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The Palace of Imagination

*A Way of Co-creating with Children
in the Emboladoura Neighbourhood,
Guimarães*

Keywords

– participatory co-creation
process; addressing community needs;
engaging children in the making;
building multifunctional structures;
enhancing the community's sense
of belonging.

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The aim of this paper is to explain how the “Palace of Imagination” (PI), funded by the Portuguese government programme Bairros Saudáveis (Healthy Neighbourhoods) in 2020, was co-created with its residents, primarily children and young people, in the Emboladoura neighbourhood on the western edge of the municipality of Guimarães. The PI aimed to correct the absence of collective public spaces, particularly covered spaces that can house different groups and host various activities, through the co-construction of the multifunctional collective structures. Starting with an explanation of how the idea first came to us and continuing through the process of realizing it, we outline the methodology, structured in

four action verbs (“interdialogue,” inhabit, recreate, and activate), how we engaged residents, the project’s transdisciplinary approach, and the relevance given to aesthetic quality. We conclude by outlining the outcomes and results of the project as well as its potential for replication.

- 1 The work developed by ProChild CoLAB was supported by: (i) FCT—Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia and NORTE-06-3559-FSE-000044, integrated in the invitation NORTE-59-2018- 41, aiming to hire highly qualified human resources, co-financed by the Regional Operational Programme of the North 2020, thematic area of Competitiveness and Employment, through the European Social Fund (ESF) and (ii) the Mission Interface Programme from the Resilience and Recuperation Plan, notice n° 01/CO5-i02 /2022, aiming to guarantee public core funding to strengthen the network of interface institutions, as defined in the legal regime in force, approved by Decree-Law no. 63/2019, of May 16th, as well as in its first review on “Technology and Innovation Centres—CTI” and “Collaborative Laboratories—CoLABs”, approved by Decree-Law no. 126-B/2021 of December 31st. The work here is developed within the social participation area that gathers researchers from the fields of architecture and sociology of childhood. Available at <https://prochildcolab.pt/en/areas-and-projects/social-participation/>.
- 2 Information about the School of Architecture, Art and Design of University of Minho available at <https://www.arquitetura.uminho.pt/en>.
- 3 Information about Landscapes, Heritage and Territory Laboratory (Lab2PT) available at <https://lab2pt.net/en>.
- 4 Information on the Palace of Imagination’s fundraising application can be found at <https://jornal.bairrossaudaveis.gov.pt/projetos/00000496/index.htm>

Finding the Way

The Palace of Imagination (PI) is both a process and a series of small, multifunctional structures and collective spaces that were built to tackle the needs of the residents of Emboladoura neighbourhood using different participatory strategies. The PI aims to convert socio-spatial vulnerability into a transformative movement, where each “individual being” and “the collective being” can expand their imaginary, and thus overcome external and self-imposed oppression.

The idea of creating an intervention project in the Emboladoura neighbourhood arose from the partnership between ProChild,¹ a collaborative laboratory which aims to combat poverty and social exclusion of children, and academia (EAAD² and Lab2PT³, UMinho).

Gondar is situated in the Guimarães region, which corresponds to the parishes of the Pevidém group of schools, with a total of 15,453 people (Census 2021). This territory has been affected by every crisis in the textile industry, with cyclical unemployment, high emigration and precarious working conditions. This posed threats to the quality of the family environment, school performance and children’s development and well-being.

The neighbourhood, located in the Emboladoura urbanization, on the western border of the Guimarães municipality, was built in 1980 by the “Instituto de Gestão e Alienação do Património Habitacional do Estado, IGAPHE (Institute for the Management and Alienation of the State Housing Patrimony), currently “Instituto da Habitação e da Reabilitação Urbana,” IHRU (Institute for Housing and Urban Renewal), and is identified with the number 1135. It is a housing complex consisting of 231 residential units and eighteen non-residential units, with housing conditions that are very precarious and in need of urgent intervention, both in terms of the renovation of the housing blocks and the system of collective spaces. This neighbourhood was selected as a priority area for intervention due to the high levels of poverty in this community and, consequently, of its children.

To address the problems of this extremely underprivileged place, the transdisciplinary action-research team joined efforts with a local partner, Fraterna, and invited this established social solidarity institution to be the promoter of the project and to join us in the application for funding to the Bairros Saudáveis (Healthy Neighbourhoods) government programme, in November 2020⁴. Fortunately, we were granted the maximum funding available for a project, to the value of 50,000 euros. This allowed the project to become a reality. Although involving a multitude of community generations, children and young people played a quintessential part in the co-creation and co-making of the eighteen different activities between October 12, 2021 and December 10, 2022. Having been neglected for decades by official institutions, these residents were involved in a process that aimed to enhance their collective life and their sense of belonging.

During Covid-19 lockdowns, the team looked for effective ways to involve children and young people in the assessment of community needs that was crucial to the planning of future interventions in the neighbourhood. Given the impossibility of going to the field, children and young people worked with the local team in building a survey that was handwritten by them and then distributed in the mailboxes of all residents.

When asked “if I could choose” for the changes perceived as most important, residents responded on a need for a space to accommodate a diversity of uses, such as: a leisure/living space with shelter from the rain/sun; a space for sports activities; a play space; a study/training space for children and young people; a space for cultural initiatives; and a space for creative workshops, etc.

On analysis of the community’s proposals, it became clear that a place where people could meet with shelter from different climatic conditions would be the first one to address. Also, in keeping with a way that always sought to bridge the gap between the individual and the collective, we embraced empathy for the “other” as a tool for dialogue and the easing of tensions, which are not always simple to manage in interpersonal interactions, but are essential for carrying out participatory projects.

Walking the Way

The selected methodology for building the PI, including transdisciplinary work, community involvement, and especially children and young people does not have a long-standing tradition in Portugal, particularly in more deprived and peripheral areas such as this one. In general, participatory processes in architecture that involve different field areas such as education, sociology, and community intervention are not commonly found, particularly the right to the place, to the territory, and listening to children’s views on their needs and views on the public space shared with different generations.

The continuous transdisciplinary endeavour by combining the field of architecture (through ProChild COLAB, EAAD and Lab2PT, UMinho researchers) with the fields of sociology of childhood, fine arts, and design contributed to making this PI a reality by active involvement with the neighbourhood’s children on a weekly basis for one year.

The main goal and justification of the PI was to respond to the needs identified by residents and institutions in the neighbourhood in the preliminary diagnosis, correcting the absence of collective public spaces, particularly covered spaces that can house different groups and host various activities that promote healthier lives, through the co-construction of the multifunctional community space.

The participatory process used a methodology that applies four action verbs to materialise the PI objectives. Within each verb, different activities were planned to address specific needs:

5 The Palace of Imagination was developed under the coordination of Fraterna, an entity that ethically safeguards the consent of children with their parents/legal guardians.

- 1 “Interdialogue” (bridging the space between “I” and the “Other”). The interdialogue workshops were designed with the community to discuss the goals of the construction of the PI (figure 1).⁵
- 2 “Inhabit” the neighbourhood (walking and mapping workshops) (figure 2), the play (celebrating International Play Day), the study (children using the wooden structures to do their homework), the food (bread making and vegetarian cooking workshops), family physical and mental health (through free sessions for children, young people, and professionals with a paediatrician and a psychiatrist), and the fabrics (reusing waste from the textile industries in the construction of the pieces).



fig. 1 Interdialogue through the “Community café.” Launch of the project to the community and discussion of their needs and skills to participate and where they would like the structure of the Palace to be located. Guimarães, November 29, 2021. © Children from the Emboladoura neighbourhood.

fig. 2 Inhabit my neighbourhood. Walking and mapping workshop with the community. Guimarães, December 20, 2021. © Fraterna.





fig. 3 “Activate”: universal prevention and wellness promotion with sessions on prevention of drug abuse. Guimarães, October 7, 2022. © Fraterna.

fig. 4 Recreating the study with children. This was the longest co-creation process with children (from February to September 2022). We started in February 2022, by making a 1:1 model with cardboard boxes, and continued by making models on other scales. Guimarães, February 2022. © ProChild CoLAB.

- 3 “Activate”: universal prevention, and wellness promotion with sessions on prevention of drug abuse (figure 3) and activating exchange with the environment and the sky (global communication), through the community market, for example.
- 4 “Recreate” the study (building the wooden structures) (figure 4), recreating the wall, the floor and the roof (by building the palace’s structures and creating a wall/network of communication between the project team and the residents); and, finally, recreating the dialogue among all involved.

fig. 5 Co-making of the wooden structures with children to improve their study conditions. Guimarães, July 29, 2022. © ProChild CoLAB.



The longest co-creation process with children was to “recreate” the study. We started in February 2022 by making a 1:1 scale space with cardboard boxes, and pursued this for seven months until September 2022, creating models, co-building the wooden structures, and exploring different appropriations. After co-making two different prototypes with children, we arrived at the final design proposal, which was built by a professional carpenter (figure 5).

Joining People in the Way

Considering how disadvantaged and isolated this community is, inclusion and affordability have long been major concerns. We dealt with many dimensions of inclusion by interacting with the community, young people, and the elderly population, as well as people who face a range of difficulties, such as addiction.

Different levels of involvement were also present in the stages of the PI, with children being more actively involved in appropriation and implementation of activities, whereas adults were participants and helped in the improvement of neighbourhood relationships.

Children and young people are always important stakeholders in these processes, although they are often left behind or do not actively participate in expressing their desires and needs. “For children, the right to the city is the condition of their own citizenship. This does not constitute a legal proclamation nor is it a granted statute. It is, moreover, something that results directly from public policies for children and for the city, which guarantee the participation of children and adults in the construction

6 Manuel Jacinto Sarmiento, “Infância e cidade: restrições e possibilidades,” *Educação*, no. 2 (May 2018): 16.

of the urban territory according to logics of inclusion and sustainability.”⁶ One of the key goals of the PI was to improve the neighbourhood’s collective spatial conditions through a co-creative and co-making process of the PI’s physical structures (figures 6–7) to meet previously identified community needs.

Another important goal was to integrate these residents into the PI’s structures in order to consolidate their various forms of appropriation and sense of belonging, both at the individual and the collective level (figure 8).



fig. 6 “Activate”: universal prevention and wellness promotion with sessions on prevention of drug abuse. Guimarães, October 7, 2022.
© Fraterna.



fig. 7 Building the prototype of the wooden structures and furniture pieces with children. Guimarães, April 4, 2022. © ProChild CoLAB.



fig. 8 Activate exchange: local market in Emboladoura neighbourhood. Guimarães, September 9, 2022. © Leszio.

Therefore, alongside the involvement of children and young people in the building process, they were also consulted on how to expand the use of the study structures. Using these suggestions, the team was able to design the wooden structures to meet the different purposes intended by them. The result was a diverse programme (March 2022) structured into six verbs: 1. play (room for board games, space to play); 2. look/listen; 3. be/talk/rest; 4. read; 5. enable better IT conditions; and finally, 6. arrange storage space, cabinets, etc. (figure 9).

The project not only involved the inhabitants, but also tried to consistently mobilise endogenous resources that could contribute to meeting

principles of cost affordability regarding the construction of the structures and implementation of the activities. Local communities often possess important resources that are not always acknowledged as valuable enough to be included in such projects, be it a particular craft (such as construction, textile expertise, etc.) or specific businesses that are willing to contribute to projects like the PI.

Finally, by integrating the local residents, particularly children and young people, inclusion and participation principles are thus addressed. In doing so, a revitalised sense of belonging is also achieved, which was one of the PI's core objectives from the outset. The PI's main goal was to ensure that the activities implemented would benefit the local

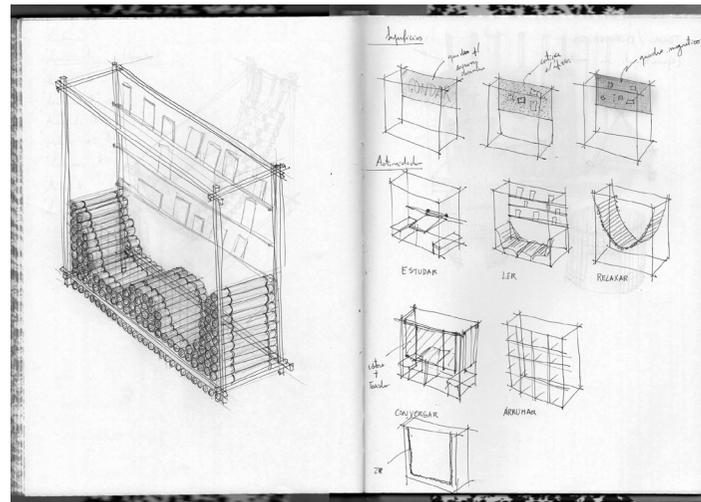


fig. 9 Study of the expansion of the use of the study structures. April 2022. © Mariana Carvalho, ProChild CoLAB.

residents and the citizens at large. During all phases of the built project, civil society and partners were crucial to achieving the desired outcomes. The communication strategy, via regular media posts, ensured that the information reached a larger audience, thus opening the neighbourhood to civil society and helping to reduce the existing social stigma. Several events brought both local residents and outsiders together, such as the exchange market (vendors and buyers) (figure 8); International Play Day (figure 10); the concert by the band Quatro e Meia (figure 11); and the vegetarian food workshop on International Women's Day (figure 12), promoting gender equality in a notoriously sexist setting.



fig. 10 Inhabit play. Celebration of International Play Day. Guimarães, May 28, 2022.
© CMG. Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yefFaQwulZ4>



fig. 11 Activate the sky. Concert by the band Quatro e Meia. With people from the community and teachers and children of the Gondar primary school. Guimarães, November 11, 2022. © Leszio. Video: <https://youtu.be/3ARBGE4PXEU>



fig. 12 Inhabit the food. Workshop on vegetarian food. International Women's Day. Guimarães. March 3, 2022. © ProChild CoLAB.

fig. 13 Children's persistent involvement in co-making the wooden structures for their study. Guimarães, July 29, 2022. © ProChild CoLAB.



- The residents were involved in all stages of the process:
- a a survey done with children in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic provided a preliminary analysis to assess what should be the focus of the project. The residents' most critical needs were all related to the basic necessity for a shared covered space and improved study conditions for children and young people;
 - b via “interdialogue” and “inhabit my neighbourhood,” we learnt about the residents' skills, how they would like to participate in the PI, and where its structure should be placed;
 - c both children and adults participated in the co-making of the wooden structures to “recreate the study.”

As a result, children discovered their own handcraft skills and how enjoyable this experience can be (figure 13). The genuine involvement of the local population in the eighteen activities helped strengthen their community ties.

The PI was designed with different stakeholders and partners (figure 14) headquartered in the territory. Many voluntarily gave countless hours of their work, as this was the only way to achieve the proposed goals with such a tight budget (€50,000). The stakeholders had different responsibilities and their level of involvement in the project varied, with some of them providing institutional or technical support, whereas others (by their own nature) were responsible for the design and implementation of the different activities. The continuous collaboration between Fraterna (a private social solidarity institution that is the promoting entity), ProChild CoLAB and EAAD, Lab2PT UM in carrying out the various activities proposed should be highlighted.

PALÁCIO DA IMAGINAÇÃO

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ENTIDADE PROMOTORA

Fraterna Centro Comunitário de Solidariedade e Integração Social

ENTIDADES PARCEIRAS

Câmara Municipal de Guimarães
Universidade do Minho LAB2PT/EAAD/UM
ProChild CoLab Against Poverty and Social Exclusion – Association
Junta de Freguesia de Gondar
Associação de Moradores da Emboladoura
Unidade de Saúde Familiar de Pevidém

PROGRAMA PÚBLICO

Bairros Saudáveis

FINANCIAMENTO

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Laboratório da Paisagem
Dr. Joaquim António da Costa Borges (Médico psiquiatra)
Dra.ª Georgina Monteiro (Médica pediatra)

LOCALIZAÇÃO

Bairro da Emboladoura, Guimarães



As part of an institution established in the neighbourhood, Fraterna’s technicians interacted closely with the community while managing the project and coordinating the various partners in a crucial effort to mobilise endogenous resources, the community’s involvement, and facilitate the weekly PI work with children and young people in its facilities. The residents’ association, the parish council and the municipality provided logistical support. The local textile company supplied waste and remnant materials to be used in several PI activities. The Landscape Lab promoted environmental awareness actions to bring about changes in attitudes and behaviours towards achieving a cleaner and healthier neighbourhood.

A Way That Crosses Fields

The transdisciplinary nature of the project allowed rigorous knowledge of the territory and its residents to be obtained, as well as the necessary proximity to the local population to build a sound, trusting relationship. This multilevel analysis of the community’s desires and needs was achieved with the help of the different professionals involved in the diagnosis process.

The activities designed to address these needs required experts from different fields of knowledge, such as sociology, visual arts, social work,

fig. 14 Credits of the “Palace of Imagination,” with the involvement of numerous fields, partners and stakeholders. © Palácio da Imagem.

educational sciences, paediatrics, psychiatry, writing, psychology, music, social education, and primary school education, all of whom participated in the different stages of the process.

Architects were involved throughout the whole process, by mapping the place, co-creating the wooden structures with children and young people, and designing the three main structures of the PI (the six wooden structures, the covered collective space, and the Imaginarium). Sociologists and educational experts designed strategies to involve the community, particularly children and young people. Health professionals were responsible for the prevention activities carried out with children and young people, working closely with a psychologist, a paediatrician and a psychiatrist, all experienced professionals in working with these age groups. Social workers and social educators were particularly important in specific activities, such as the workshops on International Women's Day, by involving the community, and contributing to gender equality awareness in a highly sexist setting.

Achieving the goals would only be possible with a transdisciplinary team such as this one, since expert knowledge was critical in addressing the complexity and dimension of the previously identified needs. In January 9–13, 2023, in the Fa[s]er workshop, sixty architecture students from EAAD. UM worked in the neighbourhood and built eight different architectural devices (a counter for the community kitchen; structures for play, etc.), thus adding a huge value to the PI.

The Aesthetics of the Way

The three languages of the textual, the visual, and the design of built structures are linked in terms of aesthetic quality. The writing was done by crafting a language faithful to the poetry of imagination. The children were directly involved in this process, which comprised activities such as the promotional fundraising video. A careful selection of colours and patterns made with children and young people crafted the distinctive visual language of the PI across all the communication pieces (logos, videos, pamphlets, etc.) (figure 15).

The idea of a distinct aesthetic that incorporates visual quality was thought to be crucial for dispelling the unfavourable perceptions regarding this excluded place.

In terms of the aesthetics of the designed structures, two points must be taken into account: a) the wooden structures are easy to assemble, allowing the project to focus on its goal of “making with the children”; they are also easy to disassemble and to move to another site, as well as being flexible and stimulating free and playful appropriation by children (figure 16); and b) the multipurpose uses of the structure of the palace (figure 17) facing the River Ave valley favour the enjoyment of this beautiful landscape.

The choice of the colour red for this structure, the same colour used in the Guimarães Historic Centre (a World Heritage Site), is an ethical



fig. 15 The children were an active part in the creation of the visual language of the “Palace of Imagination” through all the communication processes (logos, videos, pamphlets, etc.). Guimarães, November, 2021. © ProChild CoLAB.

fig. 16 The wooden structures are easy to assemble, to disassemble and to move to another site, as well as being flexible and stimulating free and playful appropriation by children. Guimarães, March 29, 2022. © ProChild CoLAB.





statement so we do not forget the 99% of this resource- and attention-starved territory. Fostering positive emotions is conducive to revitalising a sense of community, especially among the kids and teenagers who actively took part in selecting the placement of the PI. The project's various events provided local residents with access to cultural experiences, such as a concert by a well-known Portuguese band, International Play Day, a reading session for the community led by a famous author of children's books, and expert-led cooking classes that broadened the residents' experiences. The PI was able to meet people's needs and promote better lifestyles as a result.

A New Way?

The innovative character of this project stems directly from the close relationship between academia — Architecture (EAAD) and Lab2PT — ProChild COLAB, and all the local stakeholders. Academics are applying their professional understanding of the diffused territory of Vale do Ave to promote concrete changes.

Another critical trait is the transdisciplinarity of the PI, which brings together eleven different fields of knowledge to produce a singular process, to achieve a thorough understanding of the territory and its residents, as well as the necessary proximity to build trust, and to improve the emotional, psychological, and physical conditions of a place inhabited by a very vulnerable population.

The project's participatory strategies differ from the majority of mainstream interventions in underserved areas, which fail to include the local residents, especially children, in all the project's stages—from the

fig. 17 Six flexible wooden structures, a space for study and many other uses. Guimarães, January 25, 2023. © Leszio. Video: <https://youtu.be/6Tz8hzBA1Nw>

- 7 Gabriela Trevisan et al., “Infância, espaço público e participação: a abordagem do território de aprendizagem,” in *O Direito das crianças à cidade. Perspetivas desde o Brasil e Portugal*, ed. Márcia Gobbi Aparecida et al. (São Paulo: FE-USP, 2019), 54.
- 8 Idem, 54–55

diagnosis to making and appropriating the structures—since they require more engagement time regarding the completion of the whole process.

As we have argued elsewhere, building democratic decision-making processes means the possibility for each and every one, according to their responsibilities, to influence the decision about life in common, and this process is the ultimate meaning of participation (which, therefore, does not mean only “taking part,” but has an unavoidable dimension of power and is, consequently, inevitably political).⁷ In this conception, as we have argued, children are able to exercise concrete political actions, which demands adequate strategies, devices and instruments for children’s political participation, not to be confused with the institutional rules of representation in liberal democracies).⁸ The question of the balance of power is, therefore, decisive in the construction of a dynamic of participation.

Children and young people, who are the generations most commonly excluded from participatory processes, were prioritised not only by listening to their needs and desires, but also actually involving them in all the project’s stages, from conception to construction. Children and young people evaluated very positively what these activities brought them: for example, the celebration of International Play Day. The original method, strategy and the proposed structure of verbs-actions of the PI (interdialogue, inhabit, activate, recreate) can be replicated in other settings. Circular economy principles were applied for the construction of the structures via use of endogenous resources. Opening up a territory also entails inviting many local entities to contribute to improving the population’s well-being.

What Did We Attain with This Way?

The project’s direct beneficiaries are around 200 residents of the Emboladoura neighbourhood, including adults and children and young people. However, the PI’s collective structures continue to serve different uses and activities, and a larger number of people from the surrounding areas can also benefit from them. Local primary school children from the Gondar parish were also participants in activities such as International Play Day and the musical concert by Quatro e Meia, with an audience of around forty children and six adults.

Thanks to the PI, the community has built structures to address their identified needs: a covered space of 7.5 × 15 metres, capable of accommodating the uses listed in the community diagnosis; and, next to it, the Imaginarium and six flexible wooden structures, a space for study and many other uses. All this is now possible because of the PI (figures 18–19).

The PI also had an impact on creating innovative pedagogic strategies in the field of architecture, both at EAAD.Uminho and SRH University Heidelberg, by proposing exercises to the students within



fig. 18 The Imaginarium. Guimarães, January 13, 2023.
© Leszio.

fig. 19 The Palace of Imagination is a community structure with 7.5 × 15 metres of covered space, capable of accommodating the uses listed in the community diagnosis. Guimarães, January 13, 2013. © Leszio.



this ongoing in situ project in the academic year 2020–2021: fifty-five third-year students surveyed and mapped the neighbourhood’s social-spatial features, and designed the urban strategies. In the following academic year (2021–2022), Cidália Silva was a visiting professor at the SRH University Heidelberg, where the architecture students had the opportunity to develop their own design proposals for the Palace of Imagination in this neighbourhood by assessing local needs and considering the prior urban analysis by their Portuguese colleagues. It is also important to highlight the outcomes of the PI regarding the FA[S]ER (Making/Being) workshop carried out in situ on January 9–13, 2022, involving 60 EAAD.Uminho

students in the creation and construction of flexible architectural devices for this neighbourhood (figure 20), thus continuing the project of Palace of Imagination as a work in progress. This activity made a strong impacted on the students, since it was the first time they had the opportunity to work with a “real-world” situation. Having 140 architecture students facing real-world challenges equates to sowing a seed for the blooming of a generation committed to “the needs of territories, communities and individuals that need particular and urgent attention.”

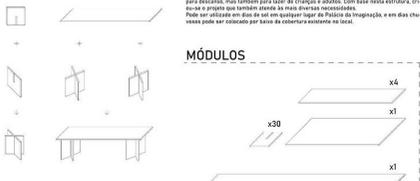
FRAGMENTOS

O projeto tem como função servir de apoio ao Palácio da Imaginação como um elemento versátil que se adapta às necessidades dos centros do bairro. Caracteriza-se por ter quatro braços de 2m x 4,5m, um braço de 6m x 4,5m e uma mesa de 2m x 1,60m. A partir destes braços é possível criar diversos módulos que podem ser usados para a realização de laboratório, oficinas de trabalho de grupo e outras atividades comunitárias.

A ideia surge a partir do projeto Praça da Beira, localizado no bairro da Escultura Park, em Vila Rica de São Paulo, que consiste numa estrutura metálica bastante robusta, mas com base neutra - mais adequada para lazer de crianças e adultos. Com base nesta estrutura, criou-se o projeto que também dá origem à mesa, com as seguintes características:

Podem ser utilizados em áreas de lazer ou simplesmente para o Palácio da Imaginação, e em áreas que não são cobertas por uma cobertura existente no local.

MÓDULOS



COMBINAÇÕES



Nesta combinação forma-se um banco, onde podem ocorrer atividades culturais entre a comunidade.

No 2º combinação obtém-se uma unidade de alguns metros de comprimento, com uma mesa de 6m x 4,5m, para reuniões e outras atividades.

A 3ª proposta consiste num banco, numa espécie de mesa, com uma mesa de 6m x 4,5m, para reuniões e outras atividades.

Esta proposta mostra a utilização da mesa de uma forma mais versátil, com braços a diferentes níveis de altura, permitindo a utilização da estrutura e funcionalidade.

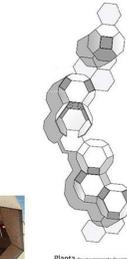
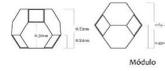
A 5ª proposta consiste numa unidade de alguns metros de comprimento, com uma mesa de 6m x 4,5m, para reuniões e outras atividades.



FA[S]JER

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No bairro da embaudadura, em Condear, surge o “Palácio da Imaginação”, de uso destinado à comunidade. A ambiguidade que este espaço apresenta permite a criação de dispositivos e mobiliário que pretende acompanhar e responder às necessidades e pedidos dos moradores. Deste modo, surge a instalação de um playground que tenta responder às necessidades de várias faixas etárias. Depois, cria-se a “Zona do chegar”, onde, através do aproveitamento de restos, constrói-se um plano de parede retrátil que cumpre várias funções: uma tela de projeção, aproveitando o espaço em função de cinema, proteção contra os elementos, como o sol e o precipitação, e vento. Ao mesmo tempo, cria um background para todos os equipamentos interativos, no caso os laboratórios (estes também em madeira) e uma estrutura de madeira dimensionada para crianças, composta por pedredos hexagonais de madeira que, através dos seus diâmetros e vazios, cria um percurso interno, no qual as crianças podem percorrer, interagir e conviver.



Alçada em uma proposta de composição



Planta em uma proposta de composição



A proposta da criação de uma paragem de autocarro foi um desafio estrutural para o grupo, dado ser uma elemento estrutural necessário para o bairro e os seus habitantes.

Deste modo, iniciou-se o desenvolvimento de uma forma modular que poderia receber tanto a gestão da paragem, como uma variedade de outras funções que afetam o bairro, como a falta de iluminação. Esta modularidade poderia ser facilmente multiplicada, podendo ser explorada brevemente para outros tipos de construções, como lugares de convívio para todos os idades.

Concluído a dinâmica da estrutura não era compatível com a brevidade do workshop, o que nos levou a decidir desta proposta.

Surge então a ideia de um banco de tecido impermeável que protege a comunidade, tanto da chuva como do sol, acompanhado de um banco, feita a partir do material de 5 peças e que pode ser usado de diferentes maneiras e por várias pessoas ao mesmo tempo.

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A Sustainable Way

The key objectives of the PI interconnect four main dimensions of sustainability: ethical, environmental, social, and economical. Within the ethical domain, the project pledges to responsibly meet community needs by participating in the eighteen activities, including the process of creating adaptable collective structures that can be used both inside Fraterna (the promoter of the project and the solidarity institution that supports this population), and outside, in the public space, for numerous uses.

fig. 20 Workshop FA[S]JER, January 9–13, 2023. © EAAD.

- 9 United Nations. 1989. "Convention on the Rights of the Child." Treaty Series 1577 (November): 3.
- 10 Council of Europe, "Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027)," (Brussels, March 2022).

The project formed different partnerships with the local community, stakeholders, and companies such as the textile industries, which are a trademark of this region; these businesses participated in manufacturing components for the structures and provided waste and remnant materials (fabrics, cardboard rolls, etc.) that were reused throughout the project's activities. These partnerships connect the environmental, social, and economic sustainable dimensions.

The environmental dimension is enhanced by reconnecting people with nature, namely by integrating them into the natural realm. These residents can now enjoy a pleasant, bright environment thanks to the placement of the palace's structure facing the River Ave valley with its beautiful agricultural slopes. The project was able to establish a connection between environmental sustainability and public health by bringing together the local family health unit, two doctors, and a local restaurant to promote healthy eating habits on two levels: using locally available ingredients such as homegrown vegetables, and teaching children how to prepare healthy and tasty meals. Regarding the economic dimension, it must be emphasised that promoting the local market allowed residents to sell their own produce and draw in customers from the neighbouring areas, thus helping to mitigate the social stigma that continues to affect this place.

Different challenges are addressed with this project. The first regards citizens' participation in meaningful projects in their own communities, especially children and young people, who are quite often excluded from these opportunities. Their participation constitutes a fundamental right⁹ and it is also a priority under the scope of the European Strategy for the Rights of the Child,¹⁰ in addition to being a condition for their recognition as full citizens. Environmental concerns and sustainability are also at the centre of the project, as explained previously, in alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), namely sustainable cities and communities, and climate action. By working with deprived communities, the aim of the project was to tackle social exclusion and poverty, which fall under the first SDG, gender equality (SDG 5), for example by celebrating Women's Day, involving men and women, girls and boys in preparing healthy meals to take away, and also by promoting a healthy lifestyle and well-being (SDG 3) via sessions with health professionals open to the larger community. Finally, it involved quality of education (SDG 4) through the construction of the wooden structures that provided children with an adapted space both for individual and group study, co-designed and co-made with them.

The right to beauty and aesthetic quality is an ethical commitment to universal inclusion, no matter how deprived people are — ethics and aesthetics hand in hand.

Is It Possible to Re-Walk This Way?

This is a site-specific, non-conformist project. Still, paradoxically it can be replicated in other places or communities. The ethics adopted is the first principle to be endlessly repeated: to recreate over and over again a utopian project that addresses the needs and potentials of people and place, without any prejudice, through acceptance and empathy without a priori judgments as the starting point for committed change and the construction of a place for freedom and inclusion. The project can be replicated according to four points.

- a The methodology is structured in five verbs/actions—“to interdialogue” as an instrument to interconnect all the individuals involved in a project; “to recreate” whatever is needed (the wall, the ceiling, the doors, etc.); “to inhabit” (the food, the play, etc.); “to activate” (the exchange, the environment, the sky, etc.).
- b The study box’s wooden structure is a prototype that can be manufactured and used in any place by module repetition; the process has demonstrated that this can be used both inside and outside in the public space (for example, for music stands or market benches); it can be appropriated in an infinite number of ways, providing an intimate space for a single child to feel at home in their own body while peacefully reading a book while in a shared and common space, and the perception of the collectiveness of the structure by playing with the modules to create a protected place.
- c The Imaginarium is a small triangular architectural piece equipped both with a “spyhole” to look at the sky and expand our sense of infinity and belonging to a much larger universe, and a square window facing the play area.
- d Finally, the project’s motto, “Imagination” as the capacity for integral communication of each being and of all.

“Finally, the construction of the public space is intended for the entire community. Against a reductionist conception that presents the participation of children as being limited to the construction of spaces, sites, equipment or urban furniture whose use is made exclusively or predominantly by children (especially playgrounds), what is actually at stake is the construction of humanised cities, with streets where there can be autonomy from non-motorized mobility, decent housing neighbourhoods open to conviviality, fruitful and diversified leisure spaces, trees, gardens, parks and green spaces, accessibility to educational and cultural, social and health spaces, accessible and clear information points, in short, material conditions for the effective exercise of the right to the city.”¹¹