



The legacy of Children's Parks as recreational, educational and urban facilities: two examples from Santo Amaro, São Paulo¹

O legado dos Parques Infantis como equipamentos recreativos, educacionais e urbanos: dois exemplares de Santo Amaro, São Paulo

El legado de los Parques Infantiles como equipamientos recreativos, educativos y urbanos: dos ejemplos de Santo Amaro, São Paulo

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Abstract

The article addresses the relationship between children and youth educational equipment and the urban context in the city of São Paulo between the years 1935 and 1985, a period during which public institutions, called parks and corners, designed to serve children and youth from working-class backgrounds persisted. The goal is to recover the history of playgrounds and illustrate how the facilities implemented in large areas, strategically located, and with relative visual permeability between the interior and exterior of the lots, contributed to the idea of public facilities integrated into the life of neighborhoods. The historiographical-based research relies on the argument that the establishment and subsequent deactivation of playgrounds, due to the modernization of educational policies in the children and youth sector, reflected changes not only in pedagogical and social parameters but also in the connection of educational equipment with its immediate surroundings.

Keywords: Playground. Santo Amaro. Educational Public Policy.

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Resumo

O artigo aborda a relação entre equipamento educacional infanto-juvenil e o contexto urbano na cidade de São Paulo entre os anos de 1935 e 1985, período em que perduraram as instituições públicas denominadas de parques e recantos destinados ao atendimento das crianças e jovens das classes operárias. O objetivo é recuperar a história dos parques infantis e ilustrar como os equipamentos implantados em grandes áreas, em pontos estrategicamente localizados e com relativa permeabilidade visual entre o interior e o exterior dos lotes contribuíram com o ideário de equipamento público integrado à vida dos bairros. A pesquisa de base historiográfica apoia-se sobre o argumento de que a implantação e a posterior desativação dos parques infantis em função da modernização das políticas educacionais na área infanto-juvenil refletiram em alterações não apenas nos parâmetros pedagógicos e sociais, como também na articulação do equipamento educacional com o seu entorno imediato.

Palavras-chave: Parque Infantil. Santo Amaro. Política Pública Educacional.

Resumen

El artículo discute la relación entre el equipamiento educativo para niños y jóvenes y el contexto urbano en la ciudad de São Paulo entre 1935 y 1985, período en el que duraron las instituciones públicas llamadas parques y rincones para el cuidado de niños y jóvenes de las clases populares. El objetivo es recuperar la historia de los parques infantiles e ilustrar cómo los equipamientos instalados en grandes áreas, en puntos estratégicamente ubicados y con relativa permeabilidad visual entre el interior y el exterior de los lotes contribuyeron al ideal de equipamiento público integrado a la vida de los barrios. La investigación de base historiográfica parte del argumento de que la implementación y posterior desactivación de los parques infantiles a raíz de la modernización de las políticas educativas en el área infantil reflejó cambios no solo en los parámetros pedagógicos y sociales, sino también en la articulación del equipamiento educativo con sus los alrededores más cercanos.

Palabras claves: Parque infantil. Santo Amaro. Política Pública Educativa.

Introduction

The article addresses the relationship between children and youth educational equipment and the urban context in the city of São Paulo between the years 1935 and 1985, a period during which public institutions known as children and youth parks and corners persisted. The equipment enjoyed the prerogative of being attractive elements to the population and consequently were used as political propaganda by successive municipal governments.

The Children's Parks were implemented by the poet and novelist Mário de Andrade (1893-1945) during his tenure as Secretary of Culture of the Municipality of São Paulo between the years 1935 and 1938, in the administration of then Mayor Fábio da Silva Prado (1887-1963), who governed the city from 1934 to 1938. The facilities were intended to serve children and youth from working-class backgrounds and were part of Mário de Andrade's vision to alleviate the social and cultural problems of the most vulnerable population. He found it unacceptable to have a cultural divide between the elite and the people, as he believed that everyone should have access to the Brazilian cultural heritage (PESAVENTO, 2015).

The children's parks can be considered as the origin of the São Paulo early childhood education network and the first Brazilian municipal public experience in education (although not school-based) for children from working-class families who had the opportunity to play, be educated and cared for, experience nature, and move in large spaces (FARIA, 1999, p. 2).

Miranda (1942) associates the creation of Children's Parks with the precedents proposed by three educators active in the late 18th century: Pestalozzi, Fichte, and Froebel. According to the author, Pestalozzi advocated that early childhood education was exclusively the mother's responsibility, while Fichte favored delegating to the State the responsibility for the formation of children. Froebel, in turn, proposed a reconciliation of these two thoughts, recommending that early childhood education be shared between the family and the State, suggesting that the child "should spend a few hours a day outside the home, in a children's community, engaging in organized activities" (MIRANDA, 1942, p. 2). Froebel named the spaces that would house these activities "Kindergartens" and directed that they should provide activities for physical strengthening, stimulate the senses, and the spirit. Additionally, the educator invented some games that used balls, cubes, and squares, as well as manual activities such as clay modeling and paper cutting.

The ideas explored by Froebel in Germany were brought to the United States in 1885 by the physician Maria Azkerzewska, who suggested the installation of a sand table in a public garden in the city of Boston. By 1886, three of these recreational spaces were already installed in public gardens, forming the first playgrounds in the American soil. The idea spread and was implemented in other European countries, such as England, Austria, Belgium, France, and the Netherlands, as well as in South American countries, including Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile (MIRANDA, 1942).

According to Niemeyer (2005), in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, playgrounds began to be promoted as recreational and educational facilities that responded to a social demand for the establishment of public leisure spaces. Popular demands during this period were linked to issues of leisure and free time, contrasting with the long working hours in industries. At that time, there were also widespread debates about the need to address concerns related to sanitation and public hygiene.

The recreational-educational typology then served as a means of confronting the social and urban transformations resulting from industrialization, with one of its objectives being to keep the children and youth away from the streets, which had come to be considered as dangerous, unhealthy, and inhospitable (NIEMEYER, 2005).

During the administration of Mayor Engineer-Architect Luis Inácio Romeiro de Anhaia Melo, between the years 1930 and 1931, discussions began on the qualification of the public open spaces in the modern industrial city. Three years later, the recreational-educational typology was introduced as a public policy with the implementation of the first Children's Parks in the city of São Paulo through Act 767 on January 9, 1935 (SERÃO..., 1946).

Therefore, this text addresses the theme of Children's Parks in São Paulo with the aim of contributing to the discussion on the relationship between public educational facilities and their integration with the urban and social surroundings. The goal is to recover the history of the children's parks and illustrate how the facilities distributed across various zones of the city, especially in areas with an industrial focus, implemented in large lots, strategically located, and with relative visual permeability between the interior and exterior, contributed to the concept of public facilities integrated into the life of neighborhoods.

This integration between the facility and the community allowed for the creation of social and emotional bonds between the population and the facility, becoming a reference in providing public services to children in deprived areas and signifying places. Manuel Castells asserts that "the vast majority of people in traditional as well as developed societies live in places and therefore perceive their space based on the place. A place is a location whose form, function, and meaning are independent within the boundaries of physical contiguity" (CASTELLS, 1999, p. 447).

Therefore, according to Castells (1999), a place is clearly identifiable both in appearance and content, despite the transformations it may have undergone, even if affected by renewal processes. Guimarães (2022) supports this statement and emphasizes the need to build "places" and not just "spaces," as "a place presupposes the existence of meaning, while space is only the infrastructure." Within this scenario, the general objective of the research is to discuss the importance of children's parks beyond their role as institutional space, deepening the conversation about the integration of the facility with its physical territory.

The argument being developed is that the bibliographical references addressing the topic of children's parks and corners provide valuable accounts of the creation and development of the public policy for implementing institutional facilities, both from the perspective of recreational and educational practices and the programs offered by the institutions. However, the aspect related to urban integration, especially regarding land use, is still underexplored and less publicized. Therefore, the hypothesis being developed is that the deactivation of children's parks due to the modernization of educational policies in the children and youth sector reflected changes not only in pedagogical and social parameters but also impacted urban planning relationships and their integration with the immediate surroundings.

This is a historiographical research supported by three databases: bibliographic references on the topic, articles from newspapers accessible in digital databases, and maps available in the digital database of the Municipality of São Paulo. The study focuses on two children's parks in the Santo Amaro district, in the southern part of the city of São Paulo. The selected parks comprise two facilities built on plots only 900 meters apart: the Santo Amaro Children's Park, inaugurated in 1938 and located on Adolfo Pinheiro Avenue, and the Borba Gato Children's Park, inaugurated in 1953 and located on Paulo Eiró Street. In addition to the exceptional proximity between the plots, the two facilities were chosen because they represent two different moments in the implementation of the facilities and have distinct destinies when they were deactivated.

The Children's Parks and Retreats of São Paulo

In 1935, the Municipal Games and Recreation Service began in São Paulo, which would later become the Division of Education, Assistance, and Recreation within the Department of Education and Culture. The organization was responsible for implementing a plan to assist the children of São Paulo, through the establishment of Children's Parks and Children's Retreats, with the aim of providing a healthy, joyful, and instructive life at no cost to participating families (OS PARQUES..., 1951).

The children's parks and retreats were seemingly similar institutions; however, they were intended for children from different social classes and economic levels, thus serving distinct purposes. The Children's Parks aimed to assist, educate, and recreate underprivileged children in all aspects, while the Children's Retreats provided entertainment for children residing in residential complexes and apartments that lacked space for recreational activities due to limited leisure areas.

The Children's Retreats were primarily established in public squares near densely populated vertical areas. The first Children's Retreat was inaugurated in República Square on November 12, 1946 (MEIO..., 1950). Subsequently, two more retreats were opened: one in Jardim da Luz and another in Buenos Aires Square (now Buenos Aires Park).

Initially, three Children's Parks were opened: Dom Pedro II, Ipiranga, and Lapa. Subsequently, new units were inaugurated, including Santo Amaro (1938), Barra Funda, Vila Romana, Bom Retiro (1941), and Catumbi (1942), forming a total of 8 children's parks.

Nicanor Miranda, then Chief of the Division of Education and Recreation, outlined an initial program for the implementation of the facilities, using the following definition: "A children's park is an open-air educational institution, whose purpose is to bring to the child's knowledge the elements of physical, moral, and intellectual life, in an exclusively recreational form" (MIRANDA, 1936, p. 95).

The key concept applied in the proposal of Children's Parks was that of education through recreation. Maria Aparecida Duarte, General Inspector of Children's Parks at the Department of Physical Education of the State of São Paulo, presented the following objective for the facilities:

Educating the child through recreation is the main objective of the Children's Park. Whether installed in the State Capital or the poorest Municipality, its purpose is the same: education in all its aspects – physical, moral, social, and intellectual – achieved through play, the child's normal activity, and organized toys (DUARTE, 1941, p. 303).

According to Maria Aparecida Duarte (1941), the installation of a standard Children's Park should follow the following premises: a plot located in a populous neighborhood, with an area of 8 to 10 thousand square meters, preferably flat and with good tree coverage, allowing the installation of a shed or possessing a building that could be used. The minimum program necessary for its operation included a shed or space for large events and for use on rainy days; rooms for professionals; rooms for a doctor and a dentist; a library; a pantry; sanitary facilities with showers, and changing rooms.

According to Niemeyer (2005), the land occupation with covered built area was around 15%, leaving the rest of the area available for the installation of outdoor equipment and the planting of trees and shrubs near the borders, serving as a living fence and shading for hot summer days. The external spaces housed equipment for physical exercises, games, and play, a pool when possible, and an open grassy area for events and outdoor presentations.

The initial public criticisms in the press acknowledged the potential of the equipment proposal but already raised questions about the role they would play in early childhood education:

The purpose of these parks is very appealing. There was initially some concern among educators that they might compete with groups, diverting children from study benches to recreational and sports fields. We know that some complaints were formulated in this regard. However, the truth is that parks, when well-guided, can become allies of public schools (NOTAS..., 1938, p. 5).

In 1942, Nicanor Miranda pointed out the changes and revisions that were necessary in the programmatic premises of the children's parks in response to recurring criticisms. The goal was to change the population's idea that parks served only as sports fields with shelters, sheds, and recreational equipment for children to play with. Thus, Nicanor altered the definition of Children's Parks to: "public spaces where, through recreation and organized play, an effort is made to educate the child by simultaneously providing all the necessary assistance" (MIRANDA, 1942, p. 38).

Thus, Children's Parks were assigned three purposes: to assist, educate, and entertain. The modalities of medical, dental, and food assistance were added to the pre-existing modalities of social assistance, education, and recreation, which were already practiced through a set of activities: gymnastics, games, dances, tournaments, library services, newspapers, clubs, choral music, modeling, drawing, handicrafts, excursions, and festivals.

In 1946, there were only seven children's parks in operation in the capital, and the press of that time denounced the structural flaws and organizational deficiencies of the existing parks, while emphasizing the need to implement new units. The reference model continued to be the example adopted in the United States, where children's parks held a prominent place and were widespread throughout the country. The main criticism concerned the need to hire technical experts and educators who effectively applied educational techniques in the activities:

The service of children's parks, entrusted to the guidance of the municipal government, is in need of major repairs for it to yield the results for which it was created. Initially, we must emphasize that there was an error from the beginning: the lack of technicians capable of organizing the parks on solid and efficient foundations. We have few parks, and those few are inefficient (SERÃO..., 1946, p. 3).

In total, in 1946, the Division of Education and Recreation of the Department of Culture of the Municipality managed: the seven children's parks that operated in two periods; four youth clubs and one girls' club, distributed in some of the neighborhoods with the highest population density; and a camp near the Guarapiranga reservoir. Together, these units assisted approximately a total of 4,500 children, 600 boys, and 150 girls daily, which was considered little in proportion to the population at that time (SERÃO..., 1946).

In four years, the numbers increased, and by 1950, there were operational in São Paulo: 22 children's parks, 2 children's corners, 6 boys' centers, and 4 girls' centers. In total, 553,453 attendances were recorded in the first 6 months of the year (MEIO..., 1950). The secretary at the time, the lawyer Dr. Pedro Brasil Bandecchi, acknowledged the existence of some flaws in the children's parks and corners and stated that the solution depended on the release of resources

already defined by the municipal executive, whose mayor was Mr. Amando de Arruda Pereira (1889-1955). Furthermore, the replacement of the children's parks in Santo Amaro and Lins de Vasconcelos was already planned due to the insufficient number of spots given the existing demand (RIBEIRO, 1952, p.10).

With the enactment of Decree-Law 3,185 in 1956, which established the public network of primary education, children's parks began to coexist with the new school classes. This marked the beginning of the weakening of their political influence, and primary education gradually diminished the role of children's parks (NIEMEYER, 2002).

This was observed in 1968, during the administration of then-mayor José Vicente Faria Lima (1909-1969). At that time, 12 pre-primary courses were inaugurated to accommodate 720 children, replacing 12 children's parks. These parks yielded their spaces to the new configuration of classrooms. The affected parks were Mooca, Vila Jaguará, Consolação, Barra Funda, Vila Gomes, Vila Manchester, Casa Verde, Vila Pirituba, Jardim Japão Novo, Monções, Cruz das Almas, and Santo Amaro. The classes were formed with 30 students and operated in two periods (PARQUES..., 1968).

At the time, the Director of the Department of Education, Assistance, and Recreation, Maria Teresa Fumagalli, explained that, according to education experts, she was convinced that the best way to combat failure in primary and secondary schools was to provide pre-primary education for children. At that time, Director Maria Teresa advocated for the early promotion of literacy, stating:

The children's parks aim to provide preschool-age children with sensory and communicative development; especially benefit children with sociological needs; emphasize the importance of readiness for schooling, particularly literacy (PARQUES..., 1968).

Since then, the other Children's Parks that had not yet been adapted to become preschools gradually suffered degradation due to the reduction or even lack of funds for full operation. On July 29, 1975, Decree No. 12,115 was promulgated, regulating the Municipal Education Framework and its respective positions and functions within the Municipal Teaching career. Article 49 of the Decree states: "The current Children's Parks of the Department of Early Childhood Education shall be called Municipal Schools of Early Childhood Education" (SÃO PAULO, MUNICÍPIO, 1975), officially closing these facilities.

The Children's Parks of Santo Amaro

The district of Santo Amaro, along with the districts of Campo Belo and Campo Grande, make up the Santo Amaro Subprefecture located in the southwest region of the city of São Paulo. The geographical, cultural, and social importance of the original historical nucleus of Santo Amaro is described from its foundation in 1552 when the settlement emerged near the indigenous village of Guaianazes in the region initially called Ibirapuera. Almost a century after the visit of Father José de Anchieta, the church in the region received its first chaplain, Father João de Pontes, in 1686. The settlement was elevated to the status of a village on July 10, 1832, and remained an independent nucleus until 1935 when it was annexed to the municipality of São Paulo.

Even after annexation to the capital, the region of the original nucleus remains a reference and a center of attraction for the community in the south of São Paulo, as it houses a significant popular commerce and public and private entities of considerable importance, such as hospitals, libraries, museums, and cultural spaces, notaries, public service centers, units of SESC, SENAC, and SENAI, public schools, bus terminals, metro stations, and bus corridors.

The Santo Amaro region also followed the process of industrialization in São Paulo. With the end of the 2nd World War and the relative stabilization of the commercial and economic situation in developed countries, São Paulo entered a new phase of expansion based on industrial development. With the increasing value of land located near the central region, there was a demand for more distant locations, such as the Santo Amaro region, for the establishment of new industries.

According to Berardi (1981), the attractive factors of Santo Amaro for the establishment of industries were the ease of transporting production and the existence of dams and streams that allowed the disposal of waste, encouraging the installation of some heavy industries in the region.

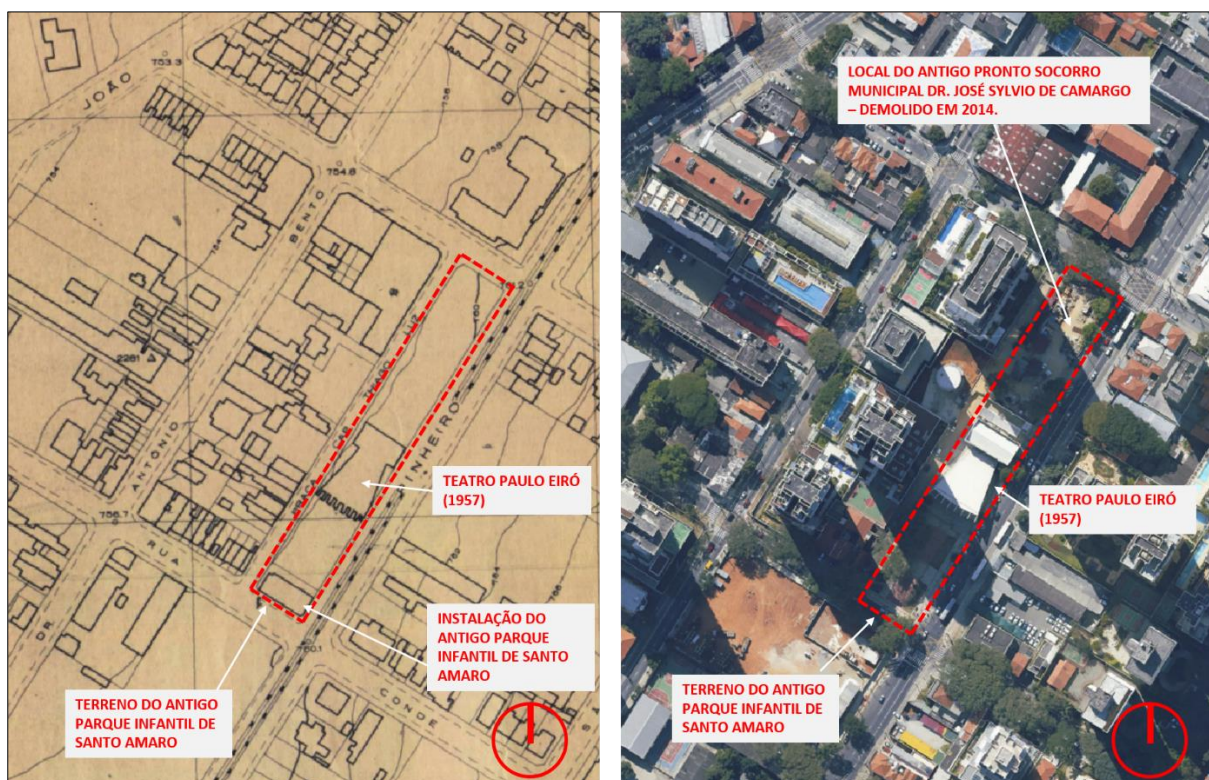
Due to its historical and economic relevance, Santo Amaro was chosen to host two Children's Parks: Santo Amaro Children's Park (1938) and Children's Park 4 (1953), now Borba Gato Municipal Early Childhood Education School (EMEI).

Santo Amaro Children's Park

The Santo Amaro Children's Park was officially inaugurated on June 26, 1938, by Mr. Francisco Pati, director of the Municipal Department of Culture at the time. The inauguration featured artistic performances including dance, gymnastics, and children's games (NOTAS..., 1938).

The project was carried out by the then Subprefecture of Santo Amaro and handed over to the administration of the Department of Culture. The rectangular-shaped plot had an approximate area of 12 thousand square meters, forming an isolated block bordered by Adolfo Pinheiro Avenue to the east, São José Street to the north, Salomão Karlik Street to the west, and Conde de Itu Street to the south (Figure 1).

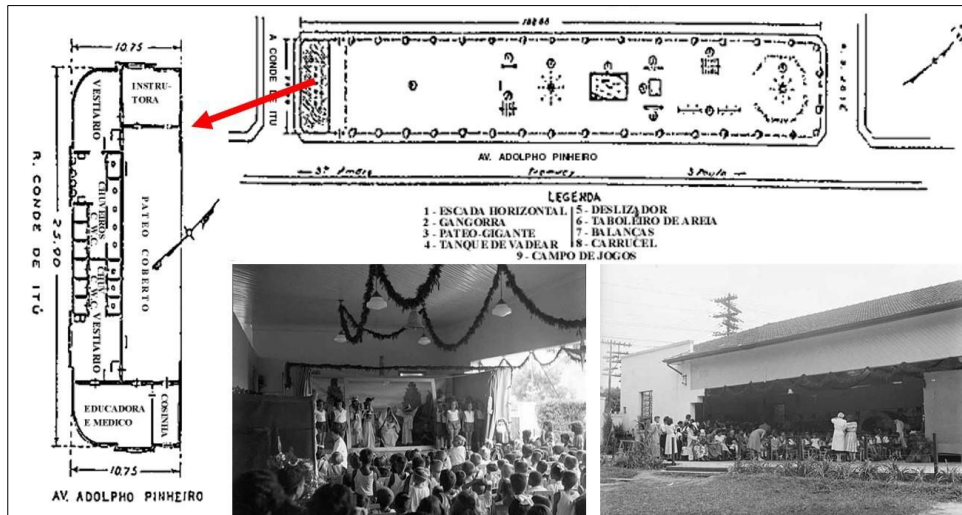
Figure 1 – On the left, a 1954 map indicating the outline of the land and the shed of the Santo Amaro Children's Park. On the right, an aerial photo from 2017 showing the Paulo Eiró Municipal Theater, inaugurated in 1957 and located in the center of the former Children's Park's grounds.



Source: Developed based on Geosampa data (2022).

The playground complex consisted of a shed measuring 25 meters in length by 10.75 meters in width, occupying the southwest end of the terrain, with an area of 268.75 square meters. The remaining area of the terrain was allocated for outdoor activities with children's toys: seesaw, sandpit, slide, swings, and carousel (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Left: plan of the construction of Santo Amaro Children's Park, which occupied the southwest end of the 12,000 square meters terrain. Below: photos of the building in the mid-1950s



Source: Drawings: Niemeyer, 2002, p. 116; Photographs: Collections... (1940-1950).

The block presented a slope between Adolfo Pinheiro Avenue, to the South, and Salomão Karlik Street, to the North, which was solved by leveling the terrain in its lower quota and creating a slope on the southeast face. The entire area was enclosed by a perforated fence and surrounded by a hedge of shrubs, allowing visual integration and giving the place a "backyard" look, creating a welcoming atmosphere at the same time (Figure 3).

Figure 3 – View of the external recreation area of Santo Amaro Children's Park from São José Street, in the 1930s.



Source: Niemeyer (2005), p. 11; Benedito J. Duarte (1938)

The Santo Amaro Children's Park was deactivated in the 1950s when the park's land was chosen for the implementation of a neighborhood Municipal Theater. The proposal was part of the School Agreement Program, a partnership between the municipality and the State of São Paulo, created in 1949, which proposed the establishment of a set of theaters in the city's peripheral neighborhoods.

The 1954 map (Figure 1) shows that for a period, the Children's Park building in the southwest and the construction of the Paulo Eiró Theater coexisted on the land. The theater was located in the center of the land and would only be inaugurated in 1957. The northeastern portion was later occupied by the former Municipal Emergency Room Dr. José Sylvio de Camargo, which was demolished in 2014. The land was then used for the construction of Subway Line 5-Lilac.

Currently, the Paulo Eiró Theater has a square with a mural by the artist Júlio Guerra on its main facade, occupying the portion where the Santo Amaro Children's Park shed was previously located. On the rear face of the theater, after the completion of the subway works, the hoardings were removed, and the area was transformed into a new square, inaugurated on July 2, 2022 (Figure 4). The square, named Adelino Ozores Neto II, has participatory management for sociocultural use, solidarity economy, fairs, and social events, as well as an adapted and accessible children's playground and an area for pets (PREFEITURA..., 2022).

Figure 4 – Clockwise: square in front of the Paulo Eiró Theater; general view of Adelino Ozores Neto II Square; view of the equipment in Adelino Ozores Neto II Square; view of the rear of the Paulo Eiró Theater.

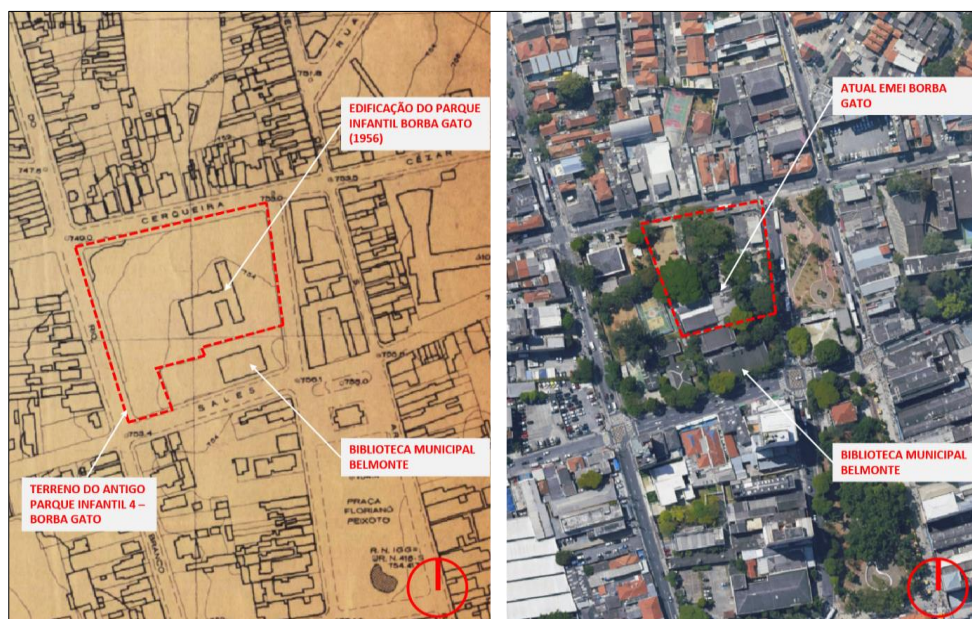


Source: Collection of the authors (2023)

Former Children's Park 4 and current Borba Gato EMEI

The former Children's Park 4, now the Borba Gato Municipal Early Childhood Education School (EMEI), began its activities on January 25, 1953. The school is located on Paulo Eiró Street, on the land in front of Salim Farah Maluf Square and near Floriano Peixoto Square (Figure 5). The block of approximately 11,200 square meters housed, at its center, the Children's Park building, and on its south side, the Belmonte Public Library, which was also inaugurated on the same date, thus forming a cultural and leisure complex.

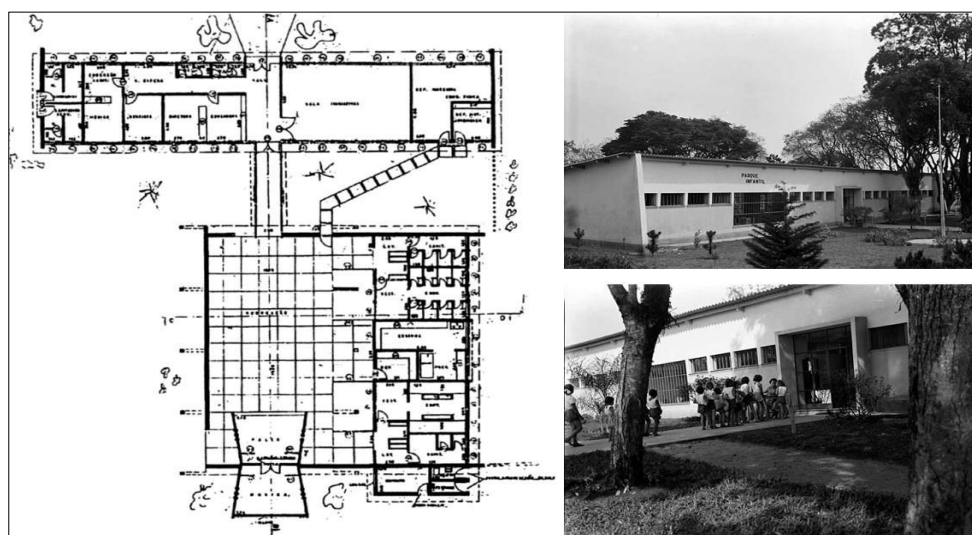
Figure 5 – On the left, a 1954 map indicating the outline of the terrain and the construction of Playground 4 - Borba Gato. On the right, an aerial photo from 2017 showing the Belmonte Municipal Library and the construction of the current Borba Gato EMEI.



Source: Self-prepared based on Geosampa data (2022).

The building intended for the uses of the Playground consisted of two blocks joined by a covered marquee. The regularly shaped block to the east housed the main entrance, administrative space, and individual counseling rooms for the children. The square-shaped block to the west contained dressing rooms, kitchen, dining area, and storage rooms (Figure 6).

Figure 6 – On the left, the plan of Playground 4, currently Borba Gato Municipal Early Childhood Education School, and on the right, photos of the building in 1954.



Source: Drawings: Niemeyer, p. 168 (2005) e Photographs: Gabriel Zellai (1954)

In the images of Figure 7, it is possible to observe the perforated enclosure that surrounded the entire perimeter of the court, and the two buildings closely implanted without divisions between them, with a direct connection between the Library and the Playground.

Figure 7 – On the left and center, views of the Santo Amaro Children's Library in 1953 and 1966. On the right, a view of Playground 4 (currently Borba Gato EMEI) in Santo Amaro in 1953.



Source: collections..., (from the decades of 1950 and 1960)

In 1968, Playground 4 was selected to be one of the 12 institutions transformed into preschools, in accordance with the new educational policy implemented by Mayor Faria Lima. A few years later, the location became officially recognized as a school unit through Decree No. 20,348, dated November 5, 1984 (São Paulo, Municipality, 1984), which consolidated the creation of school units in the Municipal Education Network of the city of São Paulo during the administration of Mayor Mário Covas.

From the 1980s onward, the land of the former playground was divided and occupied by new constructions, losing its characteristic of a tree-lined recreational park. On the subdivided lots, buildings were constructed from the 1980s onwards: an annex for the Belmonte Public Library, with the original design by architect Eduardo Corona; a building for the Santo Agostinho Daycare, on the northwest side of the block; a warehouse for the Corrente Libertadora Cultural Association, a non-governmental institution, located in the northeast portion, and a new set of classrooms for the EMEI on the southwest side of the block.

Thus, the block became divided into three uses and enclosed with blind walls along almost its entire perimeter, leaving only the faces around the Belmonte Public Library with a perforated metal fence (Figure 8).

Figure 8 – On the left, a view of the front closure of the Belmonte Public Library with a metal fence, and on the right, a view of the wall of the Borba Gato EMEI.



Source: Collection of the authors (2023)

Discussions

The history of the implementation and spread of playgrounds in the city of São Paulo corroborates Pesavento's statement (2015) that they served as an embryonic foundation for the current network of early childhood education in São Paulo. This is due to their scope and the transformations that have taken place over time to assimilate the necessary changes in response to the criticisms raised.

The account of the temporal journey of two examples of playgrounds in the district of Santo Amaro, from inauguration to the deactivation of the facilities, demonstrated that the leisure and educational qualities they incorporated were also expressed in their implementation as urban objects integrated with their surroundings and the local population. In the case of Borba Gato Playground, the connection with the Belmonte Children's Library on the same plot allowed a solution of program complementation since children could engage in sports, leisure, educational, and cultural activities in the same location. In the case of Santo Amaro Playground, the visually permeable enclosure of the lot allowed visual integration and proximity between the population and the activities developed in the public facility.

However, starting in 1968, then-Mayor Faria Lima decided to innovate in the field of municipal education, transforming playgrounds into pre-primary class institutions with renewed teaching methods. As a result, some playgrounds were adapted for the new classroom configurations, while others were simply deactivated, and the locations were repurposed for other uses.

Faria (2015) linked the transformation of Playground into Municipal Early Childhood Education Schools as the factor responsible for the loss of emphasis on the playful and artistic character, leading to a detriment of the free-spirited nature previously enabled by games and play encouraged among children. The author believes that the current model of education focused on literacy has replaced play, discouraging and preventing the construction of new knowledge, both for teachers and students. She lamented what she considered a setback in the national public education policy by requiring children's enrollment in preschool and the early entry of six-year-olds into Elementary Education.

On the other hand, Ana Lucia Faria (2015) viewed with optimism the creation of the Unified Education Centers – CEUs, which she referred to as the “Playground of the 21st Century.” According to her, these are the current facilities that come closest to the playful-educational concept embedded as public policy in the early playgrounds of the city.

In the case of the playgrounds in Santo Amaro, the difference in the final destination of the facilities demonstrated two opposite solutions: the land of the former Borba Gato Playground was subdivided into lots to accommodate different public facilities and was completely enclosed with walls around the entire perimeter and along the limits with the sidewalks. On the other hand, the land of the former Santo Amaro Playground was transformed into a public square in front of the Paulo Eiró Theater, and more recently, in 2022, a new square was implemented at the rear of the mentioned theater.

The two situations described demonstrate how the allocation of the lands impacted their immediate surroundings: the current Borba Gato EMEI reflects the current typology of elementary schools, with the building isolated and segregated from its surroundings. On the other hand, the Paulo Eiró Municipal Theater continues to be an important urban reference for the Santo Amaro population and was recently used in the Covid-19 vaccination campaign.

Final Considerations

Public education policies directly influence the organization of space and the school environment, as well as the urban territory where the institutions are located. Thus, educational facilities can be understood as the physical support for educational practices and also as elements of articulation and reference for the urban environment in which they are situated. The playgrounds and children's corners that were implemented and managed between 1935 and 1985 represented the physical support of a public policy that lasted for four decades, an uncommon occurrence in Brazilian public administration, and can be considered as a successful example of a state policy rather than just a government policy.

The results of the investigation demonstrate the importance of reflecting on and discussing the thinking and designing of urban facilities, both publicly and privately owned, in line with their role as legitimizing elements not only in their function of providing services to the population but also as elements that articulate and generate a place integrated with public spaces and the local community.

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