

Reflection Article/Essay

# The power of collective spaces as a strategy against the violation of rights

*La potencia de los espacios colectivos como estrategia frente a la vulneración de derechos*

*O poder dos espaços coletivos como estratégia contra a violação de direitos*

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## Abstract

This paper articulates the theoretical-methodological contributions of social occupational therapy and the experience of “*Timbó em Movimento*” and “*ResisTO*” projects, which are part of the *Rede Metuia* nucleus belonging to the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB), Brazil. It recognizes the importance of territorial practices and the social occupational therapy field for the strengthening and support of populations with diverse conditions of vulnerability. Articulation of what was observed in the *Timbó em Movimento* and *ResisTO* projects with concepts such as the intersectionality of social markers of difference, their implications for the right to the city and their effects in the daily life of youths. The article elaborates the implications of social markers in the daily life of the participants, as well as the potential of collective reference spaces and intersectoral articulation to confront violence. It is concluded that the spaces of belonging have great relevance for addressing conflicts in the social field, promoting the participation of people and the exercise of citizenship, rejecting the tendency to seek individual solutions to collective problems. Remains the challenge of taking these dialogues to the daily contexts in which violence takes place, incorporating actors that may also be involved in its reproduction.

**Keywords:** Occupational Therapy, Youth, Social Conditions, Politics, Citizenship.

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### **Resumen**

Se propone desarrollar la articulación entre los aportes teórico-metodológicos de la terapia ocupacional social y la experiencia de los proyectos *Timbó em Movimento* y *ResisTO*, dentro del núcleo de la *Rede Metuia* perteneciente a la Universidad Federal de Paraíba, Brasil. Se reconoce la importancia de las prácticas territoriales y del campo de la terapia ocupacional social para el fortalecimiento y acompañamiento a poblaciones con diversas condiciones de vulnerabilidad. Se articula lo observado en los proyectos *Timbó em Movimento* y *ResisTO* con conceptos como la interseccionalidad de los marcadores sociales de diferencia, sus implicancias en el derecho a la ciudad y sus efectos en el cotidiano de los jóvenes. Se desarrolla la implicancia de los marcadores sociales en los cotidianos de los participantes, así como el potencial de los espacios colectivos de referencia y la articulación intersectorial para enfrentar las violencias. Se concluye que los espacios de pertenencia poseen gran relevancia para el abordaje de conflictos en el campo social, potenciando la participación de los sujetos y el ejercicio de ciudadanía, rechazando la tendencia de buscar soluciones individuales a problemáticas colectivas. Se identifica el desafío de llevar estos diálogos a los contextos cotidianos en que las violencias tienen lugar, incorporando actores que también puedan estar involucrados en su reproducción.

**Palabras-clave:** Terapia Ocupacional, Juventud, Condiciones Sociales, Política, Ciudadanía.

### **Resumo**

Propõe-se desenvolver a articulação entre as contribuições teórico-metodológicas da terapia ocupacional social e a experiência dos projetos *Timbó em Movimento* e *ResisTO*, dentro do núcleo da *Rede Metuia* pertencente à Universidade Federal da Paraíba, Brasil. Reconhece-se a importância das práticas territoriais e do campo da terapia ocupacional social para o fortalecimento e acompanhamento de populações com diversas condições de vulnerabilidade. Articula-se a prática dos projetos *Timbó em Movimento* e *ResisTO* com conceitos como a interseccionalidade dos marcadores sociais da diferença, suas implicações para o direito à cidade e seus efeitos no cotidiano dos jovens. Desenvolve-se a implicação dos marcadores sociais nos cotidianos dos participantes, assim como o potencial dos espaços coletivos de referência e a articulação intersetorial para o enfrentamento das violências. Conclui-se que os espaços de pertencimento têm grande relevância para o enfrentamento de conflitos no campo social, promovendo a participação dos sujeitos e o exercício da cidadania, rejeitando a tendência de buscar soluções individuais para problemas coletivos. Identifica-se o desafio de levar esses diálogos aos contextos cotidianos em que as violências ocorrem, incorporando atores que também podem estar envolvidos em sua reprodução.

**Palavras-chave:** Terapia Ocupacional, Juventude, Condições Sociais, Política, Cidadania.

## Introduction

This text arises from the intention of analyzing territorial and community practices from the social occupational therapy, recognizing their importance for the support of collectives with different conditions of vulnerability. This writing is part of a three-month experience of work of residents<sup>1</sup> in the Metuia Network, within the nucleus of the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB) in Brazil. The objective is to articulate the observations during the insertion in this nucleus with the theoretical-methodological contributions of the social occupational therapy. Firstly, it analyzes how the intersectionality of differentiating social markers translates into the vulnerability of the rights of young people and adolescents, highlighting the specific impact on the right to the city and everyday urban mobility. The potential of collective reference and identification spaces continues to be developed, highlighting the value of the Rap Battles movement, and then the interventions promoted from the social field, identifying the challenges and opportunities of the intersectoral articulation.

To define the social occupational therapy, the contributions of Malfitano (2016)<sup>2</sup> are considered, who describes it as an area that develops actions in the search for emancipation and autonomy of subjects who have difficulties in accessing to their social rights. It is understood as a particular field of performance with its own resources, technical knowledge and target populations. The author mentions as pillars for the intervention an approach to the daily life of people and the promotion of collective spaces of coexistence.

Taking into account that the Metuia Network has a wide theoretical-practical trajectory in this approach model, and that it is a pioneering group and a reference in the area, this space was chosen as a work place. Such Network started as a project in 1998, developed by university professors from the state of São Paulo who gathered to deepen their reflections, researches and practices related to the social occupational therapy (Lopes & Malfitano, 2016). Through research and theoretical-methodological productions, they serve as a base and strengthen the foundations of the field, and currently the network has seven centers in different states of Brazil, composed of professors, researchers, postgraduate students and university students.

The development of this work takes up situations identified in both extension projects belonging to the Metuia Network, which develop actions from the theoretical-methodological framework of the social occupational therapy. On the one hand, ResisTO aims to plan and implement actions to guarantee and strengthen democratic spaces of coexistence with mutual respect, recognizing the LGBTQIA+<sup>3</sup> population as subjects of rights, necessary for the political construction of the society (Braga et al., 2021). On the other hand, the extension project "Timbó em Movimento: public space, education and collective action" (Timbó em Movimento hereinafter), seeks to generate spaces of belonging among young people and approach strategies to face the situations

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<sup>1</sup> The residency is a postgraduate training system in service of three years duration, which is carried out in various public health effectors dependent on the Ministry of Health.

<sup>2</sup> The translations cited in the present article were carried out by the authors.

<sup>3</sup> The acronym LGBTQIA+ refers to a collective of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex and Asexual people. The "+" symbol at the end of the acronym serves to encompass other possibilities of sexual and gender identities (Monteiro, 2022).

of vulnerability and lack of opportunities that impact on the inhabitants of the Community of Timbó, in the city of João Pessoa (Pereira et al., 2021).

It is expected that the following work will contribute to reflection on the previously presented topics, expecting that the exercise of writing will stimulate new questions and learning.

## **The Implication of Social Markers in Everyday Life**

Starting from a context in which social movements gain strength at a global level and demand to occupy representative spaces in everyday life, the occupational therapy sees itself in the need to include demands related to identity characteristics in the understanding of human activities (Ambrosio & Silva, 2022). The insertion in the extension projects allowed us to observe how the people with whom we work find themselves into everyday situations of discrimination. The authors Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and Hill Collins (2000) are Afro-American women and pioneers in the development of the concept of intersectionality, one of the most important contributions of black feminism, which understands such situations of discrimination as the product of the intersection of diverse oppressions, where it is not possible to point that one predominates over the others nor can they be understood in isolation, since they act together provoking injustices. On the one hand, the work of the ResisTO project is aimed at facilitating access to the rights of people with non-hegemonic gender identities, while Timbó em Movimento works with young people from a neighborhood characterized by conditions of housing precariousness and poverty. Both collectives are crossed by social markers of difference such as gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, social class, religion, nationality and generation. These markers can be defined as social constructions that, when articulated, can produce greater or lesser social inclusion or exclusion, acting dynamically and fluidly on the process of conformation of the social identities of the subjects (Couto et al., 2019).

What has been previously developed is essential to know the possibilities of the participants of both projects to inhabit spaces, interact and express themselves. During the Activities, Dynamics and Projects Workshops<sup>4</sup> (hereinafter “Workshops”) with adolescents and young people supported by the ResisTO Project, experiences of violence related to the expression of their identity in spaces of daily circulation such as the home, the school or the street were evidenced. Authors such as Ribeiro da Silva Filho & Rodrigues (2012) and Leite et al. (2022) recognize a tendency of the collective to circulate through spaces identified as safe and friendly for the LGBTQIA+ community, which enable to express themselves freely among peers. Although the existence of spaces that accommodate is important, this could also indicate a limitation to move freely around the city.

In addition, during the activities of the ResisTO project, various actors recognized the attendance of adolescents with dissident identities at mental health institutions as a common reality. It is understood that, far from being casual, this is related to a lack of

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<sup>4</sup> The Workshops are mediating resources of the social occupational therapy for the approach, follow-up, understanding of the demands and strengthening of the subjects (Lopes et al., 2014).

spaces that provide containment and carry out actions to prevent violence inflicted by society on this population. The lack of timely intervention allows the perpetuation of this violence, sustaining it over time and generating suffering that is sometimes accompanied by a pathologization of dissident identities, focusing on the multicausality of suffering. In the words of Peidro (2019), through these mechanisms, those identities that remain outside the delimited are dehumanized and pathologised, excluded for not entering the heteronorm.

On the other hand, in the accounts of the young people of Timbó, daily life conditions conditioned by different social markers of difference are identified, where race, social class, gender and generation predominate, with the association of black youth from the periphery being common with a stereotyped idea of dangerousness. This translates into various barriers to access opportunities; In particular, they refer that when they circulate through spaces outside their usual territory, they expose themselves to the symbolic violence of the fearful gazes of others and from society, as well as institutional violence expressed through testimonials of repeated police abuse, which are framed in a context of criminalization of black and peripheral youth. As a consequence, some prefer to stay within the community to spend their free time, understanding it as the safest place for them.

In line with this, the participants of each project describe both explicit and implicit limitations in their circulation. These experiences exemplify a variety of violated rights; among them, the right to the city stands out, understood as the possibility of turning it into a meeting place that enables the construction of collective life (Pacheco Acuña, 2021). The author understands the city as a cultural, collective and political product, where it is sought to live with dignity and that its inhabitants recognize themselves as a leading part of it, equitably distributing the current resources of work, health, education, housing, participation and access to information. Therefore, this right not only implies creating cities based on human needs, but also inhabiting and transforming them. It is understood that the act of circulating also brings implicit political, cultural, social and subjective aspects, in addition to the physical ones, which is why daily urban mobility is interpreted as a social practice, conditioned by the place that people and groups occupy (Gonçalves & Malfitano, 2021).

These barriers contribute to the lack of spaces for representativeness and expression, which translates into invisibility and lack of response to their specific needs. Consequently, Ambrosio & Silva (2022) agree that the consideration of markers and their intersection can serve as an instrument to identify those realities that are invisible in the different contexts of daily life, as well as the forms and experiences of oppression and the knowledge of the marginalized communities. According to the authors, their incorporation enables the actions of the occupational therapy to strengthen the expansion of rights, participation, citizenship and representation.

In this way, "[...] working from an intersectional perspective can provide the profession with tools to create new intervention methodologies for the benefit of human and social rights, and opportunities to develop person-centered strategies [...]" (Balanta-Cobo et al., 2022, p. 4) Finally, it is important to highlight that although the intersection of social markers can contribute to the construction of enormous inequalities, they also have the possibility of generating democratic spaces for dialogue with diversity (Vencato, 2014).

## **Analyzing the Role of Collective Spaces**

Taking into account the injustices derived from the social markers of difference, the collective spaces take value as an instance of appropriation and claim of rights; especially those related to city spaces and urban mobility. In this sense, the importance of framing practices from the social occupational therapy is necessary, making use of its tools and resources to generate collective spaces of resistance, where populations can face daily situations of rights violation and find peers with whom they create reference and identification. In this same line, the wealth of promoting the construction of formal and informal support networks is highlighted, whose resources, according to Dabas (1998), are enhanced from the socialization of the problems and learning of each of them, allowing the construction of collective strategies to deal with this violence.

In this way, collective construction stands out as a possible response to the violence experienced in the daily lives of young people and adolescents. Monzeli (2013) states that the concept of community participation is related to popular participation; that is, with the involvement of people from a certain context in the problematization and resolution of local difficulties, with a view to social emancipation.

As an example, the Rap Battles movement is presented in order to analyze the role it plays as a meeting place for youth. Participants of the *Timbo em Movimento* project present this space as a place of belonging and with a strong identity charge, which at the same time makes it possible to denounce inequalities and injustices that they experience in their daily lives. In this sense, Dayrell (2002) proposes to think about the way in which participation in rap influences the socialization of youth, arguing that their involvement in said activities affects the way in which they are constructed as social subjects, developing an own individual and collective identity. When recounting their entry into this movement during adolescence, the youngsters put into play elements related to the search for an identity that represents them through their artistic names; the acquisition of confidence to express oneself even without the skill of the experience; meeting people with similar interests and stories; and the choice of words and rhymes in search of their own message.

The Rap Battles allow us to analyze a new edge of the concept of the right to the city, knowing how they facilitated the beginning of movements towards unknown parts of the city to appear at the meetings and continue developing as artists. In this line, it is considered that these battles allow their participants to find new circulation spaces, resignifying and expanding daily urban mobility in the city. On the other hand, the young participants refer that organizing these meetings within the territory implies expanding accessibility so that other neighbors can get closer to a space that means transformation, openness of views and personal growth.

Another interesting point of analysis is the involvement of Rap Battles in political participation at an individual and collective level. Silva & Malfitano (2021) are followed by defining political participation as the possibility of speaking, being heard and being seen in society as someone with the capacity to contribute to public and collective life in the construction of a common world. In this sense, young people express the desire that their words have effects, from leaving a mark on the trajectory of others from the same territory, to transforming their own social place

to be heard, assuming different roles and leaving resonances in those who occupy spaces of power.

At the same time, the participants describe the Rap Battles as marginalized social movements, as they are created and supported by minorities. These meetings appear in their stories as a means to amplify their voice, reaching other communities through social networks and the battles carried out outside of Timbo, reporting the violence and questioning the established order.

Despite the fact that this social movement functions independently, its analysis is considered relevant for work with young people from the social field due to its power as a constituted belonging group, which at the same time has marks and effects on their daily lives. Thus, it is interesting to take these stories, seeking to highlight how these spaces enable new ways of strengthening connections with the community, building one's own identity and occupying public spaces. At the same time, it is interesting to analyze the role of the social occupational therapy monitoring these movements, promoting their long-term continuity by reducing the barriers inherent to self-management and contributing to their recognition at a social level.

In this line, Silva & Malfitano (2021) call for thinking about the political dimension inherent in each professional intervention; especially when following historically silenced communities. The extension projects use the specific tools of the social area with political implications, favoring the meeting and joint construction between people who are going through challenges derived from the intersectionality of social markers of difference. In this way, Timbó em Movimento manages to strengthen the spaces for expression of the young participants, promoting artistic and cultural production activities and strengthening connections based on a comprehensive reading of their specific needs and interests. These actions, in addition to promoting the meeting between neighbors favoring community participation, generating identification and support networks; they also contributed to the generation of positive representations of the community at a social level.

From the ResisTO project, these resources were used for the construction of spaces that accommodate, favor the encounter and tend to the protection of the rights of the LGTBQIA+ population. Thus, instances of coexistence, listening and expression were favored so that the young people and adolescents socialize coping strategies against violence, generating spaces of resistance. It is highlighted that this construction is especially significant in the stage of adolescence, where meeting peers with whom to create reference and identification can constitute a protective factor.

In summary, it is significant both the strengthening of movements that promote community participation, as well as the monitoring for the creation and support of spaces of belonging when the problems exceed individual responses. The field tools enable to deepen and streamline these processes, problematize these violations, and implement possible strategies. It is considered a priority that each approach starts from the deep recognition of the interests and needs of each group, which is possible thanks to the support of long-term connections with the recipients.

## **Intersectoral Articulation as Power**

Based on the recognition of the political dimension inherent to each professional intervention, and considering that the problems addressed throughout this work arise from a complex network of structural violence, the urgency to generate actions that have an impact on macro social processes is evident. At this point, Barros et al. (2013) highlight the efforts to think about actions based on the understanding of the historical-political dimensions and aspects of the daily life of the people with whom one works from the social occupational therapy. Thus, there appear different aspects of intersectoral articulation that become fundamental in daily practice, as components of a key tool of the area: the *Dinamization of the Care Network* (Lopes et al., 2014), a social technology that seeks to map, disseminate and consolidate the programs, projects and actions aimed at the target group, articulating the different sectors and levels of intervention, facilitating the effectiveness and direction of the strategies.

Through extension projects, the university carries out different actions, such as the creation of proposals aimed at populations that are at a social disadvantage and participation in spaces for planning and debate about public policies. *Timbó em movimento* works in coordination with different local institutions, such as the *Association of Youth in Action* (AJA in Portuguese), a public school in the neighborhood, health centers and referenced social services, among other actors. The AJA is a social organization created and supported by young people from the community of Timbó autonomously and without party leadership, whose main interest is the development of proposals designed by and for the young people of the territory. Articulating from occupational therapy with an organization of these characteristics offers the possibility of planning strategies that convene the subjects, taking into account the needs and potentialities of the population, generating collective forms of work. On the other hand, not having stable economic support and depending on the voluntary participation of community residents contribute to the fluctuation in the level of participation of their representatives.

In this sense, intersectoral articulation presents challenges inherent to working with diverse actors, such as the incompatibility of available times and the differences in the ways of intervention. Faced with this, the question arises of what tools are available from the social occupational therapy to accompany associations in moments of demobilization, in this particular historical, social and economic context. At the same time, it is interesting to think about the scope of an extension project to modify issues of the internal functioning of associations in the territory.

On the other hand, ResisTO maintains fundamental intersectoral articulations to think about the work with the recipients, such as with the *Municipal Coordination of Promotion of LGBT Citizenship*, a municipal body dedicated to the protection of the rights of the population; as well as with health and social action centers that house and accompany the LGBTQIA+ collective. In these cases, dialogue appears as a necessary tool for the construction of joint strategies, establishing work spaces to delve into the roots of the problem and develop possible future lines of work.

At the same time, recognizing that situations of daily injustice are framed in a society that historically violates young people and adolescents with non-hegemonic identities,

reveals the need for spaces for the prevention of violence and accompaniment in identity construction processes. From this perspective, the social occupational therapy seeks to develop concrete actions with a possible incidence on public policies, developing proposals to put this population on the agenda. At this point, it is considered that the invisibility of this problem from the State is a form of violence itself, being the guarantor body of the rights of this group.

In both projects, the relevance of intersectoral articulations can be observed as an essential component of the work from the social occupational therapy, which must be reconsidered in the long term, and not as isolated articulations in the face of emerging problems. This would make it possible to anticipate the urgency, establishing stable connections, with common objectives and projects, expanding the potential of the actors involved, and thus the scope of interventions in the social field.

## **Reflections**

The concepts developed throughout the writing contribute to the analysis of the daily lives of the observed populations, aiming to build practices that contribute to the guarantee of their rights. The potential to plan actions from projects that arise and are developed in the social field is highlighted, seeking the joint creation of strategies against various problems, rejecting discrimination based on differences. This perspective emphasizes the importance of a sustained observation over time that makes it possible to recognize the needs of each group, encouraging the participation of the community itself in the creation of coping strategies for vulnerabilities. To this end, the construction of collective spaces and intersectoral articulation are fundamental strategies to face inequalities.

According to Lopes et al. (2015), collective spaces allow the occupational therapist to access the universe of subjects and, in addition, significantly expand the possibility of creating both connections and projects. These have great relevance for addressing conflicts in the social field, promoting the participation of subjects and the exercise of citizenship, rejecting the tendency to seek individual solutions to collective problems. In this line, the challenge of going beyond the meeting between peers is identified, to bring these dialogues to the daily contexts in which the violence takes place, incorporating actors who may also be participating in the reproduction of this violence, such as the school, the health center or home.

This reality accounts for the complexity of the problems addressed, reinforcing the importance of building intersectoral collaborations that can be sustained in a stable and long-term manner, avoiding isolated articulations in response to daily emergencies. The challenge remains to delve into the possibilities of the social occupational therapy to mobilize and strengthen associations in the territory that have the capacity to represent the interests of the community, as it is a privileged space for the protection of social rights, political participation and construction of the citizenship of their community.

In a transversal way, we conclude with the words of Ambrosio & Silva (2022) when affirming that if the occupational therapeutic analysis is limited to a single structure of marginalization, it would be contributing to making violence based on social structures invisible, maintaining the system of oppression instead of breaking it.

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### **Author's Contributions**

Camila Abigail Baigorria, María Victoria Díaz, Lucía Grondona, Mónica Ailén Silvester and Evelyn Ailen Vazquez: article's conception, data organization, analysis and writing. Beatriz Prado Pereira, Iara Falleiros Braga, Gustavo Artur Monzeli: work's supervision and writing. All authors approved the final version of the text.

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