

## Chapter 11

# Change the Mood! Participatory Action Research With Children Affected by Community Deprivation

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### Abstract

The neighbourhoods surrounding social housing are often characterised by poverty, high rates of unemployment, community violence and other social stress factors that are often linked with adverse childhood experiences, including diverse forms of family, community and institutional violence against children. Based on the sociology of childhood, which considers children as active subjects with rights and promotes a critical understanding of their participation in matters that concern them, this chapter reviews participatory research with children, highlighting the importance of hearing their voices, to sustain their key role in building knowledge about them and the contexts in which they live. In this case, children participated in research to provide a deeper understanding of their needs in their neighbourhood, the role of their families and communities and what they needed to improve the quality of their lives.

*Keywords:* Children's participation; participatory action research; deprived community; disadvantaged children; social exclusion; stigma

### Introduction

Being a child can have different meanings that bring different ways of being in time and space, and the place a child occupies today 'in everyday life is not the same nor is it, surely, still, in all places and at the same time' (Trevisan, 2007, p. 2).

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According to [Marchi \(2007\)](#), the ‘awareness of childhood diversity’ refers to the existence of social inequalities among children around the world. It is a reality that we cannot ignore, and it makes a difference in childhood, because it can result in the unfolding of many childhoods.

Children who live in social housing neighbourhoods (publicly subsidised housing) are the same as many others, but also very different due to the spatial and social contexts in which they are placed, which influence their ways of being and acting and their well-being and rights. Social housing neighbourhoods are often marked by isolation, stigma, exclusion and even self-exclusion. Some children are exposed to dangerous situations, such as parental neglect or domestic violence. They often have school careers marked by failure, fuelled by the parents’ lack of interest in school and consequently, in their children’s education.

Generating knowledge on the lives of children, from their points of view, has been the major contribution of childhood studies since the 1980s, in general and among children who live in deprived contexts, based on the assumption that children are active social actors with relevant voices and social behaviours. Linked with this epistemological issue, several methodological frameworks have since been developed with respect to this epistemological and political stance.

## **Participatory Research With Children in Deprived Neighbourhoods: A Tool Against Social Exclusion?**

Participatory research with children has been identified as a research method that allows us to respect children as competent subjects who can observe, act, describe, explain and interpret the social reality that is significant to them. This research method makes it possible to view children beyond the classic negativity that characterises methodological approaches because it explores and highlights their skills, rather than focusing on their limitations and incompetence ([Fernandes, 2016](#)). Thus, we consider participatory research not only as a powerful tool for knowledge production with children but also as important to develop children’s lived citizenship, which has strong implications in the traditional roles of children and adults, implying a transformation in the unequal power relations between adults and children.

Participatory research with children emerges as a criticism of positivist and functionalist models, which defend neutral, apolitical and uncompromising conceptions of science, and assumes that children’s participation is a fundamental tool to fight against cycles of exclusion ([Soares, 2006](#)).

[Lincoln and Guba \(2000\)](#) identified the participatory paradigm, which came from the critical social sciences and is viewed as a political movement and multifaceted process of investigation, education and action. These issues were already pointed out by [Freire \(1973\)](#), who described the need to consider reflexive

and critical dialogue in a horizontal relationship between the researcher and participant. By mobilising children's active participation in research processes, we also create an opportunity to promote children's status as active holders of rights in the multiple dimensions of provision, protection and participation. We also sustain that methodological approaches of research with than rather on children demand a strong ethical relationship in which power relations are deconstructed so children can go beyond being participants and become researchers.

As stated by [Lundy et al. \(2011\)](#), considering children as active holders of rights via explicit strategies that allow them opportunities to express their points of view, to become critical and active subjects in their lives, is a basic step to promote authorship of own protection ([Fernandes, 2016](#)). [Bergold and Thomas \(2012\)](#) also pointed that participatory research is important 'to involve marginalized groups in the production of knowledge and thus stimulate empowerment. The main objective of participatory research is to give a voice to members of marginalized groups or to enable their voices are heard' (pp. 201–202). Still, [Cuevas-Parra and Tisdall \(2019\)](#) argued that participatory research is a tool that provides opportunities to engage children and young people in shaping policy and practice and thereby, to shape their lives.

When presenting collaborative studies with children and young people in several contexts in Ghana, Malawi, South Africa and Tanzania, [Porter \(2016\)](#) discussed the need to have a strong ethical approach that is applied from the stage of planning throughout the research process to ensure a sustained commitment among all involved in co-investigation projects. The author also made the point that participatory research approaches with children and young people 'dont offer rapid or certain success and are unlikely to make much of a dent in the massive power imbalances within which global relations are embedded, even when stringent efforts are made towards inclusiveness' (p. 300). Nonetheless, they still have strong implications not only for individual peer researchers but also their wider communities.

In a study involving 711 children aged 10–17 years referred to primary care services in a socioeconomically disadvantaged neighbourhood in the suburbs of Rome, Italy, [Ralli and colleagues \(2020\)](#) provided an overview of several key elements to better understand children's lives in these contexts. They identified the availability of health services and access to basic housing and hygienic facilities as major issues.

In sum, participatory research with children is especially relevant to developing research processes with children who are at risk and vulnerable, because it is an excellent tool to deal with risky and dangerous situations, given the dynamic process of reflection and action in which children get involved ([Fernandes, 2016](#)).

Evidence arising from the development of participatory research with children who are at risk of or in vulnerable social conditions indicates that it enables them to develop skills to become more critical and agentic about their lives and have opportunities to search for protection ([Santana & Fernandes, 2011](#), p. 13).

## The Context of Participatory Research

The neighbourhood under study in this research – Lagarteiro, in Porto, Portugal – was the target of a Portuguese strategy based on economic cost containment, namely, ‘the lowest cost attributed to each home and the high density required’ (Ribeiro, 1979, p. 31).

As Park (1992) pointed out, the poorest people were automatically excluded from certain areas of the town, due to the price of housing per square metre, which they cannot afford, the result being ‘tenements that are inhabited by large numbers of poor class people, unable to defend themselves from mingling with marginals and addicts’ (p. 63).

Lagarteiro is considered a problematic neighbourhood in Porto, a label that is linked with the location in the periphery, disintegrated from the urban network. The major issues identified and associated with this neighbourhood are crime and deviant risk behaviours (drug trafficking, theft, robbery, bodily harm); negligence and abuse; family breakdown; unemployment and inactivity; dropout or school failure and low qualifications; a culture of subsidy mentality; human trafficking; marriages of convenience; and domestic violence (higher incidence than other neighbourhoods), among others.

Some children are exposed to dangerous situations, such as parental neglect or domestic violence. Their school career is often marked by failure, fuelled by their parents’ indifference to school and consequently, their children’s education.

Most children who participated in the present study came from socially disadvantaged conditions and sometimes persisting situations of poverty, exclusion and social precariousness, forming a downward spiral of social problems.

When neglected, some children adopt role models who engage in risky behaviours or deviant practices. The strong influence of these peers has consequences regarding absenteeism and early school dropout, with several children failing school.

Being born and growing up in social housing neighbourhoods, such as Lagarteiro, does not guarantee a life marked by precarity and personal and professional failure, but it contributes to this likelihood. As Pinto (2007) pointed out, there is a tendency for individuals to live according to the lifestyle of the household to which they belong: ‘Unfortunately it is also possible to see that in Lagarteiro the social reproduction that leaves the subsequent generation in the same structural and social position in which the previous generation was is mostly the rule’ (p. 142).

For most of the children who participated in this study, their neighbourhood streets often represent a second home, because in their household they do not always find a good family environment or the right conditions that can make them feel comfortable.

The neighbourhood is where they have their home and their family, but also where they play and make friends. The children enjoy the outdoor space more and have greater freedom for street games, which provides important playing spaces (Tranter & Doyle, 1996). In economically disadvantaged contexts, street spaces

emerge as an important focus of leisure and interaction, as places of choice and other equipments that does not exist in the neighbourhood (Matthews, 2001).

Also, it is important to consider that territorial stigma is frequent and refers to a self-exclusion that isolates, affecting both adults and children, showing, often, a taste and distaste for the neighbourhood (Pinto, 1994).

Data from the Commission for the Protection of Children and Youth show that several children from the neighbourhood were referred to child protective services (Trigó, 2015), often making it difficult for them to continue living in these places. According to the Commission for the Protection of Children and Youth of East Porto, in 2015, the Lagarteiro neighbourhood had 48 cases. It should be noted that at the time of this research, of the group of 38 children involved in the present study, six had protection processes underway. The issues experienced by most of these children and their families, even those not flagged by the commission, often translate into domestic violence; consumption of alcohol or drugs by parents or guardians; drug trafficking in the nuclear family; arrest of one or both parents; low incomes; accumulated debts; subsidy dependence and single parenthood.

## **The Participatory Research Process**

The participatory research ‘Children’s participation in territories of social exclusion: possibilities and constraints of children’s active citizenship’, from which we will be presenting some data, has as research goal the need to mobilise children as active agents in the process of giving meaning to their lives in the neighbourhood surrounding social housing which they lived.

Given the situation of the children in this housing area, the authors’ objective was to enrol these children in research process that enabling them to collect information and plan changes to improve the conditions of their lives. Through the research process, one major goal was to promote children’s critical thinking, reflection and participation regarding the issues that affected their well-being in the neighbourhood. This was as important as the different research tools and data collection process. We considered that all the steps children developed during the research process were very important contributions to raising awareness of the problems that affect them but also the possibilities to overcome these problems.

The research was developed during two years and had the participation of 38 children aged between nine and 12 years old, that attended primary school (Lagarteiro neighbourhood) and secondary school (Cercos neighbourhood). Most of the children came from deprived social conditions (poverty, exclusion and social precariousness). In this chapter, we will be talking about data only related with children from Lagarteiro neighbourhood.

The research process followed important ethical issues, namely the need to balance research risks and benefits, which demanded an ongoing critical commitment during the research with children, their well-being and rights; also the process of obtaining free and informed consent from children, parents and teachers was assured by informing them about their voluntary participation, the

possibility to withdraw without any penalty, the possibility to access the findings of the research and the possibility to clarify their understandings.

During the research process, several research tools were used: 115 meetings with children, 30 interviews with children, 100 interviews with adult researchers, 165 drawings, 386 images and 165 field notes from researchers.

Through these data, the children identified and made known their ideas, identified some problems about the neighbourhood (violence and filth were the most common), offered proposals with a view to their resolution (Vis et al., 2011) and attributed responsibilities. From the identification and recognition of problems and responsibilities, the children organised planning actions and looked for solutions to their problems. They created several participatory tools through which they sought to intervene in their life contexts, as stated by Santana and Fernandes (2011, p. 14), when defending that data resulting from participatory research allow portraying 'more reliably the reality of children'.

The methodological framework based on a participatory research approach allowed the development of a shared relationship with children (Francischini & Fernandes, 2016) and knowledge production based on their representations and actions. The collected data allowed us to portray the reality of children in a well-grounded way (Santana & Fernandes, 2011). Under these assumptions, it was possible to plan for change with and for children in an active and dynamic way.

This participatory process resulted in initiatives fully considered by the children, who looked to adults for the support they needed and with whom they shared decisions with a view to implementing them (Hart, 1992; O'Kane, 2008; Shier, 2001).

During this process, children showed that they have the determination and skills to make their voices known, using information and dissemination tools to assume their roles as participatory and active agents. Several strategies were developed by the group of children to achieve their goals:

- The newspaper *Os Pequenos Jornalistas* (The Young Journalists), whose imprint resulted from the realization of a market where children sold used products.
- The documentary *O Bairro do Lagarteiro Pelas Mãos dos Pequenos Jornalistas* (The Lagarteiro Neighbourhood in the Hands of Young Journalists).
- An awareness session in the EB/JI (basic school) of Lagarteiro and the Teatro das Lições (Theatre of Lessons) with the aim of sensitising other students, families, teachers and staff for issues that were of concern to children. The stories were about education, hygiene, garbage and respect for others.
- The organisation of the group Missão Ajuda Júnior (Mission Junior Aid) with the aim of providing help to the most deprived residents of Lagarteiro.

Some of these tools had a larger scope, such as the newspaper and documentary, through which the children sought to overcome the invisible barriers of the neighbourhood, whereas others were more limited to the territory, such as the

awareness session or Theatre of Lessons. In any case, the main objective of all strategies involved sensitising others (whether children and students or families, teachers and staff members) to various issues that concerned the children.

In addition to these tools, the children resorted to institutions that they considered able to operationalise their desired change, such as the Municipality of Porto and the EB/JI of Lagarteiro. Thus, they requested meetings with the coordinator of the school and sent a letter, via email, to the mayor of Porto. Meetings with the school coordinator were held whenever requested by the children, but the document sent to the municipality never received an answer.

All the collected data were returned to the children who generated them for analysis and modification if they felt the need, promoting their participatory role and legitimising them as co-researchers. We considered the return of data an important moment of the research because it allowed a collective validation of the elements collected and promoted discussion in a more structured and organised way.

The partnership developed between adults and children, in participatory methods, does not ignore the fact that children are social beings protected by adults, but this does not invalidate that partnership, because children can create their own interpretations, reinterpret others and bring authorship to the process.

Moran-Ellis (2010) considered that participatory methodologies make it possible to reduce the impact of the presence of adults who guide the investigative process, especially their influence on children, whether direct or indirect, contributing to the development of a more balanced and horizontal relationship with the participants in the research.

## **Results of Acting for Change With Children**

Children played an active and participatory role, making known their perspectives and meanings in relation to their ways of living, allowing us to get a better understanding and deeper knowledge of their worlds. They observed, reflected and verbalised their intentions, developing projects that materialised their aspirations for change. They sought to operationalise change in their social reality, mobilising tools of participation that resulted in ideas they put into practice.

This active and civic participation allowed the children to see change in their living contexts but also in themselves, others and the roles they all played (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010). As active citizens, children participated and became involved in the society of which they were members (Ballesteros, 2016).

According to this group of young co-researchers in the community, the people (children and adults) who inhabit the neighbourhood are largely responsible for the numerous difficulties that haunt that place, preventing it, according to them, from being a better and different place.

They assumed a critical attitude that often generated discussions in the large group, caused by divergent opinions on a given subject. Criticism almost always arose but was accompanied by a constructive attitude to propose a solution for

most of the problems presented. Although children were not always responsible for solving the problem, they always presented a proposal of what or who could help with the solution of a given issue. For example, the Municipality of Porto was often presented as the viable and transversal solution to the different problems they identified:

I'd go to the city hall or anywhere, a place where they run the neighbourhoods. I would go there and say, "I want to change a lot of things," and if they would listen and if they wanted, they would start doing that. (Deborah, interview, 2014)

Participants identified the behaviour of people in the social housing neighbourhood as the origin of many of the problems they identified. The inappropriate behaviour attributed to the residents of the neighbourhood involved both children and adults, although with slight differences, particularly in attitudes. Children identified behaviours such as mistreating and abandoning animals; spoiling equipment, houses and nature; shouting and swearing; and finally, manifestations of violence, both physical and verbal, although they only associated domestic violence with adults: 'Sometimes even adults get into a fight' (Dinis & Tiago I, text excerpt, 2014).

In the behaviours attributed only to children, mischief stood out, which participants described as including throwing stones, making graffiti and disrespecting others. In the case of adults, specific behaviours included breaking in people's houses, problems with addictions (alcohol and drugs) and disrespect for traffic signs, particularly in parking lots, at crosswalks and with respect to traffic lights:

If possible, we should force people to use crosswalks for their safety, so as not to be run over. Because if they were run over, their family would be very sad. (Dinis & Tiago I, excerpt, 2014)

Some children were very critical of behaviour in which they also engaged. Although they condemned and disapproved these acts, being fully aware and verbalising what was considered right and wrong for them, sometimes when it came time to place trash in the garbage can, they did not do so. Then, they felt shame because they recognised that they had perpetrated the same behaviour that they criticised so much in other residents and neighbours.

In some cases, we could see that when they analysed their littering behaviour and became aware of the consequences of their act, there followed a change in already somewhat rooted behaviours and habits, as a discovery and a new learning.

From then on, placing trash in the garbage can became for them almost a point of honour. As the coordinator of the EB/JI of Lagarteiro explained, the change in attitude in children occurred alongside a strong desire to change the attitudes of others, even though sometimes they felt somewhat frustrated for not being able to achieve the desired effect:

They came to me many times ... “Oh, teacher, look at the playground! We’ve told them so many times to pick up their trash and they don’t do it!” (Silva, interview, 2015).

By becoming co-researchers, examining their communities, reflecting on what happens around them and discussing in their groups what they like or do not like, children gained an awareness of their ability to choose what they want for themselves and what path they want to take. In some cases, it seemed as if the kids were looking at the neighbourhood for the first time, because until then, it was like they had never really seen it. [Graham and Fitzgerald \(2010\)](#) reported that the involvement and participation of children in research, in addition to providing an opportunity for discovery and negotiation, sometimes transforms the conceptions they hold about themselves and the role they play in society. From the moment this consciousness is aroused, children experience freedom of choice. They can choose to be like those whom they recriminate, acting by imitation and appropriating the behaviours they see in adults, through which they ‘share the social world, build a common universe of meanings’ ([Gouvêa, 2011](#), p. 556). On the other hand, they may choose to differentiate themselves and counteract those behaviours, acting in opposition to them.

The children proposed many solutions, although they all had in common the same goal of alerting people of the neighbourhood to be aware of the problem and the need to change their behaviours.

The children were unanimous about their efforts to realise these small achievements, considering that because of their interventions in the neighbourhood and school, these places were changing, becoming more beautiful, cleaner and tidier. The residents, including the children, now had an example of how to behave, and this example showed them how they could change their attitude.

In view of this, children argued that in a certain way, others recognised them as responsible for the operationalisation of these changes:

The kids and the people who live in the neighbourhood learned that we are kids who do not like to drop litter, that we like to do things right, and our schoolmates got to know that one should not spoil one’s belongings. (Quaresma, interview, 2015)

Reflecting on their needs and acting to change was the motto adopted by these children, who revealed social skills of participation in their living contexts, in the sense of understanding and becoming acquainted with various social problems, for which they presented solutions. They revealed skills in identifying, planning and streamlining processes that have made them more autonomous and protagonists in their lives.

Along the way, the participatory process developed by the children faced constraints that limited the interventions they planned and at different times, proved to be obstacles to participation.

We consider that during the research process with children, the school had a relevant importance in the way these obstacles emerged. We developed our

research with children that attended a primary school inside the neighbourhood. Due to this fact, the image and the role of these children as pupils was often superimposed in the activities, largely due to the interference of the adult teacher, who sometimes wanted his opinion and decisions to prevail over those of the children, but also due to difficulties that children faced because of all the other activities they had to develop as students. [Marchi \(2010\)](#) adds in this regard that this image of children as student's role brings a negative impact on their social action and participation because the institutional issues surrounding their place as students move children to the impossibility to give opinions neither to participate in the issues that are relevant for them.

On other hand, also, was very relevant to verify that these children needed the support of an adult, considering this support as essential to move on the processes in which they were involved. We noted what we call the (un)power of children, representative of the constraints of participation responsible for a decrease in the power of some children. This included tensions between children and adults ([Ballesteros, 2016](#)) namely the absence of power in favour of the adult.

When faced with difficulties, such as lack of collaboration, some children showed that they had a hard time including others in the participatory process, revealing an absence of collective awareness. From this perspective and to the extent that participation means being part of something, we can consider that children do not always internalise this concept inherent to the performance of full citizenship. Although many children noted that one of their most acquired skills during the process was teamwork, that goal was not always achieved.

Learning to participate (by participating) and making and establishing shared commitments ([Cámara & Maria, 2012](#)) were part of the process, but they were not always present, constituting barriers to participation.

Participation proved to be a privileged tool in the fight against social exclusion through the exercising of skills that enabled them to perform an active and inclusive citizenship ([Santana & Fernandes, 2011](#)). In the performance of their role as citizens, the children worked to meet their needs ([Ballesteros, 2016](#)), revealing levels of satisfaction, self-confidence and pride ([Alderson & Morrow, 2011](#)).

In this process, the adults were surprised by the participatory skills demonstrated by the children, especially those revealed in daily school life, pointing out changes in certain children's ways of doing and being:

Their attitude has changed; their behaviour has changed. They were very quarrelsome at first. They continued to be, but much less. Maybe an ability to dialogue, to exchange ideas with others, in their own way. . . . I felt that, at the end, they had a more serious attitude. (Marques, interview, 2015)

In addition to the changes that some children operationalised in themselves, at the end of the present study, they made a point of highlighting the things they had learned ([Willow, 2010](#)). Learning to work in groups seems to have been the biggest change, given the number of children who identified this as one of the

most important lessons: ‘Children learn to work as part of a team, which strengthens solidarity, team spirit, and can help them to make new friendships’ (Kränzl-Nagl & Zartler, 2010, p. 172), as evidenced by the following testimony:

I realized it’s not just – we have to – oh, I don’t know how I’m going to explain! That we all have to work together and not just think about ourselves. We have to think of everyone. (Ana Rita, interview, 2015)

Although the participatory processes of children without adult intervention and participation could be considered more genuine, according to the opinion of the children who participated in the research, we consider that they were, in one way or another, affected or touched by the presence of adults, without whom children are rarely successful (Mannion, 2010).

## Conclusions

As previously mentioned, the children took responsibility for the change they wanted to see in others, whether at school or in their neighbourhood. This was the result of questioning children about their lives in school and the neighbourhood. They chose to observe and reflect on their reality, so they could verbalise what they would (or would not) like to change and how they could achieve this goal.

Children initially identified the issues associated with their neighbourhood and school in individual interviews, at which time common denominators were identified and presented in a large group for discussion. In these moments, they explored the issues they raised through discussions, debates and brainstorming, among other methods. The children gathered as much information as possible on the subject and participated, making known their opinions and potential solutions for the items under analysis, then putting them into practice (Franklin & Sloper, 2005).

They voiced their opinions and perspectives through drawings, photographs, videos, interviews and focus groups that resulted in numerous data, allowing us to perform a rigorous analysis of the themes presented by them for discussion. Through these data, the children identified and made known their ideas – namely, how they envisioned change in their neighbourhood and school and their action plans to operationalise this transformation.

At various moments of our participatory research, the children revealed multiple skills in their analysis of, identification of and participation in the social living contexts, which they integrated, revealing an awareness of the social problems that affected them and for which they presented solutions. By performing their role as citizens, children added valuable knowledge to change their interactions in the deprived territories where they live, being able to envision, in these contexts, the changes they want (Santana & Fernandes, 2011) with increased insight but also a reflection on themselves, others and the roles they all play

(Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010). This would be the starting point for children who have begun to adjust the symbolic systems responsible for managing their social spaces (Sarmiento, 2006) through behavioural change.

Their problems and behaviours led them to a self-analysis that resulted in their desire to modify their behaviours, which corresponded with those that they identified in others. The children felt the need to operationalise, in themselves, the changes that they envisioned for other people in their communities.

When reflecting on the operationalisation of their intentions for change, the children idealised and created several tools that they considered appropriate to the intended transformation.

At times, adults have contributed to limiting the participation skills of children, who have sought to find their rightful place, even though the adults often have the first and last word. The power of the adult, thus, frequently limits the exercise of active citizenship in childhood. The hierarchical relations of power are marked by the physical presence of the adult (Komulainen, 2007), but also the authority embedded in them (Delgado & Muller, 2005).

The children recognised the abilities of adults and sometimes compared them to their own, identifying adults as more capable and responsible, in contrast to the irresponsibility and folly of certain children. Liebel (2006) noted that the relationships between adults and children are often based on protection, sometimes clouding out children's voices and actions and blocking their participatory and decision-making skills. In this participatory research, these asymmetries were considered and explored, having been taken as a starting point for conscious reflection on the children's reality and a parallel effort to reduce these imbalances.

We tried to develop a close and dialogic relationship between the adults and children, keeping in mind the need to strengthen a trusting and respectful relationship to sustain a meaningful research process in which children could build a sense of belonging. In this relationship, the adult researcher assumed an open, receptive and facilitating posture and tried to interfere as little as possible. Also, the adult researcher sought to bring strategies that encouraged an active and dynamic participation, provoking reflection and questioning for decision-making. During this process, the researcher sought to reduce her role as a facilitator (Freire, 1973), trying to bring more children's participation to the project.

Throughout this process, power issues were very relevant for the researcher. Being attentive to the way the researchers approached and communicated with children – including care with our body posture, tone of voice and speech content, among many other elements – helped to ensure (or not) dialogic and shared relationships between adults and children.

By using questions, reflections and dialogues, we tried to build, as much as possible, the research instruments in partnership with the children, always considering their opinions and participation in the decision-making process (Hart, 1992; O'Kane, 2008; Shier, 2001), as reflected the following field note, in which we discussed the possibility of children being enrolled in the organisation of a newspaper. In a short time, the group of children developed concrete proposals that allowed them to move forward with the project:

This is a newspaper that we made, as I said earlier, that we made a lot of effort to make. The newspaper about the neighbourhood and the school. (Tiago I, Field Note, 2014)

From their involvement in the organisation of such activities and others, children who participated in this participatory research built other important competencies, linked with their sense of belonging to the community and their responsibility for others and themselves, as shown in the following field note:

We are not only representing our class, but we are also representing the school and the parish because almost nobody knows this school ... and this neighbourhood. We are representing the neighbourhood, the school, and our class. (Tiago I, Field Note, 2014)

Children were aware of the prejudice against the neighbourhood, and through the research process, they became more conscious about their place and role there, assuming the mission to build a different image of their neighbourhood by changing with their actions those issues that affected their well-being and safety. Although childhood is not equal at all times and places (Trevisan, 2007), citizenship skills developed by children, in participatory processes, enable them to develop active citizenship and provide them with the necessary tools to transform the society of which they are active members, creating a place that is more respectful of their rights.

Participation, along with the assumptions of participatory research, emerges as a privileged tool in the fight against social exclusion and intervention in contexts of social vulnerability because it exercises skills that enable the performance of an active and as such, inclusive citizenship in the society to which children belong (Santana & Fernandes, 2011).

To sum up, participatory methodologies are important tools to develop with children that live in deprived and complex territories or contexts. However, these are not only moments of research but also moments of awareness, of critical reflection about their lives, and moments to be able to promote with the children very relevant citizenship competencies to face the risks they must face in their life.

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