

Playful Streets

Creating child-friendly urban spaces



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Playful Streets

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Principal Contributors:

Ximena Manchego Rosado, Sharon Ogoti, Nagla Gamaleldeen, Wasela Althereyed

Editors:

Stefanie Holzwarth, Luh Pandyaningrum, Yuki Takada, Jordi Bosch

Art and Design:

Ximena Manchego Rosado

P.O. Box 30030 00100 Nairobi GPO KENYA

Tel: 254-020-7623120 (Central Office)

www.unhabitat.org

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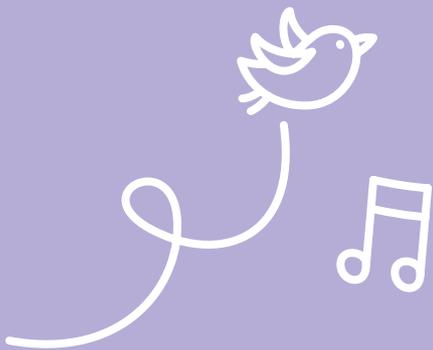
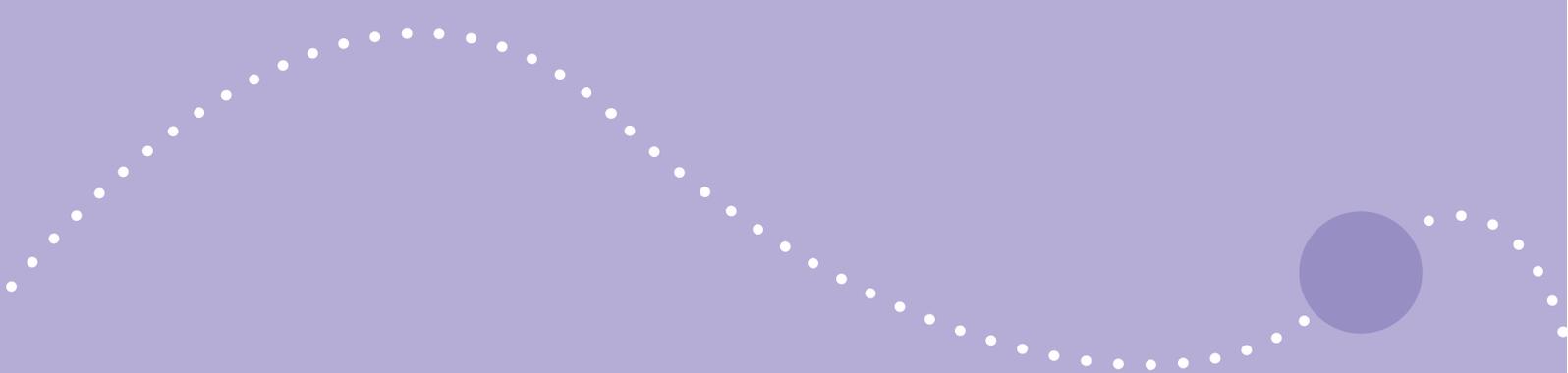
Introduction

Background

Objectives

Who is this Guidebook for?

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01

Background

Urban streets are the arteries of a city, shaping how people move, interact, and experience their environment. Traditionally, cities have been designed prioritising vehicles over pedestrians, overlooking the needs of children. This, together with other challenges resulting from rapid and unplanned urbanisation, has resulted in streets that are unsafe, uninviting, and lack opportunities for play and social interaction. *Playful Streets* seeks to address this gap by reimagining streets as vibrant, dynamic environments that benefit children, caregivers, and entire communities.

This guide highlights the importance of incorporating playfulness into street design, creating spaces that stimulate children’s development while being affordable for cities to implement with additional benefits on sustainability.

Playful streets offer children opportunities to explore, and socialize in their neighbourhoods, fostering their cognitive, physical, and social development. The design process also provides children with a platform to experiment and co-create spaces according to their needs and likes. Moreover, the impact of playful design goes beyond children. Streets that are designed with children in mind also improve accessibility, safety, and quality of life for everyone, from caregivers to the elderly, to people with disabilities.

Affordability and **sustainability** are key themes in this guide. In resource-constrained cities or neighborhoods, high-cost solutions are

often not feasible. This publication emphasizes the use of **low-cost, eco-friendly interventions** that can be adapted to any urban setting. By using recycled materials, implementing community-driven solutions, and integrating green spaces, cities can create streets that are playful and inclusive without requiring significant financial investment.

This approach aligns with international guidelines, particularly the **UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child**, which underscores every child’s right to live in a safe, inclusive, and engaging environment. Designing streets for children ensures that cities uphold these principles while also improving the urban experience for all residents.

By showcasing examples of **affordable** and **sustainable playful street elements** through sketches and best practices, *Playful Streets* provides a practical roadmap for urban planners, designers, and community leaders to reimagine their streetscapes. Whether creating interactive sidewalks in school zones or turning residential streets into vibrant play spaces, this guide emphasizes that playful design can be simple, cost-effective, and sustainable—transforming cities into environments where children and communities can thrive.

Through its focus on creating safe, accessible, and child-friendly streets, the guide serves as a catalyst for advancing the **New Urban Agenda** and the **Sustainable Development Goals**, especially SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 13 (Climate Action).



Children on Street.
© Maksim Romashkin. Bangkok, 2022.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The creation of child-friendly streets promotes sustainable development within cities by promoting inclusive, safe, and accessible spaces that prioritize the needs of children and their caregivers. This approach directly aligns with several SDGs:

Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being - Child-friendly streets encourage physical activity, social interaction, and mental well-being, promoting healthy development for children. By offering safe and engaging outdoor environments, these spaces also promote healthier lifestyles for caregivers, families and communities at large.

Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities - Designing streets to accommodate the diverse needs of children enhances inclusivity for other vulnerable groups, such as women, persons with disabilities, and the elderly. This equity-focused approach ensures that public spaces are welcoming and accessible to all segments of society, reducing disparities.

Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities - By enhancing public spaces to make them inclusive, safe, and resilient, child-friendly streets advance sustainable urban development. They contribute to a sense of community and create spaces that support diverse social and cultural activities.

Goal 13: Climate Action - Integrating green infrastructure, improving walkability, and reducing dependency on motorized transport within child-friendly street designs contributes to

UNICEF's Children's Rights

The UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child highlights the need for child-friendly considerations in cities and ensuring the active inclusion of children's views in decision-making processes. *Playful Streets* aligns with this framework by prioritizing safety, health, and well-being through child-centered urban design strategies.

Article 31: The Right to Leisure, Play, and Culture - Every child has the right to relax, play, and participate in a diverse range of cultural and artistic activities. *Playful Streets* creates vibrant public spaces where children can safely play, explore, and interact, fostering their cognitive, emotional, and social development.

Article 27: The Right to an Adequate Standard of Living - Every child has the right to a standard of living that supports their physical, mental, and social well-being. This article emphasizes the responsibility of governments to ensure equitable access to resources and infrastructure that support families in providing a nurturing environment. *Playful Streets* promotes equitable access to safe, stimulating urban spaces, especially in underserved communities.

Article 12: Respect for the Views of the Child - Every child has the right to freely express their views, feelings, and wishes on matters that affect them and to have those views given due weight. *Playful Streets* empowers children through participatory co-design processes, ensuring their perspectives shape urban planning decisions.

Objectives

The primary objective of *Playful Streets* is to shift the focus from vehicle-oriented urban design, particularly targeting adults, to child-friendly design that prioritizes non-motorized options, creating cities that are vibrant, engaging, and conducive to children's need. To achieve this, the guide builds on existing knowledge and resources. See Box 2. The guide outlines several key goals:

Increasing Positive Interactions:

The design of playful urban spaces should encourage children to interact positively with their environment and each other. By fostering social skills, creativity, and a sense of community, these spaces help children develop into well-rounded individuals who are connected to their surroundings and peers.

Creating Inclusive Spaces: It is essential to design urban spaces that are inclusive for children of all abilities. This includes providing accessible play areas, sensory experiences, and environments where every child, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities, can participate fully and meaningfully in urban life.

Promoting Movement, Social Interactions, Playfulness, and Contemplation: Cities should be designed to encourage physical activity, social

interactions, and playful exploration. Spaces that invite movement and play contribute to children's physical and mental development, while areas dedicated to contemplation and relaxation support their emotional well-being.

Emphasizing Caregiver Wellbeing:

The well-being of caregivers is intricately linked to that of children. Urban spaces should therefore be designed to be comfortable and engaging for both children and their caregivers, ensuring a supportive environment that nurtures families.

Slowing Down the Speed and Diverting Vehicle Traffic:

Create walkability through wide, well-maintained, and safe sidewalks, with clear crossings at intersections and traffic-calming measures to slow down traffic in streets and areas with high volumes of children. Where possible, vehicle traffic should be diverted away from these zones, turning them into low-speed and low-emission areas that reduce air pollution, contributing to a healthier and safer environment for children.

By adhering to these objectives, *Playful Streets* aims to transform urban environments into spaces where children can thrive, play, and develop in safe, stimulating, and inclusive settings.

Who is this Guidebook for?

This guidebook is intended for a wide range of audiences involved in the urban design and planning process, including:

Urban Planners and Designers: Professionals responsible for shaping cities, who need specific guidelines and strategies to incorporate playful and child-friendly elements into their projects.

Municipal Leaders and Policymakers: City officials and decision-makers who aim to prioritize children's needs in the urban environment.

Community Organizations and Activists:

Local groups advocating for improved public spaces for children and families.

Educators and Child Advocates: Those who work directly with children and have an interest in promoting their right to safe, inclusive environments.

Parents and Caregivers: Families who want to understand how cities can be shaped to better serve the needs of their children and advocate for changes in their communities.

How to use this Guidebook?

This guidebook is designed to be a flexible, easy-to-use resource that can be adapted to the specific needs of different cities and communities. Each section builds on the principle that playfulness and accessibility are fundamental elements of good urban design. Here's how to navigate and make the most of it:

Start with the Fundamentals: The first chapters introduce the core principles of child-friendly urban design and why playful, accessible streets are essential for everyone, not just children.

Use the Design Elements: The guidebook contains sketches and visual references of playful street elements that can be easily adapted and applied to different urban contexts. Each sketch is accompanied by design tips, material suggestions, and explanations on how the elements benefit children and caregivers.

Explore Best Practices: Real-world examples and case studies highlight cities that have successfully implemented playful street elements, showcasing a variety of interventions that are both affordable and sustainable.

Resources for Urban Design focused on Children

This guidebook focuses on creating **child-friendly** streets through **playful, low-cost**, and **eco-friendly** interventions. It complements existing publications by providing practical, scalable ideas to transform streets into vibrant, child-centered spaces, building on broader design principles, policies, and frameworks. The following resources offer valuable context and guidance to support these efforts:

- Designing Streets for Kids by The National Association of City Transport Officials (NACTO) - <https://globaldesigningcities.org/publication/designing-streets-for-kids/>
- Global Street Design Guide by The National Association of City Transport Officials (NACTO) - <https://globaldesigningcities.org/publication/global-street-design-guide/>
- Child-friendly Cities and Communities by UNICEF - <https://www.unicef.org/eap/reports/child-friendly-cities-and-communities-handbook>
- Cities Alive: Design for Urban Childhoods by ARUP - www.arup.com/insights/cities-alive-designing-for-urban-childhoods/
- The Playful Cities Toolkit by Real Play Coalition, ARUP and The Lego Foundation - <https://www.arup.com/globalassets/downloads/insights/playful-cities-toolkit-resources-for-reclaiming-play-in-cities.pdf>
- Shaping Urbanization for Children by UNICEF - https://www.unicef.org/media/47616/file/unicef_shaping_urbanization_for_children_handbook_2018.pdf
- Designing Child-friendly High-Density Neighbourhoods by Cities for Play - <https://www.citiesforplay.com/child-friendly-neighbourhoods#:~:text=Book%20Description%3A%20Given%20the%20significant,-belonging%20and%20ownership%20within%20their>





Father Walking with Son on Bike
© Danilo Melendez. Lima, 2024.



02

Why Playful Streets Matter

Different Experiences: Defining Children and the Role of Caregivers
Play as a Key Element in Development in Every Stage
Benefits of Creating Playful Streets





Playful streets offer more than just opportunities for fun, they create environments where children can grow, explore, and connect with their surroundings in meaningful ways. For caregivers, these spaces provide safe, engaging, and accessible environments that make daily life easier and more enjoyable. By designing streets that prioritize play and interaction, we foster vibrant, inclusive communities where both children and caregivers can thrive, enhancing the overall quality of urban life for everyone.

Different Experiences

Defining Children and the Role of Caregivers

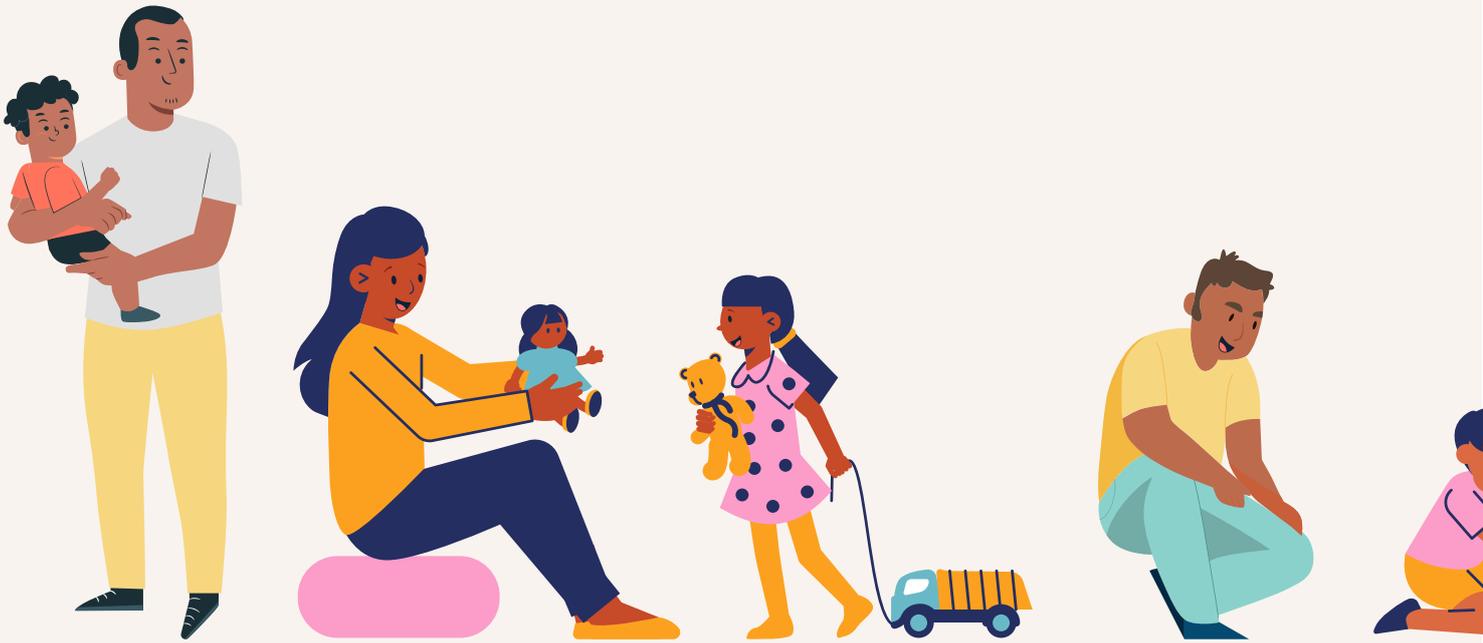
According to the UNICEF guidelines, children are defined as all people under the age of 18. This is further categorized into distinct age groups to better address their developmental needs. These classifications are key in designing targeted interventions, policies, and programs that promote children's well-being and support their growth at every stage of life. Each age group reflects a unique phase in a child's development, with specific physical, cognitive, and emotional characteristics that require unique approaches.

Caregivers

While this publication primarily focuses on the experiences of children in urban environments, it recognizes that caregivers play an important role in shaping these experiences. These are individuals who provide essential care, nurturing, and support to children, thus significantly contributing to their development, well-being, and protection. Caregivers can be parents, pregnant people, extended family members or other guardians responsible for a child's day-to-day needs. For this reason, one cannot be exclusive of the other. The experiences of children in urban environments significantly depend on the actions, decisions, and well-being of their caregivers. Therefore, any effort to enhance the urban experiences of children must simultaneously address the needs and challenges faced by their caregivers.

Children experience urban environments differently from adults, and understanding these differences is crucial for designing child-friendly cities. Children actively learn by observing and interacting with the world around them. They require a diversity of experiences (related to objects, people, events, social situations and even themselves) for development. Here are some key aspects:





Infancy

0-1 years. It is marked by rapid physical and neurological development, with a strong dependence on caregivers for basic needs and emotional security. From the womb, babies are more vulnerable to environmental factors. They absorb four times more pollution than adults during pregnancy. Designing cities with reduced pollution levels and more green spaces can significantly impact their early development.

Stage of cognitive development: Infants use their senses to learn about the world. One of the key milestones in this stage is object permanence: infants learn that an object still exists, even if they do not see it. They learn how to perform physical actions such as crawling and walking. Sensory play is important for these younger children as well as using real objects and toys to help them develop an understanding of object permanence.

Early Childhood

1-5 years. Early childhood is characterized by significant growth in language, motor skills, and social interaction, as well as the beginning of formal education and structured play. Regular access to nature and play areas is vital for younger children. Studies show that exposure to natural environments reduces stress and enhances physical and cognitive development. Designing urban spaces that integrate nature can improve the quality of life for younger children.

Stage of cognitive development: A characteristic of this stage is dramatic and imaginative play. It is important to create space for the children to come up with their own ideas and support them as they question the world around them.



Middle Early Childhood

6-11 years. It is a time of steady physical growth, enhanced cognitive abilities, and the development of a sense of identity and peer relationships. They require spaces that are safe and engaging. They need more time to cross streets than adults and have different walking patterns. Ensuring that streets and public spaces are designed with their needs in mind can promote independence and physical activity.

Stage of cognitive development: Logic enters the scene in the concrete operational stage as children start to organise their thinking. They are less egocentric, and they have an awareness of their own unique thoughts and feelings.

Adolescence

12-18 years. This stage involves advanced cognitive development and the formation of personal identity and independent relationships. Provision for teenagers in public space is limited. Often deemed too old for 'play', teenagers need more than youth shelters and areas for ball games. More places where they can congregate and socialise with their friends are especially important.

Stage of cognitive development: Characterised by abstract thinking and the ability to deal with hypothetical concepts. Besides integrating the needs of children in urban design, considerations need to be made for caregivers by creating a supportive and nurturing environment, fostering a sense of community, enabling interaction and improving quality of life for families.

Play as a Key Element

in Development in Every Stage

Play is a fundamental part of childhood and plays a critical role in the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development of children. Through play, children engage in exploration, creativity, and problem-solving, all of which are vital to their overall growth and understanding of the world. Streets and public spaces, when designed to encourage play, become platforms for this essential development.

Cognitive Development

Play stimulates children's brains, helping them develop essential skills like decision-making, imagination, and language. Playful urban environments, such as interactive street elements, colourful murals, and creative playgrounds, spark curiosity and encourage children to learn by exploring their surroundings.

Fostering Independence

Playful streets allow children to explore their environments freely, building independence and confidence in navigating their surroundings. By incorporating playful design into urban spaces, cities can help children feel more comfortable and autonomous in their daily interactions with the environment.

Physical Development

Active play, especially in safe and engaging urban environments, helps children develop motor skills, coordination, and balance. Streets that incorporate features like hopscotch, climbing structures, and bicycle lanes not only invite physical activity but also contribute to overall health and well-being. These spaces encourage movement and play in ways that benefit both children and caregivers.

Social and Emotional Growth

Play also nurtures social interaction, cooperation, and communication. Children learn to share, take turns, and collaborate with peers in environments designed for interaction. Public spaces that foster play become hubs for social exchange, where children from diverse backgrounds can build friendships, develop empathy, and enhance emotional intelligence.

Stages of play

Building on the development phases, it is important to understand the different stages of play:

Unoccupied Play (birth - 3 months): This is the first stage of play that starts from birth to three months of age. It's something babies do instinctively.

Solitary Play (Birth - 2/3 years): Children learn solitary play from birth up to 2 to 3 years old. It could involve playing alone with toys or puzzles, drawing, or role playing. Through solitary play children develop confidence, self-reliance and creativity.

Onlooker Play (2 years): When a child watches other children and adults play without actually joining in. It's common in toddlers or younger children who are still developing language skills.

Parallel Play (2+ years): When two children are playing next to each

other but not together, this is parallel play. It usually happens around 2 to 3 ½ years of age.

Associative Play (3-4 years): Around 3 to 4 years of age, children may start to engage in associative play together with other children, however, in an unstructured way.

Cooperative Play (4+ years): When children work together towards a shared goal, that's cooperative play. It usually starts around 4 to 5 ½ years of age. Cooperative play is more organised. The children will each have a role and there are established rules that guide the play.

Designing spaces that support play across different stages of childhood ensures that children's physical, social, and cognitive needs are met as they grow, while also enhancing the urban experience for all residents.



Benefits of Creating Playful Streets

Creating playful streets does much more than provide spaces for children to play—it enhances the overall liveability, safety, and vibrancy of urban areas for everyone. Playful streets invite

interaction, exploration, and creativity, transforming everyday environments into dynamic, engaging spaces. These designs benefit entire communities in several ways:



Boosting Creativity and Cognitive Development

Playful street elements, such as interactive games, sensory installations, and imaginative structures, stimulate creativity and problem-solving in children. These spaces allow children to learn through play, fostering their cognitive development and imagination in ways that structured environments cannot.

Better Physical and Mental Health

Playful environments encourage physical activity and exploration, helping children stay active and promoting healthy habits. Regular access to nature and safe outdoor play areas reduces stress and enhances various aspects of children's development, including physical, emotional, and cognitive growth. For caregivers and adults, these spaces offer areas for relaxation and socialization, contributing to emotional well-being and reducing stress. Playful streets, if combined with traffic calming measures, also contribute to reduced noise levels and better air quality.

Increased Inclusivity and Accessibility

By integrating playful elements that are accessible for children of all abilities and regardless of their socio-economic background, cities create environments that promote inclusion. These design features make public spaces welcoming and enjoyable for everyone, from young children to the elderly, and people with mobility challenges.

Enhanced Community Interaction

Playful street elements encourage social interaction and create natural gathering points for families and neighbours. Whether through shared play spaces, interactive street furniture, or communal seating areas, these streets promote stronger social ties and foster a sense of community belonging.



Improved Safety for All

Streets designed with children in mind tend to prioritize walkability and cyclability, traffic calming, clearer signage, and improved lighting. These improvements not only protect children but also make streets safer for the elderly, people with disabilities, and all pedestrians.

Better Urban Ecology

Playful streets provide an opportunity to promote green spaces, trees and urban gardening. They can foster biodiversity and educate children to become agents of change for a more sustainable future.

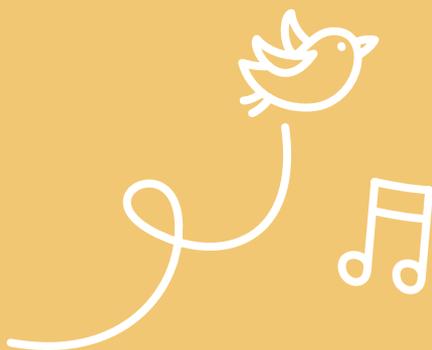


03

Foundations of Playful Design



Principles of Design
Process of Design



Principles of Design

In order to create truly child-friendly cities, urban interventions must holistically address various elements of the environment, ensuring that **infrastructure, safety, health, and mobility** are all designed with children and their caregivers in mind. A key aspect of child-friendly design is recognising that cities must be built at a **child's scale**, from their height and physical abilities to their level of independence. Streets, signage, and public spaces should be designed so that children can easily navigate and interact with their environment, helping them develop confidence and autonomy.

This involves providing **safe and accessible infrastructure**, such as public transportation, healthcare, and recreational spaces, while also prioritising traffic safety, pollution reduction, and the integration of green spaces. Additionally, streets must be designed with a child's perspective in mind, ensuring that signage, crossings, and public furniture are visible and approachable for younger, smaller users.

Freedom of movement is a critical indicator of the quality of a child-friendly city. Children should feel empowered to move freely and safely throughout their neighbourhoods—whether walking to school, playing with friends, or exploring their surroundings. This freedom fosters independence, cognitive development, and social connections, while also reflecting the overall safety and accessibility of urban design.

Sustainable mobility, including walking and cycling, should be encouraged to promote healthy lifestyles and provide children with safe, enjoyable ways to navigate the city. Moreover, **inclusive design practices** must ensure that

all children, regardless of ability or background, have a voice in the urban design process and can fully access and enjoy public spaces.

Making playful streets that are accessible, inclusive, and sustainable requires careful planning and thoughtful design, based on an integrated, multi-sector approach. The following principles serve as a guide to developing streets that prioritize the needs of children while benefiting the entire community. By incorporating these principles, urban planners and designers can create vibrant public spaces that promote **play, safety, sustainability, and social interaction**.



Playfulness and Engagement

At the heart of a child-friendly street is playfulness. Streets should be places where children can interact with their surroundings in creative and dynamic ways. The streets should be designed to attract children to stay and spend time on them. Playfulness can be integrated into urban design through:

- **Interactive Street Elements:** Incorporate playful features like hopscotch painted on sidewalks, musical elements (like drums or chimes), educational stations, or sensory walls with various textures for children to explore. These elements should be scattered throughout the street, inviting spontaneous play and engagement.
- **Colour and Creativity:** Use bright colours and bold patterns in crosswalks, benches, and public art. Vibrant designs can energize the environment, making it more inviting for children and signalling that the space is designed with them in mind.



- **Dynamic and Adaptable Spaces:** Streets should feature flexible areas that can serve multiple purposes, such as spaces that shift between play zones and social gathering points. Movable play equipment, large-scale board games, and multi-use furniture can encourage both play and social interaction.
- **Wellbeing:** The design of urban spaces should prioritize the physical, emotional, and social wellbeing of children. This means creating environments that are not only safe but also stimulating and nurturing, supporting the holistic development of children. This may include protective barriers to prevent accidents, play features like climbing structures to enhance physical activity, using colourful and sensory elements to trigger positive emotions and curiosity, creating spaces for group activities to promote social interactions, and integrating nature to enhance mental wellbeing.



Sustainable and Green Interventions

Incorporating sustainability into urban design is essential for creating long-lasting, healthy environments. Sustainable street design not only benefits the environment but also provides children with opportunities to engage with nature in playful ways. Key sustainable strategies include:

- **Green Spaces and Natural Elements:** Integrate trees, small gardens, or even vertical plant walls into street design to provide shade, reduce urban heat, and offer children places to interact with nature. Green spaces also promote biodiversity and contribute to cleaner air.
- **Use of Recycled Materials:** Utilize recycled and locally sourced materials for playground equipment, street furniture, and even pavement. For example, benches made from repurposed wood or plastic, or recycled rubber for play surfaces, can reduce environmental impact while creating functional, playful street elements.
- **Water Features and Environmental Play:** Include small-scale water play elements like fountains or splash pads that children can interact with. These features can be designed with eco-friendly water systems that reuse or recycle water.



Pop-Up Playgrounds for Kids in Hanoi
© UN Habitat, Healthbridge Vietnam
Hanoi, Vietnam. 2021.

Safety and Accessibility for All

A playful street must also be a safe street. Urban design should create environments where children, caregivers, and pedestrians feel secure while moving through public spaces. Key elements of safety and accessibility include:

- **Traffic Calming Measures:** Use features such as raised pedestrian crossing, sharpening the turning radius for cars, and curb extensions to slow down vehicle traffic and prioritize pedestrians. Reducing vehicle speeds creates a safer space for children to play and for families to walk.
- **Clear Signage and Visibility:** Signage designed with children in mind—using clear visuals, bright colours, and simple language—can help make streets more navigable and understandable for younger users. Well-lit streets and open sightlines are essential for both safety and creating a welcoming atmosphere.
- **Accessible Play Areas:** Streets should be designed to accommodate children of all abilities. This includes incorporating elements like ramps, tactile surfaces, and sensory play features to ensure that children with disabilities can fully participate in the urban environment. Universal access considerations will also support caregivers, such as those with baby strollers or cargo bicycles.
- **Equity:** Child-friendly design must be equitable, ensuring that all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have access to safe and engaging urban spaces. This includes addressing disparities in access to resources, such as open green spaces and recreational facilities that are available at no cost.
- **Proximity:** The concept of proximity is about bringing essential services and amenities closer to where people live, while promoting walkability. This not only supports a sustainable lifestyle but also makes it easier for children to access the services they need, such as schools, parks, and healthcare.
- **Street Vibrancy:** Creating vibrant streets with “eyes on the street,” a concept introduced by Jane Jacobs to describe natural surveillance through active public presence and community engagement, can enhance children’s safety and boost caregivers’ confidence in allowing children to move independently. Among the strategies to achieve this are active building frontages with windows and entrances facing the street to promote interaction, but also mixed-use development by incorporating shops and cafes with residences and offices.



Process of Co-Design

Designing urban spaces for children requires a thoughtful, structured approach that prioritizes co-creation and active involvement of children at every phase. From initial planning to implementation, children must not only be participants but also co-leaders, actively shaping the streets they use daily. This chapter outlines the detailed process of co-designing child-friendly

Co-Creation as the Core of Design

Co-creation goes beyond simple consultation; it places children at the heart of the design process, empowering them to lead. In this approach, children actively participate in generating ideas, assessing their environment, and designing the spaces they interact with. By engaging children in co-planning, co-design, co-implementation, and co-monitoring, cities create street environments that reflect the true needs, preferences, and imaginations of children.

Pre-fieldwork Phase

The Pre-fieldwork phase establishes the groundwork for child-led assessments of streets, aligning the project with urban mobility and child welfare goals. Here, children are involved early, co-planning the objectives and scope of the assessment. Children help define key themes for exploration, from safety and playfulness to comfort and connectivity. Their experiences and expectations shape the foundation of the project, ensuring that the assessment reflects their real-world needs. This phase focuses on the following activities:

streets, highlighting the importance of embedding principles of participation and collaboration at all stages—planning, data collection, design, implementation, and monitoring—ensuring that the voices of children are central to the creation of streets that support play, social interaction, and development.

Safe School Environments UN-Habitat

Location: Belo Horizonte, Brazil

Overview: The project aimed to implement Safe School Zones,  using on active mobility and safety for children, teenagers, and the local community. One pilot site was the Anne Frank Municipal School in the Confisco neighborhood, a socially vulnerable area in the Pampulha region. The school's efforts to promote a culture of peace extended to engaging the wider community.

Key Interventions: The intervention prioritized active mobility and pedestrian safety by.

- Extending sidewalks with bulb-outs to reduce vehicle speeds.
- Painting zebra crossings at the school entrance and key pedestrian locations.
- Aligning corners to shorten crossing distances and improve pedestrian flow.
- Restricting car parking to expand pedestrian areas and enhance connectivity between the school and nearby public spaces.

Outcomes: The intervention improved safety significantly, with 79% of respondents feeling safer crossing streets and 78% observing reduced vehicle speeds. The success of the Zone 30 projects has led to their institutionalization and plans for city-wide replication in Belo Horizonte.





Promoting Safe Schools Environments
© UN Habitat, WRI Brazil.
Belo Horizonte. 2019.

Additionally, this phase focuses on engaging a wide range of stakeholders, including government agencies, local communities, NGOs, and advocacy groups, to ensure a multidisciplinary perspective. Desk research is also conducted to review local policies and strategies related to urban mobility and child welfare. Lastly, data collection tools, such as Kobo Collect questionnaires, are developed and deployed to facilitate the upcoming data-gathering phase.

- **Engaging Children as Stakeholders:** Children participate in early stakeholder meetings alongside local governments, NGOs, urban planners, and community groups. This involvement fosters a multidisciplinary perspective while ensuring children's insights are prioritized.
- **Desk Research:** Reviewing local policies and strategies. Involving children in understanding how city planning influences their streets.
- **Children Leading Objectives Setting:** Kids are asked to define their own objectives for the project, helping shape questions like, "How do we make streets fun?" or "Where do I feel safe walking?" Their input helps identify key areas of focus and gaps in the adult perspective, framing the entire assessment.
- **Developing Data Collection Tools with Kids:** Children play a role in creating interactive tools, such as kid-friendly surveys, mapping exercises, and mobile apps, such as Kobo Collect, designed to capture insights from their peers in playful, engaging ways.

Data Collection Phase

The Data Collection phase involves systematically gathering quantitative and qualitative data using various tools and methods, such as the Kobo questionnaires developed in the previous phase, and open-source data. These tools are tailored to provide a detailed understanding of how children interact with streets and how streets can be made safer and more accommodating for their needs. This phase centres on children as active researchers, using creative and playful methods to assess the quality of their streets. Here, children are not just subjects of study but researchers who collect, interpret, and present data.

- **Children Mapping Their Spaces:** Children participate in exercises where they physically map the streets they use every day. They identify unsafe or undesirable areas and places they enjoy, helping planners understand the spaces that need attention.
- **Walking Interviews and Exploratory Walks:** Children lead walking interviews with peers, caregivers, and local community members, talking about their experiences as they navigate streets. These interviews provide rich, qualitative insights into how streets could be improved for safety, fun, and inclusivity.
- **Storytelling Workshops:** Kids are encouraged to tell stories about their daily routes to school, parks, or friends' homes. Through storytelling, children offer valuable perspectives on how they experience their urban environment, highlighting emotional connections, barriers, and opportunities for improvement.



Building a Kid-Friendly Playground
© UN Habitat.
Dhaka, Bangladesh. 2018.



Building a Kid-Friendly Playground
© UN Habitat.
Dhaka, Bangladesh. 2018.

Kid-Friendly Playground

UN-Habitat, Block by Block, Healthbridge

Location: Dhaka, Bangladesh

Overview: In Dhaka, one of the world's most densely populated cities, a lack of safe, accessible public spaces particularly affected women and children. Following a refugee crisis and a public space assessment, the Boishakhi Khelar Math playground was selected for renovation. The project aimed to create a welcoming, secure, and child-friendly space through community participation and the Block by Block methodology.

Key Activities:

- **Community Engagement:** Using Mine-craft-based workshops, 54 local participants, including women and youth, contributed ideas for the playground design.
- **Collaborative Design:** Over three days, participants designed features like separate kids' play areas, wide walking paths, and public utilities.
- **Renovation and Beautification:** The playground was revitalized with bright murals, new plants, play equipment, lightweight fencing for safety, and multicolored tires for added structure.

Outcomes: The renovated playground opened in October 2018, transforming the space into a vibrant, inclusive environment. Women and children now visit in greater numbers, enjoying a secure area for play and social interaction. The project successfully showcased how participatory design can empower communities and create meaningful, inclusive urban spaces.

- **Temporary Installations:** During the data collection phase, temporary, child-designed street installations (e.g., pop-up play zones, mock pedestrian crossings) are created. These installations allow children to test their ideas in real time, giving planners a glimpse into their vision for more playful, safer streets.
- **Children's "Street Diaries":** Kids maintain personal journals or diaries, documenting their daily interactions with their streets—where they feel safe, where they play, and where they avoid. These diaries become a powerful tool for understanding the nuances of a child's urban experience.
- **Technology-Enhanced Data Collection:** Children can use simple tools like smartphones and tablets to photograph or record audio and video documenting their experience. These digital tools capture their thoughts as they encounter street elements, offering a unique perspective on the quality of the urban space.

Assessment Phase

The assessment explores the management and maintenance, evaluating the regular upkeep of the streets and its facilities, cleaning, lighting, drainage, and landscaping, while also considering community involvement in street management, as local engagement improves responsiveness to children's needs.

Distribution is another important factor, focusing on ensuring equitable access to child-friendly streets across all communities. The assessment maps the availability of public spaces to identify underserved areas, particularly in marginalized neighbourhoods.

Moreover, the quantity of streets dedicated to children's activities is also reviewed to determine if there are enough child-friendly streets to meet current and future demands. Quality is assessed by examining the physical condition of streets, including play equipment, sidewalks, signage, and street furniture, as well as the presence of green spaces and safe crossings, which enhance children's safety and comfort.

Accessibility is a key priority, ensuring that streets are easily navigable by all children, including those with disabilities. The evaluation identifies barriers that may limit access, such as inadequate pedestrian pathways or crossing points. Lastly, connectivity is assessed to ensure that child-friendly streets are well linked to important destinations like schools and parks, allowing children to move safely and freely throughout the city.

Child-Friendly Spaces

UN-Habitat, UNICEF

Location: Sharjah, UAE

Overview: The initiative evaluated 60 public spaces for distribution, connectivity, accessibility, and quality, aiming to create climate-adaptive, child-friendly environments. This effort informed the Sharjah Child-Friendly Open Public Spaces Guidelines, a framework addressing children's needs while mitigating local climate challenges.

Key Activities:

- **Exploratory Walks:** Enabled children to highlight challenges such as insufficient shade, limited play areas, and safety concerns.
- **Data Collection:** Children assessed public space amenities, comfort, and environmental quality under extreme heat conditions.
- **Co-Design with Minecraft:** Workshops allowed children to digitally recreate spaces, incorporating elements like shaded seating, water features, and playful structures to address climate and comfort.

Outcomes: Development of child-centric guidelines for open public spaces, rooted in children's lived experiences and addressing climate challenges. The guidelines provide a replicable model for creating child-friendly, climate-resilient urban spaces in similar contexts. collaboration, ensuring that the public space reflects the aspirations of its users and promotes long-term stewardship. Empowered participation of children in urban design processes, fostering ownership, awareness, and advocacy for sustainable urban development.

Reporting Phase

This phase turns data into actionable insights, with children taking an active role in analysing findings and presenting recommendations. This co-analysis process ensures that children's voices are heard in the final reporting, bringing to light the unique opportunities and challenges they encounter in their streets. This phase begins with data cleaning and analysis, where the information is evaluated against predefined indicators. This process highlights key strengths, such as areas with good accessibility or safety, as well as weaknesses like poor maintenance or insufficient child-friendly infrastructure.

Through this analysis, challenges and opportunities are identified. Common issues may include inadequate safety measures or lack of accessibility, while opportunities might involve redesigning streets for greater interaction and play or improving green coverage. Based on these findings, tailored recommendations will be developed, addressing both design and policy needs for both the present and the future in the short, medium and long term.

- **Children as Analysts:** Children, with the help of planners, analyse the data they collected—whether it's mapping results, interview recordings, or observations from walking tours. They work together to identify key issues such as unsafe crossings, lack of play areas, or poor accessibility.
- **Recommendations Developed by Children:** Based on their analysis, children propose specific interventions—ranging from more play equipment to safer crossings—tailored to their needs. They prioritize these interventions and suggest how city governments and communities can implement them, ensuring that the solutions come directly from the people who will use the streets.



Block by Block Workshop
© UN Habitat.
Sharjah, UAE. 2019.



Block by Block Workshop
© UN Habitat.
Sharjah, UAE. 2019.

Post-Assessment Phase

The post-assessment phase shifts from gathering insights to action. Here, children work alongside urban planners, designers, and community members to transform their findings into concrete designs and interventions that improve their streets.

First, streets with the highest need of improvement in terms of safety, accessibility, and child inclusivity, as well as those likely to have the highest impact in terms of creating opportunities for play, are identified for further attention.

For these selected streets, detailed site-specific assessments are conducted, focusing on key areas such as accessibility, safety and comfort, available facilities, patterns of use, and green coverage. This ensures that design interventions are tailored to the specific needs of each street.

Participatory design processes are then employed, involving local communities, particularly children and their caregivers, in shaping the street improvement plans. This inclusive approach promotes community ownership and ensures that the designs reflect the actual needs on the ground. Finally, the city and its partners will mobilize resources to implement pilot projects based on the designs. These pilot projects serve as models for scaling child-friendly street initiatives across the city.

- **Children's Priority Mapping:** Children help identify which streets or areas should be prioritized for improvements. They base these decisions on the data they've gathered,

targeting streets that lack safe crossings, accessible sidewalks, or adequate play spaces.

- **Participatory Design Workshops:** In child-led workshops, children use models, drawings, and digital tools to co-design streets that reflect their vision for play, safety, and social interaction. They work with urban planners to translate their ideas into realistic, actionable designs that can be implemented in the short, medium, and long term.
- **Pilot Projects Co-Implemented by Children:** Children take an active role in building temporary pilot projects to test their design ideas. Whether through pop-up parks, painted crossings, or new signage, children and city officials together bring their designs to life in a low-cost, experimental way. These pilots provide immediate feedback on how well the designs work in practice.
- **Children's Feedback and Monitoring:** After implementation, children are involved in co-monitoring the streets they've helped redesign. Through surveys, focus groups, or even informal playtesting, they evaluate how well the interventions meet their needs and offer suggestions for improvement. Children also lead follow-up sessions, providing ongoing feedback to city planners and ensuring continuous refinement of the design.

Road Redesign

UN-Habitat, GoDown Arts Centre

Location: Nairobi, Kenya

Overview: The HerCity HerStreets Project is an initiative by The GoDown Arts Centre, a cultural arts organization active since 2003, in partnership with UN-Habitat. Located in Nairobi's Industrial Area, the project aims to transform the streets surrounding the upcoming GoDown Arts Centre redevelopment into safer and more inclusive public spaces.

Key Activities:

- **Participatory Design:** The project utilized UN-Habitat's HerCity Toolkit to engage communities in the design and planning of public spaces through workshops, walk-throughs, and co-design exercises.
- **Data-Driven Analysis:** Gathering and analyzing data to identify challenges such as safety, comfort, and inclusivity in the targeted public spaces.
- **Minecraft Integration:** Using Minecraft as a digital participatory tool, participants, including children as young as 10, visualized and built interactive models of their ideas.
- **Community Engagement:** 31 students from Mariakani Primary School and local community members co-created solutions tailored to their needs, ensuring inclusive and diverse perspectives were considered.

Outcomes: Empowered community members, particularly children, by integrating their voices into the design process, fostering a sense of ownership and pride. Identified and addressed specific safety and inclusivity challenges, creating a more vibrant and accessible public space. Built community engagement and collaboration, ensuring that the public space reflects the aspirations of its users and promotes long-term stewardship.





04

Playful Streets Elements



- Residential Streets
- School Zones
- Pedestrian Streets and Plazas
- Parks
- Access Routes to Public Transportation



04



Designing playful streets that are scalable, affordable, and sustainable allows cities to implement child-friendly spaces, no matter their size or budget. Playful street elements can be introduced on various scales, from small residential streets to bustling public squares or transit stations.

Tailoring playful designs to specific street typologies ensures that designs are context-sensitive and maximize engagement within the space. These solutions can be adapted to fit the needs of different communities, ensuring that all residents can enjoy playful, sustainable, and accessible streets.

This chapter showcases practical examples of playful street elements that are both affordable and sustainable, accompanied by best practices from around the world. The goal is to highlight how these elements can be implemented in different urban settings, focusing on adaptability, cost-efficiency, and environmental benefits.

Each playful element is designed to be easily replicated using locally available or recycled materials and to foster community engagement. Alongside sketches of these elements, we present real-world case studies that demonstrate how playful design can transform streets into vibrant, inclusive, and environmentally friendly spaces.



Residential Streets

In smaller, quieter streets, playful elements can include simple interventions such as hopscotch painted on sidewalks, colourful seating areas, or pocket parks. These spaces offer children a

safe environment to play close to home while encouraging social interaction among neighbours.



Playful Pavement Art: Colourful hopscotch paths, mazes, or street games painted directly on the pavement invite spontaneous play. These simple interventions are cost-effective and easy to implement, turning everyday sidewalks into playful zones.

Nature-Based Pocket Parks: Small patches of greenery integrated into residential streets provide natural play spaces where children can interact with nature, climb trees, or engage in tactile play. Pocket parks can be built with low-maintenance plants and recycled materials.





Community Seating: Benches and seating areas designed with playful shapes or bright colours create gathering spaces for both children and adults, encouraging social interaction and relaxation within the neighbourhood.



Dandora Model Street

Location: Dandora Phase II, Nairobi, Kenya

Partners: Dandora Transformation League (DTL), UN-Habitat, Making Cities Together, Constituency Development Fund (CDF), Local Government, Dandora Community



Background

Dandora, a low-income neighbourhood located 11 km from Nairobi's city centre with a population of 141,885, faced significant challenges including high crime rates, youth unemployment, urban decay, and environmental degradation due to unregulated dumping. In response, the Dandora Transformation League (DTL) launched the Model Street initiative, to address these issues and serve as a benchmark for future urban interventions.

Design Approach and Interventions

The project was executed through a participatory process involving children, local youth and women, demonstrating the potential of co-production in public space management. The Model Street in Dandora Phase II featured several child-friendly design elements and comprehensive placemaking efforts, including paved streets that support skating activities and foster youth engagement and play opportunities.

The project also included drainage improvements with opened and cleared lines to resolve issues of overflowing sewers, flash floods, and mud. Street lighting was installed to significantly enhance safety and security, while 25 trees were planted to improve environmental quality and contribute to urban greening. Moreover, 13 artistic waste receptacles with inspirational quotes were placed to promote cleanliness, and four grand gateways were constructed to give a new identity to the street and neighbourhood.





Outcomes

- The street's redesign enabled around 40 children and youth to participate in skating, some of whom are considering it as a career.
- Perceived safety increased among residents, enabling them to walk freely even at night.
- The project supported small-scale businesses by extending their operating hours and created employment opportunities in maintenance and security.
- The initiative improved relations between local youth and authorities, fostering collaboration in public space management.
- The environmental health of the neighbourhood improved due to better drainage and waste management practices.
- The Dandora Transformation League won the Dubai International Award for Best Practices.
- The successful implementation inspired further investment from the local Member of Parliament through the Constituency Development Fund.

Poblenou Superblock

Location

Barcelona, Spain

Partners

The Municipality of Barcelona, Urban Ecology Agency

Background

Based on an urban model for freeing certain urban sectors from fast-moving traffic. The project was based on the Urban Mobility Plan (2013-2018) and the resulting “Superblocks Programme 2016-2019”. The City Council identified several areas that are to be successively pedestrianised. The first of these, designated the “Poblenou Superblock” located in the Poblenou neighbourhood, of the Sant Martí district, a former industrial zone which, less densely populated than the rest of the grid, offered the terrain which seemed most suitable for a first pilot project.

Design Approach and Interventions

The transformation of public space in Dandora was carried out in two stages. The first used tactical urbanism with low-cost, reversible solutions, such as painted ground signs, temporary street furniture, and mobile tree planters, enabling quick implementation and community feedback. These interventions created playgrounds, sports areas, picnic spaces, and markets. The second phase, launched in 2017, consolidated these changes permanently through conventional civil engineering.



Read more here!



Poblenou Superblock
© Colletiu Superilla Poblenou
Barcelona, Spain. 2017.

Outcomes

The Poblenou Superblock increased pedestrian space by 13,350 square meters, reduced inner-street traffic by 58%, and lowered noise levels by 5 decibels. Over 300 benches were added, 212 trees planted, and open-air cultural activities expanded.

iPlay Miami Streets

Location

Florida, USA

Partners

Kaboom, City of Miami, Office of the City Manager, City of Miami Public Works Department

Background

Recognizing that many city residents often see dead-end streets as prime locations for trash dumping or drug deals and acknowledging that not all children have the luxury of a safe walk to the neighbourhood park—which often leads them to play in unsafe areas—this intervention directly addresses these issues. It transformed dead-end streets in five Miami districts into safe and unique play spaces designed specifically for children, creating environments that promote safer play.



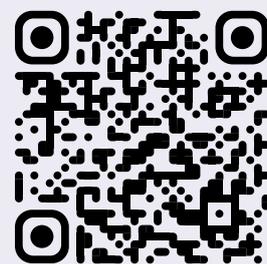
iPlay Miami Streets
© Kaboom.
Miami, Florida, 2019

Design Approach and Interventions

This project utilizes simple yet effective interventions, such as painting games on the street pavement with semi-permanent, colourful paint and installing barriers to safeguard the area. The game designs incorporate cultural or educational themes, creating an engaging environment for all. Children and families in the community can enjoy a kickball and baseball field, hopscotch, and games like Twister and tic-tac-toe. iPlay Miami Streets encourages exploration and imagination, inviting children and adults of all ages and abilities to play in new and exciting ways.

Outcomes

The project transformed everyday spaces into safe, designated play spaces for the children and families of five communities in Miami.



Read more here!

Pasaje Paiva

Location: Barrios Altos, Lima, Peru

Partners: Limeños al Bicentenario, Vecinos del pasaje Teniente Paiva, Municipality of Lima, Bernard van Leer Foundation, Urban95

Background

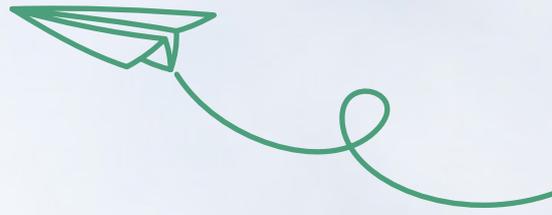
Pasaje Teniente Paiva, located near Lima’s historic Plaza Dos de Mayo, was once a neglected cul-de-sac surrounded by residential buildings housing over 100 families. For years, the space was used as a public parking lot and became a hotspot for garbage accumulation, alcohol and drug consumption, and prostitution, making it unsafe and unsuitable for children or caregivers. The area lacked vegetation, recreational infrastructure, and basic cleanliness. However, the organized efforts of local residents, led by Rosario Vásquez, alongside technical and financial support from the Municipality of Lima, initiated the transformation of Pasaje Paiva into a safe and accessible public space for all.

Design Approach and Interventions

The primary goal of the project was to recover Pasaje Paiva as a public space by expanding the pedestrian area and adding urban greenery. This effort sought to address the lack of safe play areas for children and create an environment conducive to rest, accessibility, and enjoyment for the community. Key interventions included relocating parked vehicles to formal garages, installing urban gardens and vegetation, and encouraging children to spend at least 30 minutes daily playing outdoors. The project also aimed to eliminate harmful activities such as alcohol and drug consumption in the area, fostering a healthier and safer community environment.



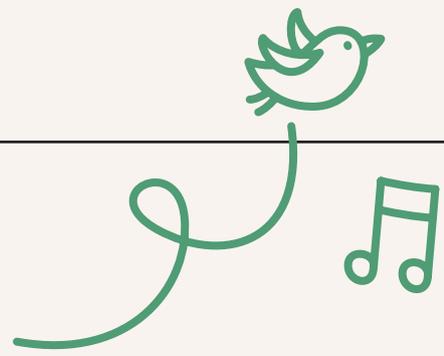
Pasaje Paiva.
© Metropolitan Municipality of Lima.
Lima, Peru. 2021.



Outcomes

The intervention reclaimed 874 m² of public space, adding six bio-garden boxes, 12 ornamental trees, and 125 plants and shrubs. A level crossing was installed to improve accessibility and calm traffic, while a 115 m² artistic installation enhanced the area's visual appeal. The space now benefits 1,577 nearby residents, including over 50 children under five who regularly use it for recreation. Local residents have organized events such as Independence Day celebrations and anniversaries of the project. Families have taken ownership of tree maintenance, fostering a sense of community pride. The revitalized space is no longer used as a parking lot, transforming it into a vibrant, shared space for relaxation, play, and community activities.





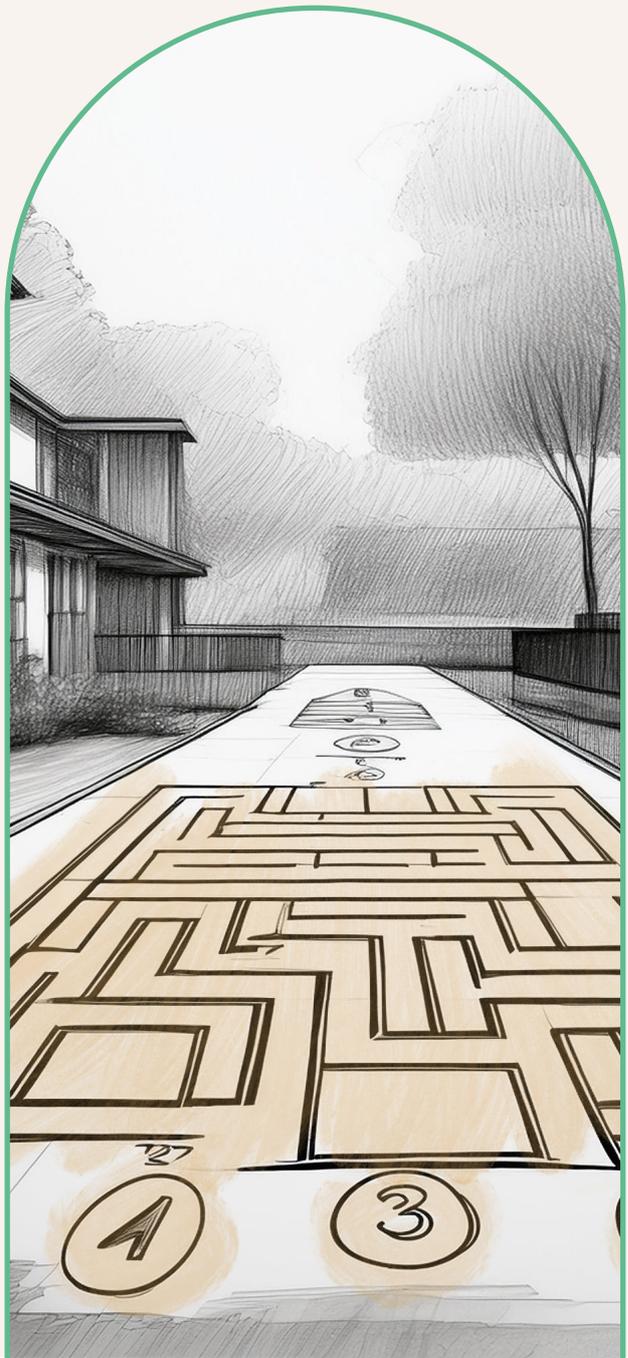
School Zones

Streets near schools can be transformed into playful, safe spaces that engage children before and after school hours. Playable crosswalks, murals, and interactive sidewalk games can

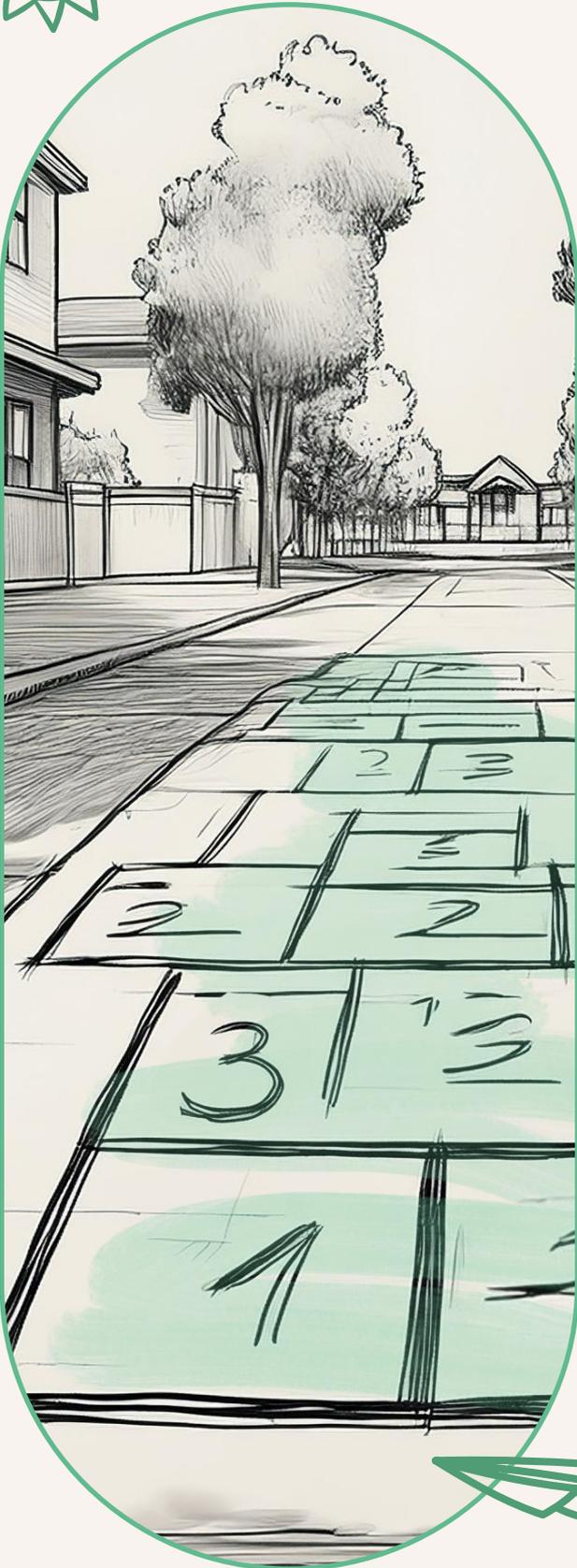
make school zones more vibrant and less vehicle-centric, promoting safer routes to school for children.



Playable Crosswalks: Crosswalks near schools can be transformed into playful, interactive designs with bold colors, textures, or patterns that engage children as they cross the street while making the space safer for pedestrians.



Interactive Sidewalk Games: Games such as number hops, word puzzles, or painted mazes can be incorporated into sidewalks around schools, encouraging playful learning and movement before and after school hours.



Waiting Zones with Seating: Designated waiting areas with playful seating or small sculptures give children and caregivers a safe, engaging place to gather before and after school. Using recycled or upcycled materials for benches and seating keeps costs low while enhancing the zone's appeal.

Praça da Primeira Infância Maria Cardoso do Nascimento

Location: Sobral, Brazil

Partners: Municipality of Sobral, Urban95

Background

Located in the Sumaré neighborhood of Sobral, Brazil, Praça da Primeira Infância Maria Cardoso do Nascimento was transformed from a vehicle-prioritized street into a safe, welcoming space for young children and caregivers. Previously, the area faced high traffic volumes, inadequate pedestrian infrastructure, and poor conditions that isolated a small existing plaza. The neighborhood, characterized by social vulnerability, lacked spaces that catered to early childhood needs. These challenges prompted the redesign of the plaza in front of CEI Irmã Anísia Rocha to create a safe and engaging environment for play and socialization.

Design Approach and Interventions

Community involvement was integral to the project. Using participatory workshops with children, caregivers, and residents, the design addressed local needs such as improved pedestrian safety and expanded play areas. The project was guided by the Urban95 network and supported by multiple city departments and consultants. Interventions included:



Space for First Infancy
© Urban95.
Sobral, Brazil. 2023.



Before

Expanding sidewalks and social spaces.
Installing speed-reducing measures and appropriate signage.
Adding new greenery, colorful pavements, and play equipment.
Improving the integration of the plaza with the neighborhood, removing its prior isolation.
Collaboration between city departments ensured a holistic approach, with shared digital platforms enabling simultaneous updates and refinement.

Outcomes

The redesigned space nearly doubled its area for play and relaxation, offering a vibrant environment for children and caregivers to enjoy at all hours. Traffic calming measures enhanced safety, while the improved plaza strengthened community bonds. Residents actively maintain the space by watering plants and managing the use of play equipment. This initiative not only addressed safety and accessibility but also fostered a sense of pride and ownership among local residents. Inspired by its success, the city is now planning similar interventions in other school areas.



After



Read more here!

Hoywik School

Location: Kibera Slums Nairobi, Kenya

Partners: The Municipality of Barcelona, Urban Ecology Agency



Hoywik School, Kibera Slums
© Playgrounds for the World
Nairobi, Kenya, 2020.

Background

A playground was added to a primary school in the crowded Kibera slums, an area that lacks public parks and services. The students, aged 3 to 14, come from vulnerable backgrounds; some are orphans, while others are street children. Additionally, over 250 children and young people are affected by AIDS. The school underwent a renovation to enhance its suboptimal learning environment, which included improvements to the classrooms as well as external enhancements and the addition of the playground.

Design Approach and Interventions

A vibrant playground was created using recycled tires, which were painted in bright colors. The tires were transformed into swings, a balance path, and climbing structures. Additional play elements included a traditional slide, a seesaw, and monkey bars.



Outcomes

The importance of a playground cannot be overstated. Once the slide was built, the children were reluctant to leave the school's recreational area, prompting teachers to send them home late in the evening. In Kenya, playground equipment is typically accessible only to children from wealthy families, making a playground in the heart of the Kibera slums a significant attraction. Some children even walked 5 kilometres just to enjoy the playground.

As a result of the new playground, 70 new students have enrolled at HOYWIK school. Teachers have observed that students are no longer skipping classes; many have expressed their desire to attend school simply to have the opportunity to play. This new playground has transformed the school atmosphere and positively influenced the children's attitudes toward learning in a way that teachers had never seen before.

The construction of the playground has brought considerable attention from the community, local businesses, and neighbourhood children. It has also provided an economic boost to local companies, which previously did not exist in this capacity. The playground has also elevated the status of HOYWIK school, reinforcing the sustainability and importance of education in the Kibera slums.

Sensing the City

Location: Montevideo, Uruguay

Partners: Espacio Lúdico, Bernard Van Leer Foundation, Asociación Sorda de Montevideo

Background

This project focuses on creating inclusive urban environments where everyone, especially deaf children and their caregivers, can learn, play, and connect. Centered around Escuela N° 197 in Montevideo, which serves about 100 students from early childhood to sixth grade, the project addresses challenges like car-dominated streets and narrow pedestrian pathways that limit access to nearby public spaces. These conditions leave students feeling excluded from their neighborhoods and public spaces, reducing their opportunities for outdoor learning and community interaction.

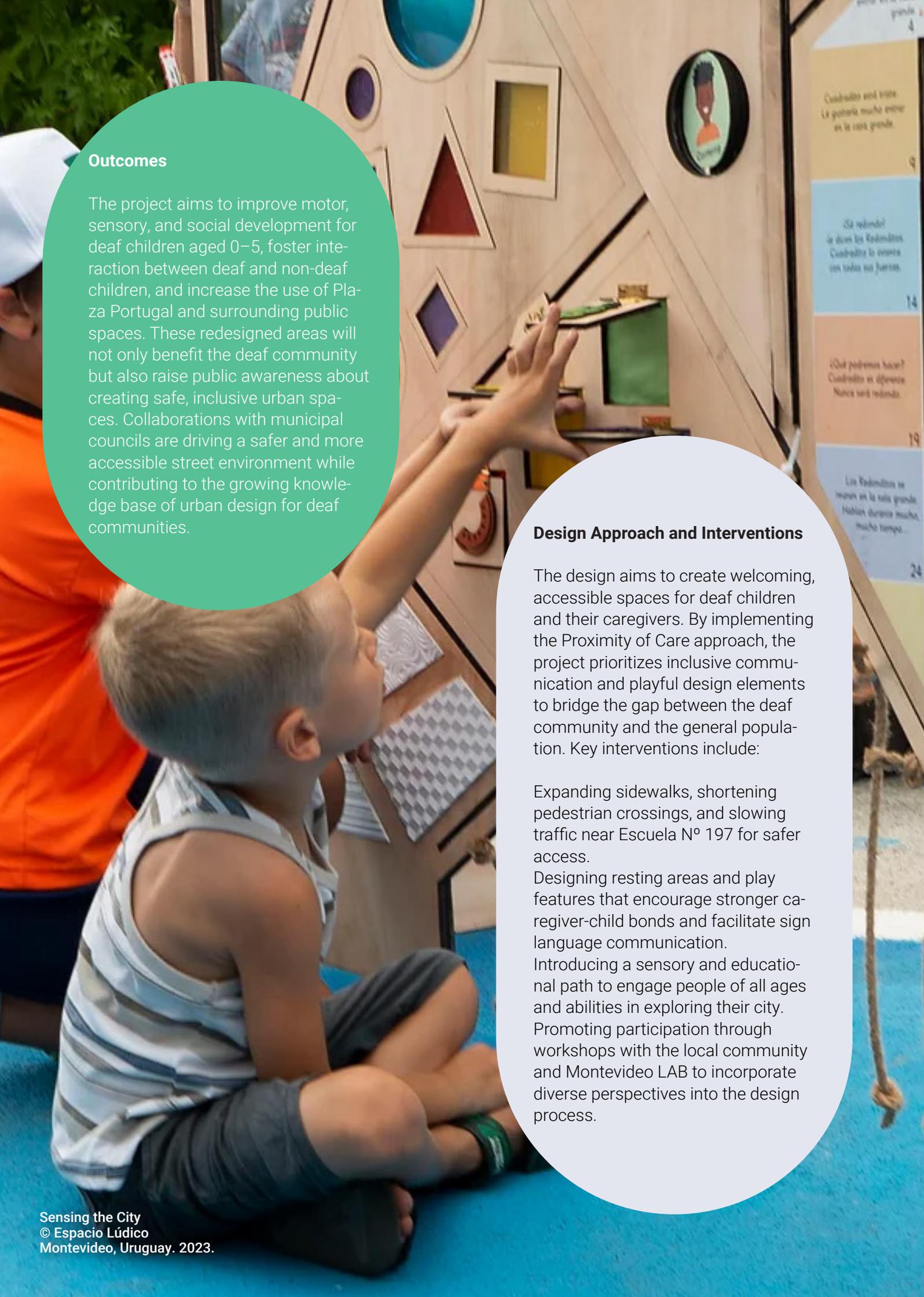


Sensing the City
© Espacio Lúdico
Montevideo, Uruguay. 2023.



Read more here!

Sensing the City
© Espacio Lúdico
Montevideo, Uruguay. 2023.



Outcomes

The project aims to improve motor, sensory, and social development for deaf children aged 0–5, foster interaction between deaf and non-deaf children, and increase the use of Plaza Portugal and surrounding public spaces. These redesigned areas will not only benefit the deaf community but also raise public awareness about creating safe, inclusive urban spaces. Collaborations with municipal councils are driving a safer and more accessible street environment while contributing to the growing knowledge base of urban design for deaf communities.

Design Approach and Interventions

The design aims to create welcoming, accessible spaces for deaf children and their caregivers. By implementing the Proximity of Care approach, the project prioritizes inclusive communication and playful design elements to bridge the gap between the deaf community and the general population. Key interventions include:

Expanding sidewalks, shortening pedestrian crossings, and slowing traffic near Escuela N° 197 for safer access.

Designing resting areas and play features that encourage stronger caregiver-child bonds and facilitate sign language communication.

Introducing a sensory and educational path to engage people of all ages and abilities in exploring their city.

Promoting participation through workshops with the local community and Montevideo LAB to incorporate diverse perspectives into the design process.

Interlúdico

Location

Barranco, Lima, Peru

Partners

Municipality of Barranco, Ocupa Tu Calle, Bernard van Leer Foundation, Urban 95

Background

The Interlúdico urban intervention was developed in 2022 by the District Municipality of Barranco and Ocupa Tu Calle, with support from the Fundación Bernard van Leer's Urban95 initiative. The project emerged from the "Public Spaces for Early Childhood" urban design competition, which sought innovative ideas to improve public spaces for young children. The winning design by the CI.TE team focused on transforming the surroundings of the Nicanor Rivera Cáceres School, in collaboration with local residents and neighborhood organizations.



Interlúdico
© Ocupa Tu Calle
Lima, Peru. 2022.



Interlúdico
© Ocupa Tu Calle
Lima, Peru. 2022.

Design Approach and Interventions

The project aimed to create safe, accessible spaces for play, rest, and exploration, allowing children and caregivers to engage with the city confidently. The Interlúdico intervention emphasized sensory engagement—tactile, visual, auditory, and olfactory—while fostering emotional and physical connections to the urban environment. The participatory process involved the school community and Zone 13 Neighborhood Board, ensuring the design reflected local needs. Key features included safe play areas and pedestrian-friendly spaces aligned with the rhythms of school activities.



Design Approach and Interventions

The project aimed to create safe, accessible spaces for play, rest, and exploration, allowing children and caregivers to engage with the city confidently. The Interlúdico intervention emphasized sensory engagement—tactile, visual, auditory, and olfactory—while fostering emotional and physical connections to the urban environment. The participatory process involved the school community and Zone 13 Neighborhood Board, ensuring the design reflected local needs. Key features included safe play areas and pedestrian-friendly spaces aligned with the rhythms of school activities.

Outcomes

Interlúdico provided children and caregivers with a secure public space to play, explore, and travel to school, promoting interaction with the city through sensory and emotional experiences. The intervention not only enhanced the quality of public space but also strengthened community ties and supported the school's role as a hub for learning and connection.



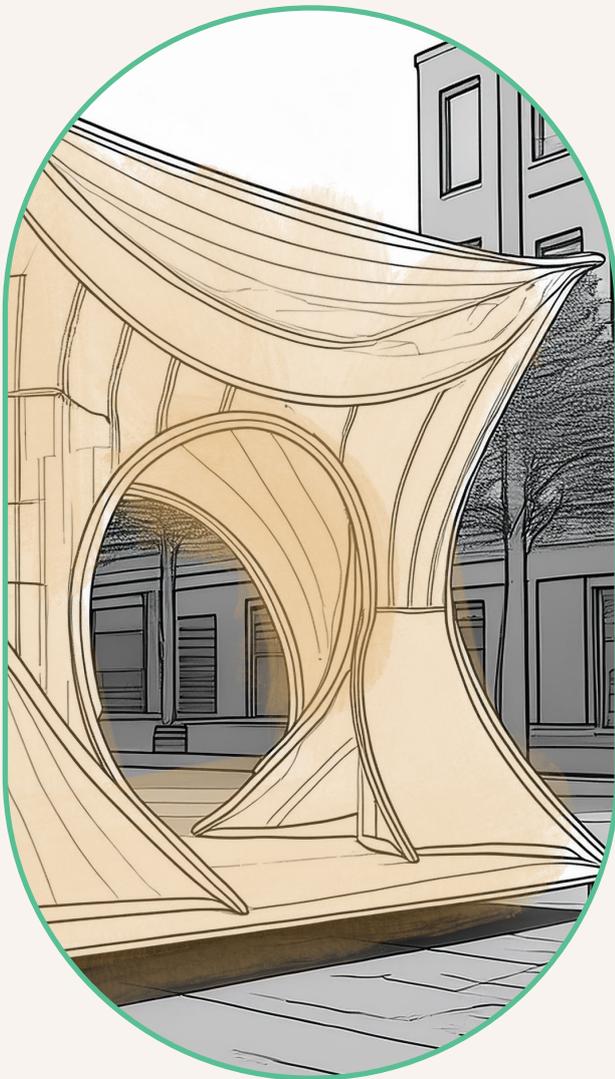
Read more here!

Pedestrian Streets and Plazas



Pedestrian streets and public plazas are typically found in busy urban centers, providing space for social gathering, recreation, and relaxation. These areas are often used by people of all

ages, making them ideal for multi-functional play elements that can engage children, caregivers, and other community members.

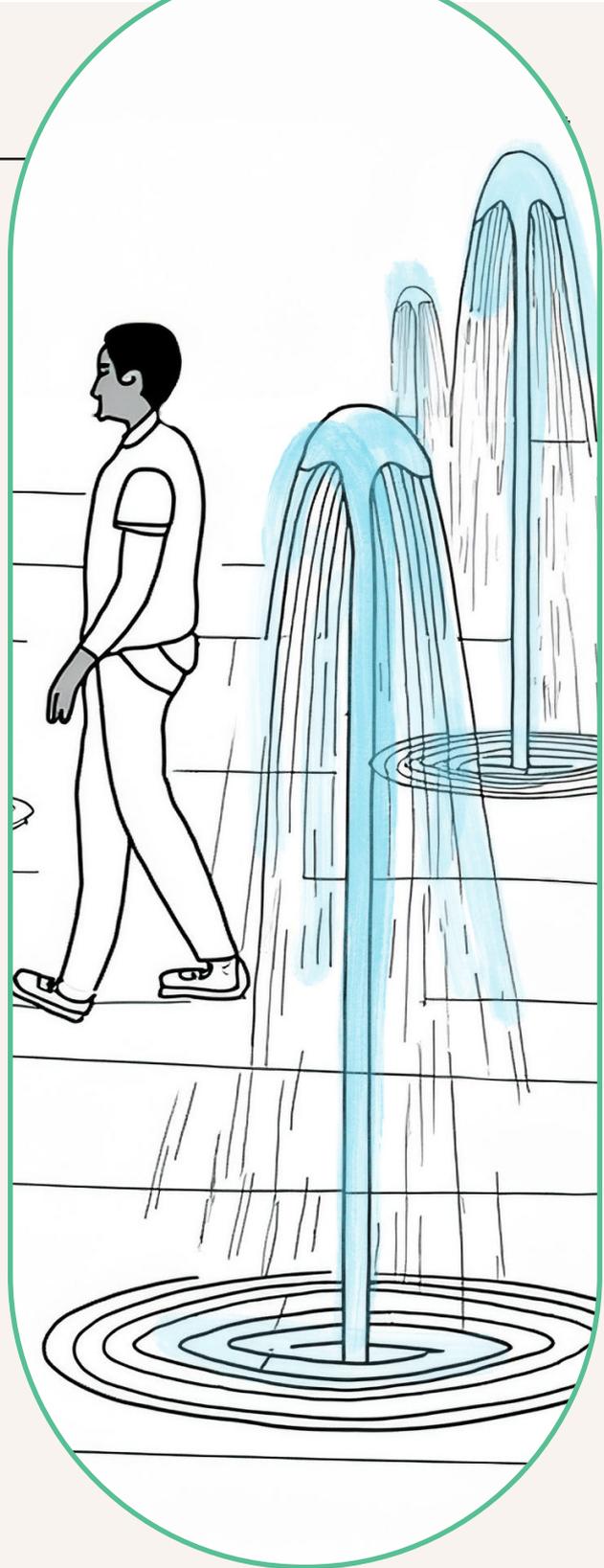
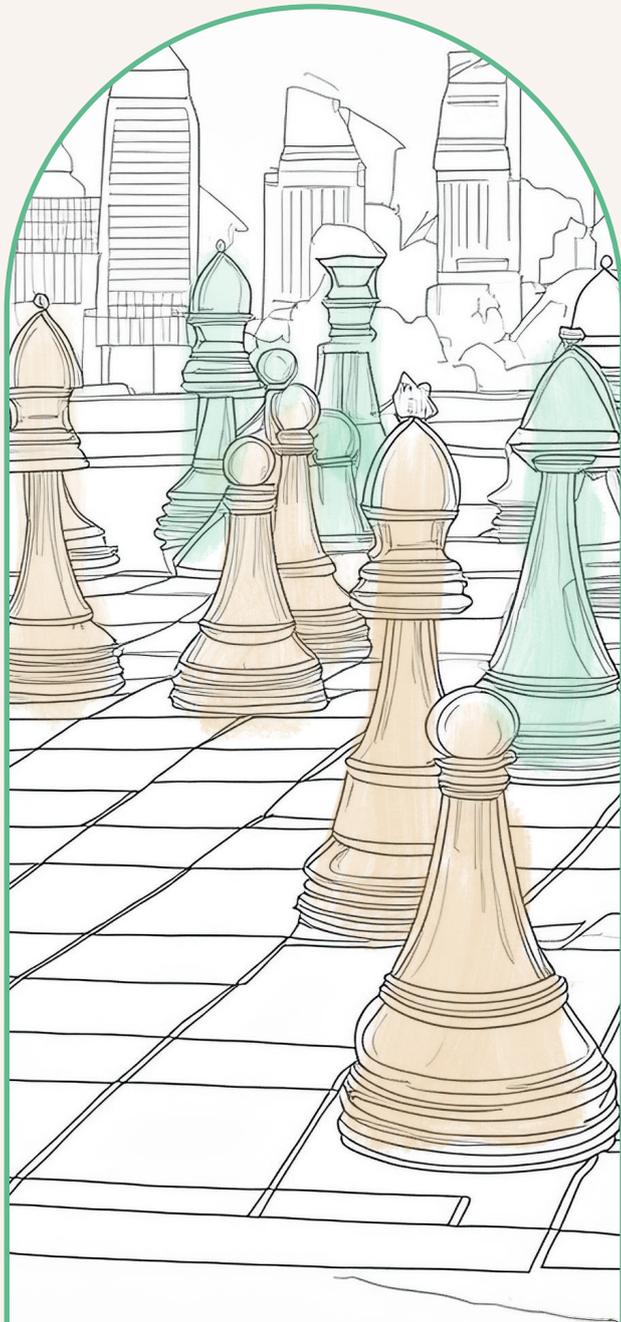


Modular Play Structures: Install multi-functional play structures made from sustainable materials (like recycled plastic or wood) that can cater to various age groups. These structures are adaptable and can be easily rearranged to accommodate seasonal events or community activities.

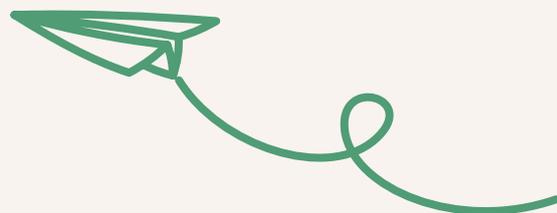




Pop-Up Play Installations: Temporary play installations, such as large-scale games (e.g., chess or hopscotch), climbing features, or sensory pathways, activate public spaces during specific times or events. These installations can be created using movable, low-cost materials that are easy to set up and dismantle.



Water Play Features: Low-maintenance splash pads or interactive fountains made with eco-friendly systems (e.g., recycled water) encourage children to play and cool off in hot weather. These features attract visitors and add a playful element that enhances public plazas' usability.



The Haya Promenade

Location

Khan Younis, State of Palestine

Partners

Government of Canada, Palestinian Ministry of Local Government, Khan Younis Municipality, Palestinian Housing Council, UN Women, UN Habitat, UNFPA, UNODC

Background

The Haya Promenade, part of The HAYA Joint Programme, located along the Mediterranean coast in Khan Younis, Palestine, was created to address the lack of safe, inclusive public spaces for women, girls, and families. A city-wide public space assessment revealed that 50% of Khan Younis's public spaces were deemed unsafe, and 14% were associated with harassment and crime. With a population of over 200,000 women and girls, the city urgently needed a secure, accessible space where they could freely exercise their right to the city.



Design Approach and Interventions

The promenade's design incorporated community engagement and innovative tools to create a space that reflected the needs of its users. Highlights include:

- **Participatory Design:** Community involvement included 40 young representatives and four architecture students who used site assessments and tools like Minecraft to conceptualize and refine the design.
- **Inclusive Features:** Facilities were designed with women, girls, and people with disabilities in mind, including baby care rooms, accessible bathrooms, and service areas.
- **Focus on Safety:** The promenade's layout and design addressed security concerns to create a safe environment for social activities and leisure.
- **Environmental and Sustainability Considerations:** The design process integrated environmental and social factors to ensure long-term sustainability and ease of maintenance.

Outcomes

The Haya Promenade transformed an underdeveloped 8.2-kilometer coastal area into a vibrant, safe, and inclusive public space, improving the quality of life for women, girls, and families in Khan Younis. The project promoted gender equity by reducing gender-based violence through thoughtful design and fostering community engagement. Residents now enjoy a space where they can gather, play, and connect in a secure and welcoming environment. Local leaders and UN-Habitat emphasized the importance of engaging marginalized communities in planning and implementation processes, showcasing the success of inclusive urban development.



Read more here!

Plaza with Breastfeeding Thematic

Location: Niterói, Brazil

Partners: Urban95, Bernard van Leer Foundation

Background

Niterói, one of 25 Brazilian cities in the Urban95 network, has been actively implementing early childhood initiatives. The Praça do Ponto Certo in the Salinas Community, Jurujuba, was selected for an intervention focused on creating a public space that supports young children and their caregivers. This project was part of a collaboration with the Bernard van Leer Foundation, with Niterói chosen as one of three cities to develop a public-space initiative centered on breastfeeding.

Design Approach and Interventions

The Praça do Ponto Certo intervention included:

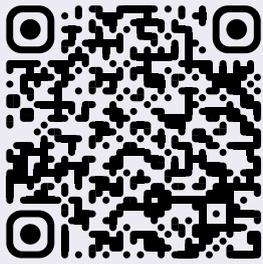
Child-Friendly Design: Adapted furniture and play structures tailored to young children.

Art and Advocacy: Public art emphasizing the theme of breastfeeding, raising awareness and creating a supportive environment for caregivers.

Community Activation: The new space was launched with activities for children, including musical instrument workshops, storytelling sessions, and a children's carnival, fostering a sense of community ownership and engagement.



Breastfeeding Plaza
© Urban95
Niterói, Brazil. 2023.



Read more here!

Outcomes

The intervention transformed Praça do Ponto Certo into a vibrant, inclusive space for children and caregivers, strengthening community bonds and promoting early childhood development. The project is envisioned as a model for similar interventions in other parts of Niterói, reinforcing the city's commitment to creating supportive public spaces for families.

Tercera Praia da Infancia

Location: Recife, Brazil

Partners: Urban95, Bernard van Leer Foundation, CECIP

Background

In the San Martin neighborhood of Recife, the third Praça da Infância was inaugurated on September 23, 2023, as part of the city's initiative to provide high-quality public spaces for children. Covering over 3,000 m², the plaza is designed to integrate nature, play, and local cultural traditions, addressing the needs of the community. This project follows Recife's commitment to building 10 Praças da Infância in various regions, guided by the Guia de Princípios para Remodelação de Praças, developed in partnership with the Bernard van Leer Foundation.



Design Approach and Interventions

The project emphasized community participation and co-creation, with the city's Secretariat of Urban Innovation conducting interviews and workshops with local children and adults to shape the plaza's design. Key features include:

- **Child-Friendly Play Areas:** Naturalized play equipment such as slides, swings, trampolines, and textured flooring.
- **Community Spaces:** A covered seating area for gatherings and interaction.
- **Infrastructure Improvements:** Enhanced drainage, lighting, accessibility, landscaping, and pedestrian pathways for safety and comfort.

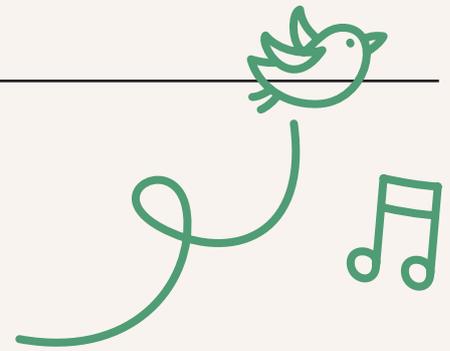
Outcomes

The Praça da Infância in San Martin has become a community favorite, offering a safe and engaging environment for children and families. Recife's mayor, João Campos, emphasized the importance of investing in children, stating, "If we take care of children, we take care of everyone." Building on the success of this initiative, Recife has already delivered two similar plazas this year in the neighborhoods of Encruzilhada and Compaz Miguel Arraes, with more planned to benefit children across the city.



Read more here!





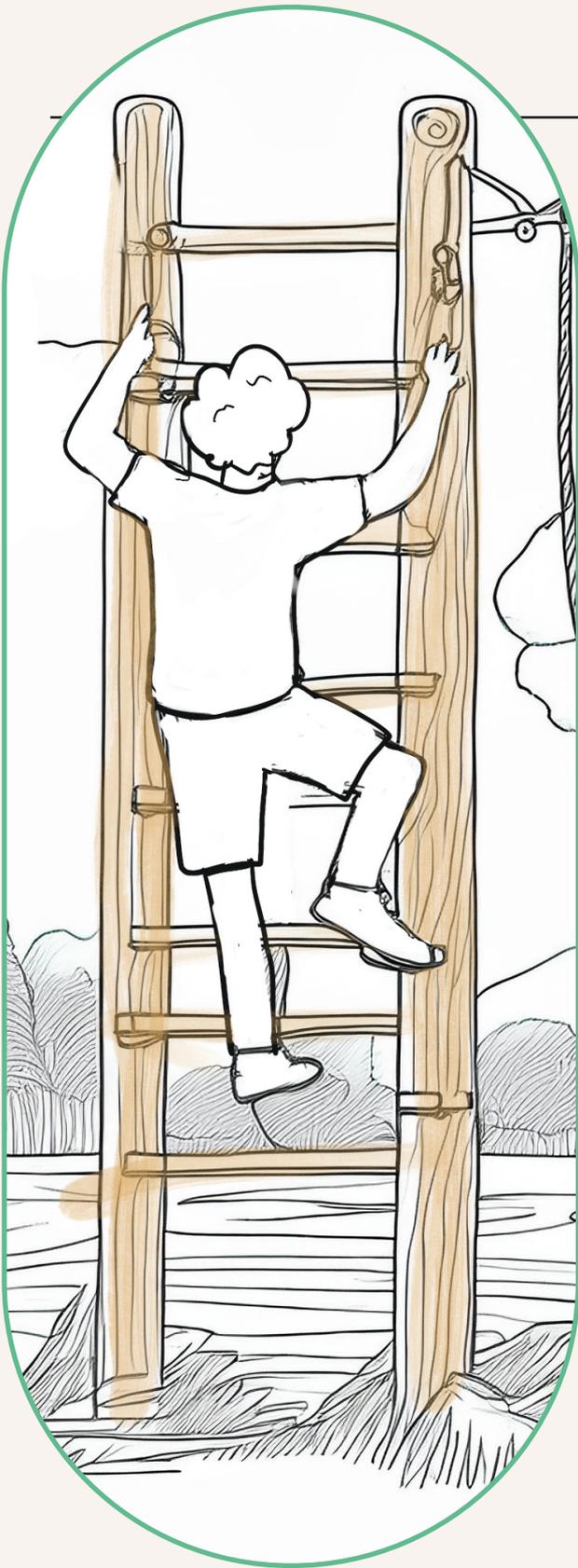
Parks

Larger public spaces like parks can be designed with multi-functional play structures, nature-based play areas, and modular equipment. These elements can adapt to different uses

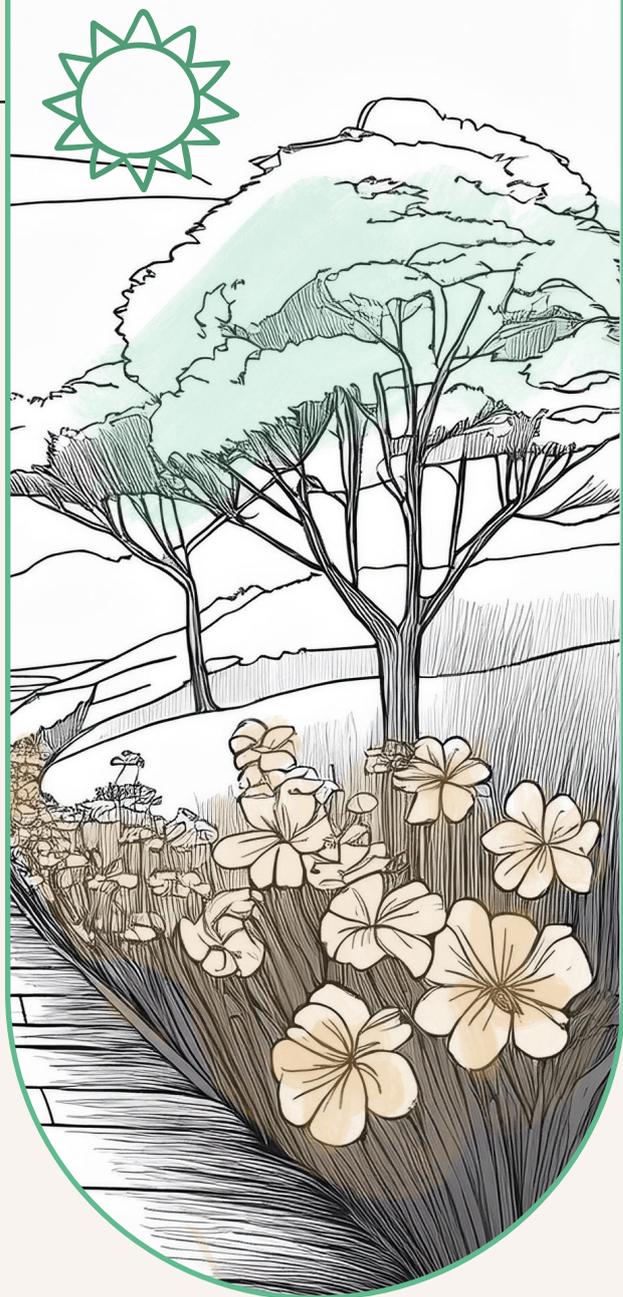
throughout the day, inviting both structured and unstructured play while fostering community interaction.



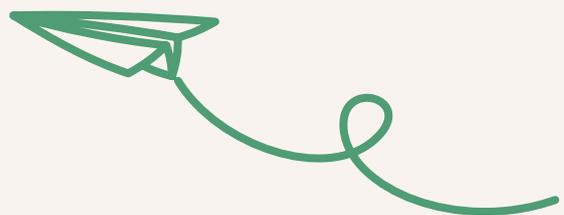
Recycled Material Play Structures: Play equipment made from upcycled materials, like climbing walls or obstacle courses, offer children diverse physical challenges while promoting environmental awareness. These structures can be created affordably and maintained sustainably.



Nature-Based Play Areas: Natural playgrounds made from logs, stones, and plant elements allow children to climb, jump, and explore. These areas are low-maintenance and can be adapted to suit different park layouts.



Sensory Trails and Garden Walks: Paths lined with fragrant plants, textures, and colorful flowers stimulate children's senses and invite exploration. These trails are affordable to install and integrate easily into the natural landscape, providing a calming, sensory-rich play experience.



Pop-up Playgrounds for Children

Location: Hanoi, Vietnam

Partners: UN-Habitat, HealthBridge Vietnam, Think Playgrounds, Women's Unions, Youth Unions, Community Leaders

Background

In response to COVID-19, the Vietnamese government prioritized proper sanitation in public spaces. The pandemic negatively impacted children in Hanoi, both physically and mentally. Even after easing social distancing, primary school children were still not allowed to return to school. This led to the creation of mobile pop-up playgrounds to support children's physical activities and social connections in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

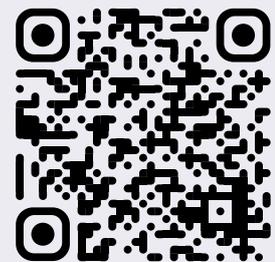
Design Approach and Interventions

The project introduced mobile playgrounds using recycled and natural materials, a novel concept in Hanoi. It faced initial resistance from the community, requiring several meetings with local leaders and authorities to build acceptance. HealthBridge Vietnam trained 58 playworkers on COVID-19 prevention measures, resulting in a safety-focused training curriculum. The playgrounds were designed for small neighbourhood spaces in dense urban areas, ensuring accessibility and minimal maintenance.



Outcomes

- The project successfully established seven mobile playgrounds, benefiting 400 children in Hanoi.
- The community successfully adopted new COVID-19 prevention measures, such as designated play zones, regular sanitization of play equipment, and handwashing stations.
- The initiative enhanced safety, inclusiveness, and social connections in these neighbourhoods, providing a valuable resource for children during the pandemic.



Read more here!

Self-made Playground

Location: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Partners: UN Habitat, Spanish Embassy

Background

The Kibebe Tsehay Orphanage in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, serves children aged 0–8 who have lost their parents due to conflict, poverty, and disease. Despite being a critical space for shelter and education, the orphanage lacked adequate play areas. Existing outdoor spaces were poorly maintained, with broken and unsafe equipment. Recognizing the importance of play for children’s physical and mental development, the Spanish Embassy in Addis Ababa partnered with Basurama Collective and other stakeholders to rehabilitate the playground in December 2012.

Design Approach and Interventions

The project followed a methodology rooted in three principles: public space activation, community co-creation, and the reuse of materials. Key steps included:

Child Participation: Children used cameras to capture their favorite spaces and activities, providing insights that shaped the final playground design.

Material Reuse: Old cribs, beds, and swing frames were repurposed alongside locally sourced materials, ensuring cost-effective and durable interventions.

Collaborative Creation: Artists, community leaders, and NGOs contributed to the project, adding cultural relevance and creativity to the design.

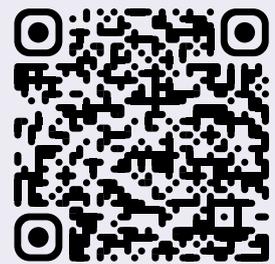
Durable Additions: Play structures were built with simple wooden pallets, scrap metal, and advertising canvas, offering long-lasting solutions in a resource-limited setting. The project was completed in just ten days, demonstrating the efficiency of coordination among various stakeholders and the potential for impactful, low-cost interventions.



Self-Made Playground
© UN Habitat
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. 2012.

Outcomes

The rehabilitated playground significantly improved the lives of the orphanage's children, providing a vibrant, safe space for recreation and social interaction. The initiative also highlighted the value of reused materials and inspired similar projects in cities like Maputo, Malabo, and Taipei. Volunteers and local participants gained valuable insights into designing child-friendly spaces, while the final lecture at Addis Ababa University underscored the broader implications of such projects for urban regeneration. This collaborative effort showcased how innovative design and community engagement can transform neglected spaces into meaningful environments for vulnerable children.



Read more here!

Wawaparque

Location: Lima, Perú

Partners: Municipality of Lima, Neighbours of Rosa de Santa María, Bernard van Leer Foundation

Background

Located in the Jardín Rosa de Santa María neighborhood of Barrios Altos, Lima, the Wawaparque addresses the needs of a working-class community of over 1,000 families. This area, marked by limited access to public services, struggled with poor-quality public spaces misused for criminal activity and substance abuse. During the COVID-19 lockdown, stress levels among children and caregivers increased, highlighting the urgent need for a safe, nearby recreational space. With strong support from the local neighborhood association, the project aimed to create a welcoming environment for early childhood development and broader community engagement.

Design Approach and Interventions

The Wawaparque was designed to benefit children under 36 months and their caregivers, providing opportunities for active recreation and connections to nearby community services. Key interventions included:

Child-Friendly Features: Installation of playful topography and interactive furniture to encourage free play and exploration.

Greening the Space: Planting eight trees and adding planters to enhance nature contact and user comfort.

Enhanced Comfort: Adding benches for caregivers, including breastfeeding-friendly seating.

Artistic Improvements: Conducting mural painting workshops to improve the space's aesthetic and sensory appeal.

The improvements transformed the Wawaparque into a vibrant, accessible public space promoting recreation, community interaction, and early childhood well-being.



Outcomes

The intervention recovered 360 m² of public space, benefiting over 8,251 nearby residents. Notable results include:

Increased presence and average stay of children and caregivers, reaching 20 minutes per visit, particularly in the afternoons and weekends.

A 95% reduction in alcohol and drug use in the area.

Integration of the space into daycare routines, with the Wawateca using it for motor skill activities.

Community involvement, with mothers initially caring for the newly planted trees.

Naturalised Park

Location: Jundiaí, Brazil

Partners: Pé de Infância, Allma Hub, Urban95, Bernard van Leer Foundation, CECIP

Background

Located in the Jardim Novo Horizonte neighborhood of Jundiaí, São Paulo, the Dorival Raymundo Risso Naturalized Park requalifies over 1,800 m² of green space. Situated in a peripheral area near the Jundiaí River, the park addresses the lack of natural and recreational opportunities for children in the community. Officially inaugurated on March 25, the park aims to foster outdoor play and strengthen children's connection to nature.



Naturalised Park.
© Urban95.
Jundiaí, Brazil. 2024.

01 Design Approach and Interventions

The park was developed through a participatory process led by Ateliê Navio, with input from local children attending nearby schools and the CRAS (Social Assistance Reference Center). The project integrates natural elements and emphasizes accessibility and sensory engagement. Key features include:

- **Water-Based Play Areas:** Permeable walking paths, a rain garden, water fountains shaped like local fish, and a water tunnel with sprayers.
- **Natural Play Structures:** Sandboxes, a climbing wall, a bamboo pyramid, a suspended playground ("aldeota"), and a circuit of tree trunks.
- **Inclusive Design:** Communication boards at child height with playful language, available in Libras and Braille, to ensure inclusivity.
- **Community Engagement:** Kits for caregivers participating in the Criança Feliz program encourage them to bring babies to the park, fostering early childhood interaction with nature.

The park's visual identity incorporates elements from the Pé de Infância campaign, blending art and play in its design.



Naturalised Park.
© Urban95.
Jundiaí, Brazil. 2024.

Outcomes

The Dorival Raymundo Risso Park offers a transformative space for children and families in Jardim Novo Horizonte, promoting physical activity, social interaction, and a deeper connection with the natural environment. Community participation, from design to implementation, ensured that the park reflects local needs. Supported by Urban95 and partners, the initiative demonstrates the potential of naturalized play spaces to enhance childhood development and community well-being. Mayor Luiz Fernando Machado and Claudia Vidigal from the Van Leer Foundation praised the project's innovative approach during its launch, highlighting it as a model for other cities to follow.



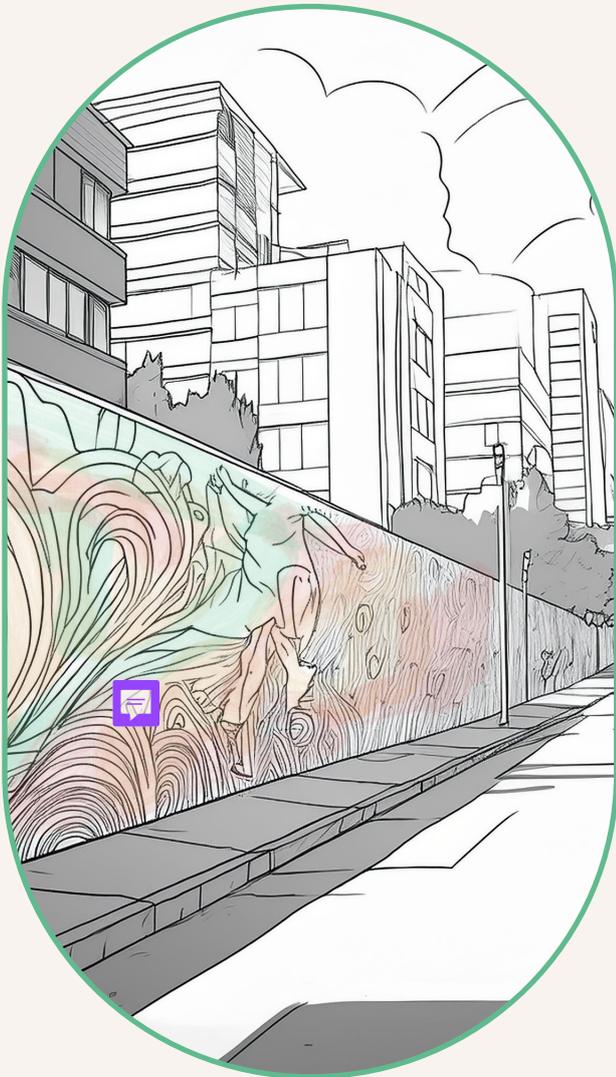
Read more here!

Access Routes to Public Transportation

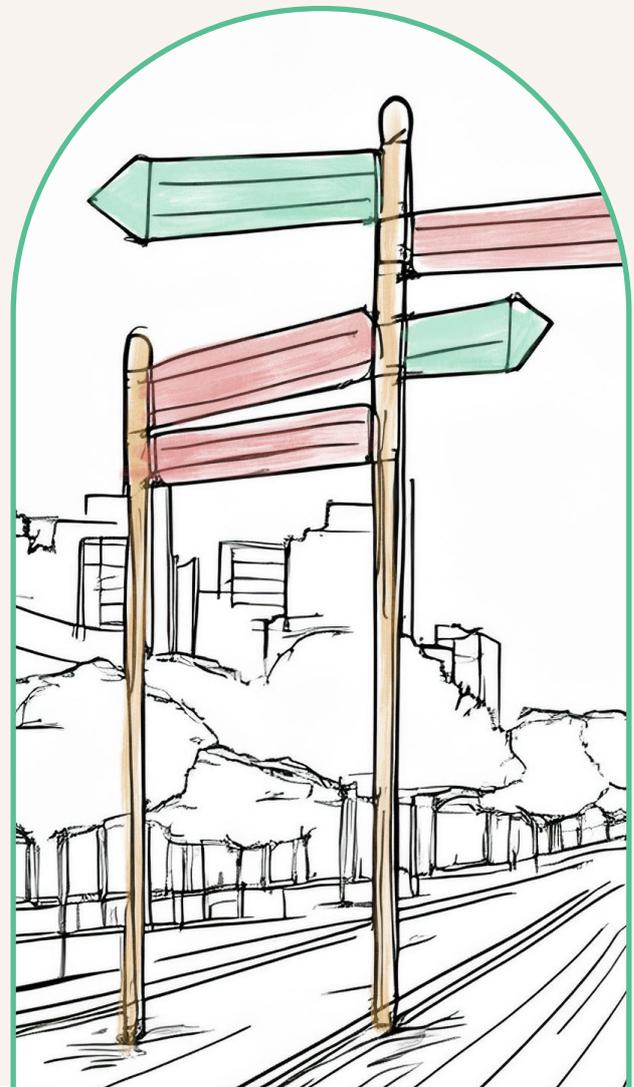


Access routes are major pathways connecting neighborhoods to essential destinations like schools, parks, and shopping areas. These routes require safe, navigable design elements

to support children's freedom of movement, making it easier for them to travel independently and safely.

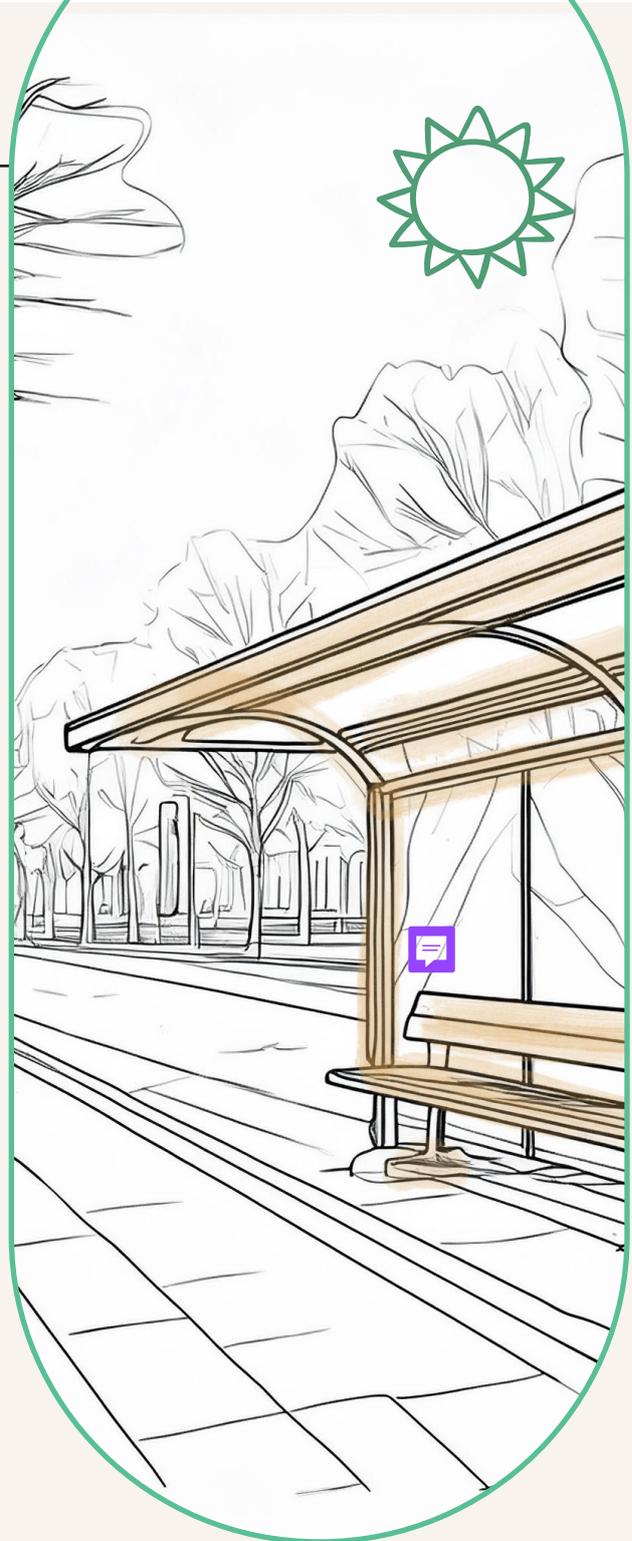


Storytelling Panels and Murals: Colorful murals or storytelling panels along access routes can share local culture, history, or imaginative stories, making the journey more engaging for children. Community-created art projects add unique, low-cost elements that reflect local character.





Playable Markings and Wayfinding: Adding footprints, hopscotch paths, or animal tracks along sidewalks helps guide children along their route while making it playful. These markings encourage physical activity and are easy to install with paint or decals.



Shaded Rest Stops with Playful Furniture: Rest stops along the way with shaded seating, playful sculptures, or small play features provide children and caregivers with places to rest. Using recycled materials and designs that double as both seating and play elements keeps these rest areas functional, affordable, and sustainable.



Happy Lane

Location: San Francisco, USA

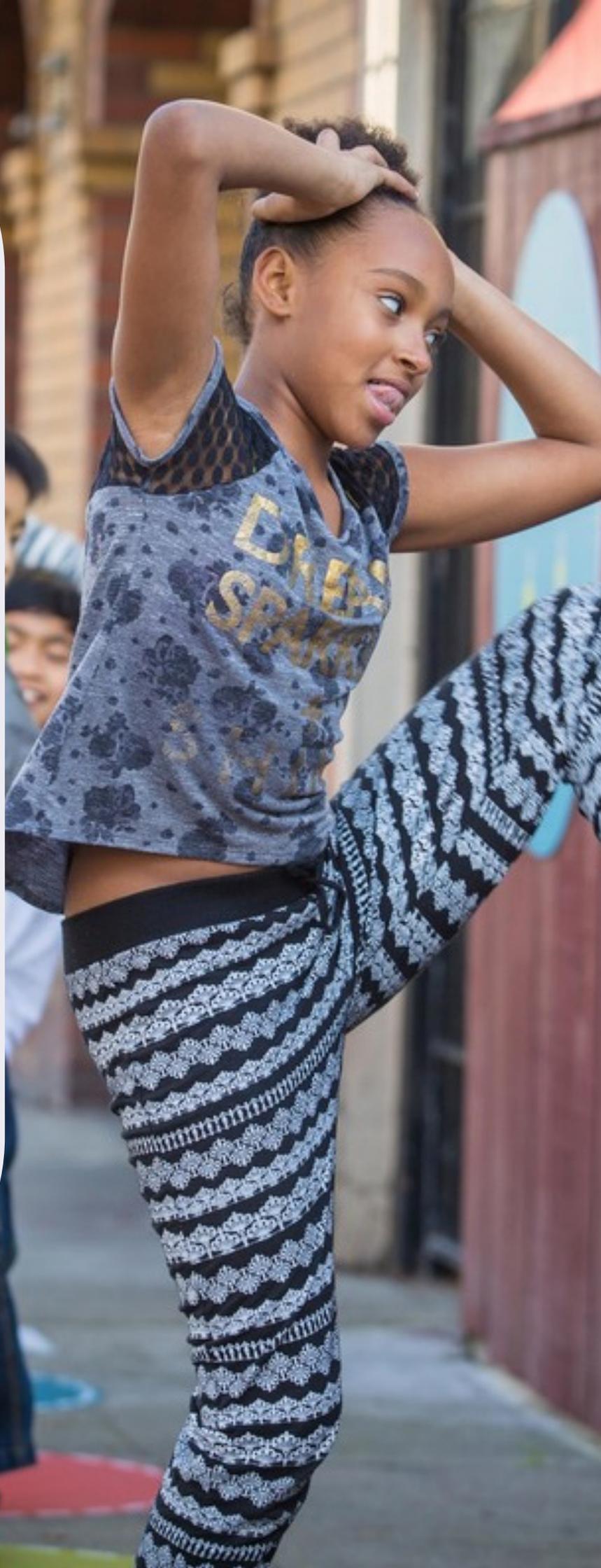
Partners: Kaboom, Telegraph Hill Neighbourhood Center, PLAY 60, Play On initiative

Background

Happy Lane is a temporary pop-up play path and public art installation designed to inspire reflection, joy, and community connection. Located on Chestnut Street, it combined playfulness with physical activity and emotional well-being, encouraging healthier lifestyles through spontaneous play and shared aspirations.

Design Approach and Interventions

The sidewalk was transformed into a colorful exercise course, featuring prompts for quick activities like skipping and jumping. A fitness-focused "Happy Par Course" guided participants through activities such as squats and jumping jacks. The space included burlap decorations, redesigned tree areas, and a chalkboard prompting visitors to answer, "What makes me happy?" Community feedback played a key role, with local leaders, schools, and residents shaping the design.





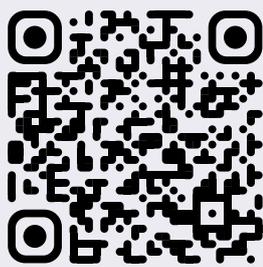
Happy Lane
© Kaboom.
San Francisco, USA.

Outcomes

Initially temporary, Happy Lane's success led to an extended presence. It increased community engagement, encouraged spontaneous physical activity, and fostered conversations across age groups. The chalkboard became a participative hub, sparking reflection and dialogue. Happy Lane redefined urban space by promoting health, creativity, and community bonding in an innovative way.



Happy Lane
© Kaboom.
San Francisco, USA.



Read more here!

Rail Trail Symphony

Location: Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

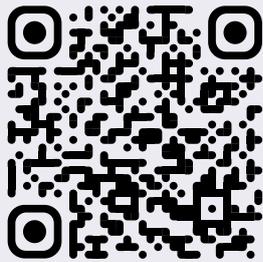
Partners: Kaboom, Charlotte Center City Partners (CCCP), Bethlehem Center, CATS/City of Charlotte, Historic South End, Playmore Design Corporation, DRUM STRONG, ACSM, C3 Lab, CPCC Graphic Arts Program, Durban Group

Background

Charlotte’s first light rail provided an important link between South End inhabitants’ places of employment and their communities. With an average of over 2,000 passengers each day, this station is among the busiest on the line. However, community members were unaware that the trail was open for public use. According to a survey on the trail, many neighbours had never been on the trail before. They also expressed the need for a space that is more interactive and playful space instead of just a path to ride a stroller up and down. This problem was seen as a chance to build a playful space for community members driven by community involvement, and aiming for more green space, and greater equity.



Rail Trail Symphony
© Kaboom.
North Carolina, USA.



Read more here!

Design Approach and Interventions

The design is based on creating nodes along the trail that are thoughtfully designed and provide seating and activity. One of these nodes is the Rail Trail Symphony, which improves the neighbourhood's public space.

The project featured number of creative interventions that include:

- **Musical Play Zones:** The project installed instruments like drums, chimes, and xylophones along a section of the Rail Trail, encouraging spontaneous musical exploration.
- **Interactive Design:** Vibrant colours and inviting signage guided users, making the installations accessible and enjoyable for all ages.
- **Temporary Activation:** The Symphony was designed as a temporary feature to test community interest in incorporating play and art into the trail permanently.

Outcomes

The Rail Trail Symphony has fostered a vibrant community that celebrates culture, connection, and play. Its impact has extended beyond its immediate reach, inspiring an adjacent property owner to enhance their entrance to the trail. Additionally, a local business owner has joined in to co-host a children's musical band that performed for over 100 attendees, and they continue to collaborate with CCCP to develop arts-focused programming. Through another partnership, free "Symphony Saturday" summer concerts are held, with activities in the space raising funds and awareness for cancer research.

Beirut's Public Stairs

Location: Beirut, Lebanon

Partners: UN-Habitat Lebanon, Catalytic Action, UNIDO, UN-Habitat, Block by Block

Background

The project aimed to rehabilitate and enhance social activities on the St. Nicholas, Vendome, and Laziza stairs in Beirut's Mar Mikhael and Gemmayzeh neighbourhoods. The stairs are key public spaces where residents gather, and children play. The project, therefore, focused on increasing play and recreational opportunities, while improving accessibility.



Beirut's Public Stairs
© UN-Habitat, Catalytic Action.
Beirut, Lebanon. 2022.

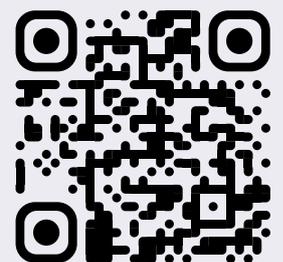
Design Approach and Interventions

The project involved participatory design by engaging the local community, particularly youth, through Minecraft-based co-design workshops.

It introduced creative seating options strategically placed along the stairs to encourage social interaction. Accessibility enhancements included the installation of handrails, improving access, especially for elderly residents.

To make the stairs more engaging for children, playful elements like interactive sensory play items—such as speaking pipes, rolling spheres, and a slide—were integrated. Aesthetic improvements were made by adding coloured tiles to create vibrant, playful gathering spaces along the stairs.

Additionally, landmark structures, including a shade structure and a stage, were designed to support social and cultural activities.



Read more here!



Outcomes

The stairs have become a more playful and aesthetically pleasing environment for all users.

Post-construction activities strengthened community ties and fostered a sense of belonging.

The interventions revitalized the stairs as spaces for social and cultural activities.

Elderly residents now find it easier to navigate the stairs, improving inclusivity.

Mind the Step

Location: São Paulo, Brazil

Partners: Cidade Ativa, HealthBridge Foundation of Canada, UN-Habitat, Block by Block

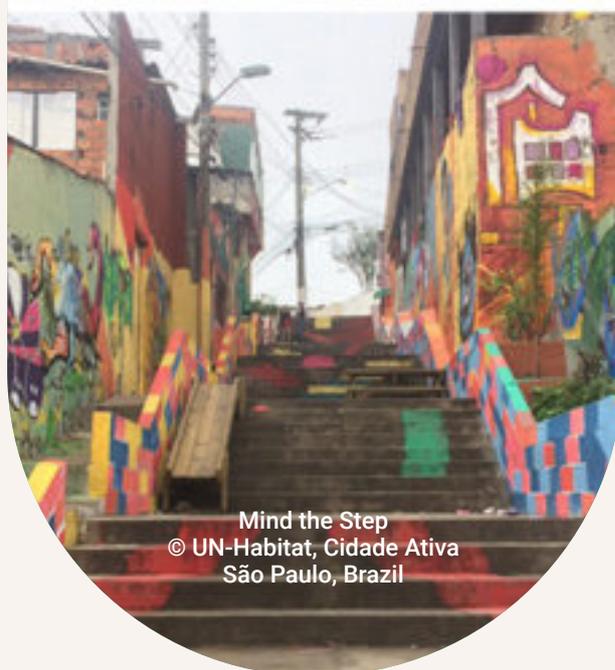
Background

The project aimed at transforming staircases in São Paulo into vibrant public spaces. This project focused on a staircase in Jardim Nakamura, a peripheral neighbourhood in São Paulo, addressing issues such as poor maintenance, garbage disposal, and inadequate lighting. The staircase serves as an essential pedestrian route but lacked engagement as a social space. The project was supported by Health Bridge Foundation of Canada and UN-Habitat through the Block by Block initiative.

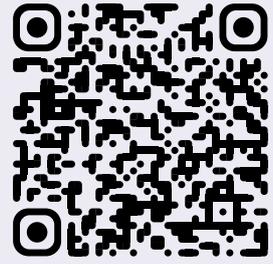
Design Approach and Interventions

The project included a co-created light intervention to enhance the staircase's quality, making it a safer and more welcoming space for the community. Key engagements involved community engagement activities, including walking bus events, Minecraft workshops, and collaborative design sessions.

Local artists, students, and neighbourhood associations played an active role in these activities. The intervention aimed to increase the staircase's use not only as a shortcut but as a gathering place, fostering a sense of ownership and improving overall safety.



Mind the Step
© UN-Habitat, Cidade Ativa
São Paulo, Brazil



Read more here!

Outcomes

Significant increase in the use of the staircase as a social space, especially among youth and children.

Stronger sense of responsibility among local stakeholders and the local government authority, ensuring the staircase's continued maintenance.

The awareness raised through this initiative highlighted the importance of public spaces in urban policy discussions and set a precedent for similar future interventions.

Comuna 13

Location: Medellín, Colombia

Partners: Cidade Ativa, HealthBridge Foundation of Canada, UN-Habitat

Background

Once notorious for violence and military operations like “Operation Orion” in 2002, Comuna 13 has undergone a remarkable transformation through community-driven initiatives and urban regeneration. Efforts focused on improving mobility, public safety, and community pride through a blend of infrastructure projects and social programs, restoring dignity and fostering resilience.

Design Approach and Interventions

Using a strategy of urban acupuncture, interventions revitalized Comuna 13 while preserving its identity. Key projects included the installation of outdoor escalators, connecting steep hillsides to the city and drastically improving mobility. Playful elements, such as a twin slide, reimaged public spaces as destinations for families and children. Local artists contributed murals and graffiti depicting the neighborhood’s struggles and triumphs, turning walls into canvases of resilience and hope. New parks, plazas, and gathering spaces enhanced with lighting and landscaping provided venues for recreation and community events. enhanced with thoughtful lighting and landscaping.

Outcomes

Comuna 13 is now an international model for community-led urban regeneration, marked by a decline in crime and increased quality of life. Public spaces host cultural events, performances, and workshops, fostering social interaction and economic revival. Murals and graffiti symbolize the neighborhood’s resilience, attracting artists and visitors worldwide. Local businesses have flourished, and the area has become a cultural hub, hosting festivals and creative collaborations that cement its identity as a vibrant symbol of transformation.



05

Conclusions

The Broader Impact of Playful Streets

-
- Social and Environmental Benefits
 - Benefits Beyond Children
 - Economic Value of Playful Streets
 - Creating Playful, Sustainable Streets for All



05

Social and Environmental Benefits

By creating playful, interactive environments, streets become hubs of community engagement, where people come together, connect, and form stronger social bonds. Playful streets encourage spontaneous interactions between children, caregivers, and passersby, fostering a sense of belonging and shared ownership of public space. In doing so, they help reduce feelings of isolation and create a more inclusive, connected urban experience.

Additionally, playful streets contribute to the environmental health of cities by incorporating

green elements like trees, gardens, and natural play areas. These interventions not only provide children with opportunities to engage with nature but also reduce urban heat, improve air quality, and promote biodiversity. Streets that are designed with sustainability in mind, using eco-friendly materials, energy-efficient lighting, and recycled resources, help mitigate the environmental impact of urban development, creating healthier and more resilient cities for future generations.

Benefits Beyond Children

While the primary focus of playful street design is on children, the benefits extend far beyond this group. Streets designed with playfulness in mind become more accessible and welcoming to everyone, from caregivers to the elderly, to people with disabilities. By slowing traffic, improving walkability, and adding clear signage, these streets promote safety and ease of movement for all pedestrians. Additionally, the vibrant, engaging nature of playful streets attracts visitors and encourages local economic activity by making neighbourhoods more appealing

to residents, businesses, and tourists alike.

For caregivers, these spaces provide safe, relaxing environments where they can socialize, watch their children play, or take part in community activities. Elderly residents benefit from slower, safer streets with seating areas where they can rest and engage with their surroundings. In this way, playful streets help create urban environments that are inclusive and supportive of all members of the community.

Economic Value of Playful Streets

Investing in playful street design can also bring significant economic benefits. By making neighbourhoods more attractive and engaging, playful streets can increase property values, encourage local business activity, and attract investment. Additionally, well-designed public spaces often lead to reduced costs related to public health by promoting physical activity, reducing stress, and fostering mental well-being.

Furthermore, community-led, affordable interventions, such as murals, recycled play equipment, or temporary installations, can activate underutilized spaces with minimal cost. These playful elements not only bring vibrancy to the area but also build a sense of community ownership and pride, leading to more sustainable urban development.

Creating Playful, Sustainable Streets for All

Playful streets have the power to reshape cities, making them more vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable for all residents. By prioritizing the needs of children, we create environments that encourage exploration, creativity, and interaction, while also fostering safety, accessibility, and sustainability. Playful urban elements, from colourful hopscotch paths and interactive murals to recycled playground equipment and nature-based play areas, turn ordinary streets into dynamic spaces that invite engagement and build stronger communities.

The design principles and best practices outlined in this guide demonstrate that playful streets are not just a luxury for wealthy cities, but an achievable goal for any urban context, regard-

less of budget. By using affordable, sustainable materials and involving local communities in the design process, cities can create spaces that reflect the unique culture and character of their neighbourhoods while supporting the physical, social, and emotional development of children.

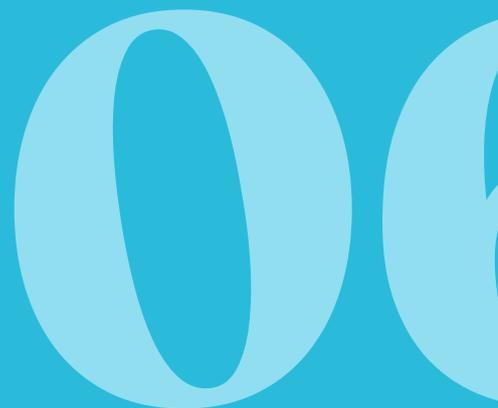
Moving forward, playful street design should be seen as a fundamental part of urban planning, contributing to the broader goals of social equity, environmental resilience, and economic vitality. By creating streets that are fun, accessible, and sustainable, we make our cities better places to live, work, and play—for children, caregivers, and the entire community.



06



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