

*Landscapes of Care. Public housing across multiple  
geographies: crossing theories and practices*



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## **Right to the City (photo)voices: participatory photography with children in Greater Lisbon**

*Rosa Arma, Camila Andrade dos Santos*

### **Abstract**

The study “Voices of the Right to the City” consists of two participatory photography actions conducted in 2018 and 2021 by members of the Group of Socio-Territorial, Urban and Local Action Studies (GESTUAL). These actions involved children of African origin and Roma ethnicity from the self-produced neighbourhood *Bairro da Torre* in Greater Lisbon, who experienced a rehousing process that began in 2007 and concluded in 2023. Through a description and comparative analysis of the two actions and the data collected and by focusing on the neighbourhoods, housing and play spaces, we aim here to discuss the participants' perceptions of changes in the places of their everyday lives before and after the rehousing process. Data collected includes the children's own photographs, which have been obtained through photovoices, and interviews about these photographs, which were conducted through photo-elicitation. We also seek to reflect on participatory photography as a research methodology. We argue that participatory photography can foster dialogue between researchers and research subjects, in our case children, offering an opportunity for the collective construction of knowledge. The results of this research highlight the urgent need to (re)think and (re)build cities in a way that ensures the voices of children and other vulnerable groups are heard and considered, thereby contributing to a just transformation of both the city and society.

Keywords: participatory photography; children; right to the city; greater Lisbon.

## THEORETICAL PAPERS

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## Introduction

The study “Voices of the Right to the City” consists of two participatory photography actions conducted in 2018 and 2021 by members of the Group of Socio-Territorial, Urban and Local Action Studies (GESTUAL) at the Lisbon School of Architecture (FA.ULisboa). These actions involved children of African origin and Roma ethnicity from the *Bairro da Torre* (BDT), which was a self-produced<sup>1</sup> neighbourhood in Greater Lisbon. In 2021, the study included both the young participants still living in the BDT and those who had been rehoused in the meantime.

The study began with the seminar “Right to the City (1968–2018)”, organised by GESTUAL in 2018. The first action, conducted under the seminar, aimed to understand the notion of the Right to the City through the eyes of the children. The second one was guided by the authors’ (members of GESTUAL) PhD research objectives: one with a thesis in the field of Architecture on an interactive approach to intervention in the self-produced neighbourhoods of Greater Lisbon, and the other in the field of Design, focusing on participatory design with children for the creation of play places in public spaces in the urban margins.

In order to build more just cities, children were chosen as subjects of the study because of the importance of their active participation and unique voices in debates about space and rights to the city. Children also provide valuable insights into intergenerational and intercultural dialogue within their communities and the city. Several programs and projects centred on co-creation focus on placing children at the centre of decision-making processes related to transforming the built environment because of how those processes directly affect them. These initiatives encourage children to actively participate through diverse participatory methodologies that ensure their voices are heard and their needs and desires are addressed. Additionally, they promote mutual learning among researchers, technicians, and children. Notable initiatives in this area include the *Children’s City* (Tonucci 2019), as well as the experiences detailed in the works of Parnell et al. (2018) and Khan et al. (2020), which explore the theory, audio, and visual practices of engaging with children to (re)think how we design cities.

Participatory photography was adopted as the primary methodology through which research was garnered because it is considered appropriate for research with children (Blackman 2007 and Derr et al. 2013). It uses interactive tools that allow research subjects to portray their reality through photographs guided by a specific research theme. In a photovoice or a photo-elicitation – which we choose as tools supporting our methodology – the perception and interpretation of reality occurs through the act of producing and discussing images, which stem from a series of choices reflecting the producer’s imaginary (Meirinho 2016). According to Wang and Burris (1997, 369), “[photovoice] entrusts cameras to the hands of people to enable them to act as recorders and potential catalysts for social action and change, in their own communities”. Research

<sup>1</sup> The notion of self-production arose from a debate among researchers of GESTUAL and refers to the notion of production of space as addressed by Henri Lefebvre (1974) rather than just to self-construction.

methodologies using photographs are diverse and can be found in the literature, especially in the social sciences, as photovoice (Wang and Burris 1997), photo-elicitation (Harper 2002 and Pink 2020), photographic studies or picture cards (Martin and Hanington 2012) each with specific characteristics. When based on images directly produced by the research subjects, the results are materially rich because they foster the agency of the participants in the research and enhance a dialogue between all agents.

In this research, the participatory photography (including photovoice followed by photo-elicitation) was conducted over an interval of three years. This process allowed for the comparison between two specific and different socio-spatial situations in Greater Lisbon: first, children's everyday life in self-produced neighbourhoods and second, rehoused children's everyday life in public housing estates. This comparison was made through the different (photo)voices of the same social group in both situations, collected between 2018 and 2021, before and after the rehousing process. The approach cannot be considered original since other studies with children as research subjects with the focus on their perception of the spaces in which they live their everyday life and that use participatory photography tools are widespread.<sup>2</sup> Still the "Voices of the Right to the City" research creates new knowledge due to the specific context it presents in relation to rehousing processes and access to adequate housing in Portugal of the most vulnerable groups. Through the adopted methodology, this research highlights the often contradictory relationship between the material quality of spaces and their perception, the latter frequently shaped by criteria such as family ties, bonds of affection and solidarity, and sociability.

In the context of the two participatory photography actions presented here, disposable analogue cameras were chosen due to their ease of use and to the limited access some participants had to digital technology (Fig. 1). Analogue photography has some disadvantages compared to mobile devices or digital cameras including the limited number of exposures and the irreversibility of taking photographs which cannot be deleted from the film. Therefore, the use of disposable analogue cameras required the children to be more mindful and deliberate in their observation. The very small viewfinder on these cameras, from which the process of capturing an image initiates, also encouraged the children to better frame their reality. In other words, it prompted them to select more carefully what they considered relevant for each shot. Additionally, using analogue equipment required the children to work at a slower pace throughout the process, as they had to wait for their photographs to be developed before seeing the results. They

<sup>2</sup> We refer to the worldwide "Kids with Camera" program and Zana Briski's well-known experiences with children, reported in the book and documentary *Kids with Cameras* (2005) and in the documentary *Born into Brothels* (2004). We also mention the participatory action research *Olhares em foco* led by Daniel Meirinho (Meirinho, 2016) which serves as a reference for our study. Meirinho's research involved youths from another self-produced neighbourhood in Greater Lisbon, Alto da Cova da Moura, and focused on identity and self-esteem recovery through photography.



expressed great surprise at the outcomes and, in some cases, frustration due to errors they recognized in framing, lighting or obstacles (such as their own fingers) interfering with their intended subjects.

In the two participatory photography actions, we aimed to connect closely with the children from the BDT and their places of everyday life to understand their perceptions and perspectives through the medium of photography. We sought to explore the research questions: how does a child perceive their neighbourhoods? What does a child like, and what changes would they make, and how? What are a child's views on their houses and play spaces? Can a child produce their play spaces, and how? Which elements in the space does a child consider significant? How does a child interact with their community? What changes does a child identify in their places and everyday life after the rehousing process? Using these questions as drivers of the research, the two participatory photography actions allowed us to delve into each child's world, understood through the photographs they took and their responses collected in the interviews. In this study, children were regarded as co-researchers contributing to the understanding of their reality and points of view, towards a collective construction of knowledge through dialogue (Freire 1987).

Here we adopt both a narrative and an analytical approach, guided by data triangulation (Minayo et al. 2005). This involves an intersection between our position as researchers, the impressions of our interlocutors and the theories adopted. Starting from the narrative approach, we discuss

[Fig. 1]

Camila Andrade dos Santos, 2021. A young photographer with her disposable analogue camera. Personal archive.

the two actions of the study and compare them through a cross-analysis supported by the triangulation of theory, method and field, uncovering the data and the different interpretations produced over the two moments. The participatory photography actions were based on two key concepts guiding their interpretation: Paulo Freire's 'dialogicity' (Freire 1987) – or the knowledge constructed through dialogue –, and Henry Lefebvre's 'Right to the City'. Lefebvre (1968) presents the city as an oeuvre, and the "Right to the City" as the "Right to the Oeuvre" (or the "Right to Work"), meaning the right to "make the city" and transform it. Accordingly, Lefebvre understands the 'Right to the City' as the power to produce and shape urban space according to the needs and desires of its inhabitants. Building on Lefebvrian theories (1968), David Harvey (2012) argues that the type of city we want should reflect who we want to be. Harvey (2008) contends that the city should be based on a notion of the 'Right to the City' that connects the participation in the transformation of the city with the transformation of those who participate. Here we assert that the construction of the city as a place for the encounter must be a collective effort that prioritises use value and involves people in the process of building it. The 'Right to the City' "is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right, since this transformation inevitably depends on the exercise of collective power to reshape the processes of urbanisation" (Harvey 2008, 23).

Through a comparative analysis of the research and the data produced, i.e., children's photographs and the accompanying interviews, we aim to discuss two topics. The first, is the changes in the places of child participants' everyday lives, particularly in their relationship with the neighbourhood, housing condition, and play spaces and activities, before and after they were rehoused. The second is the use of photovoice and photo-elicitation as tools for data collection that foster dialogue between researchers and research subjects, in this case, children living in vulnerable contexts. The way dialogue emerged throughout the two interactive processes and how it served as an opportunity for co-produced knowledge and could serve for the collective imagination (and creation) of a different city will now be outlined.

### **The Bairro da Torre**

The *Bairro da Torre* was a self-produced neighbourhood located in Camarate in the municipality of Loures, Greater Lisbon, Portugal (Fig.s 2 and 3). It resulted from the occupation of public and private land starting in the 1960s and was home to a community of families,<sup>3</sup> mostly of African origin from São Tomé and Príncipe and Portuguese families of Roma ethnicity.

3 According to the surveys carried out by GESTUAL between 2014 and 2016 as part of the research and local action project "Ação-Investigação no Bairro da Torre, Loures. Extensão académica e experimentação metodológica e projetual" (2014–2023, coordinated by Isabel Raposo), almost 240 people were surveyed in 2016, most of whom settled in the neighbourhood after 1994.





Throughout its history, the neighbourhood experienced a series of socio-spatial vulnerabilities, like other marginalised neighbourhoods neglected by public authorities in Portugal. It faced significant deficiencies in infrastructure including electricity supplies, access to piped water and basic sanitation that encompassed a shortage of sanitary facilities, lack or limited access to the sanitation network, and inefficient sanitation. In addition, public spaces were degraded and had accumulated waste, there was no facilities or equipment and housing conditions were extremely precarious. Most residents had low levels of education and high unemployment rates, particularly among Roma ethnicity families), relying on social income and other forms of welfare assistance. In 2007 and 2011, the Loures City Council rehoused part of the families under the *Programa Especial de Realojamento* (Rehousing Special Program). Residents who were not included in the program had their homes demolished although many managed to rebuild them in a more precarious way and continued living in the area. In 2016, the neighbourhood experienced an electricity outage, and in 2018, a major fire broke out due to a short-circuit in the precarious electricity supplies, leaving 35 people from 14 families homeless. Following this, the City Council resumed and intensified the rehousing of the families to other neighbourhoods or municipalities with the support of the *Instituto de Habitação e Reabilitação Urbana* (Institute of Housing and Urban Rehabilitation). The rehousing process continued until 2023 when the last family was rehoused and the BDT was officially extinguished. Even today, the *Associação Torre Amiga – Moradores do Bairro da Torre* (the residents' association), established in 2012, continues to advocate for the rights, access to essential goods, and improved living conditions for needy families over the whole municipality of Loures.

As Raposo (2012) and Pestana and Braga (2016) point out, in the Portuguese context, when land tenure is secure such as in Urban Areas of Illegal Genesis (AUGIs), Law 91/952 and its revisions allow for legal and urban reconversion. In neighbourhoods resulting from the occupation of

[Fig. 2]

Rosa Arma, 2023. The Torre neighbourhood. Personal archive.

[Fig. 3]

Google Earth, 2016. The Torre neighbourhood from above.

public or private land, which we refer to as self-produced neighbourhoods, such as the BDT, socio-spatial vulnerabilities tend to worsen because there is no provision for legal and urban reconversion. The approach to intervention in self-produced neighbourhoods, consistent with the Rehousing Special Program of 1993, remains largely technocratic and top-down focusing on their eradication and the rehousing of residents to distant public housing estates.

Although stigmatised and marked by factors of socio-spatial vulnerability, inequality and exclusion the residents of the BDT revealed: first, diverse and rich experiences of appropriating and (self) producing their space; second, personal and collective strategies of resistance in everyday life; and third, forms of community (self)organisation and practices of solidarity and mutual help as well as cultural manifestations that supported individual subsistence and the existence and resistance of the entire community. These experiences underscore the relevance and value of a participatory approach in the processes of rehousing for vulnerable groups, particularly children, as opposed to technocratic and top-down approaches to intervention that focus on the eradication of the neighbourhoods and result in non-participatory and inadequate, rehousing.

### **“Voices of the Right to the City”**

#### ***Action 1, 2018: The photographic process of recording the ‘Right to the City’***

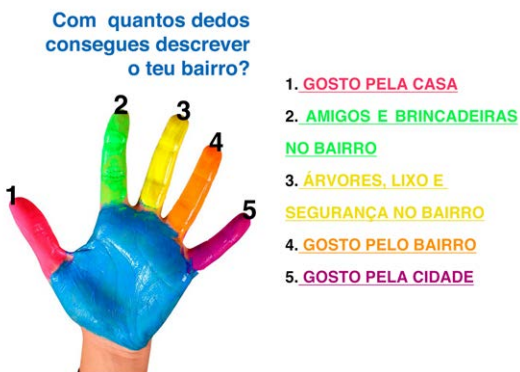
A collective exhibition of photographs, videos and graffiti titled “Voices of the Right to the City” was held during the seminar “Right to the City (1968–2018)”, organised by the GESTUAL at the FA.Lisboa in 2018. The exhibition aimed to offer a plural perspective on the notion of the ‘Right to City’ (Lefebvre, 1968). It featured photographs resulting from a participatory photography process with children, conducted by four researchers from of the GESTUAL<sup>4</sup> in the BDT and Alto da Cova da Moura (in the Amadora municipality),<sup>5</sup> both self-produced neighbourhoods in Greater Lisbon. The process with the children in the BDT and its outcomes are briefly summarised below.

Nine children aged between 6 and 12 were involved: 3 girls and 6 boys, 2 of African origin and 7 of Roma ethnicity<sup>6</sup>. Each child was instructed on how to use the disposable camera provided to them and give basic photographic training. The children were also given a script with questions about five main topics: (i) their house, (ii) where and how they were used to playing and interacting with friends and family, (iii) green areas, trash, and safety in the neighbourhood, (iv) their perception of the neighbourhood, and (v) the city (Fig. 4). Children were asked to respond to these questions through photographs.

<sup>4</sup> Including Rosa Arma, co-authoring this paper.

<sup>5</sup> The second action of the study involved only the participants from the BDT. Therefore, for comparative purposes, only the actions related to the BDT have been considered here.

<sup>6</sup> All the participating children obtained their parents’ authorisation to take part in the study by signing an informed consent form. The signed children’s consent forms were collected at the beginning of the activity. Their identities were anonymized.



The cameras were collected around two weeks later, and the photographs were developed, printed and returned to their creators. The images produced revealed freedom of interpretation of the provided script, with the children autonomously choosing what they wanted to photograph: different moments from their daily lives including gatherings with family, neighbours, and friends around the fire, their favourite places in the neighbourhood, places they dislike, and portraits of themselves and loved ones. Despite the limitations of the disposable analogue cameras, most of the children's photographs are striking, with some being particularly impressive in terms of lighting, composition, point-of-view and narrative.

A computer was used to facilitate a conversation between the researchers and the children on their photographs (photo-elicitation), conducted through semi-structured interviews. The children were asked to select the images they considered most significant to them, identify where they had been taken, and explain what they wanted to convey through them. The children's photographs and the researchers' recordings of the conversations – photographic, audio and video –, and of the entire process were collected and organised. Selected relevant parts of the conversations were transcribed, and their content was analysed.

The children were able to express their perceptions and points of view, engaging in a critical reflection about the places of their everyday lives based on the images they produced. During the interviews with the children, the notion of the 'Right to the City' (Lefebvre 1968) was introduced to the child participants. While complex to them, through their photographs and reflections, the research team was able to define how the children could understand the concept.<sup>7</sup> After the exhibition at the FA.U.Lisboa, the children's photographs travelled back to the BDT and were displayed at the local church. This returned the research to its participant community to stimulate public local debate, as advocated by Raposo (1999).

<sup>7</sup> The way the child participants understand the Right to the City is explored further in the article.

[Fig. 4]

Cover of the script given to children in 2018.

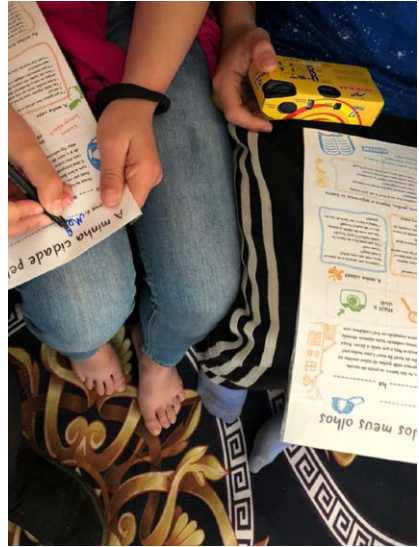
## **Action 2, 2021: The process of understanding "My city through My Eyes"**

As a continuation of the study "Voices of the Right to the City", a second participatory photography action was conducted in 2021 called "*A minha cidade pelos meus olhos*" ("My City through My Eyes"). This action involved nine participants (including six from the previous group): two still living in the BDT and seven who had been rehoused in public housing estates. At the time of this new action, the children were aged between 6 and 14, comprising four girls and five boys. Among them, two were of African origin and seven of Roma ethnicity.

Three years later, the action was guided by two new objectives which were based on the participants' current place of residence. For the participants who were still living in the BDT, the research team sought to understand their perception of the changes in their everyday places, considering the rehousing process which involved demolition to their neighbourhood, the removal of families and friends, and fears and expectations over the years and, more specifically, the (self)production of their play spaces given the persistent lack of equipment for this purpose in the neighbourhood. For the children who had already been rehoused, the research team sought to understand the changes they had experienced in the places of their everyday lives, adaptation to the new neighbourhoods, new homes, and renewed opportunities for play. Through the dialogue based on the participants' photographs, their insights about what they missed and what they would change or add to the spaces they were currently living in were sought. The overall goal was to encourage the children to develop their skills in reading and interpreting the places that shape their everyday lives, and expressing their opinions, promoting an understanding of their rights, namely the Right to Housing and to the City as well as the Right to Play. This approach aimed to strengthen their sense of belonging to the city and give them the opportunity to practise active citizenship.

On a first visit to the homes of the participants, each of them was given an analogue disposable camera with 27 exposures, along with a child-friendly script that explained the challenge and suggested themes to possibly explore in their photographs, such as the neighbourhood, the house, play areas, green spaces, gathering places, social interactions in these spaces or their daily routes (Fig. 5).

*Think about the place where you live, where you play, near your house, in your neighbourhood, or near your school. It could be a corner of your house, a street, a tree, or a square where you like to be alone or with your family and friends. Observe: What do you like about these places? What do you dislike? How have they changed? Take photographs. Talk to your family and friends and show them what you're doing. Think with them about what could be improved in your neighbourhood. We want to get to know these spaces through your eyes and hear about them from you. Your photos will be part of an exhibition! We're counting on you! Thank you for your participation. (Script, photovoice, 2021)*



As in the first participatory photography action, the children used the script as a guide but ultimately photographed whatever they wanted to capture. They chose to document their homes and daily journeys from home to school, portray families and family activities, and capture landscapes and the built environment including significant buildings around their homes and public spaces. Playing was a frequent theme with many photographs depicting both play and play environments, such as public playgrounds and their equipment in the new neighbourhoods. Images of play spaces and self-built facilities in the BDT were captured. Children also photographed community events they considered significant that took place in their neighbourhoods. Some photographs are remarkable for their storytelling intent and their quality in framing, composition, use of light and shadow, and colours, despite the limited equipment provided.

Based on a prior analysis of the children's photographs, a semi-structured interview to guide the conversation with the participants on the pictures they had taken (photo-elicitation) was prepared. Then the children saw their photographs after being developed and scanned, and analysed the images expressing their points of view. They were also shown the photographs they had taken in 2018 which helped facilitate a comparison between the spaces where they currently live and where they had previously lived. Finally, the children were asked to select their favourite photographs which were then printed and given to them.

[Fig. 5]

Camila Andrade dos Santos, 2021. Participants with their camera and the scripts.  
Personal archive.

As a culmination of this process, two exhibitions were held featuring the selected children's photographs, and records of the research process. The first exhibition took place at FAUL as part of the Portugal Participatory Design Conference Place from 19th of August to 1st of September 2022. This exhibition served to both disseminate the research showcasing the children's imagery and their perceptions of space, expressed through their photographs and words to an academic audience. It represented an opportunity for the children's "voices to be heard" by future designers, architects and city planners. The second exhibition was held at the *Dia da Africa* fair in Parque Desportivo de Camarate (Fig. 14), organised by the Torre Amiga Association the 18th of November 2023. From there, the exhibition moved to the association's headquarters where it is currently displayed. Presenting the exhibition where the data was collected and for the people from the community from which the participating children come from aligns with the research team's approach of 'returning' the research. It also demonstrates that the research was embraced locally, and its objectives and outcomes were understood and valued.

### **The two processes in comparison: What has been learnt**

A comparison of the two actions in "Voices of the Right to the City" study involves reporting on the children's own photographs, words and views. The purpose of this comparison is to discuss the results in two ways. The first is in relation to the children's perceptions of the changes in the places of their everyday lives following the rehousing process responding to the question: *What did the children and their photographs tell us?* The second is in relation to the dialogical exchange between researchers and research participants responding to the question: *Did participatory photography foster dialogue with children and a collective construction of knowledge?*

The photographs and children's words reveal their concerns, needs and desires about their neighbourhoods, homes, and play places both at an individual and community level. These insights highlight the socio-spatial exclusion they experience, their creativity and the bonds they share with these places. Through the use of both the photovoice and the photo-elicitation tools, the research team gained insights into their perceptions of the rehousing process, the changes it brought to their daily lives, the preservation (or loss) of bonds with family, friends, and former neighbours, and the new connections they formed in their new neighbourhoods.

In the 2018 action, almost all the photographs were taken outdoors due to the lack of light inside the children's homes, most of which had no windows or electricity supplies. In contrast, most photographs from the 2021 action were taken by the children inside their homes through their windows. This shift reveals the different access conditions and relationship with the outdoor spaces in the neighbourhoods where they were rehoused (Fig. 6).

[Fig. 6]

C4, 2021. The Sapateiras neighbourhood. Photovoice archive.



In 2018, when discussing the BDT, Child participant 3 (C3) stated "nothing is lacking in the neighbourhood" (C3, photo-elicitation, 2018). Siblings, Child participant 4 (C4) and Child participant 8 (C8) pointed out issues such as the presence of rats, rubbish, puddles and mud, while Child participant 1 (C1) and Child participant 5 (C5) highlighted the absence of a playground. To C4, his bike meant everything to him as it gave him a sense of freedom, making it the almost exclusive subject of his photographs (Fig.7). In contrast, C3 enjoyed playing by jumping over the wooden sticks used for the fire. The children expressed their desire to remain in the neighbourhood, despite acknowledging that it needed improvements. They wished to build new, single-storey brick houses in the area 'if they had the money'. Nonetheless, their own homes were their favourite places in the neighbourhood, and several children captured their front doors in photographs (Fig. 8). As C3 noted, "I prefer to live in my own house because it hides me from the cold" (C3, photo-elicitation, 2018).



[Fig. 7]  
C4, 2018. The Torre neighbourhood. Photovoice archive.



[Fig. 8]  
C9, 2018. The Torre neighbourhood. Photovoice archive.

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In 2021, the photographs and children's reports revealed changes in their and their families' everyday lives following their rehousing to five different public housing neighbourhoods in Camarate, Loures, Sacavém and Almada municipalities. They identified improvements to the conditions of the public spaces, housing and play areas in the neighbourhoods in 3 areas:

I. They captured in their photographs "more 'walls' and pavement on the ground, (...) more movement and more light" (C1, photo-elicitation, 2021, rehoused in the Quinta do Mocho neighbourhood in Sacavém). However, when asked to compare with the BDT, C3 responded, "there were more plants (...), here it's just more houses, there's not so much vegetation" (C3, photo-elicitation, 2021, rehoused in the CAR neighbourhood in Camarate during the study – Fig.s 9 and 10)

II. To the children, the new houses are of better quality, although they mentioned not being used to living on upper floor levels. "We don't get as cold here as we did there, everything is closed", said C1 (photo-elicitation, 2021)

III. The play spaces in the new neighbourhoods including playgrounds and the football pitches, although a little damaged, were lacking in the BDT.



[Fig. 9]

C1, 2018. The Torre neighbourhood. Photovoice archive.



[Fig. 10]

C1, 2021. The Quinta do Mocho neighbourhood. Photovoice archive.



However, almost all the children said they liked living in the BDT the most ("despite the rubbish everywhere", said C1, photo-elicitation, 2021). They all cited the following reasons:

I. C1 (photo-elicitation, 2021) commented: "Since it's a building here, you can't run around and play, can you?" Because of this, she would often visit her aunt's house in another neighbourhood, which has a yard. She also noted she preferred the old neighbourhood because it offered more opportunities for free and independent play.

II. C4 (photo-elicitation, 2021, rehoused in the Sapateiras neighbourhood in Loures) said that "it was cooler there" for playing because you could "do everything there", whereas "in a house [flat] you can't". C2 (photo-elicitation, 2021) also mentioned that "there was more space there [in the old neighbourhood]". Despite being rehoused to the São Sebastião de Guerreiros neighbourhood in Loures with C2, C7 took most of his photographs in the old neighbourhood, where his grandmother still lived and where he kept his bicycle and enjoyed greater freedom to play (Fig.s 11 and 12)

III. In the BDT they had all their friends and family nearby. C4 (photo-elicitation, 2021) explains: "There were more of us, my cousins, we were a lot of people!"



[Fig. 11]  
C5, 2021. The Torre neighbourhood. Photovoice archive.



[Fig. 12]  
C8, 2021. The Sapateiras neighbourhood. Photovoice archive.

On the other hand, C6 (photo-elicitation, 2021, rehoused in the Vale Figueira neighbourhood in Almada), expressed a preference for the new neighbours and neighbourhood because “there’s squalor there [in the BDT], not here. Here there’s a football pitch, there [in the BDT], there isn’t!”. C3 (photo-elicitation, 2021) mentioned feeling “at ease everywhere, with his family”. Similarly, when asked by the interviewer in the 2021 photo-elicitation: “So you wouldn’t like to live in a building?”, C5 (rehoused to the Sapateiras neighbourhood after the study) replied: “I would. If I had friends, I’d like to”. Just like C3 in the photo-elicitation of 2018, C5, who was the last child to leave the BDT, stated “there’s nothing lacking in the neighbourhood [BDT]!”, but he also felt sad about the absence of his playmates and relatives who had already been rehoused. The analyses of the conversations with the children about their photographs in 2018 and 2021 showed that the word “family” was one of the most frequently mentioned, and most children chose images depicting family members and friends as their favourites. C8 (photo-elicitation, 2018, rehoused in the Sapateiras neighbourhood) liked being in the BDT because she had all her family there and felt safe around them. C6 (photo-elicitation, 2021) said that he would like to live anywhere if he was with the people he loves most.

In 2021, C3, who took his photos for the second photovoice action in the BDT and was rehoused shortly afterwards, recalled during the photo-elicitation his family’s vegetable garden in the BDT with some nostalgia. He remembered taking care of the garden, the products that grew there, and animals he helped raise, which appear in his pictures. C3 (photo-elicitation, 2021) explained: “This is the vegetable garden (...). I am there... I was often there during the day (...). To help (...). I liked it, it was fun!”. His favourite photograph, which he entitled “Friendship”, depicts the van that the Torre Amiga association used for its activities. He chose this photograph as his favourite because the van and the mural painting “Welcome to all” in the background represents the spirit of solidarity and mutual help in the old community. C3 (Ibid.) explained: “(...). This van helped to make the moving, also the collecting [and delivery of foodstuff] (...). Everyone was welcome”.

The reflection with the children about the places of their everyday lives, as mentioned previously, was supported by the photo-elicitation tool (Harper 2002 and Pink 2020) which is based on the idea of using images to access symbolic representations through questioning (Coelho et al. 2024). During the conversations with the children, using their photographs as a starting point for reflection, the notion of rights was introduced, and we asked them what they understood by their rights, particularly the Right to the City, and whether they believed this right was being respected or realised as it should be. To the child participants, the Right to the City can essentially be defined as the Right to Play independently and safely in the city, having spaces supporting this. From their perspective, the Right to the City is the opportunity to do what they want while respecting others. Above all, it is the right to be and gather with family and friends.

## **The participatory photography and the dialogue between the participants**

Despite the precarious living conditions faced by the participants, the children and their families contributed significantly to the progress of the participatory photography processes used in this research. During the actions, although it was not possible to hold an ideal collective discussion with all the children due to the families' choice in 2018 and the conditions imposed by the health crisis in 2021, a participatory family dimension emerged through the research findings. The families collaborated with the photographic production and were present during the conversations about the images taken, contributing to the discussion, expressing their impressions, complementing information, and motivating the children to express themselves.

Participatory photography created an "assembly setting" for "designing things together" (Binder et al. 2015) with our young interlocutors also interacting with their families. Bridging different perspectives, it became a relational practice that brought the researcher team, children, and their families closer together in a collective construction of knowledge through dialogue (Freire 1987). Participants expressed themselves through their photographs and engaged in a dialogue with their families and the researchers, using their images as a starting point to articulate their points of view, needs, and desires on space (Fig. 13). It was essential to build bonds of trust with participants in order to foster dialogue and a genuine understanding of the places that shape their everyday lives, as well as their perceptions and perspectives on these places – a key goal of the research. Achieving this level of engagement often requires many years of relationship-building. Here, this has been made possible through the GESTUAL's direct and prolonged contact with families in the BDT since 2014 through action research. This established relationship has enabled the families to welcome the researcher team into their homes to conduct the study and gain insight into their representations and perceptions of the places where they live and have lived. The children showed great interest in and enjoyment of the participatory photography activities, reporting that they expanded their understanding of the places in their daily lives, also expanding their practical knowledge of photography and camera use.

The results of the study show that participatory photography was a valuable methodology due to its ease of application, participatory nature, and playful and engaging dynamic for the children. The two actions, as they were conceived and implemented, contributed significantly to strengthening the relationship between researchers and participants, stimulating children's participation and expression, developing their critical thinking, and practical and creative abilities. At the same time, it facilitated an understanding of their perceptions and points of view, promoting dialogue and joint critical reflection on the places they live in. On our side, we also learned to be flexible with participants' involvement, as the study's timeline depended on the children's time, their availability and willingness to participate. A middle ground of dialogue and inter-knowledge (Beaud and Weber 2007) was provided, mediated by photography, tracing paths with the children to '(re)think the city' in more interactive and inclusive ways.



[Fig. 13]  
Rosa Arma, 2018. The photo-elicitation. Personal archive.

[Fig. 14]  
Rosa Arma, 2023. Expo of the children's photos of 2021 action  
at Dia da África fair in Camarate. Personal Archive.

## Conclusion

The study “Voices of the Right to the City” and its results have been presented here in terms of processes, children’s perceptions of changes in their living and play places following a rehousing process, and methodology. Participatory photography was used as the primary research method to foster a dialogue between researchers and child participants.

The tools used for the study (photovoice and photo-elicitation), enabled the young participants to observe, capture and reflect on their everyday lives, revealing their knowledge, perceptions, and perspectives on space. These tools facilitated the co-production of valuable data and knowledge in a dialogue (Freire 1987) with the researchers, which could have informed the rehousing process for BDT’s families by considering participants’ points of view, needs and desires. This aligns with Lefebvre’s (1968) definition of the ‘Right to the City’ as the right to actively participate in the transformation of the city, and Harvey’s (2008) interpretation of it, which includes the right to transform individuals while transforming the city. However, the BDT has been demolished, and the top-down rehousing process has dispersed all its families throughout Greater Lisbon. This solution has deprived them of local support networks. Some have lost their sources of income and now face additional expenses, such as rent, water and electricity bills, and transportation. They have been left isolated, experiencing serious constraints and difficulty in adapting to their new neighbourhoods. While their housing situation has improved, their socio-economic situation has arguably worsened. In any case, this study, along with other participatory research practices in design, architecture, and urban planning within vulnerable contexts, can contribute to the creation of critical scientific knowledge about stereotyped views of self-built neighbourhoods and urban margins more broadly. The aim is to ‘rethink’ them to contribute to the imagination of new, more transformative intervention approaches, as alternatives to the technocratization of contemporary urban intervention in Portugal and globally. In this sense, the study results highlight the importance and potential of valuing and including the voices of children and other vulnerable groups’ into the processes of transformation of the places supporting their everyday lives. This can guarantee their rights, especially the Right to Housing, Right to the City, and as children’s Right to Play, and to imagine and build a more just city for everyone. Dissemination is considered a crucial stage of any participatory photography process, ensuring that ‘the (photo)voices’ of the participants are heard and have an impact.

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