may be understood as the outcome of human interactions within a given space, it is important to emphasize the risk that such a definition may privilege concrete dimensions, such as building construction or increased automobile traffic, over aspects essential to the human dimension, including equity, social justice, sustainability, health, and citizenship.

Understanding the city requires recognizing that it is not merely a collection of streets or buildings. Its complexity lies in the ongoing tension between geometric rationality and the tangle of human existence, as Sawaia (1995) emphasizes. Accordingly, the distinctiveness of each city stems not just from urban planning, but from the intersection of people's identities and the spaces they inhabit. This encounter materializes places while also shaping narratives, memories, and connections. As Cássio Eduardo Hissa and Maria Luísa Nogueira (2013) note, urban life is forged through bodily experience, spatial movement, and affective action. The city shapes, and is shaped by, the bodies that inhabit it, becoming a territory of existence. Understanding territory as a space where relationships and emotions flow highlights its role as a site of tension and dispute within urban planning. Thus, the city must be viewed as a space of citizenship rooted in specific historical, spatial, social, and political contexts—contexts where rights are negotiated and exercised within the dynamics of social and institutional relations. As Silvia Lane (1984) suggests, to understand individuals within their social networks is to recognize them both as products and as authors of their personal and collective histories.

When discussing the relationship between space and territory in the context of globalization, Santos, Seabra, Carvalho, and Leite (2001) argue that territory should not be approached as a concept in isolation. Its relevance for social analysis emerges only when its use is considered alongside the actors who engage with it. From this perspective, Milton Santos introduces what he terms *used territory* (Santos et al., 2001, p. 26) and emphasizes that it transcends the notion of territory as a physical

form, encompassing objects and actions; constituting a human space that is lived and inhabited (Santos, 1994). These reflections are pertinent to the present study, as they reinforce the understanding that *used territory* is a key category for formulating urban policies committed to social justice and, consequently, for developing strategies and policies that take into account the needs and demands of minority groups historically rendered invisible in urban planning. Among these groups are children, who are generally excluded from decision-making processes and whose modes of appropriating space and affective experiences in urban territories reveal ways of existence that unsettle the patterns by which cities have historically been organized.

Thus, this theoretical-critical essay directs its gaze toward childhood, understanding it as historically silenced in the processes of urban space production and, consequently, seeking to underscore the importance of incorporating children's desires and demands into the construction of more inclusive cities. The essay is structured around an ongoing master's research project in Psychology and is anchored in the central concerns of that study, engaging in dialogue with other areas of knowledge and reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the field in which it is embedded. Drawing on a critical reading of the academic literature, it proposes a reflection on the (in)visibility of childhood in the production of the city and on the tensions between children's ways of inhabiting space and established forms of urban organization and planning. Methodologically, the essay is inspired by Walter Benjamin, mobilizing fragments from a critical reading of the literature on childhood and the city to compose a theoretical-critical montage that highlights the tensions and potentialities in this field (Azevedo, 2020).

Francesco Tonucci, an Italian educator, challenges dominant conceptions of urbanization by actively promoting children's participation in public debates on the future of cities, a recurring theme in his work (Tonucci, 2020). In this sense, this theoretical-critical essay recognizes children as rights-bearing subjects<sup>1</sup> and underscores the importance of ensuring both the space and the right to express their views on matters that affect them, thereby strengthening their exercise of citizenship. In the contexts of Argentina and Brazil, several authors have deepened this perspective by reflecting on childhood in the Global South and arguing that attentive listening and recognition of children's experiences are essential for challenging hegemonic models and advancing the construction of epistemological and political alternatives in the field of childhood studies (Castro, 2021). These discussions lead to the debate on children's right to the city, understood both as physical access to the territories they inhabit and as the concrete possibility of participation and expression. As geographer David Harvey (2012) argues, the right to the city is related to human rights and also entails the right to change ourselves through the transformation of the city. Recognizing children as subjects of this right implies understanding their citizenship not as a future promise but as a present reality, with the right to express opinions, play, occupy, transform urban spaces, and to be transformed by them.

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In this sense, this theoretical-critical essay aims to reflect on the recognition of childhoods in the city, understanding that their active presence—woven through bonds, discoveries, and shared experiences—challenges hegemonic ways of planning and inhabiting urban space. The essay is organized into three sections. The first, *From invisibility to the recognition of childhoods in city planning*, discusses how cities have been historically shaped by an adult-centric logic that silences children. The second, *Children's right to the city and play as a counter-hegemonic practice*, examines how children's right to the city and to play, as counter-hegemonic practices, can unsettle the productive logics that structure urban space. Finally, the third section, *Insurgent practices for the recognition of childhoods in the city*, explores possible pathways toward more inclusive cities for children, in dialogue with participatory initiatives, university outreach, and public policy. This essay engages with the theme "Multilateral Dialogues: Praxis, Interlocutions, and Confrontations," situating itself within the struggles and disputes that permeate the production of the city. The excerpt presented seeks to illuminate the tensions between hegemonic approaches and insurgent practices, while also pointing to possible avenues for recognizing childhood as a political and affective agent within urban space.

## 2 From invisibility to the recognition of childhoods in city planning

<sup>1</sup> We highlight the Statute of Children and Adolescents, referring to Law No. 8,069, of July 13, 1990 (Brasil, 1990), which consolidates the concept of children and adolescents as subjects of rights.

Tonucci (2020) argues that urban planning has historically been structured around an idealized citizen profile: male, adult, worker, and a driver. This model has shaped how cities have been planned and built, prioritizing the needs of this specific profile while neglecting those who do not fit it. As Joice Berth (2023) observes, architecture and urbanism can shift from their organizing and social functions to become segregationist and exclusionary. As a result, cities become fragmented according to a hierarchical logic shaped by race, social class, and gender, and lack spaces that account for minority groups. Although Leslie Kern (2021) focuses primarily on women's urban experiences, she underscores the need to attend to less visible forms of urban life by analyzing the city's social dynamics through aspects such as gender, race, sexuality, and age. Within this broader context of invisibility, childhood emerges as a segment of the population whose characteristics and needs are routinely neglected in urban planning processes. It is important to stress, however, that childhood does not constitute a numerical minority, but rather a social condition frequently rendered invisible and silenced in decisions that shape urban space. Moreover, childhoods are expressed in diverse ways, marked by class, gender, and territory, which produce distinct inequalities in access to and experience of the city.

Jan Gehl (2015) argues that urban planning has, over the years, given little importance to public spaces, pedestrian areas, and the role of urban space as a meeting place for city dwellers. This approach has overlooked the creation of adequate spaces for children in general and has had particularly detrimental effects on children from low-income families. Without access to private spaces such as clubs or gated communities, and in the absence of urban policies that prioritize inclusive and safe environments for children, their experiences in the city become even more restricted. In this way, social inequalities become materialized in urban space. Manuel Sarmento (2018) addresses the invisibility of childhood as a multifaceted phenomenon with historical, social, political, economic, and epistemological roots. According to the author, the city both includes and excludes, simultaneously offering opportunities and imposing constraints that affect children as well. In this sense, Sarmento (2007) identifies initiatives and movements aimed at children's participation as opportunities. As constraints, however, Sarmento (2007) highlights a social construction of the city that can restrict their autonomy, threaten their safety, and induce globalized forms of colonization through consumption. Given this, it becomes relevant to understand that the inequalities and contradictions present in urban life shape, with unequal intensity, the contours of children's experiences and forms of existence.

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These contradictory and unequal effects of urban life shape the invisibility or recognition of childhoods in cities. Thus, consistent with several studies (Azevedo et al., 2020; Seixas, Tomás & Giacchetta, 2022; Carmo, 2022; Santos, 2022), this theoretical-critical essay argues that the erasure or recognition of children in the production of cities is a socially constructed process. On the one hand, there are experiences that affirm children as subjects of rights, knowledge, and active presence in urban spaces; on the other, practices and structures prevail that silence their ways of living and delegitimize their participation. In this sense, according to Sarmento (2007), childhood invisibility occurs in two ways: first, children are ignored in their social complexity and are disregarded as concrete political actors; second, their own ways of acting and relating to the world are silenced by the hegemony of adult-centric approaches. In other words, even when acknowledged, childhood may remain subordinated to interpretations and priorities defined by adults.

Gislei Lazzarotto and Maria Livia do Nascimento (2016) problematize the relationships between city, childhood, and visibility, which are shaped by power dynamics that impact or constrain children's ways of inhabiting urban spaces. In this movement, by questioning whether the association between the presence of children on the streets and ideas of violence or neglect is, in fact, as evident as commonly assumed, the authors challenge the socially ascribed meanings of guardianship and risk. Thus, depending on the meanings attributed to children's presence in the streets—such as associating them with abandonment, danger, or inadequacy—one may legitimize their exclusion from public spaces, perpetuating a city that marginalizes and silences childhood. It is emphasized, however, that problematizing these meanings does not imply disregarding the importance of children's safety, but rather critically reflecting on the effects that certain discourses produce in shaping how childhood is perceived in urban space. In this context, the authors note that the relationship between childhood and the city has long remained at the margins of psychological studies (Lazzarotto & Nascimento, 2016). In this way, the field of psychology can contribute either to the invisibility of childhood in the city or to its recognition, and by bringing this tension to light, the authors invite psychology to engage in the construction of new interpretations and interventions.

Thus, considering the place of this essay within the field of Psychology and, in dialogue with authors of Critical Social Psychology such as Silvia Lane (1984) and Mary Jane Spink (2011), the city is understood not as a mere backdrop but as

an active space in the production of subjectivities, in the experience and expression of affects, and in the construction of ways of being and narratives about the self. Being a child in the city constitutes a situated social experience, shaped through relationships with others and through the devices that regulate children's circulation or presence in urban spaces. Spink (2011), in problematizing the conceptual use of terms such as person, individual, and subject, discusses how Psychology has historically contributed to processes of individualization, functioning as a mechanism of behavioural control through the categorization, standardization, and medicalization of ways of existing. She further examines the systematization of observations and records as a tool that simultaneously enabled "the standardization and normalization of childhood" (Spink, 2011, p. 16, our translation). In this sense, such practices may help construct an idealized notion of childhood based on norms that exclude or silence diverse ways of inhabiting space. Conversely, by challenging these rigid norms and conceptions of childhood and by attending to the effects they produce, Psychology can contribute to making visible multiple childhoods, recognizing that each child undergoes singular experiences situated in specific historical, social, cultural, and material contexts, as Lane (1984) emphasizes. This stance, which breaks with hegemonic logics, invites Psychology to move beyond the position of external observer and to assume an ethical-political commitment to transforming the social relations that generate exclusions and inequalities in access to urban spaces.

In this direction, understanding how children relate to urban space requires attention to the affective dimension of everyday experience. As Baruch Spinoza (2009) proposes, the body can be affected in multiple ways, thereby increasing or diminishing its power to act. When this power expands, individuals gain broader possibilities to affect and be affected, thereby opening new ways of relating to the world. Drawing on this framework, Bader Sawaia (2003) identifies *affectivity* as a central ethical-political category in the constitution of the subject and highlights its relevance as a tool for transformation. Affectivity, as discussed by the author, expands subjects' capacity for action, particularly in situations of suffering—whether psychic or ethical-political—when such suffering results from social processes such as exclusion, violence, or the denial of rights. Thus, by advocating for accessible public spaces and urban experiences that foster positive encounters, this essay underscores the importance of expanding children's power to act, recognizing that their active presence in the city is shaped as well by bonds, discoveries, and shared experiences.

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### 3 Children's right to the city and play as a counter-hegemonic practice

The works *One-Way Street* and *A Berlin Chronicle* bring together aphorisms and fragments in which Walter Benjamin (1979) (re)constructs a cartography of the city that exceeds its physical or functional dimensions. By revisiting everyday experiences and childhood memories, he reveals how urban spaces are also shaped by sensibility, imagination, and aesthetic experience. From childhood onward, urban encounters shape how we see, feel, and inhabit the world. This perspective invites reflection on the idea that the presence of children in the city should extend beyond access or circulation to include participation, interaction, and the production of meaning. Recognizing children's presence and participation in the making of the city is likewise to affirm their place in processes of meaning-making and urban memory. As Carolina Fedatto (2018) argues, the city is not merely the setting where history unfolds but a space of living textuality, in which meanings are inscribed, displaced, and reconfigured. In this sense, urban materiality—composed of streets, buildings, squares, parks, and other infrastructures—provides the ground for different ways of narrating the city, a terrain in which memory is anchored, renewed, and transformed. Thus, the material elements of the city are not neutral: they carry stories, disputes over meaning, and traces of everyday experiences that participate in constituting subjects and collectivities.

As David Harvey (2014) argues, the right to the city is not limited to access to urban space but encompasses the collective right to transform it. Reinventing the city, therefore, requires establishing forms of shared power over urbanization processes, breaking with exclusionary logics that concentrate decision-making in the hands of a few actors. This configuration occurs because, as Harvey (2014) emphasizes, the power to determine the direction of a city—its uses, investments, and forms—has historically been held by privileged groups who shape urban space according to their own interests (Harvey, 2014). According to Milton Santos (1993), the dominant logic guiding contemporary urbanization is associated with corporate urbanization, marked by the formation of the corporate city, a model driven by the interests of large companies that configure space according to market demands and profitability. Thus, addressing children's rights and their participation in the city requires recognizing that this debate is traversed by power structures that keep them in a subordinate position.

If the right to the city involves transforming it and producing meaning, change also occurs through everyday practices that challenge the dominant logic. In this context, play emerges as a counter-hegemonic practice: when children play, they interrupt the flow of the adult city, creating a moment of resistance and pause amid the acceleration of urban time and challenging the city's productivist and utilitarian logic. According to Roberta Barros and Gicélia Mendes (2023), through play, children occupy and re-signify public spaces, affirming their citizenship and protagonism while destabilizing the hegemonic logic that has historically rendered them invisible. The authors also emphasize that understanding how children experience and attribute meaning to spaces is fundamental to including them in urban transformation processes. Tonucci (2020) highlights that children relate to the city in sensitive and creative ways, with play being one of their primary modes of expression.

Ana Luiza Smolka (2015) understands play as a creative activity in the elaboration of experiences, social roles, and modes of cultural appropriation. In dialogue with the historical-cultural perspective proposed by Lev Vygotsky (2008), the child creates imaginary situations through play that distance them from immediate reality. In this movement, the child not only reproduces reality but also reinvents it, expressing their uniqueness and developing new ways of being, acting, and relating. The importance of imagination is emphasized here, since it is through imagination that the child transcends the limits of the immediate present and explores other possibilities of existence, relationship, and action. However, Vygotsky (2008) argues that earlier authors diminished the value of imagination in play by attributing only secondary relevance to it, and identifies three main problems in this understanding: the risk of an intellectualist approach that treats play as an abstract symbolic process—similar to an “algebraic calculation” (p. 26, our translation), a logically and mentally organized activity; the reduction of play to a purely cognitive process, disregarding its affective dimension and the child's active role in constructing the experience; and the need to examine what the imaginary situation of play contributes to the child's development.

Ivone Oliveira and Anna Maria Padilha (2015) critique how many educators have drawn on Vygotsky's ideas, treating play as an instrumental tool within early childhood pedagogical practices. From this perspective, play is valued primarily when associated with a clearly defined didactic purpose: “one plays in order to learn because one cannot ‘waste time’ on activities lacking a supposed pedagogical intentionality” (Oliveira & Padilha, 2015, p. 28, our translation). By restricting play to a means for achieving specific pedagogical ends, however, there is a risk of diminishing its expressive, affective, and inventive potential. Outside the context of formal schooling, play can emerge freely, unconstrained by the logic of productivity. Such free play is characterized by spontaneous ludic actions that unfold across everyday spaces, without subordination to fixed schedules, pedagogical aims, or predetermined cognitive objectives (Alves et al., 2024). In urban environments, play as a counter-hegemonic practice escapes utilitarian frameworks. In this sense, through free play, the child's imaginative activity allows the city to soften the hardened contours shaped by the logics of productivity and haste. Imagination makes it possible for a chalk-marked sidewalk to become the setting for adventures, a tree to become a hiding place, the curb to become a balance beam, and a bench to become a lookout point from which the child perceives the place from another perspective. The city becomes a territory of invention, discovery, and enchantment.

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Although children reinvent cities, the transformative power of play does not authorize adapting childhood to hostile environments. On the contrary, it underscores the urgency for adults to ethically and politically commit to creating more inclusive cities. As discussed by Samy Lansky and Maria Cristina Gouvea (2022), the increasing dangerousness of large metropolitan areas, combined with the privatization of public spaces and the road-centred model that prioritizes automobiles over pedestrians, has restricted opportunities for social interaction, leisure, and play. In line with the emptying of the street as a place of encounter, Jane Jacobs (2011) questions the naturalization of the idea that playgrounds and parks are good places for children, while streets are inherently bad or dangerous. Thus, urban spaces designed with and for children should not necessarily be limited to dedicated areas, although such areas may indeed provide safe, high-quality leisure opportunities. Beyond the specific spaces created for childhood, it is important to guarantee children's right to be present in diverse public spaces—streets and squares among them—and to ensure that they have opportunities to participate actively in the everyday construction of different territories, reaffirming these spaces as places for existence and the expression of citizenship. The next section presents studies and movements that challenge hegemonic models and propose ways to foster cities that are more open to childhood.

This theoretical-critical essay does not seek to provide an exhaustive historical survey of documents or solutions, but rather to share recent studies, experiences, and interventions that indicate possible paths toward building more inclusive cities for children, particularly in the Brazilian context. These paths are not understood as neutral or universal; they are inscribed in specific social, political, and cultural contexts. Nevertheless, they emerge from an ethical-political commitment to children's right to inhabit, participate in, and transform cities. In this regard, this section discusses three areas of action that, although heterogeneous in form and scope, share a common effort to challenge hegemonic logics of urban planning: tactical urbanism, as a local strategy for the reappropriation of urban space with the potential to amplify children's protagonism; participatory budgeting, as a democratic mechanism that—especially when it incorporates children or organizations representing them—broadens the capacity to listen to childhood experiences; and university extension, as a bridge between knowledge, subjects, and territories, capable of making childhoods visible and reconfiguring boundaries between academia and the city.

The first area of action concerns tactical urbanism, understood as small-scale spatial practices—generally limited to neighbourhoods, streets, or parks—that reconfigure the use of urban space through local initiatives. This is not a unified movement, but rather a category that encompasses emerging urban projects, typically grounded in participatory and practical orientations, in which directly affected actors mobilize to address local challenges (Brenner, 2016). However, as Neil Brenner (2016) cautions, its effectiveness as an alternative to neoliberal urbanism is not automatic; such practices may be neutralized or absorbed by hegemonic logics, even while retaining the potential to promote spatial justice and popular engagement. Thus, although the limitations of tactical urbanism are acknowledged—as noted by several authors (Eboli, 2019; Nogueira & Portinari, 2017; Felizardo, 2024)—including the lack of guarantees of effective participation, the potential reproduction of power relations and symbolic domination, and the risk of reinforcing neoliberal ideals of individual responsibility, this essay seeks to highlight some experiences developed within the Brazilian context.

Thus, despite its ambiguities and limitations, tactical urbanism can be critically reappropriated, especially when articulated with participatory processes and public policies committed to social justice. As an example, we highlight the *Mais Vida nos Morros* program, developed in the city of Recife, in northeast Brazil, a public policy that mobilizes principles of tactical urbanism as a strategy for localized spatial intervention, active listening, and the political participation of children in territories marked by historical inequalities (Prefeitura Recife, 2020). Among the actions promoted by the program, Figure 1 illustrates a community space implemented in the capital of Pernambuco. In a recent analysis of the program, Daniella Silva, Ana Clara Nascimento, Poliana Santana, and Sérgio Mello (2024) noted that, by combining low-cost solutions, rapid implementation, and direct community involvement, *Mais Vida nos Morros* constitutes a viable and innovative alternative to the traditional urban planning model. The authors emphasize that the protagonism of children in the decision-making process fostered concrete experiences of citizenship from early childhood, strengthened their sense of belonging to public spaces, and broadened both the understanding and exercise of the right to the city by the children themselves.



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Fig. 1: Community Space in Recife, Pernambuco, northeast Brazil. Source: Recife City Hall (2021). <https://maisvidanosmorros.recife.pe.gov.br/espacos-de-convivencia/>

According to the *Mais Vida nos Morros* program's informational booklet, children are regarded as protagonists of urban transformation and are involved through a range of participatory methodologies. The document describes several activities designed to engage them affectively and subjectively in urban planning, including: playful walks—guided routes led by the children in their own territories, during which they are invited to observe, name, and comment on local spaces; affective mapping, in which they are encouraged to write or draw what they would like to change in the territory using an illustrative map of the area; workshops and discussion circles, where they graphically represent the territory and collectively reflect on possible changes; and hands-on interventions through painting, planting, and building toys. Among the equipment designed for children are “play balconies”, toys adapted to uneven ground, toys made of PVC and broom handles, play paths, and child-sized urban furniture (Prefeitura de Recife, 2020).

In another initiative, Amanda Macêdo and André Almeida (2015) analyzed actions carried out in the neighbourhood of *Vila de Santa Luzia*, on the banks of the *Capibaribe* River (Recife), by the collective *Praias do Capibaribe* through the project *A Cidade Precisa de Praias*. Although not directly aimed at children, the project incorporates them as present and active subjects in the territory. The authors highlight interventions such as the creation of children's furniture, the construction of a pier that enabled access to the water, bioconstruction workshops, the establishment of a community garden, and play activities, including the building of a water slide and the creation of pools and inflatable toys (Macêdo & Almeida, 2015). These actions contributed to the re-signification of public space as a site of conviviality, care, and play. In addition, several Brazilian municipalities have adopted initiatives such as *Ruas de Brincar* (Prefeitura de Jundiaí, 2019), *Ruas Abertas* (Prefeitura de São Paulo, 2016), and *Ruas de Lazer* (Prefeitura de São Paulo, 2014), which also fall within broader urban interventions promoting more inclusive public spaces for children. By temporarily closing public roads for collective use, these initiatives strengthen community interaction and the playful occupation of space by children and their families. As discussed

by Marcelo Peroni and Adriana Uemori (2024), the municipality of Jundiaí, in Southeast Brazil, has developed actions aimed at guaranteeing children's right to the city through listening, play, and participation. As part of the municipality's integration into the Latin American Children's Cities Network, Image 2 illustrates the *Ruas de Brincar* program established by Decree 28.075/2019 (Prefeitura de Jundiaí, 2019). The decree stipulates that any resident may request the temporary closure of public streets, provided that 75% of neighbours approve the request. Children and adults living in the vicinity of the street are responsible for defining activities and determining how often the street will be used. Residents recognize these spaces as important for social interaction, free play, and reducing screen time (Peroni & Uemori, 2024).



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Fig. 2: *Rua de Brincar* in Jundiaí, São Paulo, southeast Brazil. Source: Jundiaí City Hall (2021). <https://jundiai.sp.gov.br/noticias/2020/12/12/cidade-das-criancas-ruas-de-brincar-leva-o-segundo-lugar-em-premio-nacional/>

Another area of focus in building more inclusive cities for children concerns participatory public policies, such as Participatory Budgets (PB). As presented by Jon Anderson Cavalcante (2011), the *Orçamento Participativo Criança e Adolescente* (OPCA – Participatory Budget for Children and Adolescents) is an initiative that integrates children and adolescents into the deliberative processes of the public budget, recognizing them as political subjects. According to Leonardo Soares (2012), the Participatory Budget in *Fortaleza*, in northeast Brazil, is organized at two levels: territorially, through the division into administrative regions; and by social segment, including children and adolescents who participate in all cycles of the PB. Although recognized as innovative, the OPCA faced resistance grounded in limiting conceptions of childhood, such as questioning children's moral and cognitive capacities (Soares, 2012; Cavalcante, 2011). Lis Melo, Veriana Colaço, and Jesus Pascual (2011) argue that, for children's participation in decisions concerning the public budget to be effective, specific methodologies and languages must be adopted, including workshops, games, and playful activities. In the context of the OPCA, the presence of children may be understood as an insurgent practice, insofar as it challenges the exclusivity of adults in democratic processes and affirms children's right to political participation in the present, rather than only as a promise for the future.

Finally, the third area of action concerns university extension, understood as a practice that promotes encounters between academic knowledge and knowledge produced in the territories. For example, the *Ciranda de Palavras* project, developed by Luciana Quixadá and Jaileila Menezes (2021), sought to create a space for continuous listening among children and adolescents in contexts of social vulnerability, using storytelling and artistic production as mediating practices. Workshops, exhibitions, and cultural visits were mobilized as ways to strengthen children's expressive capacities and encourage their participation in public life. The authors noted changes in the children's relationship with urban spaces after a visit to the *Dragão do Mar* Center for Art and Culture in *Fortaleza*, in northeast Brazil, when they initially expressed distrust and later recognized themselves as belonging to that place. In addition to this experience, the extension project enabled children to exhibit their works—photographs, drawings, and paintings—in public spaces and to engage in dialogue with passersby, an experience that demonstrated the potential of university extension to establish micropolitics of resistance and to create new meanings for childhood in vulnerable contexts (Quixadá & Menezes, 2021).

Regiane Oliveira (2025) identifies several university extension projects that promote more inclusive cities for children. Among them is the *Cartilha da Cidade*, developed by the Institute of Architecture and Urbanism of the University of São Paulo (IAU-USP) in *São Carlos*, in southeast Brazil. This project constitutes a university extension initiative aimed at promoting urban education and civic formation through interactive practices, including the *Agentes Urbanos e Cidade Participativa* game, designed to encourage dialogue and the collective proposal of urban transformations. Developed by Miguel Antonio Buzzar, Ana Maria Beraldo, Analee Sasso, Edimilson Santos Junior, and Mayara Vivian Cruz (2023), the *Cartilha da Cidade* project offers a critical and accessible approach that brings residents closer to the elements that compose and organize urban life. Another project, developed by Lansky (2022), sought to contribute to the formulation of plans and urban interventions centred on childhood, as well as to encourage the use of participatory methodologies for reflecting on and transforming public spaces. Through the integration of teaching, research, and university extension, a space in the neighbourhood *Vila Pindura Saia*, in *Belo Horizonte*, in southeast Brazil, was gradually re-signified, transforming a former motorcycle parking area into a place dedicated to children's play. Named *Nossa Pracinha* by the community itself, the space was later recognized by the municipal government as a leisure area, and an architectural project was carried out by Lansky (2022) and university students based on children's suggestions. By mentioning experiences such as these, this essay seeks to highlight the relevance of extension initiatives that involve children in urban practices, contributing to shifting the university away from its hegemonic position and broadening dialogue with the concrete demands of people and territories.

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## 5 Final considerations

Throughout this theoretical-critical essay, it was argued that childhood remains largely overlooked in urban planning processes, whether due to the lack of effective participation by children themselves or the predominance of a hegemonic logic oriented toward adult interests in productivity and consumption. In this context, play is defended as a counter-hegemonic practice capable of challenging the functionalist use of space and inscribing, within the fabric of the city, temporalities and ways of being that escape the productive logic. The aim here was not to offer definitive solutions but to problematize the absences and invisibilities that shape the relationship between childhood and the city. The practices presented as insurgent in the recognition of childhoods—such as tactical urbanism, participatory budgeting, and university extension programs—illustrate different ways of opening fissures within the hegemonic model of space production. Although distinct in form, scale, and scope, these initiatives share the aim of expanding children's presence and protagonism. In dialogue with the theme *Multilateral Dialogues: Praxis, Interlocutions, and Confrontations*, the reflections developed reaffirm the need for urban practices and public policies that bring together multiple forms of knowledge and diverse social actors, recognizing children as legitimate producers of knowledge and space. By engaging with modes of inhabiting the city and with experiences of confrontation and invention, the essay aligns with broader debates on contested urban spaces and on the practices that emerge across universities, public policy, and communities, affirming university extension and transdisciplinarity as forms of praxis committed to social transformation and to diverse modes of producing knowledge.

Thus, recognizing and sustaining practices that open fissures within the hegemonic model entails assuming an ethical-political commitment to children's right to inhabit and transform cities. Such a commitment requires rethinking and expanding the meanings of citizenship, democracy, and public space by incorporating children's voices, bodies, and experiences as constitutive elements of urban life. It also demands the creation and preservation of conditions that strengthen children's capacity to act, allowing them to reinvent spaces and imprint their own marks, temporalities, and modes of inhabiting them.

These practices raise questions about who defines urban space, for whom it is made, and which forms of life it privileges. In the context of the Global South, this commitment gains further weight as it is situated in realities marked by structural, social, and cultural inequalities. In this scenario, public policies committed to children's right to the city become essential. Beyond providing infrastructure, they can establish mechanisms for participation and for expanding access to safe, high-quality, and inclusive spaces. In this way, efforts are made to strengthen practices and public policies capable not only of transforming spaces but also of shaping the relationships that are built within them. By recognizing children as legitimate agents in the production of the city, pathways are opened for new forms of coexistence, participation, and belonging to take shape, challenging exclusionary patterns and expanding the possibilities of inhabiting and living in cities.

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