CADERNOS BRASILEIROS DE
TERAPIA OCUPACIONAL
BRAZILIAN JOURNAL OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Original Article

Photos, narratives, and impressions about the city of children living in the periphery of São Paulo[1,2]

Retratos, relatos e impressões de crianças moradoras da periferia de São Paulo sobre a cidade

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Abstract

Children in vulnerable conditions represent the social group most exposed to constraints that make it difficult to know and belong to the city where they live. The objective of this research was to know and understand the perceptions of children living in complex vulnerable conditions, living in the periphery, about their neighborhood in the city of São Paulo, as well as to identify the relations they establish with these spaces. It was collaborative participatory research through photovoice. Seven meetings were held with a group of five children between 08 and 10 years old, without severe mental disorders, being followed up at a Child and Adolescent Psychosocial Care Center (CAPSij). The verbal and visual narratives underwent a thematic analysis in dialogue with the researcher's field diary, which resulted in the following categories: (1) Body: experimenting with oneself and forming a group, (2) CAPSij: revisiting a known space through photography, (3) The territory as a place of desire and consumption, (4) Everyday life paths and life histories at a physical and existential territory and (5) The subtleties amidst the concrete of the city: territory and nature. The research revealed that children have a detailed and critical view of their spaces of circulation and their relationships with them. A view permeated by their singularities of life, attending to the beautiful and the subtlety of nature amid the gray concrete of the city, constantly dialoguing with mass cultures and hegemonic social values.

Keywords: Childhood, Occupational Therapy, Social Participation, Social Vulnerability, Culture.

Resumo

Crianças em situação de vulnerabilidade representam o grupo social mais exposto a constrangimentos que dificultam a tarefa de conhecer e pertencer à cidade onde moram. O objetivo desta pesquisa foi conhecer e compreender as percepções de crianças vivendo em condições complexas de vulnerabilidades, residentes na periferia, acerca de seu território na cidade de São Paulo, assim como identificar as relações por elas estabelecidas com esses espaços. Tratou-se de uma pesquisa participativa, de caráter colaborativo, por meio do fotovoz. Foram realizados sete encontros com um grupo de cinco crianças entre 08 e 10 anos de idade em acompanhamento em um Centro de Atenção Psicossocial Infanto-Juvenil (CAPSij). As narrativas verbais e visuais passaram por análise temática em diálogo com diário de campo da pesquisadora, que resultou nas seguintes categorias: (1) Corpo: experimentando a si mesmo e constituindo um grupo; (2) CAPSij: revisitando pela fotografia um espaço conhecido; (3) O território como lugar de desejo e consumo; (4) Percursos cotidianos e histórias de vida no território físico e existencial e; (5) As sutilezas em meio ao concreto da cidade: território e natureza. A pesquisa revelou que as crianças têm um olhar detalhado e crítico sobre seus espaços de circulação e pelas relações estabelecidas com o território. Olhar este permeado por suas singularidades de vida, atento ao belo e à delicadeza da natureza em meio ao concreto cinza da cidade, dialogando constantemente com as culturas de massa e os valores sociais hegemônicos.

Palavras-chave: Criança, Participação Social, Vulnerabilidade Social, Cultura.

Introduction

Life in the cities and the dynamics of social relationships involved in it become especially challenging as coexistence requires constant negotiation of conflicts and establishment of consensuses that articulate the right to movement, individual and collective freedoms, and respect for others. On this basis, the tension of social coexistence in communities usually takes place, which points to the importance of an understanding of how learning to be, coexist, and participate in collective spaces happens (Castro, 2001a).

At this stage of the city, living territories, more than geographic spaces, should be understood as places of particular human existence in which we feel comfortable (Takeiti, 2014). A place

> […] historically constructed and with socioeconomic and cultural relationships to unravel [...] [where] different ways of existing, dreaming, living, working and carrying out all possible social exchanges can be observed (Oliver et al., 1999, p. 5).

Thus, social life is guided by exchange processes, particularly of messages, affections, and goods. The relational dynamics that involve social actors – men, women, older people, youth, and children – presupposes a pre-attributed value, that is, a contractual power (Kinoshita, 1996).

The presence of children in the city is based on their concrete living conditions, which can hinder their circulation and appropriation of the diversity of experiences that the city provides. The restriction of children's movement to spaces of learning and protection, for example, illustrates the current situation of this generational group, which is deprived of a further position of participation and social responsibility (Castro, 2001a).

However, unlike other places where the child lives - such as school, family, and social and health services - the city provides insertion of these actors in a way that is less determined by pre-established institutional roles of subordination, such as a student, child, or patient. On the streets of the city, the roles occupied are different. The public discussion seems to be struggling with a childhood ambiguity caught between two equally problematic images: children in danger and dangerous children. The first of them, children in danger, highlights the idealized concepts of innocence and vulnerability. On the one hand, this perspective highlights important social problems such as neglect, poverty, and insecurity; on the other hand, it induces the need for vigilance over children, since activities, which used to be routine, such as playing in the streets, are increasingly understood as risky. The second image of dangerous children, addresses them "[…] as a threat to themselves, to others and society as a whole" (Prout, 2010, p. 24). Therefore, they are seen as a representation of supposed evils in society, such as criminality, which feeds strategies of social control over children (Prout, 2010).

Even if unable to take direct and effective action on the city, children print their marks on the community, by questioning the world as it is, or by envisioning different courses of daily action. Children are protagonists of life in society and the focus of social policies, which is why excluding them or keeping them on the sidelines can be illusory (Castro, 2001a).

Based on Christensen (2010) ideas, children's lives must be understood as a construction based on a procedural relationship in which personal biography, generation, and growth are intertwined with the use and meaning of the environment where they circulate. Thus, throughout life, they continue to make and understand their life stories in and from particular locations.

Children build situated knowledge of their local environment, full of personal and social meaning, through their daily encounters. Knowledge of the place is accumulated and transformed during life, through inhabiting, being, and changing.

Casey (1996) argues that being in place means that a person becomes aware of their physical presence in the world. "Living is living locally and knowing is, first of all, knowing the places where you are" (Casey, 1996, p. 18, free translation). In this sense, children circulate and occupy places in cities.

Thus, the city, with its unpredictability, needs to be conquered by children. It is not proposed here that the city change its structure, but that children participate as citizens in their contradictory diversity. As in the words of Castro (2001a),

> […] sometimes attractive and sometimes strange and dark, it demands action without preparation and reflection, but with the use of various subjective resources, conscious or not, visual and others (Castro, 2001a, p. 115).

These questions are fundamental to a broader understanding of children's lives in contemporary cities (Christensen, 2010).

However, we need to highlight that the participation of the collective of popular urban children under significant conditions of vulnerability is even more limited than the participation of those integrated into the hegemonic social system (Luna, 2001). Therefore, this first group experiences the greatest difficulties and impediments in the task of getting to know and participate in the city where they live.

It is important to highlight that schools, social and health services, although spaces that favor the development, socialization, and care of children, can also act as devices in the control of poor childhood. This was the experience of the first author when working in a Children's and Youth CAPS, where she witnessed the frequency of children with low adherence to educational activities and family problems were placed in a position of social discredit and discredit, being referred to the health service mental.

Therefore, this study sought to give a voice to these children, exposed to a series of vulnerabilities and complex life situations, inserted in public schools and monitored in a mental health service on the outskirts of the city of São Paulo. Thus, this article aims to present the experiences and perceptions of these children about their circulation through the city's territory, as well as the relationships they establish with these spaces.

The study was built based on the Sociology of Childhood, that is, that children should be understood "in their difference from the adult, with 'the other', in their otherness and the value they have in themselves, and not indirectly or passively through other categories of society, such as the family or school" (Oliveira & Tebet, 2010, p. 49). Furthermore, this research was carried out by occupational therapists, who understand and use the articulation between daily life, play, and culture in their professional practice. The use of the photovoice allowed the camera to become the toy and the photographs the records of the uniqueness of each child and the culture in the specific scenario of the study, contemplating expressions of playing and living.

Methodology

The research, of a participatory and collaborative nature, used the methodological resource of the photovoice (photovoice) – a research strategy that uses photographs taken by the participants to encourage discussion groups about the difficulties and resources of the community (Caso, 2011). Several studies (Rasmussen & Smidt, 2003; Christensen, 2004; Alderson, 2005; Müller, 2007; Carvalho & Müller, 2010; Andonian, 2010; Lal et al., 2012; Lynch & Stanley, 2017) have pointed out the potential of the use of photography in participatory research with children.

Thus, the methodological choice sought to enable the children in the study to explore and dialogue about the territory in which they live in a participatory way, using photography as a resource to encourage imagination, reflection, and the construction of ideas. The participants were five children, three boys and two girls, aged between eight and ten years old, inserted in different public schools between the 2nd and 4th grades of elementary school and monitored at the Children and Youth Psychosocial Care Center (CAPSij), in the East Zone of São Paulo, where the first author worked. The group was selected based on the discussion with the team of health service professionals, considering the following inclusion criteria: age between seven and eleven years old,

with complex life situations and vulnerability, no diagnosis of severe mental disorders and persistent, residence in the delimited territory and autonomy to circulate with the research group (a researcher and a research assistant).

Among the five participating children, two of them were in a situation of institutional care with no prospect of resuming family life, another two lived with an extended family with no relationship with their parents, and one of the children living with adoptive parents, still in the process of permanent custody. All had been referred for follow-up at the mental health service for important behavioral difficulties in the school and family context, as well as emotional and learning issues.

For this master's research, the photovoice was the methodological resource of choice for the effective participation of children since researching with children requires the use of languages appropriate to the typical forms of communication in childhood, which points to the power of playing for the dialogue with this age group. The intention is to use a research resource that can be considered a toy in the intrinsic relationship between children, culture, everyday life, and playing. The understanding of toy is not as

> […] defined by a precise function [because] it is, above all, an object that the child manipulates freely, without being conditioned to rules or principles of use of another nature (Brougère, 2001, p. 13).

The project was authorized by the Ethics Committees of the Faculty of Medicine of USP, under number 368/15, of 11/25/2015, and by the São Paulo Health Department, under number 1386718, of 10/01/2016. Legal guardians signed the informed consent form and the children signed the assent form to participate in the research. To preserve their identities, their names have been replaced and their faces edited with the Graffiti app.

The children were active in the construction of the research process, suggesting places of meaning in the territory, asking significant questions about their roles during the study, and even proposing a final exhibition with a sequence of photographs chosen and developed. We held 9 meetings:

1st and 2nd meetings: Presentation of the research for children and guardians. Request for the consent of the child and the authorization of the family.

3rd meeting: Workshop for learning how to use digital cameras (three linked to cell phones). Collaborative creation of a community map based on the participants' places of interest. Their homes, host institutions where two participants lived, schools, parks, squares, subways, and routine paths were identified. The first photographic records were at the health service for training and improving the technique of photographing and for the exercise of recording images of meaning by the children.

4th, 5th, and 6th meetings: Circulation through spaces previously selected by the group on the map and by others suggested on the way for children to record their perceptions of daily life and the place in which they live in photographs. Children took turns in the group's leading guide position so that they all exercised this function and presented their perceptions about their chosen places.

7th meeting: Selection of photos that would be developed and discussion about the movement through the city recorded in audio.

8th meeting: Assembly of individual panels with the photos revealed and construction of joint narratives from each child's selections and collective dialogues.

9th Our World Exhibition: a photographic exhibition organized by the children and held at CAPSij for families, healthcare professionals, and the community.

At the end of the entire process, we held meetings with each of the children individually, recorded in audio to complement the analysis of the study, to discuss the work process and deliver the revealed photos, as well as listening to the lived experience.

Thus, after the investigation work, as assumed by the participatory research methodology, from the transcripts of the audio recordings of the meetings and the records in the researcher's Field Diary, in line with the photographs taken by all the children, we performed the thematization and critical reflection on the researched facts and their theoretical elaboration. Then, thematic analysis of the verbal and image material was carried out, as proposed by Minayo (1999). With the material analyzed in convergences, divergences, and trends, we could identify and classify five thematic categories that are in line with the paths experienced in the research.

Results

During the meetings around the territory to carry out the photographic records, we observed how the group traced a common path, with many identifications related to the territory, even though with life stories and unique relationships. In general, the participating children spontaneously composed a path different from the one traced on the collective map. Thus, the photographs started with records of the body, followed by records from the CAPSij, to finally reach the territory.

Thus, we constructed a diagram that illustrates how the children moved between bodily, physical, media and effective territories in a context of the discovery by the camera lens in the circulation through the periphery territories in which they live (Figure 1). The uniqueness of the participating children permeates their personal experience, as well as the hegemonic values of mass culture; both shown in Figure 1.
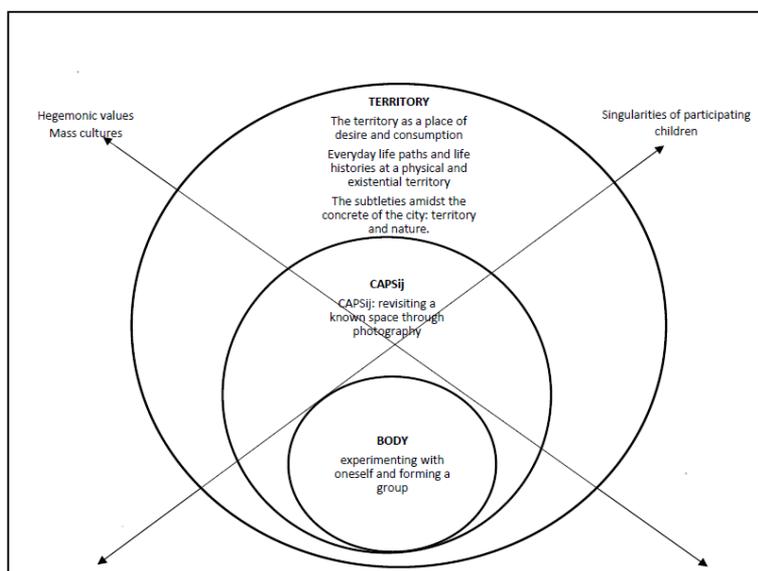

Figure 1. "In these fotos there is my world": thematic categories.

The analysis of the photographs and transcripts of the children's speeches, complemented by the records in the researcher's field diary, resulted in the identification of five thematic categories, which are in line with the paths experienced in the research, as described in the methodology and illustrated in Figure 1, and which will be described below.

(1) "Body: experimenting with oneself and forming a group";

(2) "CAPSij: revisiting a known space through photography";

(3) "The territory as a place of desire and consumption";

(4) "Everyday life paths and life histories at a physical and existential territory"; and

(5) "The subtleties amidst the concrete of the city: territory and nature".

Body: experimenting with oneself and forming a group

After the combined pre-survey and routes outlined on the community map, the group began to put the ideas and suggestions from the fieldwork into practice. On our first day of recording with the cameras, at the CAPSij space – meeting point –, we started with an explanation about the use of equipment for children. Some showed great familiarity with the camera, while others were not familiar with the lenses, showing a certain lack of coordination between the hands that held the camera and the framing of the image that would be photographed. However, given the different times to learn to photograph and the different intimacies or not with the action, the common point among all the participants was, after learning to manipulate the machine, starting spontaneously by recording their bodies and the bodies of the other participants. The photograph took place with a composition in fragments, like someone discovering himself and the other little by little, in pieces: legs, feet, arms, faces (Figure 2).

Continuing this discovery, children began to record their faces in the "selfie" model, both individually and in groups, composing scenes and poses in the collective that referred to adult everyday photos and what was exposed in virtual social networks (Figure 2).

Selected places in the health unit and throughout the territory were photographed with the author of the record in front of the camera lens, since, as said by some of them, everyone who saw the photographs needed to know that they were in their chosen places. They also asked each other to record individual photos at specific times, such as Paulo in his superhero poses, Sara with the animals around the neighborhood, and all of them in their spaces of circulation through the territory.

In this context, the children started photographic records by experimenting and discovering their bodies as one who perceives their details, bodies in fragments, and then perceives the other participants in the same perspective. Subsequently, they were able to recognize themselves by composing existential territories with records marked by "selfies", in which individual children were highlighted in the composition of the scenarios, to later photograph the collective of the group, constituted in this process, united in the "selfie" model" in different territorial spaces (Figure 2).
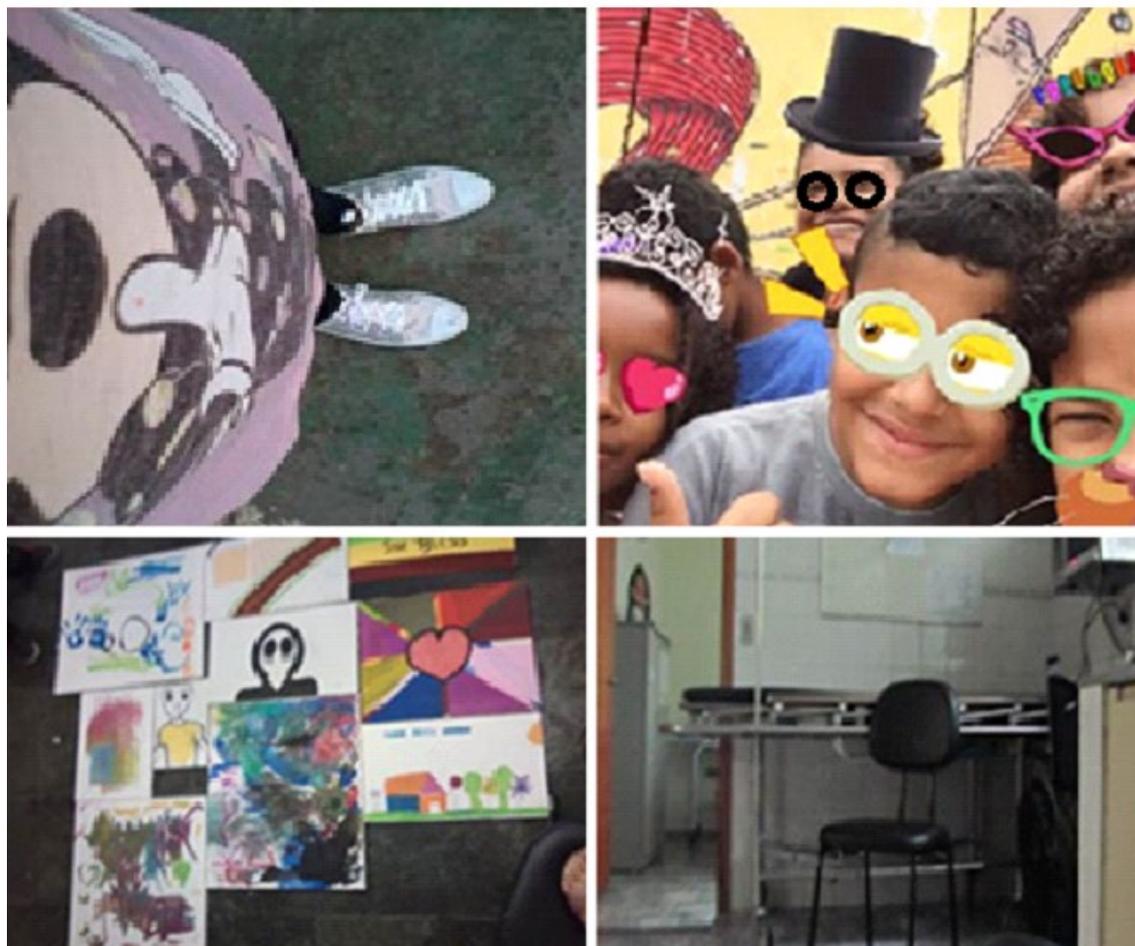
Figure 2. From feet to CAPSij. Description: left to right/top to bottom – part of the body by Giovana, collective selfie organized by the group by Paulo, painting by Caio, nursing room by Sara.

CAPSij: revisiting a known space through photography

As the first meeting took place on a rainy day, the group chose to stay in the institution's space for the initial records, which favored the fact that the children chose places of meaning and reference within the health unit. Participants circulated freely for more than an hour, sometimes in groups, composing scenes from the routine of care at CAPSij, sometimes alone, recording professionals, places, toys, spaces, and, as they often said: things we like and don't like here.

One of the children created combinations and scenarios with pictures, toys, and objects, which inspired the others to do the same in a relaxed atmosphere. They placed pictures on the floor, idealized compositions with puppets, and photographed each other, posing with characters (Figure 2). Some lines were triggered during this shared play process:

> *This doll here is my favorite; since I can't take him home, I'll take the photo.* (Paul)

>*Hey, take a picture of this sign: Toys belong to everyone. It is important.* (Sara)

>*Come here, let's all take pictures with this umbrella, like the ones on the film cover.* (Sara)

The children occupied the entire health unit, registering many of the spaces: playroom, reception, kitchen, bathrooms, backyard. They took the opportunity to discover places they did not know before, such as the professionals' kitchens, and also to build photographic images under their eyes and perspectives (Figure 2):

>*I'm going to find out what's in this kitchen now and I'll show you in the photo.* (Sara)

>*I'm behind the window to take a picture to let people know what I see here when I walk in.* (Giovan)

Also, in the CAPSij context, the children got together in a game of journalist photographers and began to look for "reports of things that they don't like or are not working", as mentioned by Sara when a professional from the unit asked what they were doing. They photographed a section of the roof of the roofless courtyard, messy toys, and small parts of broken cabinets. The game had a reporting tone, with two of the participants conducting the scene as television presenters and the others as researchers, looking for scenes with make-believe magnifying glasses, metaphorically revisiting the cameras. The children reproduced scenes, poses, and images typical of adults' daily lives in a mix of imagination, game, and reality.

In summary, the participants started from initial recognition of their bodies through the lens to discover, also from the perspective of the camera, the group as a unit, and the health institution with the most intimate people in this scenario. The CAPSij was also the meeting point for departures and returns from the territory and their return, occupying a strategic place for exploration and discovery arrivals and departures. The health unit could be revisited as an affective and existential territory for children.

The territory as a place of desire and consumption

Following the meetings, by choice of the participants, the movement through the territory began with photographic records of what the children identified as objects of their desire: imported cars and houses that stood out for their size and structure in the middle of the neighborhood (Figure 3). Amid these photographs, they told pieces of their stories related to these objects and life contexts.

Everyone talked about the personal ideals of owning the cars, motorcycles, and houses they saw on the streets when they reached adulthood. In one episode, the three participating boys decided to ask the owner of a motorcycle workshop to enter the establishment and took photographs of each other sitting on motorcycles and tricycles singing songs with ostentatious funk lyrics, as well as posing with the many-colored car wheels that decorated the wall (Figure 3).

> *Ostentation out of this world. Look at this motorcycle!* (Caio)

Newsstands were also mandatory stops at all meetings, primarily motivated by memory, such as when one of them said:

> *My mother always stops with me at this stall to buy stickers when I get back from school, come and see.* (Caio)

> *I've known this man at the newsstand since I'm a baby because I've been coming since I was born on this subway here to go everywhere, let's say hi to him.* (Sara)

However, these observations from newsstands triggered conversations and many photographic records of magazines, toys, and accessories with advertising themes aimed at the children's universe (Figure 3). Images from the soap opera Carousel, characters such as Barbie, Spider-Man, and Captain America, singers such as Justin Bieber, Biel, Anitta, Mc Gui and others mobilized children who claimed to be fans, talking about their desire to buy many objects related to this universe:

> *Miss, take this Justin to me, I want to put it on my bedroom wall.* (Paul)

> *Will my grandma give me some money so I can take this Barbie magazine?* (Sara)

The children also registered many magazine´s covers with thin bodies of half-naked men and women (Figure 3) and the participating girls talked to each other with statements such as:

> *Oh, I want that hair.* (Sara)

> *I will look like her when I grow up.* (Giovan)

> *Look at this beautiful makeup!* (Sara)

Thus, in the context of circulation through the territory, the children began the exploration and recording of images through what represents the place of consumption and objects of desire for this generational group, located in the East Zone of the São Paulo periphery. The set of photographs of all participants, to a greater or lesser extent, included cars, large houses, singers, and characters linked to the media. Boys, in general, presented a greater number of images related to cars and superheroes, while girls registered most of the covers of magazines, singers, and dolls.
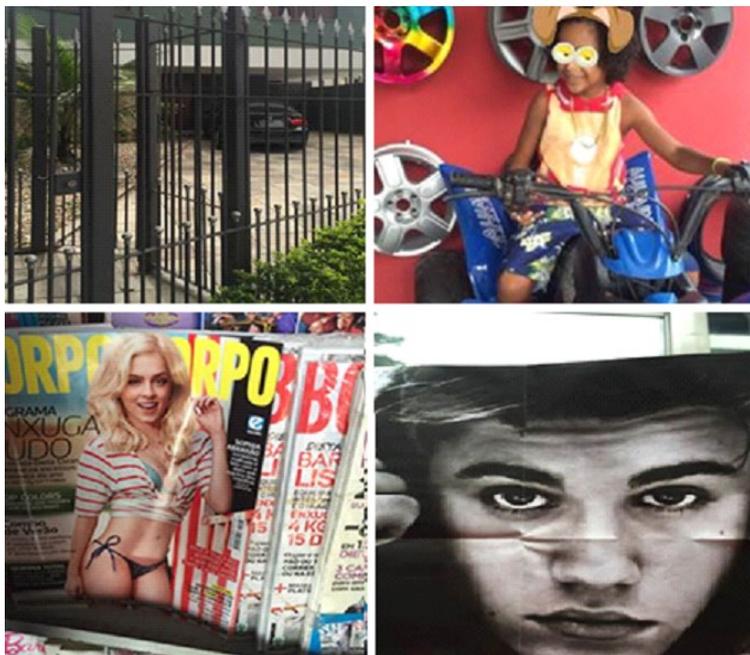
Figure 3. The territory as a place of desire and consumption.

Description: left to right/top to bottom – house referenced as a dream by Sara, Caio sitting on the tricycle chosen by the group by Giovana, magazine cover with body idealized by Sara, Justin Bieber poster by Caio.

Everyday life paths and life histories at a physical and existential territory

The experience of circulating through the city took shape and appeared in narratives about the daily lives of each one of them. Participants told about their daily journeys, took the group to know their schools, homes, shelters, parks, and squares where they play. Many memories were invoked on the paths and narratives emerged such as one of the children who stopped under a tree near his house to tell about an episode in which his cat ran away, getting stuck in the top of that tree, mobilizing neighbors and his parents so that rescue him.

Each walk full of records and conversations became significant because the children presented images of the community as they knew it, peculiarly and uniquely, intertwining subjectivity, subtlety, and affection. The presentations of their living spaces, for example, were illustrative when they described details on the floors and walls, favorite trees in the backyard, toys scattered in the garage, mixing current experiences with memories of their first experiences in the registered places (Figure 4).

> *Can you see those woods piled up there? They were from my little wooden house and I made these scratches on the wall with my dog.* (Sara).

> *What I like most here is this tree, because I love eating guava! From time to time I ask my aunt and she comes with the squeegee to help me pick it up.* (Paul).

> *This is the part I like the most here, the library!* (Giovana).

During the walks through the territory, the children not only photographed the places they traveled but also actively interacted with each one of them. When they stopped in front of their homes, they called for pets and told about their neighbors, greeting them and introducing the group when they were around. Furthermore, they told details of their stories related to their life contexts, as illustrated by the speech of one of them when stopping to photograph a house along the way:

> *This big house here is where my mother works, I'm going to take a quick picture so her boss doesn't see it, I never went in there, nor did I ride this Pajero.* (Gustavo).

The parks and squares, mainly, were the stage for free play and discovery, with the exploration of swings, slides, seesaws, skate parks, benches, lawns, and everything else that could be used (Figure 4). The repertoires about the neighborhood gradually expanded as shared in the collective:

> *Now that I know this square, I'm going to ride my bike here.* (Caio).

> *Wow, the man from the shelter must not even know that you can bring everyone to play ball in this place.* (Paul).

> *I didn't even know I could get to my school from this street!* (Gustavo).

Another highlight of the circulation through the places of meaning in the territory was the heterogeneity that makes up the community. In a square presented by one of the children as a space that usually skates with his family, many elderly people did a physical activity on gym equipment, some dogs walked sniffing the tall lawn, two boys organized cigarettes and paper bags, and the children played on the swings and ran freely. Research participants greeted the seniors and took many photographs of each other as they played together. One of the children also made a statement about the boys who handled drugs at a table:

> *Those boys are my mother's friends, she's already brought me when she comes to talk to them, but I'm never close.* (Sara).

However, all returned to play, interested in betting races in the large open spaces of the square. The children also registered what they assessed as negative in the territory to the same extent that they proposed solutions to the identified problems (Figure 4):

> *I chose to take a picture of the hole with stagnant water because of Dengue. This is a part of the city I don't like, the hole I can fall into, and the disease.* (Sara).

The military police were also the target of photographic records and discussions, sometimes with a protective content for children, sometimes as a threat, as illustrated by the speech of one of them when she saw many police cars on an avenue:

> *These cops must have caught the guys who were using drugs, my mom always says they catch them snorting drugs, but they also snort. […] I don't know what that means, but I'm afraid they aren't always good.* (Gustavo).

This same child asked us to go faster by a house, with a sign with the words "Guesthouse for boys", since, as he narrated:

> *In this blue house lives a rapist of women, a woman who lives next to my house has already been beaten by him and my mother told me not to come here at night; maybe he takes children.* (Gustavo).

Garbage in the streets, squares with untended lawns, and people on the yellow line at the subway station were registered by the images, accompanied by a critical speech about wrong actions for the city and citizens (Figure 4). Another participant mentioned that he would take advantage of the photo exhibition to:

> *[…] to show the residents of the neighborhood that they shouldn't do it so that everyone lives better, maybe they'll see it and that changes?* (Giovana).

In this way, the children's circulation went beyond the physical territory of the surroundings covered and designed at the time of the pre-research. They presented their daily paths and life stories in the territories of their existence, full of affection and a critical and positive view of society, experiencing the role of protagonists in their lives as social agents.

Figure 4. Life stories and social complaints.

Description: left to right/top to bottom –library of the shelter by Giovana, group playing by Paulo, hole in the sidewalk with still water and a possible outbreak of dengue by Sara, garbage in the way by Caio.

The subtleties amidst the concrete of the city: territory and nature

The subtleties of the spaces were also registered and involved the children who often stopped to observe and photograph the animals in the neighborhood: turtles, cats, dogs, and parrots (Figure 5). Some conversations were started with residents, each time helpful, helping the children to play with their pets. One of the children, for example, insisted on chirping in front of a house on the way to her school, claiming that there were many chickens and chicks there. A short time later, these animals were fleeing through the gate, scattered along the sidewalk, entertaining the children. In another moment, a bird on the high wall of a house made everyone stops other actions in space to observe it together and pay attention to the surroundings, admired with discoveries of flowers and plants (Figure 5):

> *Wow, look what a beautiful flower, in my favorite color!* (Giovana).

> *I wanted to catch that little bird and hug it.* (Sara).

> *Look here, guys. It looks like a berry among the plants.* (Paul).

The discovery of the natural spots in the middle of the urban space, full of the hardness of concrete and high walls, gave lightness and fun to the children, who stopped walking several times to admire the animals and plants.

> *Do you know that I had never seen this tree properly? And I come here every day.* (Caio).

Furthermore, the children were able to expose their likes and fears in this context. For example, while traveling through the territory, one of the children registered a large set of photos of dogs and, when asked by the researcher if she liked animals, she replied that she liked some, but was afraid of dogs and wanted people to know about it when they saw his photos, that is why he would make a point of writing on his panel for the exhibition:

> *I don't like dogs.* (Sara).

The free and patient movement along the paths outlined by the group allowed the participants to notice details, such as trees along the way and colorful flowers among bushes. The attentive eyes discovered and shared delicacies that were hidden amidst the predominantly gray physical territory of the city's concrete, to the same extent that they were able to discover and affirm their opinions about the daily life full of these discoveries.
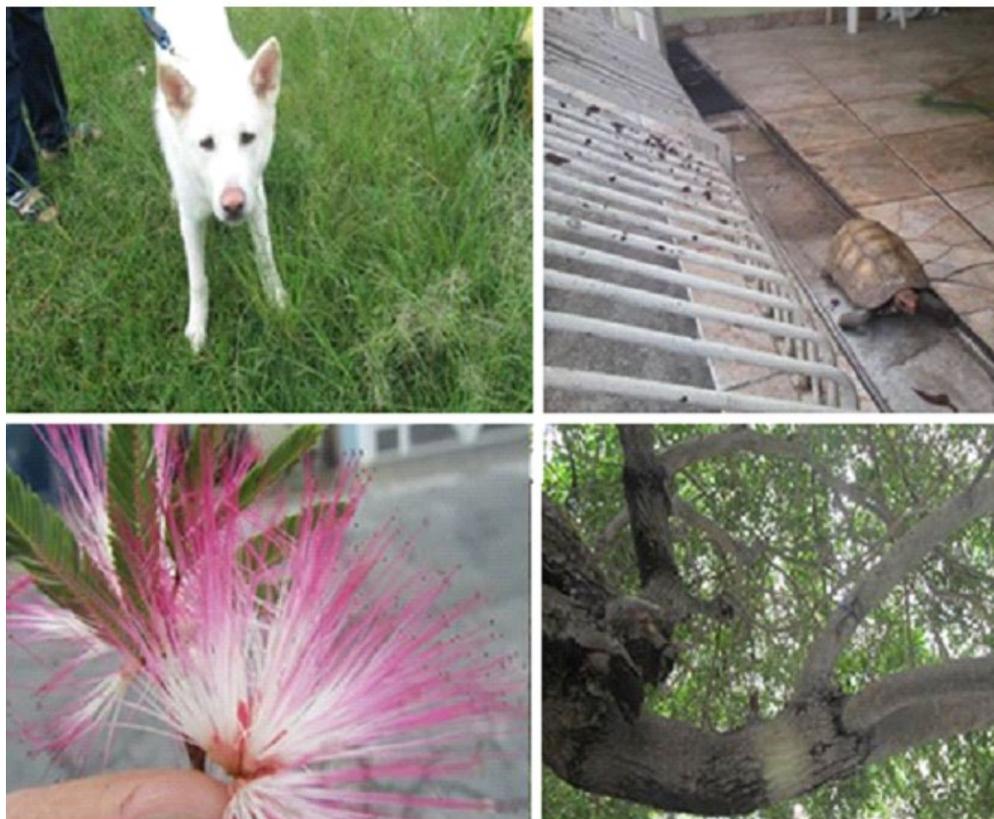
Figure 5. Territory and nature.

Description: left to right/top to bottom – dog in a square by Sara, turtle in a garage near the health unit by Gustavo, flower in Giovana's favorite color, tree on the way by Caio.

Discussion

Existential territories: the body, places of life, and circulation in the city

As the results previously presented the show, the research enabled children to move around their territories in the city. Castro (2002) states that moving around the city allows children new perceptions, actions, and meanings. Movement and circulation, and the permanent act of moving, are necessary to live in the city, illustrating the multiple and diverse possibilities of identifying the contemporary subject.

The circulation and presence of children in the city confront them with the undisguised plurality of collective life with social differences and inequalities. As they walk through the community, children with different cultural experiences analyze and produce political tools to understand inequalities, operating politically and socially (Castro, 2002). In this sense, we identified that the attentive wandering of collaborating children through the streets could start a political construction and a thought about the city and its consequences, illustrated in photographic records and critical speeches about the city and suggestions for social change

The contemporary city is the space of diversity, of the proliferation of codes, languages, and images. "Multiplicity can be understood in the tension between what has some permanence – its solid architecture, for example – and what is ephemeral – the constant flow of people in the streets" (Pérez et al., 2008, p. 180). Perceiving the city consists of making it visible through language and representation mechanisms in the effort to describe it. Thus, the children participating in the research did so, presented their experiences and perceptions – with photographic records, speeches, silences, and looks – of the city based on their unique ways of insertion and circulation.

> The meaning that each attribute to space is given through their daily use and participation, as well as their experiences there. The city lived by its inhabitants is full of memories, affections, and meanings, and is always changing. The paths that each one takes in the city refer to something that exists in ourselves (Pérez et al., 2008, p. 180).

In this way, discussing the relationship between childhood and the city implies understanding the urban space as an element that forms the singularity of individuals and constructs autonomy. The city imposes a dual task of individualization and socialization. That is, to the extent that the city manifests the classification between individuals and groups, composing the game of social status, also in this context, physical proximity and social distance are more evident, pointing to the physical variable of the agglomeration that starts to intervene in interactional processes (Müller & Nunes, 2014).

In the construction of the circulation map through the territory, carried out collectively during the third meeting of the research group, each child was able to reconstruct their city of meaning, choosing paths that enunciate their stories, individually and collectively. This means being able to move and circulate through spaces based on individual choices and decisions as social actors. Furthermore, the paths experienced and walking through the territory accompanied by photographic records went beyond all previous planning, with undefined places and situations, full of discoveries and meetings.

> In a certain sense, each life is a 'path', that is, biographical (and spatial) itineraries denote concrete paths that correspond to the possibilities of each one to conquer and expand existential territories based on living with others (Pérez et al., 2008, p. 180).

Effective participation in the city implies the freedom to choose paths, the possibilities to come and go concretely and metaphorically.

> They [the children] have a detailed local knowledge of the city, built through their concrete contact with it and their modality in and around it. Their situated knowledge is partly biographical and personal, but it is also collectively produced. Children experience the city together, and the meaning of places is elaborated and produced in collective engagement and activity. The movement of children places them about places that are already saturated with social meaning (Christensen, 2010, p. 154, free translation).

In a research carried out by Horton et al. (2014) on the free walking of children and adolescents in southwest England, the authors emphasized how much daily circulation through the city mobilizes personal and relational experiences, affecting the constitution of friendships, communities, and social geographies. Thus, the study argues that pedestrians' daily practices should be considered as a critical analysis of social policy, especially in urban mobility.

In this context, as the children participating in this research presented the community and their spaces of choice (houses, schools, health units, parks, and squares), they were able to experience the exercise of knowledge and the achievement of the city, but also of love and identification for their places and histories. As highlighted by Pérez et al. (2008), from these bases, a child's experiences of being a citizen and citizenship are, therefore, a feeling built internally by the subject through his/her action.

Greco et al. (2017), using photovoice to understand the experiences of children with mental health disorders in the context of a Canadian rehabilitation service, identified similar themes, also connected with existential territories, the chosen paths, and the relationships established in this context: (1) family, friends, and pets; (2) what I like to do for fun; (3) school; (4) house; (5) my favorite place; and (6) places I have been. However, it is necessary to point out that in our research the school did not occupy a prominent category, only two of the participating children made photographic records of the schools they attended, but this space was not discussed and viewed as an important place in life.

In this sense, as stated by Greco et al. (2017), the way each child chose to represent the themes was related to their individual experiences contextualized with their physical spaces of circulation, their affections, belongings, and identifications. This fact opens the possibility of questioning what is the relationship established by the children participating in our research with their schools since this space was not presented as part of the existential and affective territory.

Such perception goes against what Saraceno (2001) defends as an essential difference between being and inhabiting. While *being* is related to occupying a space without its appropriation, *inhabiting* is the possibility of occupying that space with increasing symbolic, material, and emotional appropriation. In this sense, we can affirm that the children inhabited their physical and existential territories as they materially and emotionally appropriated their bodies, objects, and all the spaces that made them up, interacting affectively with the people who were there.

Going back to Saraceno (2001), for subjects to inhabit, it is necessary "[…] a high degree of contractuality concerning the material and symbolic organization of spaces and objects, to their affective division with others" (Saraceno, 2001, p. 114). Thus, we note that circulation through the city in the context of this research promoted the exercise of contractuality with the appropriation of existential territories and the practice of citizenship by the children.

In this context, Sarmento (2005) contributes by pointing out that citizenship in childhood has in the urban space a problematic place of potentialization and restriction. Empowerment, since the collective construction of urban policies with the participation of children, is the most effective way to guarantee effective participatory rights of these in public space. Of restriction, understanding that this collective construction in situations of vulnerability is marked by the restriction of the autonomy of children in

the city, limitation of spaces for circulation, and colonization by consumption and social inequalities (Sarmento, 2005). Realizing this tension through the narratives and photographs of the research participants was a necessary challenge for the investigation and production of knowledge.

In the context of the aforementioned situations of vulnerability, the field of this research in the periphery of the East Zone of São Paulo stands out, recognized for its social disparities. However, the risks and fears related to violence hardly appeared during the study, except for Gustavo's speeches and punctual records and for other participants' make-believe games with superheroes who fight evil. Also, the social criticisms made by the children, such as about garbage in the middle of the city, non-compliance with rules in the subway, stagnant water as a source of dengue fever, and broken furniture in the health unit, were accompanied by possible solutions and proposals for improvements, including having in the photographic records the expectation that they could be promoters of change, as illustrated by Gabriela's speech:

> *Maybe they see and that changes.* (Gabriela).

In this sense, the research meetings and the *Nosso Mundo* Exposition were the stages for conversations about the strengths and difficulties of the community, for the expansion of the children's circulation repertoire, and the exercise of their roles as social agents.

> This understanding and involvement with children is also the necessary basis for their participation in the process of changing the physical environment in which they live. We need to know how they see the city to transform it. So, we must seek to understand how children situate themselves (Christensen, 2010, p. 163).

The children's participation in the research sought to enable the active appropriation of the space, promoting the choice and decision about what and how to tell about the community in which they live. Also, group discussions opened paths for them to identify and care about the problems of the spaces where they live, detached from pre-established institutional roles. As highlighted by Pérez et al. (2008), children learn the multiple possibilities of living together in shared spaces. Thus, they expand their perspectives to consider perspectives from others and impasses generated by living with all those with whom they share the world.

Production of childhood cultures: the logics of consumption and the discovery of nature

During the entire research process, in the walks through the city, in the direction of eyes and photographs, and the discussions, we could perceive with great emphasis the logics of desire and consumption used by children. Much has been said about the creation and purchase of new toys, food, cars, and houses, that is, the possibility of having new objects to be consumed in the city.

At the same time that the children were concerned with issues related to the city, some answers about what they liked or disliked in the community were, for the most part, restricted to the private universe, such as "watching television", "Justin Bieber", "Carrossel" soap opera, "computer", "shopping", "eating ice cream", "McDonald's", among others. Although answers such as "playing", "playing ball", "skating", "riding a bicycle" have appeared, and the experience of playing in squares and streets while traveling through the territory, we can think that most of the activities performed by children are increasingly restricted to private spaces.

As Mourão (2004) said, we live in times where the general culture has been predominantly transmitted by adults to children. Added to this, we have in our society a very close relationship between the State and business corporations. In this sense, based on the idea of a culturally produced imagery, there is a concern with the corporate construction of childhood, perceived in this work with the objects of desire presented by children, related to large fast food production companies, cars, children's characters, and media programs.

Sarmento (2007) points out that the immersion of children in the symbolic universe and the interpretive reproduction of this universe happen through the influence of several planes: the family environment with its class, ethnicity, and other conditions; local culture with traditions, institutions, and neighborhood relationships; national culture, communicated through social institutions; school culture, inserted in the local and national context, but distinct in its school structure; and global culture, spread mainly by the media and the cultural industry. Thus, we understood in this study that "childhood cultures are a product of these plans that are mutually implicated in social relationships considering inter and intragenerational relationships" (Oliveira & Tebet, 2010, p. 41).

In the case of this research, the logic of desire and consumption presented were linked to the context of vulnerability and were influenced by the socioeconomic and regional conditions of the territory on the periphery of São Paulo's East Zone, and by the life stories, family configurations and institutional relationships of each participating child. The media also had its prominent role, which can be identified, in part, by the desire for thin bodies, specific hair and makeup, and characters from the universe of soap operas and cartoons.

Müller (2006) states that it is necessary to consider a certain universalization of childhood that goes beyond the limits of local culture. For the author, the globalization of childhood is supported by the offer of a market for cultural products of childhood, as if all children share the same desires, choices, and tastes. In this way, the choices of the children participating in the research, although directly related to their personal experiences, the territory, and their relationships with them, are also choices that coincide with the material offered and disseminated for childhood in the global media and media. However, it is essential to emphasize that the appropriations of elements from the sociocultural environment of children's origin and their constant activities support what childhood sociologists claim about peer cultures, especially in the peculiar logic of children, different from the logic of adults (Müller, 2006).

In this sense, children build their cultural identities by the need for identification and differentiation from other generational groups. Based on this, as highlighted by Sarmento (2003), we can understand that the child inflects the social world he lives

uniquely, producing children's cultures that are constituted through a movement of production and reproduction of adult culture. Corsaro (1997) calls this movement an "interpretive reproduction", as children make a unique interpretation of the adult (social) world, being a distinctive element of the generational category.

During the research, children often proposed photographic records and games that referred to the universe of adults, either when they imitated a news program denouncing what they identified as problems in the health unit or poses commonly found in images on virtual social networks. However, each expression of children, even if based on adult culture, was full of singularities, in a mixture of imagination, play, and reality. Oliveira & Tebet (2010) suggest that children should be understood as social actors who interact with the world, the city, the local community, relationships, words, art, etc. In this way, they produce childhood cultures "with what we can call 'the outside' (understood as what is outside the child, the outside)" (Oliveira & Tebet, 2010, p. 39).

> The child represents and reframes their context and the information received by adults through the symbolic productions of playing and drawing. We understand that symbolic productions are how children give meaning to things. From the children's experiences through playing, drawing, inventing, building, they symbolize and build meanings specific to the worlds in which they live. Thus, childhood culture cannot be thought of in the singular, it is childhood cultures, in the plural, since there are multiple possibilities of meanings that can be attributed to the world (Oliveira & Tebet, 2010, p. 39).

Going back to Fernandes (1961), we can discuss children's cultures built by elements that are almost exclusive to children, mostly of a playful nature. Delgado & Müller (2005) analyze the work of the researcher immersed in the field of research, the street, and their appropriation of how children organized themselves into groups and lived child culture. The authors identified that Florestan's research revealed the relationships established between children, socialization processes, games, roles determined for and by children in the context of the Bom Retiro neighborhood, in the city of São Paulo. Furthermore, it became evident how the children's activities are also expressed through categories such as gender, race, and social class.

Unlike the work of Fernandes (1961), in our research, children did not have traditional street games. Although the playful nature has permeated the entire process, whether in the use of cameras, in the experiences of playing in the few parks and squares in the territory, or the pretending game at the health unit, or even when noticing the colors and delicate points of nature amidst the concrete of the city, there were no traces of popular games referred to in the author's work, relevant to the time of this study.

Thus, in our work, we observed how the playful practice of the participating children, associated with their careful and attentive looks, favored the discovery of nature amid a predominantly urban territory. Based on the statement by Brougère (2001, p. 23), that "to create a toy is to propose an image that is valid in itself and has a potential for seduction, which allows actions and manipulations, in harmony with the suggested representations", the neighborhood pets, the bird on the wall and the colorful flowers became toys full of fantasy, triggers of joy and emotional exchanges.

In another study that used the photovoice as a methodological resource, Berinstein & Magalhães (2009) also considered cultural productions as a central element in understanding children's practices and ways of life. The researchers studied the essence of the gaming experience in the context of territory with children in Zanzibar, Tanzania, based on their views and identified that the gaming experience in Zanzibar has aspects of creativity and ingenuity, and influences from tradition, of local culture, and poverty. Although game experiences are different from those discovered by the research presented here, both works illustrate the power of children's cultures in the production of ways of relating, playing, and building relationships, even in situations of vulnerability.

> The game that can be, at times, a school of social conformity, of adaptation to the proposed situations, can, in the same way, become a space of invention, curiosity, and diversified experiences, no matter how little society offers to children the means for this. It so happens that this opening marks one of the essential aspects of modern societies, characterized by the indeterminacy of each individual's future. The eventuality of play corresponds, intimately, to the unpredictability of an open future (Brougère, 2001, p. 105).

Children formulate interpretations of society, others and themselves, nature, thoughts, and feelings, in a different way to deal with everything that surrounds them (Sarmento, 2005, p. 373). Thus, children, inserted in a specific group within the social structure - generational category -, produce their own culture through a set of symbols characterized by values, norms, and ways of feeling that distinguish them by the pattern of their actions (Oliveira & Tebet, 2010). The perceptions of the children participating in the research about nature and the community, the ways to deal with the discoveries of everyday life, whether it is the smile with the skull with colorful clothes on the door of the neighborhood workshop or with the colorful flower on the asphalt, illustrated these ways of being particular to this group of children. Thus, as Ferigato et al. (2018) put it in their research, also with photovoice, we observed an encounter with a sensitive territory full of listening, exchanges and recognition.

Final considerations

Researching the perceptions of children living in complex conditions of vulnerability about their territory on the outskirts of the city of São Paulo, through photovoice, allowed to know the experience of these social actors in the process of circulation through the city based on their uniqueness contextualized in the generational structure of childhood. Furthermore, the research experience enabled their engagement in the debate and analysis of the child's place in the city and the process of knowledge production about childhood in society.

The children, when traveling through the physical territory of the city, took routes that went through the constitution of the group, existential places that they inhabit and are welcomed. Thus, the research revealed that children have a critical and complex look at their spaces of circulation and the relationships established with them. Such a look is permeated by the singularities of life, attentive to the beauty and delicacy of nature

amidst the city's gray concrete, constantly dialoguing with mass cultures and hegemonic social values.

This experience was only possible because the participating children placed themselves in the relationship as social agents full of desires and opinions. Thus, to favor effective participation by the children, the facilitation of the dialogue was a guiding basis so that, in this case, they would feel independent in conducting the conversations and in control of the situation. It was also essential to be careful in the researcher's presentation with careful explanation and in accessible language about the study, to ensure that the children understood and could put their perspectives on the research process, as well as being active characters in the process of presentation and circulation through the territory.

Understanding the children's daily experience in the spaces of circulation, and listening carefully as a crucial work practice was the structure for the development of the research and the relationships between the participants, which directly interfered with the quality of the images recorded. The use of photography as a language provided the children with a greater degree of control over the research process, facilitating their relationship with their territories and with the research questions.

The perspective of the Sociology of Childhood, combined with the participatory methodology and the photovoice resource, gave the participating children the opportunity to take the lead and attributed to them a contractual power different from the usual one in their life experiences marked by the vulnerability. Despite being children who, in other contexts and scenarios, are potentially the target of disqualification and discrimination for having important difficulties in their development and learning processes, in the research, they were able to show all their power and creative power, making suggestions, even for the production of social changes.

Thus, this study pointed to the power of research carried out with children, under their perspectives, and with their collaboration, to increase the debate on the need for validation and incorporation of childhood discourses in the construction of scientific studies and social policies. Furthermore, the organization and procedures for conducting this research are placed, together with due ethical care, as an instrument to facilitate the participation of children, regardless of their conditions and social difficulties.

It is essential that research continues to take place, in increasing numbers, in which children are the interlocutors about their desires and needs, so that, consequently, this generational group has greater public representation, overcoming the supposed inability of children to make up the social discourses. Let us work so that children are increasingly seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them, and the societies in which they live.

Acknowledgments

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Author´s contributions

Larissa Bertagnoni was responsible for the conception and development of the research, under the supervision of Sandra Galheigo. Both authors were responsible for the final writing of the article and approved its final version.

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Section editor

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