

The design of co-participation processes in public spaces in São Paulo as university extension project: The revitalization process of Dom Orione and Major Freire Squares

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Abstract - This work discusses the revitalisation process of Dom Orione Square and Major Freire Square, developed in a university extension project by architecture and urban planning students of Centro Universitário Belas Artes in São Paulo. The Dom Orione project was conducted jointly with Association Novolhar, which provides social inclusion to children and teenagers in need living near the square. Even without a proper playground, the square is used by children all through the week. At weekends a flea market takes place, with local vendors using improvised tents for selling antiquities. To better understand the children's expectations, the students organised a design and sculpture workshop in which children could express the changes they wanted in the square in a playful manner. Through the drawings and clay sculptures, the students were able to create a project that met the needs of the local population. In the Major Freire Square, the project was developed in partnership with the NGO "EU RESOLVO", taking also into account the needs of local residents. Due to its proximity to the São Judas subway station, Major Freire Square has a great potential for recreation activities. The students organised meetings with the local population to discuss their needs in order to create a project suited to the locals. It is believed that participatory processes are fundamental for the training of architects and urban planners sensitive to the real-life issues of the city. Consequently, the appropriation of public spaces by the population in general and by children and adolescents in particular, will be better understood and taken into account. In this way, discussing methodologies and development alternatives by participatory projects contributes to future public policies and to the development of responsive public spaces.

Keywords - Children, Public Spaces, Squares, Co-Participatory Processes, University Extension Project

INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the experience in co-participation process and the methodology used in the revitalization projects of "Dom Orione" Square and "Major Freire" Square, conducted with the architecture and urban planning undergraduate students of the Higher Education Institute (IES), under the ARQUICRIANÇA University Extension Project of Centro Universitário Belas Artes in São Paulo, Brazil. University extension projects in Brazil have been understood in the last decade by higher education institutions as an interdisciplinary educational, cultural, scientific and political process based on the principle of the inseparability between teaching, research and extended learning. Hence, an extension activity reaches its effectiveness when it is linked to training in the students teaching and the generation of research knowledge. The connection between teaching, research and extended learning in the training of undergraduate students articulates the university and society, in the tripartite pedagogical axis "student / teacher / community", while placing the students as protagonists in the process of citizen education 'which allows him/her to recognise him/herself as an agent for guaranteeing rights, duties and social transformation' (Ministério da Educação, 2018: 09). Hence, it is emphasized that the production of knowledge through extension projects is supported by participatory methodologies based on research/action with the engagement of different social actors.

Concerning the right to education for all citizens, it is worth mentioning the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed in 1948; the Brazilian Constitution of 1988, the National Education Plan of 2014, as well as other instruments that aim to guarantee these rights. That should be achieved by bringing educational institutions closer to the community, and including convergent knowledge, values and practices in the defence of human rights. One of the principles of the pedagogy elaborated by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire¹ is the "problematizing education," which correlates the individual's contexts and life experience in the process of personal transformation, in order to stimulate the critical awareness of reality and the active involvement of students and teachers in the teaching/learning process with the action/reflection/action strategy. The teacher assumes an important role by questioning, but mainly by knowing how to listen to the diversity of students' realities and contexts, using dialogue as the main teaching tool. The participatory design process in architecture and urban planning provides a way to capture the social and political dimensions as matters of collective interest. In those cases, the opinion and needs of (future) users must be considered in order to ensure the best appropriation of the city's public spaces (Sanches, 2015).

According to Pronsato (2005), participatory design projects are concerned with the collective achievement of rights, focusing on the citizenship and the affective bond

¹ Paulo Freire was declared Patron of Brazilian Education in 2012 (Law 12,612 of April 13, 2012).

with the place. The author stresses the importance of reciprocity in the relationship between architect/user and teacher/student, not only during the process of constructing collective knowledge, but also during the construction of spaces. Both the consciousness of the other and dialogue are instruments of the interactive teaching attitude. Pronsato (2005) reinforces the importance of the educator Paulo Freire, who illuminated the educational spaces from interactive relations, transcending the formal space to reach the informal "in the city that stretches as an educational tool". Inspired by the possibility of articulating a dynamic and interactive pedagogical practice and correlating it to the practice of an architect and urban planner acting in/with society, it is possible to build a co-creative, co-participatory, inclusive, receptive designing process, which sees the human as a social being "not only in the world, but with the world" (Pronsato, 2005: 49).

In general, public places in Brazil are abandoned. Their uses do not correspond to the prospects of the original project. The urban analysis of the city developed by architects, students, and all the professionals involved with public policies and public space projects should reveal not only the territory, but especially the people, with their dreams and expectations. In his book *Política e Educação* (1997), Paulo Freire reinforces the need to recognize the city as an educational entity "independent of our will or expectations (...) for the need to educate, to learn (...) to create, to dream, to imagine that we all (...) occupy its streets, its parks, its buildings." (Freire, 1997: 23). Additionally, Freire stresses the idea that the city is culture, so we create in it and with it: "(...) The city is us and we are the city (...). As an educator, the city is also educated" (Freire, 1997: 24).

According to Sun Alex (2011), public space can take different shapes and sizes, "from a sidewalk to the landscape seen from the window" (Sun, 2011: 19). It also includes places that have been designed for daily use, such as streets, squares and parks. The denomination of the public characteristic for these open spaces goes beyond the idea of freedom and equality. As stated by Sun, a direct relation of space with public life must be constructed. This relationship allows the presence in and use of same place by everyone, reinforcing the concepts of citizenship and democracy.

Backed by the ideas and concepts described above, the ARQUICRIANÇA² university extension project was conducted in 2015 by the Centro Universitário Belas Artes in São Paulo with architecture and urban planning students and the local community. The project was carried out using site analysis methodology and the local context for the development of a more attractive and inclusive public space. The cases of the "Dom Orião" Square and "Major Freire" Square are further discussed, as in both revitalization projects the co-participation method has been applied.

² Coordinated by Professor: Débora Sanches and Sérgio Lessa Ortiz, MSc, and with the participation of the following students: Aryane Moutinho Diaz, Barbara Menezes Sousa Barreto, Carlos Alberto Borsa, Eder Junior Meza Monterroza, Gabriel Rocha Espinosa, Isabela Pires Viegas, Victoria Mazzoni Bistulfi.

THE CASE OF DOM ORIONE SQUARE

This square is located in the district of Bela Vista, a neighbourhood adjacent to São Paulo's city centre. Bela Vista has an estimated population of 23,951 inhabitants, of which 2,647 (11.05%) were children between zero and nine years old (IBGE; 2010). The neighbourhood is popularly known as "Bixiga", the region where Italian immigrants settled in the late nineteenth century. Land management is determined by mixed use, with traditional Italian restaurants and bars, theatres and cultural equipment. Yet, it is also marked by an extreme social inequality. A large part of the population lives in tenements, board houses and substandard housing³. Another important aspect to highlight is the historical architectural values. The region presents large areas under preservation order by the municipality⁴ and consequently, the area covered enjoys the status of special protection zone⁵.

In this district there are children who suffer from the lack of adequate housing, of spaces for cultural activities and leisure (such as green areas, sports equipment and playgrounds). As stated by the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements (1996), adequate housing and its surroundings must meet the needs of early childhood⁶, in the initial and critical period of children's lives - when they are more vulnerable. They should live in a healthy environment that meets their basic physical, social, cultural and psychological needs.

The State's inability to guarantee children's social welfare rights and especially provide for adequate housing for a large part of the population that bear high levels of social vulnerability⁷ fostered many philanthropic entities to base in the neighbourhood, Novolhar Association⁸ being one of them. It aims to contribute to the social inclusion of children, young people and families, especially those who live in slums and board houses in the Bixiga neighbourhood. Among their activities are supervising children during the period when they are not at school, by teachers who provide complementary education, and also recreational, cultural and leisure activities. On May 13, 2015, an event called "13 na treze" was held aiming to discuss the cultural life of the neighbourhood. Among other activities, the workshop "assembly of children" was organised with children (six to fifteen years old) supported by the

³ Tenements and boarding house are names given in Brazil, to rented (small size) rooms in a house. Each room serves as housing for a family, with common use of kitchen and bathroom. The term gained notoriety with the book "O Cortiço" by Aluísio de Azevedo (1890).

⁴ COMPRES - Conselho Municipal de Preservação do Patrimônio Histórico, Cultural e Ambiental da Cidade de São Paulo

⁵ Zona Especial de Preservação e Cultura, Special Zone of Heritage Preservation and Culture.

⁶ This covers the period of the first six (6) full years or 72 (seventy-two) months of the child's life, according to Law n. 13,257 of March 8, 2016, which defines public policies for early childhood.

⁷ Social vulnerability is the condition of groups of individuals that are in the process of social exclusion, mainly related to economic factors. The main characteristics that reveal the state of social vulnerability are the precarious conditions of housing and sanitation, difficulties of subsistence, and absence of a family environment.

⁸ Paulo Santiago is a journalist, video producer and social entrepreneur. He founded the Associação Novolhar in October 1998. This is an institution accredited by the Ministry of Education as a reference for innovation and creativity in basic education in Brazil, contributing to the social inclusion of children, youth, family and community. <http://novolhar.org.br/>.

Centro Janusz Korczak/ Nina Koral, Novolhar Association and the Lumiar School. The children discussed the improvements they would like to have in Dom Orione Square. The ARQUICRIANÇA Extension Project was invited to organize a workshop on the revitalization of the square. It is also worth mentioning that children living in the area use this public space to play, since there are no other premises in the neighbourhood for this and, in particular, because there are few open spaces for children and adolescents in their tenements.

A Co-Participation approach for Dom Orione Square

The main objective of the co-participation process is to give voice to the different social actors - students / teachers / community - who converge on the principles of Paulo Freire's teaching and also on the activities of the extension project to develop inclusive public spaces. In this section, we describe the steps of the co-participation process that were carried out at the workshop in November 2015 to revitalize Dom Orione Square.

Approaching the site

In this stage a ludic workshop was held with 20 children aged 6 to 15 years. They were guided by the educators of the Novolhar association and by the architecture and urban planning lecturers and students. The main objective was to include the children's expectations and views on this particular open space in the project, a goal achieved by involving them by posing the following questions: What do the children want of this public space? What do they think of it? What are their dreams? Their wishes? Additionally, we inquired their point of view about the existing problems of this space. The answers provided inputs to develop the project of Dom Orione Square's the revitalization.

Drawing their wishes

In the following stage, a design activity was carried out with the question "what would you like to have in this square?". In this activity the children and adolescents could express their ideas (Fig. 1), and the students were able to consider and interpret these drawings as containers of their ideas and expectations, including needs of playground equipment, facilities and space for sports, which enabled the creation of a programme for the revitalization of Dom Orione Square.

Co-design

From the site analysis developed with the children and adolescents, it was possible to verify with the community the use and appropriation of space in the different periods and even on different days of the week - especially on Sundays, when the traditional flea market with improvised tents is held. Information on legal zoning was collected, providing additional relevant data. Finally, other projects were visited in the neighbourhood. Sketches were prepared based on the information from the previous stages, mainly from the statements of children and adolescents.



Fig. 1: Drawing workshop in Dom Orione Square. Author: Sanches, 2015

This process continued with co-design sessions. A physical model of the site was prepared from the sketches, in order to understand the availability of spaces. At this stage, the activities were held at Associação Novolhar, establishing a second listening opportunity. In this activity, children and adolescents spatialized their expectations using modelling clay, used to extract their spatial understanding of the site (Fig. 2), a fundamental stage to provide knowledge to the necessary adjustments in the project. The workshop ended with a conceptual design based on the co-participation of children and adolescents in the Bixiga neighbourhood.



Fig. 2: Children working with the first project sketches and modelling clay. Author: Ortiz, 2015

Co-participation

In 2016, the revitalization process of Dom Orione Square continued with the involvement of students / teachers / community / institutions in the project development, the construction design, and the search for resources for the proposal that was presented to the community in the Social Assistance to the Family in Bela Vista – Bixiga’s main district, in the Espaço de Cultura Bela Vista and also in the square itself, as shown in Fig. 3. In all those meetings, the children and adolescents gave their contributions to the project. Afterwards, the project and the process of co-participation were presented at the EMEF⁹ Celso Leite Ribeiro Filho for teachers and educators of the public teaching system of São Paulo. From these interactions, the project went through a new phase of adjustments and completion.

Likewise, the project was presented to SP Urbanism, an office of the São Paulo municipality responsible for the allocation of resources and the development of projects to improve urban spaces and squares. Due to the change in municipal management in January 2017, the guidelines for public resources changed their focus and the intention to revitalise Dom Orione Square came to an end.



Fig. 3: Discussion and interaction about the revitalisation project of Dom Orione Square.
Author: Sanches, 2016

THE CASE OF MAJOR FREIRE SQUARE

Major Freire Square is located in the south-central region of São Paulo, in the district Saúde, which belongs to the Regional Council of Vila Marina. The region’s dynamics is defined as a mixed-use occupation with 130,484 inhabitants, according to IBGE (2010), predominantly an upper-middle-class population. Despite being a

⁹ Municipal School of Elementary Education.

neighbourhood with distinctive characteristics and needs, when compared with the Bixiga neighbourhood, the Vila Mariana regional council presents low rates of green spaces (5.19 m²/inh.), which are much less than the 12 m²/inh recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). In Bixiga, this rate is even worse, being only 1.38 m²/inh.

In 1974, the city's first subway line was inaugurated, connecting the northern and southern regions, which propelled an intense transformation process of the neighbourhood due to real estate speculation. The subway greatly improved urban mobility, providing an increase in urban infrastructure in the region. It is possible to note a considerable increase in the region's residential density, as well as in markets and services which provide the district Saúde with enough infrastructure for living and working. Along these lines, it is worth mentioning that, in consonance with the reality of many contemporary cities, São Paulo aims to improve the main large-scale public transports (Strategic Master Plan of 2014). The main objective is to tackle the issues related to urban mobility and the scarcity of public spaces. The municipality and the population drafted (2012-2016) guidelines to make the mobility of the city less dependent on cars, create more green spaces and attract more people to the suburbs by increasing public transportation, jobs and basic service offers amongst all regions.

The principles of São Paulo's Master Plan seek to improve the quality of life, especially concerning the condition of public spaces, are aligned with the university extension project ARQUICRIANÇA. Urban planner Amanda Burden (2014) points out, in her TED talk "How public spaces make cities work", the enormous importance of open spaces to create opportunities for cities. She emphasizes that architects, landscapers and town planners should be the responsible agents for the city's transformation. Since it is up to these professionals to strive for the common good, cities must take every opportunity to create good public spaces which promote pleasant moments for socialisation and well-being; making cities enchant people and invite them to use all spaces and potentials.

At the end of 2016, the non-governmental organization EU RESOLVO¹⁰ sought the ARQUICRIANÇA Extension Project to develop a workshop for Major Freire Square. One of the aims of EU RESOLVO is to promote the transformation of the city, from a differentiated attitude of the population. Instead of remaining passively and wait for the public power to take actions, the NGO intends to encourage the population to play an active role in the transformation and maintenance of public spaces, consequently, promoting improvement in their own life quality. The NGO EU RESOLVO, in its first project called "Praça Parque" aimed to involve the residents and workers to get involved in solving local problems, and to re-appropriate open spaces without a proper use and maintenance, co-participating in the solution to urban problems.

¹⁰ <https://www.euresolvo.org.br>

The decision for the pilot project of “Praça Parque” was made considering the following premises: selection of an abandoned area with the potential to be transformed into a park, next to a large-scale mobility system, with both residential and commercial uses, in order to not only transform and impact locally but also to affect the whole metropolis. The Saúde district emerged as a promising area for these purposes. In this way, the “Praça Parque” project would develop a proposal for an open space with the population, making sports, cultural and leisure activities possible. The intention was to stimulate the working population in particular to use the park after work; offering an alternative, the city’s mobility would be benefitted by the decrease in the rush hour traffic.

Co-Participation Method for Major Freire Square

The co-participation process was used in the workshop to prepare a proposal for the Major Freire Square. However, due to the characteristics of the intervention, the interaction with the community occurred in a different way. The activities carried out from April 2017 are described below.

Approaching the site

Initially, only the professors and students of the ARQUICRIANÇA extension project interacted with the park. Thus, the students could become familiar with the place, train their perception, and think about which changes should be made in the square. By understanding that the process of technological development is becoming more and more part of the professional reality of an architect, it is worth mentioning that since the first approach to the square by the students, digital technologies boosted the process. In that first moment, the students were able to better understand the square with a 3D model of the space. During the visit, however, some residents and homeless people who lived in the area began to interact with the students, sharing their dreams and expectations, and thus providing essential information to confirm or question the concerns of the NGO EU RESOLVO. This enabled the students to elaborate their first drafts more assertively.

Designing their wishes

The site visit enabled the students to perceive that the neighbourhood was not able to effectively meet either the demand of commercial building users, or the needs of the local residents, who had asked for a proposal that could meet the neighbourhood children’s needs. Another concern was the homeless people who were living in the square, emphasizing the lack of a proper public policy focused in social services.

To promote greater participation by the workers, some technological items such as free wi-fi spots, solar-powered cellular recharging points in busy areas, and points of energy capitation by movement, would be implemented. In addition to these technological resources, there was a permanent and diversified programme, initially maintained by EU RESOLVO, with activities such as gymnastics and open-air dance classes, sports tournaments and cultural events related to music, cinema and

theatrical presentations in order to invite more people to the place. Regarding sustainability issues, the project also provided technologies for the rational use of natural resources related to energy, water and waste management. Thus, the proposal led to the implementation of a solar energy system, to the capture and use of rainwater for irrigation and cleaning, as well as to the installation of selective waste collection points, among other initiatives.

To contribute to saving water, the planting scheme prioritised species adapted to the climate and ecosystem. A site was proposed to establish a plant nursery, making the park autonomous in the production of the plants needed for the maintenance of the square, in case of climatic adversities and phytosanitary problems. The promotion of universal access has also been implemented in the project's digital model, to allow everyone to enjoy the proposed activities and places. Thus, fitness equipment and children's areas are inclusive, providing access for people with reduced mobility and those with special needs. In addition, the project included ramp access, guide tracks and braille identification for all spaces.

Co-design

The combination of the initial plans of EU RESOLVO with the insights and expectations drawn by the students on the site visit and the interaction with the residents enabled the preparation of the first sketches and digital models, proposing solutions to the demands identified. One of the most relevant conditions at this point was the maintenance of all existing trees, as depicted in Fig. 4.



Fig. 4: Proposal presented to residents and future users. Author: Ortiz, 2017.

It is worth noting that, at the first stage of conceptual design, the topographic survey and the location of all trees had not been provided to the group. This enabled the promoters to carry out a new activity with the community. The first step was organising a public consultation, in which the group shared its first ideas with the local

residents and visitors to ascertain if the demands were being fully met. The main additional demands were the inclusion of a community garden, an apiary and more spaces for children's recreation, as well as broadening and rethinking the location of the area for pets.

Co-participation

Another event was organised as an attempt to further engage the neighbourhood residents and it aimed to make it possible for this abandoned area to be transformed - turning it into a pleasant space for all. Students and lecturers advised by EU RESOLVO presented the concept design to the Municipality of Vila Mariana, in order to involve the public administration in the process – making use of the co-participation methodology to include everyone. Therefore, a second event on the site was organised to better understand and spatialise the proposal. Illustrations and drawings marking the spaces and walkways enabled everyone to gain the proper perception of the intentions of the sketches. In this event everyone went to the site and started drawing with lime all the spaces and walkways on the ground - as shown in Fig. 5. During this activity some adjustments could be made, in order not to remove any large tree. Also, through this activity, the bonds of trust between the residents and public administration could be strengthened. The expectation of turning the project into reality became a possibility.



Fig 5: Drawing the proposal on the ground with the local residents. Author: Ortiz, 2017

The workshop was concluded in April 2017, with the review of the concept design in a process of co-participation with residents of the Saúde neighbourhood. The NGO contacted a topography service provider, who, in partnership, made the necessary amendments to the databases available. This paved the way to start the design development phase, which was concluded with a preliminary budget in order to provide guidelines for the feasibility of the plan and to organise the construction documents. Currently, the NGO EU RESOLVO is checking how the project can be implemented. Through fundraising with donations from companies and volunteers, the NGO is just about to start the improvement work on the square, turning it into a new special open space to our city.

CONCLUSION

A university extension project is a fundamental activity in the students' training process, especially in architecture and urban planning in Brazil, since the country's Educational Policy is based on principles of interdisciplinary educational, cultural, scientific and political practices and on a strong link between teaching, research and extended learning. Extension projects offer the opportunity to work on real-life situations in the process of teaching and learning, to articulate an interactive pedagogical practice, as well as to combine the local community's practical knowledge with academic technical assistance, as a possibility for architecture and urban planning students to act with and plan for society. Processes involving students, lecturers, the community, local entities and public authorities are fundamental for the development of projects on public spaces - above all, for the action / reflection / action strategy disseminated by pedagogue Paulo Freire. The methodology developed in both cases, involving approaching the site, defining expectations, co-designing and co-participation, has effects on the appropriation of the sites, as well as on all those involved.

Finally, the training of architects and urban planners, qualified and sensible to the real-life issues of the city, should incorporate methods of co-participation. In the future, they will be professionals who will work in the city. Additionally, the application of this method can result in a reflection about new public policies for the development and maintenance of public spaces.

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