

Advances in Science, Technology & Innovation
IEREK Interdisciplinary Series for Sustainable Development

Francesco Alberti · Paola Gallo ·
Abraham R. Matamanda · Eric J. Strauss *Editors*

Resilient Planning and Design for Sustainable Cities

Advances in Science, Technology & Innovation

IEREK Interdisciplinary Series for Sustainable Development

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Abraham R. Matamanda · Eric J. Strauss
Editors

Resilient Planning and Design for Sustainable Cities

Editors

Francesco Alberti 
Department of Architecture
University of Florence
Florence, Italy

Paola Gallo
Department of Architecture
University of Florence
Florence, Italy

Abraham R. Matamanda 
Department of Geography
University of the Free State
Bloemfontein, South Africa

Eric J. Strauss
Urban and Regional Planning, School of
Planning, Design and Construction
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI, USA

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Experimental Co-Design with a Ludic Urban Community. The Safeguard of the Identity of Vale Do Anhangabaù as a Skateboarding Spot

Jacopo Ammendola, Benedetta Masiani and Christian Saavedra

Abstract

The paper proposes a reflection on the role of experimental co-design methodologies in mediating between top-down and bottom-up forces that shape current urban public landscapes, and their ability to listen and 'translate' the voices of resident communities, allowing them to intervene and influence decision-making processes in the urban regeneration of emblematic places in the city. Specifically, we intend to reflect upon the dynamics of appropriation of public space as a result of certain 'urban play' practices, in particular skateboarding, as well as on the role of designers and administrations in involving stakeholders in a co-design process to include these practices in urban transformations. To this end, the recent and emblematic regeneration of Vale do Anhangabaù in Sao Paulo, Brasil, a symbolic place for the local skateboarding community, is analyzed as a paradigmatic case to highlight the complex and stratified field of interests, disputes, and struggles underlying and determining the transformations of contemporary metropolitan public spaces, as well as the role played by the discipline and practice of urban design in mediating and recomposing these often opposing drives. Moving from this particular case, the paper intends to highlight the relevance of the occurrence of unexpected events during an urban transformation process and to reflect on

the construction phase as a crucial moment of negotiation and mediation between the stakeholding parts. The analyzed case is a very relevant and, at least partially, virtuous example of the application of a co-design methodology at the urban design scale, intended as a practice that promotes social sustainability of urban transformation by favoring greater social cohesion and granting participation of the public in the processes that give shape to the urban space. Lastly, the paper reflects on the differences between the 'classic' methods of participatory design in comparison to more recent and direct co-design strategies that take place during the construction phase, suggesting the possibility of including this kind of process in the general planning of this kind of urban interventions.

Keyword

Urban co-design · Public space · Bottom-up practices · Participatory processes · Urban play · Skateboarding

1 Conflicts and Negotiations in the Construction of Metropolitan Public Spaces

1.1 Urban Transformations and Territorial Conflicts

The processes of redevelopment, redesigning, and transformation of urban public spaces are sometimes linked to a need to revitalize the city's image in order to be able to attract investments that inevitably change the value and use of these places, identified as problematic, transforming them into economic resources (Bolzoni & Cotella, 2021). Some of these 'restyling' operations originate on the initiative of private actors who, by allying themselves in a

J. Ammendola (✉)
Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, Bozen-Bolzano, Italy
e-mail: jacopo.ammendola@unibz.it

B. Masiani
Urban and Regional Planning, Department of Architecture,
University of Florence, Firenze, Italy
e-mail: benedetta.masiani@unifi.it

C. Saavedra
Architecture and Urban Studies, Pontifical Catholic University of
Chile, Santiago, Chile
e-mail: cxsaved@uc.cl

partnership with a public entity, assume an important role in the orientation and definition of urban strategies and policies. If, on the one hand, there is the intention to aim for economic growth by leveraging the uniqueness of the place, on the other hand, spectacularization strategies are implemented that can lead to the increase of socio-spatial inequalities, the exclusion of certain social categories, and the distortion of the ‘essence’ of public space (Iovino, 2016).

Such strategies of privatization of public space have been extensively studied already in the 1970s by the so-called ‘critical urban theory’, which highlighted the consequences of neo-liberal policies on the planning processes and social reorganization of cities (Castells, 1985; Harvey, 1989; Lefebvre, 1968). In many cases, these processes have functioned as a detonator of urban conflicts and grassroots oppositions in which the right to participate in the transformation of the city is claimed and the defense of the use of public space becomes the object of contention (Vitale, 2007; Hartman et al., 2018). In particular, urban regeneration operations involving public spaces with a certain relevance at the metropolitan level—a central square, a metropolitan park, etc.—risk altering the symbolic imagery linked to the idea and identity of the neighborhood or the entire urban system, with wider repercussions and impacts that affect not only the direct users of the intervention but all citizenship.

1.2 Participation as an Instrument for Democracy

Very often, conflicts related to transformations of public space see strong powers, local governments, and marginalized or minority groups claiming greater visibility in the decision-making process. It is difficult to think that such conflicts can be resolved through general approaches, which are independent of the nature of the specific context, or through impositions from above. Among the tools that can be used to manage these tense situations is that of participation, an approach that has been extensively researched and tested, and which encompasses a wide range of purposes, not least to broaden consensus as much as possible, to ensure the ‘acceptability’ of the intervention in question and to be able to mediate situations of conflict and strong opposition on the part of local communities (Habermas, 1995; Holston, 2008). In general terms, taking up the words of Giancarlo Paba, we can say that participation is a principle, closely linked to that of democracy, therefore with a clear political nature, based on the idea that the creation and transformation of community places must be constructed from the active involvement of the inhabitants (Paba, 1998).

Participatory planning has its roots at the end of the nineteenth century with the work of Patrick Geddes, who was among the first to theorize and experiment with experiences

of participatory urban recovery with a view to an ecological and organic vision of the city and the territory in which design processes resulted from the involvement of a community of actors. These ideas would later be taken up and expanded during the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in those countries where democracy had reached a certain maturity and where planning began to be characterized by its political and social components. We are thinking, for example, of American advocacy planning practices, of Christopher Alexander's experiences, of self-building projects in developing countries, of the grassroots community movements in many European cities, of British planning-for-real strategies, and of Giancarlo De Carlo's contribution in Italy, to name but a few. In the 1980s and 1990s, an approach was consolidated, according to which it was considered more effective to act with urban governance policies with a work-in-progress character (Liveriero, 2015), flanked by the use of formalized methodologies, developed according to a bottom-up model that starts from citizen involvement to identify ad hoc solutions that are continuously constructed and deconstructed.

A participatory process is articulated by the presence of dedicated professionals, a willingness to listen, an effective procedure for involving all the actors and interests involved, and necessarily subject to many variables that make it not always easy or effective. The alternative to success is not the absence of effects; if participatory planning is poorly conducted (little power entrusted to the recipients, failure to meet the expectations created, poor management of conflicts, dissatisfaction of the participants), negative consequences may be produced in the sense of reduced power in the community and deterioration of social capital (Bobbio, 2007; Moroni et al., 2020). In some cases, these processes represent the first steps taken by administrations in the direction of a gradual change involving the introduction of more inclusive practices of citizenship involvement in decision-making processes, without, however, succeeding in intercepting all the interests at stake or taking on too abstract a dimension.

1.3 The Participated Construction and the Project as a Mediation Tool

Literature related to the strategies and methods for good practice in participatory urban design is very extensive,¹ and we do not feel this is the appropriate place to go into this in depth. We will just remind the reader that participation is a complex thing, “a large and problematic area of experimentation, adventurous and dynamic” (Paba, 2003, p.46).

¹For further study, see in particular the studies by M. Sclavi, L. Bobbio and I. Romano, and M. Giusti, among others.

Due to the complexity of the intertwined fields involved, participatory processes very often fail to produce concrete realization of proposed interventions. The lack of funds as well as the characteristics of the administrative and political processes that govern urban transformations mean that many of the processes begun tend to be interrupted or procrastinated in time. This contributes to a general mistrust towards both administrations and participatory processes themselves, affecting the presence and involvement of that active citizenship on which the success of the operation is based (Paba & Perrone, 2006). If, on the one hand, participatory processes come up against the difficulties of implementation, on the other hand, the moment of the construction site can bring new conflicts to the surface, bringing to light actors or interests not adequately intercepted by the process and activating new phases of negotiation up to the revision of the original proposal. This is particularly the case when there is an extension of time between the two moments, when the community organizes itself to openly oppose the continuation of the work, and when it finally succeeds in obtaining a space for listening and mediation by overcoming the dimension of self-authorized conflict.

Here, the building site takes on an important role because it gives concreteness to the project and to the urban transformation that begins to take shape. It is a moment of an experimental and constructive nature, which, because of the 'in progress' dimension it has in itself, can open up unexpected and creative solutions. No society is fully aware of its own nature or its own prospects if it ignores that there are many alternatives to the path being followed and that many other goals can be conceived alongside those that are immediately visible (Mumford, 1962). It is precisely the dimension of the unexpected, of the realization of alternative solutions that opens up space for a new phase of participation. The construction site can become the moment in which, starting from a condition of hostility and conflict, a feeling of community and belonging to a place is built and strengthened.

In these kinds of circumstances, the presence of designers (urban designers, landscape designers, planners), who are able to understand the various perspectives at play and, through the practice of active listening and the direct involvement of the community, can generate solutions not previously envisaged, can be decisive (Sclavi, 2014; Semeraro et al., 2020). Designer-mediators are as effective as they possess negotiators' interpersonal skills and specific expertise in the fields at stake so that they are better able to interpret stakeholder needs. The co-designed proposal, integrated into the dimension of the construction site, thus becomes the instrument and the result of mediation, absorbing the characteristics of a shared doing by reducing potential forms of conflict and generating feelings of fondness for the final solution.

2 Skateboarding Between Urban Play and Spatial Appropriation Practice

2.1 Theoretical Roots and Historical Trends in the Practice of Skateboarding

At first glance, skateboarding is the game played by a person on a skateboard. However, it is an urban practice that resists a simple and reductive ontology, expanding into play, mobility, art, and way of life, among others. The foundation of this practice is eminently playful, bringing together the body, the skateboard artifact, and the urban topography in a kinetic and essentially creative interaction. It originally emerged in the United States in the 1960s, and in the following decade it spread rapidly throughout the rest of the world. Its popularity and evolution as an urban sport have grown steadily, and since the Tokyo 2020 games it is a recognized Olympic discipline (Borden, 2019). Major Brazilian cities such as Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo were the hotspots of skateboarding development in South America since the 1970s, and in the last decade Brazilian skateboarding has established itself at the forefront of the sport worldwide. Its popularity among young Brazilians is only eclipsed by that of football, and this is reflected in the intensive use of everyday public space and the number of public skateparks built in their cities.

2.2 Urbanism and Skateboarding Architecture

Skateboarding finds its natural environment in cities, since it depends on a certain quality of pavements and the diversity of formal variants offered by the infrastructure, architecture, and furnishings of urban public space. The city of Los Angeles, where it evolved in its first stage, offered conditions for the discovery of diverse urban topographies, in its streets, public urban squares, empty swimming pools, and hydraulic infrastructures such as flooding control channels, which later inspired the design of specialized playgrounds, called 'skateparks'.

Skateboarding spaces can be effectively distinguished between those 'found' and those 'constructed' (Borden, 2001), which we can associate with categories such as appropriate/informal and received/formal, respectively. These represent the poles among which are playful action moves, between play and sport, between freedom and rule. The former is produced by the creative use of the existing built environment, by the action of modifying or reinterpreting the culturally assigned use and meaning. The playful action in these spaces can often cause conflict and dispute

between the authority and the community over the use of the venues. The latter is the result of practice-oriented design, whether by the skateboarders themselves or by other actors. In the case of public skateparks, popularized worldwide since the late 1990s, they tend to be conceived from a sporting and disciplined point of view, where the authority and the community establish forms of control over the location and range of action of young skateboarders.

2.3 Skateboarding and Participatory Urbanism

Street skateboarding has encountered countless episodes of encounter and disagreement with the processes of transformation of the public space they use. Sometimes, the transformations manage to reach a consensus on the permanence of the different existing activities or to incorporate new ones, while in some cases the urban redesign aims specifically to deactivate and eradicate skateboarding from the place. Regardless of whether authorities and planners intend to retain or expel skateboarding, opportunities for young skateboarders to participate are not entirely guaranteed either. Not all of these stories have had happy endings for young people.

A paradigmatic case was the transformation and cancellation of skateboarding in the iconic Love Park (John F. Kennedy Plaza) in Philadelphia, USA. This square was part of an urban plan by Edmund Bacon and designed by Vincent King, being inaugurated in 1965. Since the end of the 1980s, it has been consolidated as a world-renowned skateboarding spot (recurring in the most influential videos of the 1990s), bringing together local and foreign skateboarders on a daily basis, along with the rest of the city's inhabitants and passers-by. However, in 2002 the city authorities carried out a profound redesign of the square, completely modifying the existing topography and architecture with the aim of eradicating the young skaters in exchange for giving them a skatepark in a different location. The project led to the mobilization of thousands of skaters, with the support of various institutions and urban planners, not only opposing the initiative but also offering alternatives for dialogue and recognition of the virtues of skateboarding for the city itself. However, the authorities went ahead with the works, definitively erasing the historic site in 2016 (Howell, 2005).

On another front, skateboarders have created their own skateparks through collaborative self-construction in residual public spaces that have later ended up being recognized by the authorities and the community. A paradigmatic case of this modality is Burnside skatepark in the city of Portland. It is a concrete skatepark based on the model of transitions and pools that the skate community has been

materializing since 1990 in the wasteland under a motorway. In these cases, the initiative of transformation is taken by the young skaters, taking the sense of appropriation of the place to a higher level. The authorities initially reacted to the intervention in an oppositional way, focusing on it as an act of illegality, but after a period of dialogue they managed to recognize the virtues of the place. As a consequence of this process, Burnside was recognized and preserved, despite neighboring building processes having pushed for its removal in 2016 (Borden, 2019).

In these two experiences, we see that what is at stake is both the location of the practice site, the specific formal characteristics it requires to take place, and the specific urban environment that the site provides for skateboarding. Both cases are far away from the alternatives usually offered by the authorities, such as skateparks located in urban parks, either because they are locations that are alien to street skateboarding or because of the degree of control and discipline that they present. Each one reflects a different urban register, but they share the value of freedom, parental emancipation, creativity, spontaneity, risk, strangeness, and anonymity that these young people seek in urban skateboarding. For them, the skatepark provided by the authorities is simply not an option (Fig. 1).

3 The Case of Vale Do Anhangabaú, São Paulo

3.1 Vale Do Anhangabaú

Since its origins, the 'Rio do Anhangabaú' has been a fundamental geographical element of São Paulo urbanism in Brazil. It was at the confluence of this river with the Tamanduateí river that the first settlers founded the original settlement in the sixteenth century. Today, it marks the boundary between the oldest part of the city (Centro Velho, or Sé) and the first area of late nineteenth century expansion (Centro Novo, or República). During the twentieth century, the river was tunneled to build a large multi-lane vehicular artery, and the area took the name 'Vale do Anhangabaú'.

Beginning in 1981, the municipal administration initiated a somewhat futuristic process with the aim of covering a large area of street and building a large pedestrian garden-square, to reconnect the two areas and provide the central area of the city with a new public space (Fig. 2).

After almost a decade of elaboration, the final project, drawn up by architect Jorge Wilhelm, together with landscape architects Jamil Kfoury and Rosa Grena Kliass, saw the light in 1993. What is created is a large suspended public space, a large garden-square, which articulates with a unified but not monotonous language all the two hectares



Fig. 1 Skaters protest in front of the São Paulo prefecture. Photo: Andre Viana. Source: www.redbull.com

Fig. 2 Vale do Anhangabau before the realization of the first square. Source: <https://avidanocentro.com.br/cidades/vale-do-anhangabau-historia/>.



of available space. The paving in stone blocks alludes to the historical vocation of the area, and produces a pleasant 'promenade'. Even though the square is built on a large flyover, several medium-large trees are inserted, in

the shade of which are a series of 'arquibancadas', sort of large stone bleachers that create a series of semi-theater spaces and allow people to stop. The stone chosen to clad these structures is the red stone typical of the area.

Fig. 3 One of the grandstands, or ‘archibancadas’ of the Vale; its formal language and granite materiality are valued and preserved in the new skateable monument. *Source:* reconhecasapaulo.com.br



In the decades between the planning and realization of this first project, the urban and social situation of the district changed substantially. Following a ‘plot’ that is common to many cities on the American continent, the most central areas of São Paulo saw a progressive emptying and abandonment by representative and commercial functions, and entered into a recursive process that alternates phases of ‘urban renewal’ and phases of ‘slummification’ (Flores & Stevens, 2019). It is also due to these phenomena that the new ‘Vale do Anhangabaú’ became a gathering place for people from the lower and middle classes, street vendors, homeless, and beggars, during the 1990s.

At the same time, skateboarding also began to spread in Latin America, and El Vale has been a paradigmatic spot for the skateboarding scene of São Paulo since the 1990s. Its location in the heart of the metropolis, very close to another relevant spot such as Plaza Roosevelt (Machado, 2014),² as well as the material and formal characteristics of the plaza’s bleachers are part of the qualities that make it unique. In the words of Grazi Oliveira, this place inspired and shaped numerous Brazilian skateboarding figures such as Alexandre ZikkZira, Anjinho, Bob Burnquist, Catarina Huh, Marcelo Formiga, Gian Naccarato, Rodrigo TX, and Sucrilhos, among others. Particularly advantaged by both its location and physical conformation—the presence of the long stone steps and *arquibancadas*, with their ledges—the

square presents itself as an ideal place for the establishment of this new urban community and soon becomes one of the symbolic places of Brazilian and global skateboarding³ (Fig. 3).

3.2 Starting the Reconfiguration Process

Despite the great visionary capacity of the project and the high quality of the final realization, the new landscape is short-lived. After little more than a decade, the municipal administration launched a complicated participatory design process aimed at rethinking the space of ‘Vale do Anhangabaú’. The objectives of this new action on the area move from different assumptions and towards quite different goals than those of the 1980s. The promoters of the initiative are a series of banks, architectural firms, real estate companies, construction companies, and financial institutions, which start lobbying to initiate the reconversion of the entire central area of São Paulo into a financial center, displacing the poorest residents (Frugoli, 2001; Nobre, 2009).

The first attempt to start a new transformation process of the Vale do Anhangabaú dates back to 2007. Some of the private stakeholders, through a lobbying body called Associação Viva o Centro, ‘donated’ to the administration a participatory design process focused on the Vale, led by the

²Machado cites the case of Plaza Roosevelt as a more direct example of integrating skateboarding into the place through a renovation project that even improved playing conditions.

³See, for example: <https://kingpinmag.com/features/20-legendary-skate-plazas-time.html>.



Fig. 4 The radical change of Vale do Anhangabau comparing before (left, 4a) and after (right, 4b) the renovation project. Source: <https://juntos.org.br/2020/07/novo-vale-do-anhangabau-e-a-privatizacao-de-espacos-publicos-em-sao-paulo>

renowned Danish firm Gehl Architects. This first attempt was unsuccessful, but after a further six years, in 2013, they tried again by contracting Gehl Architects to carry out a series of consultations focusing on unique public spaces in the area, including the Vale do Anhangabau. This resulted in guidelines that became the outline for the tender for the design services of the new square, to be built in place of the existing one. The final project is drawn up by the PJJ Malucelli Arquitetura studio of Cuturiba, which subcontracts to the local Biselli Katchborian Arquitetos studio. The architects accepted Gehl's indications and instead of the complex geography of volumes and paths that characterized the existing project, they designed a much simpler space, organized in a large empty central avenue, paved with numerous sprays of water, flanked by lateral paths that distribute the new commercial spaces and a series of kiosks (Fig. 4). This project received the approval of the administration, which financed it with around 100 million Reales⁴ (almost 20 million Euros) of public resources. After a rather lengthy administrative process, the contract was awarded in 2018 and works began the following year, in 2019.

⁴ Source: <https://noticias.r7.com/sao-paulo/prefeitura-de-sao-paulo-libera-area-para-skate-no-vale-do-anhangabau-29062022>.

3.3 Conflict and Negotiation

Following the start of the demolition works in June 2019, a strong protest was triggered by the skater community that has been using the area for years. Having been little or not at all involved in the participatory design process, and being uninformed about the process, many of them only learned about the project at the beginning of the construction phase. Some community members were important figures in the national or even global skate scene, and they activated an information campaign accompanied by a petition that collected more than 10,000 signatures in a few hours. The protest resulted in an actual occupation of the site by some skateboarders, in an attempt to hinder the destruction and privatization of what was a highly symbolic place for a vast number of people. In fact, the fear was not only that the structures that had allowed the community to take root (the *arquitetadas*) would be materially demolished, but that a new condition would be established in which skateboarders themselves would not be allowed in the square, except in a small marginal area in which a small skate park was planned to be built (Fig. 5). The reaction triggered by the new project to transform the square gave rise to a movement that revealed a sense of memory and heritage that the



Fig. 5 **a** Skaters save the stone from the old *arquibancadas*. **b** Arch. Pollastrini co-designing the new structure with the skaters. Source: <https://revistatrip.uol.com.br/trip/o-corre-dos-skatistas-para-salvar-o-pico-de-street-mais-classico-de-sao-paulo-o-vale-do-anhangabau>

place embodied for this community of young people, as reflected in publications and documentaries produced by the protesters themselves. The set of bleachers in the square acquired the meaning of a ‘temple’ of Brazilian skateboarding, and in honor of this the skate community defended not only the place but also its material preservation. The young people intervened in the demolition to defend the granite blocks and reuse them to create a monument in honor of the temple: Memorial do Skate no Vale Do Anhangabaú (Oliveira, 2021). This movement acquired an epic story, summed up in the metaphor ‘Stone on stone’, which is the title of the documentary on this process.

The protest quickly led to an agreement between the representatives of the skaters and the administration to redesign an area of the square in which the original stones of the *arquibancadas* would be reused to build a new structure in the northern part. The structure, conceived as a ‘memorial’ to the old square, will be built by reusing some of the stones ‘saved’ from the demolition of the 1993 structures. There was therefore a need to design in a very short time—about a month—a variant to the approved project that is already under construction. This new project must meet the interests of the administration and the skater community promoting it, and fit into the overall design of the new square. The far from trivial task of managing this rapid participatory design phase was entrusted to Rafael Pollastrini Murolo, a young architect and urban designer from São Paulo who was

working at the city’s urban planning department at the time. Pollastrini had some special characteristics that enabled him to carry out this task very effectively. First, he was embedded in the city’s administrative machine: at that time he was working on a research project for the city planning department. Second, he was a skater, which allowed him not only to better understand the ‘technical’ requirements related to the recreational sports use of spaces, but also to master the cultural codes used by skaters and to be recognized by them as a privileged interlocutor. Finally, he had good skills as an urban designer, which will prove essential in defining the formal aspects of the project. Moreover, in the months before the protest began, Pollastrini had been working for the urban planning department on a research project called *Espacios Skataveis*⁵ and had come into contact with some representatives of the skater community.

Through Pollastrini’s mediating role, a participatory design workshop is thus activated, with the daily involvement of half a dozen representatives of the skater community for about a month. During this period, the form and construction characteristics of the ‘memorial’ are defined. The most important design choice that is made is the decision to reproduce not only the materials but also the

⁵ <https://gestaourbana.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Cartilha-espacos-skataveis.pdf>.



Fig. 6 The skateable memorial and the new flatness square. Photograph: Danilo Verpa. Source: agora.folha.uol.com.br/sao-paulo/2021/02/

‘geometries’ of the old *arquibancadas*. This choice is relevant for two reasons: on the one hand it allows to create with this element a visual connection with the past, and on the other hand the preservation of the forms allows to give continuity to that particular ‘skateboarding style’ that had developed in the place, starting from the particular conformation of the platforms. Starting from this consideration, the heterogeneous work group made up of representatives of the skateboard community, each with their own skills, and Pollastrini, carries out an accurate reinterpretation of the previous forms, adapting them to the new context and needs. The work is conducted using 3D models, floor plans, and models, with a strong in situ presence. The identified configuration is then proposed to the administration and approved by them in late summer 2019. This is followed by a long negotiation phase with the contractor, lasting about a year, during which the structure is engineered and several minor changes are made to the design, and finally in early 2021 the new ‘monument’ is opened to the public and begins to be repopulated by the skateboarding community.⁶

3.4 A ‘Skatable’ Memorial

Young skateboarders created the *Salve o Vale!* (Save the Valley) movement, from which the idea of building a ‘skateable’ memorial was born, resisting the idea of being eradicated from the usual urban space, as practitioners themselves point out: “If we had a skatepark, it would limit the creative freedom that is explored in street skateboarding”.⁷ The ‘skatable monument’ acquires a symbolic value, preserving the material memory of the stones and the formal language of the original spot, retaining its use value, this time with official authorization to do so. It is also conceived as a common grandstand, for everyone, not just skaters, enriching the public space and the interactions of urban life. The area granted to skateboarders included the grandstand monument and the surrounding area of the new esplanade, not only as an area of influence but also where they could incorporate skateable urban design elements.

The renovation of the plaza simplifies the topography through a 400-m-long and 45-m-wide central concourse. The area designated to create the skateboarding spot was the northern end of the esplanade, in continuity with a neighboring square with trees providing shade (Fig. 6).

⁶Part of information comes from an interview with Rafael Pollastrini Murolo in July 2022.

⁷Testimony of the Skateboarder Klaus Bohms. From Oliveira, Grazi. “Como a união de skatistas salvou pico no Centro de SP” <https://www.redbull.com/br-pt/skate-novo-vale-do-anhangabau>.

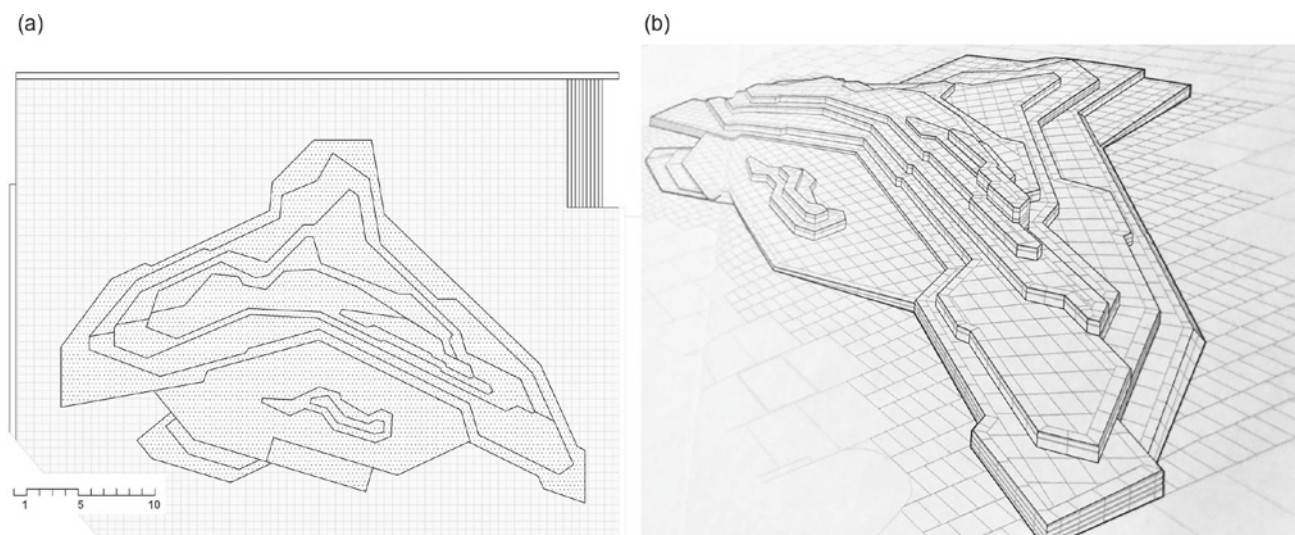


Fig. 7 **a** Plan of the 'skateable monument'. Elaboration by Christina Saavedra. **b** Perspective drawing of the monument by Pollastrini *source* <http://asfalto.blogosfera.uol.com.br/2019/09/16>

The area is approximately 25 m across the 45-m-wide platform of the esplanade, which is elevated from the pavements. It is interesting to note that the design decisions seem to be guided by the sense of memorial or monument that this intervention possesses, in terms of being conceived as an isolated element, enclosable within the designated area and preserving symbolically and functionally the material and formal language of the topographies of the original square.

By conceiving it as an isolated grandstand (in an area of 42×25 m), it can be faced from all sides, unlike the original situation of the grandstands, which were attached to one edge. This allows the architect a creative operation in the design, that of merging the three existing stepped topographies into a single unit, recognizable from the different fronts. As the architect points out, a collage generated a new geometry. From this, a combined formal result emanates, which preserves most of the original forms in the lower areas and in the higher strata there is a greater degree of fusion between them, a sort of condensed form of the best of the three original topographical areas (Fig. 7).

The granite blocks that lined the square's bleachers are preserved not only for symbolic reasons, but also because of their functionality for skateboarding. The symbolic dimension can be found in the phrase that is the title of a documentary made by the young people who led the defense of the spot: stone on stone. Those stones that offered years of play and life to several generations of São Paulo skateboarders were worthy of being treated with care and preserved in order to create a new place. On the other hand, as stone, this work would be infused with a meaning of permanence and solidity, destined to find a solid and resistant place for skateboarding in Anhangabau.

The shape of the stands is also a relevant aspect to preserve. The heights of the stairs (step) and bleachers (seat) allow a wide possibility of playful actions on them for different skill levels, which can be combined and added together depending on the acrobatic abilities of the practitioners. The geometry of the stands is one of the most characteristic features, without breaks in open angles; they allow both to direct the interactions and the attacks on the steps as well as to diversify the lengths of the edges and at the same time to preserve continuity in the development of the acrobatic actions. In this way, the great diversity of geometric variants presented by the monument is also a form open to the creativity of the game.

The skateboarding space is not only limited to the monument, skateboarding expands into it in principle because of the quality of the pavement of the new esplanade. The area surrounding the monument was also granted as part of the design decisions, especially the stairs and handrails that connect the esplanade to the pavements. The monument acts as a focus that not only concentrates the practice but also expands and radiates out into the rest of the square, toward the esplanade and the pavements, interacting with the unevenness and gaps between the two zones. Skateboarders continue to be the main inhabitants of the place.

The skateable monument manages not only to offer playful support for skateboarding, but it is also a grandstand for open use in the public space for those who want to sit and stay on it, especially in the upper tiers, without interrupting the practice that takes place in the lower tiers. A structure to play, rest, socialize, and interact among people, it is an open and less determined form of function than a conventional skatepark, which, inserted in the everyday public space,

opens up possibilities for interaction between the different inhabitants of the place. The appropriation is diverse and enriches the urban life of those who live there.

4 Conclusions

This experience highlights how public spaces of metropolitan relevance can be charged with a strong sense of identity and rootedness by informal and minority communities that, despite not being organized in a structured way or institutionalized in a formal aggregation, manage to influence and have a relevant weight in urban reconfiguration processes (Lucca Neto, 2021). Despite some critical aspects of the participatory process of the Vale do Anhangabaú reconfiguration project, thanks to the activation of the skater community and the fortunate presence of a series of peculiar characters that have been included in the transformation process, it was possible to effectively safeguard and include an urban ludic practice that is crucial to the identity of the place.

The ‘uprising’ during the construction site revealed that the stone structures of the 1993 project had over time become true monuments for the Brazilian and global skater community. In fact, the recovery of materials and ‘geometries’ for the construction of the ‘memorial’ has a value that goes beyond that of mere preservation, by bringing into play the collective meaning of urban open spaces. In this specific case, a peculiar kind of intangible heritage, represented by a particular style of skateboarding linked to the shape of the steps, was saved from destruction.

An unusual mediation process carried over during the construction phase was successful in opening a space for active listening between the parties, holding together the various interests at stake, going beyond the idea of the creation of a skatepark as a formally dedicated space, and integrating this practice into the executive project. The final solution creatively and unexpectedly resolves a significant territorial conflict while preserving one of the square's most emblematic identity features and uses.

The Vale do Anhangabaú example, beyond any specific consideration about the physical and social outcomes of the regeneration project,⁸ highlights the relevance of experimenting with innovative ways of community involvement that could be incorporated within the traditional procedures of urban open space reconfigurations. The case presented can be considered a successful example of a ‘fluid’

design process that overcomes the often rigid sequence of phases—intervention decision, participatory process, design, construction, and use—that leads to the implementation of interventions. This dynamic approach deserves to be further explored for its ability to creatively hold together, integrate, and recompose the central phases—participation, design, and realization—of the urban transformation process. In this sense, the case study brings to light some of the weaknesses of a static, procedural, and chronologically ordered sequence of the project phases in which the role of participation, relegated only to the first moments, can hardly be effectively placed. The displacement and inclusion of participatory design activities in later moments of the process, even up to the construction phase, bring beneficial results and in the best of cases, a creative, shared, and unexpected project.

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⁸The authors have strong doubts as to whether the new square, taken as a whole, can be regarded as an improvement over the previous situation, but this general assessment is outside the specific objectives of this text.

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