



Play During Childhood Colombia

Play is a structural component in the comprehensive development of girls, boys, and adolescents. Through play, they interact with the environment, relate to the world, others, and nature. Play also enhances the encounter with the human and non-human dimensions, strengthening our imaginative and reality-transforming abilities.

With advances in Colombia's public policies for the comprehensive development of children, play is recognized as a right, a guiding activity in early childhood, and a fundamental element for the realization of rights of girls, boys, and adolescents.

In this framework, the Presidential Advisor for Children and Adolescents requested the support of the Inter-American Dialogue¹ to generate exchange spaces between different actors in order to explore and reflect on the role of play in the childhood agenda in Colombia.

With this objective, two virtual meetings were organized, which were held in 2021 and 2022. In the first meeting, the progress of policies, programs, and initiatives that promote play in childhood in Colombia was shared and debated. The event focused on studies carried out by two civil society organizations, which from different angles and approaches offered an overview of play in the country.

In the second meeting, a space was opened that allowed, through different perspectives and approaches, to delve into specific themes on ways of approaching play from three different angles: play and education, play at home, and play in public spaces. For this purpose, it focused on different experiences that illustrated the themes.

Both meetings were well attended (more than 1,100 participants), revealing a strong interest in the subject and, therefore, the importance of continuing to advance in these discussions.

SECTION 1: The situation of play in Colombia

The first meeting held in November 2021 opened with the words of the **Presidential Advisor for Children and Adolescents, Carolina Salgado Lozano**. The Advisor began her speech by expressing the challenge that the country has assumed to strengthen and promote actions in favor of children in Colombia, with policies on comprehensive development during early childhood and childhood and adolescence being the compass of all actions taken.

She stressed that since the beginning of the government, it has been of great interest to deepen the understanding and implications of play during childhood. In this framework, she highlighted that play is a right, an activity typical of childhood, and is also a mechanism to promote protective environments and prevent violence.

¹ The Inter-American Dialogue is a center for analysis and exchange that unites a network of global leaders to promote democratic governance, prosperity, and social equity in Latin America and the Caribbean. One of its institutional commitments is to highlight the importance of childhood in countries' educational agenda, as a leading organization in promoting and monitoring progress in the region on the subject, and it does so hand in hand with civil society organizations, governments, and the private sector. These spaces were made possible thanks to funding from the LEGO Foundation.



Finally, she stated that progress should be made in workspaces on play in Colombia and shared with other countries. Although several steps forward have been taken as a country, obstacles and challenges that can be resolved collectively remain. We must recognize the path traveled and continue laying out the path to walk in the future. For this, the Advisor invited the participants to translate their commitment into concrete actions in the territory that encourage and promote play in childhood.

Then, during the presentations, **Angela Constanza Jerez Trujillo**, National Coordinator of **NiñezYA (ChildrenNow)**, presented **“Play: a right and an underestimated factor of human development”**. She shared that among the 10 most pressing issues for children defined by NiñezYA, play is number 5. The inclusion of play on the agenda of this coalition of 200 civil society organizations and networks is because play is considered a right, which in turn is enshrined in the International Children's Convention, ratified by Colombia, and in the Code of Childhood and Adolescence. It is also a factor of human development (it develops physical, social, cognitive, communicative, emotional, civic, and creative skills and strengths that contribute to learning). Colombia has public policy guidelines and standards for games and recreation, as well as guidance on the need for the country to have playroom facilities.

NiñezYA highlights that, despite the advances that Colombia has made in the matter, play is being affected for different reasons. These include the reduced time that girls, boys, and teenagers dedicate to it for their enjoyment, the lack of spaces and programs that allow them to exercise it, and the little appreciation of play by adults, including people in government. In this sense, they shared some data that account for this problem:

- Only 30% of boys and 20% of girls from 3 to 5 years old practice active play activities (ENSIN, 2015); even though the WHO recommends girls, boys, and adolescents at least 60 minutes a day of physical activities, from moderate to vigorous intensity (WHO), which in early childhood is associated with play.
- 62.30% of girls and 61.50% of boys aged 3 to 4 spend excessive time in front of screens (ENSIN, 2015).
- Only 21% of the families consulted in 2016 in 12 municipalities played two hours a week as a family and 32% did it for one hour.
- In Colombia, 300 play libraries that serve only 1.94% of the child population.
- In Colombia, only 4 higher education specializations teach about play, and they do so from a didactic approach for the formal education of children. This means that its recognition and study as a right, as a fundamental factor of development, as a human need, and its potential for the development of citizen competencies and socio-emotional skills: critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving are still at an early stage.

In addition, in what must do specifically with the consideration of play from the government agendas and programs, NiñezYA identified that, although the National Development Plan 2018-2022 (PND) explicitly included play "as a fundamental element of integral development", this could not be identified in the government programs of candidates for mayors and governors in the 2019 elections nor in the Territorial Development Plans (PDT).

Regarding the candidates' plans, although it was found that 88% of the candidates for mayor of capital cities and 60% of the candidates for governor included play in their government programs, they did so from a restricted perspective. In this sense, reference is made to competitive inter-school or college games and to the creation, maintenance, and adaptation of recreational and cultural spaces, but not to play as a right and factor of development.



Regarding the territorial development plans presented by local governments, it was found that:

- Only 6.24% of the development plans of the 32 governor's offices and 16.3% of the plans of 31 capital cities explicitly considered strategies, indicators, and goals related to play.
- 61.9% of the territorial development plans contemplate strategies for the creation, maintenance, and adaptation of playful and cultural spaces and environments. Only 11.1% approach play as a development factor.

Finally, NiñezYA highlights that most leaders have a very basic understanding of play, a reduced concept in relation to the development of civic competencies and socio-emotional skills in early childhood, childhood, and adolescence, and a conception of competitive play prevails. (inter-school and college sports).

Based on this diagnosis, NiñezYA proposes to carry out the following actions:

- *Apply the public policy guidelines and directives that Colombia already has in place on games and recreation, as well as the guidelines for play libraries (ludotecas).*
- *Guide the inclusion of play as a fundamental right in the PDT, with programs and budgets for the construction, provision, and operation of specialized play spaces and environments such as play libraries, playrooms, decorated and safe public parks, exclusive beaches, suitable green spaces, among others.*
- *Strengthen strategies to promote play that should be followed by State entities in relation to the comprehensive development of early childhood, childhood, and adolescence so that it is understood as a fundamental right that must be permanently upheld in the family, institutional, and public settings.*
- *Include questions in national surveys to learn about and measure adults' understanding of play as a right.* Likewise, the quality and the time they devote to play at home, at school, and in spaces specially designed for playing.
- *Define social indicators to evaluate the incidence of play in integral development.*
- *Reinforce play as a priority axis in the educational model in initial education guidelines and those across preschool, elementary, and secondary education.*
- *Promote play as an aspect to be incorporated into higher education curricula and in research in the social, human, and educational arenas. It must be a subject of study.*
- *Promote the safe return to face-to-face activities and improve the quality of education with spaces for play and social interaction.*
- *Promote citizen pedagogy on the importance of free and spontaneous play in the development process of girls and boys. Similarly, promote a strategy for the use of free time in children and adolescents.*

To finish, she highlights central messages that play is a protective factor that can keep girls and boys away from violence, mistreatment, abuse, and any form of discrimination and exclusion if it is promoted as part of a comprehensive human development policy (CDN, 2013), and that NOW is the time to recognize that children have the right to play.

Next, **Tatiana Forero**, Deputy Director of Projects at **Movilizadorio** and **Juliana Uribe Villegas**, Founder and Executive Director of **Movilizadorio** presented the experience of "**Join the Game (Súmate al Juego)**". This is a global initiative carried out with the support of the LEGO Foundation and Purpose. Join the Game seeks to promote play as a real and effective right for children. For this it seeks to persuade and support more parents, caregivers, and decision-makers to recognize the full potential of play, eliminating barriers to information, access, cultural imaginaries, and public policies that prevent them from doing so. It promotes not only public policies but also equitable access to the right of play



and considers that the best way to influence the issue is through the mobilization of different organizations and actors.

In this framework, one of the initiatives they carried out was "Mapping Play" whose main objective was to identify who was working on the subject, to know which organizations and people work on play in Colombia, with the purpose of driving alliances, collective learning, and networking. Also, to find out the areas that they work on and the target audiences of their activities.

In the year 2020, 293 organizations were mapped, the main findings being:

- *Territorial Operation:* The organizations' initiatives operate mainly at the local level (43%).
- *Play Implementation:* Most organizations have concrete and ongoing plans that implement play (68%) and 32% already have an idea.
- *Geographic location:* the departments with more organizations that implement play are: Bogotá, Antioquia and Cauca. And the departments with the lower rates of implementation of play are Putumayo, Vaupés, Vichada, and Guainía.
- *Financing:* most efforts are financed by the private sector. Public financing is mainly concentrated in the north of the country, with Antioquia, Bolívar, Cundinamarca, and Santander being the departments with the highest concentration of efforts.
- *Use of Play:* more than 80% of the organizations mapped use play as an activity/methodology that is applied thoroughly in their actions.
- *Areas:* Most of the mapped organizations use play for educational purposes, followed by other areas such as art, culture, and citizenship promotion.
- *Beneficiaries:* Boys, girls, adolescents and young people are a priority, but also migrants, female adolescents, families, older adults, etc.
- *Potential:* Among the new opportunities to work with play, 4 broad categories were mentioned:
 - As a tool for transformation and social and cultural development
 - As a fundamental human right
 - As a window to the cultures of the world
 - As a pedagogical tool in the classroom (learn from different levels, individual, social, and collective)
- *Play needs:* specific needs were identified to continue promoting the topic, these are:
 - More specialized scenarios/specialized spaces to promote sharing experiences, learning, and continued building
 - More national and international alliances, strengthen existing ones, create new ones, and bring knowledge and learning to different areas of the country
 - More personnel trained to implement methodologies/tools in the different themes of play

They concluded by mentioning some opportunities identified within the analyzed scenario. The first is that Colombia is working on the subject of play from different areas, not only from the educational sector. Organizations that operate in different sectors, such as health, environment, art, and culture have been mapped. Second, there are areas of the country where there is clear inequity in the exercise of the right to play and in the availability of organizations that promote it in daily life. Third, play can be seen as a cohesive bridge between organizations, allowing strategic alliances for the operation of more initiatives in the territory.

Towards the end of the meeting, a discussion space was introduced that was moderated by Ariel Fiszbein, Director of the Inter-American Dialogue Education Program. Some central



questions were posed there, the first one related to the cultural change that must occur to consider play as a serious matter and the role that the different actors must play in it. In this sense, it was argued that in order to move towards a cultural change it is necessary to involve stakeholders from different levels and settings. Although the school plays an important role, it is not a task that can be restricted only to it; there are many other institutions and spaces where play must take place. It is necessary to open the conversation to other actors and achieve recognition of the importance of play, so that it may become a demand from society. The media plays a central role, as it can provide traction by showing the different dimensions of play, and what play means in the life of each person. For its part, from the governmental sphere, great leadership management can be promoted, engaging many actors inside and outside the educational system on the subject of play.

The question also arose of how to achieve coordinated work between the organizations that are already working on play. Here are some ideas that were raised:

- Recognize who the allies are and build trust among them.
- Identify complementarities and ways to join forces that allow expanding the scope of the actions (there are many initiatives, an enormous wealth in the ecosystem is identified, but it is necessary to promote spaces to talk and share what is being carried out).
- Set ambitious goals and understand that everyone has a role in the movement
- Create knowledge management exchange campaigns.
- Work with the public sector.
- Have a diverse, rich ecosystem that is well-known and connected.

Thus, the invitation to those who have been working on this is to recognize each other, coordinate actions, and engage new actors, particularly those who traditionally do not see themselves as playing an important role in this agenda. This requires expanding networks beyond natural allies. This is the only way to achieve a cultural change and a change in behavior and the recognition of play as a right.

In this first meeting, many queries were received that aimed to identify specific cases of play, not to identify only "what" is being done, but rather "how".

Event recording and website

<https://www.thedialogue.org/events/evento-en-linea-el-juego-en-la-ninez-la-situacion-del-juego-en-colombia/?lang=es>



SECTION 2: Play from different perspectives

The second meeting, held in February 2022, was structured in three panels, each of which approached play from a different angle: play and education, play at home, and play in public space. In each panel, two experiences were presented and there was also a space for comments by a specialist.

The meeting was opened by the **First Lady of Colombia**, Mrs. **Maria Juliana Ruiz Sandoval**. The First Lady stressed the importance of approaching the subject of play from the three central perspectives (family, education, and public space). These three scenarios remind us of the importance of looking at everyday life through the eyes of a child. She proposed putting a special focus on the family, as has been done from her office, and highlighted the impact that the national strategy "Loving Parenting + Play" had. This strategy was led by the Presidential Advisor for Children and Adolescents, had the support of Corporación Juego y Niñez, and served as a tool to understand what are the principles that should be addressed when talking about loving parenting. To end her speech, she stated that play is an essential tool to foster empathy, respect, responsibility, and compassion, as well as to build community and society.

For her part, **Carolina Salgado Lozano**, **Presidential Advisor for Children and Adolescents** reaffirmed what was shared in the first meeting regarding the fact that her Office has been taking on the challenge of promoting and driving actions in favor of children in the country. She also argued that it is important to highlight some aspects of play: play as a right, play as an essential activity of childhood, play as a learning tool, and play as mechanisms to promote protective environments and meaningful interactions between children and adults.

The Advisor thinks that progress should continue to be made in workspaces on play in Colombia and shared with other countries. Although several advances have been made as a country, some unaddressed obstacles and challenges can be resolved collectively.

Panel "Play and Education"

In the first panel, play was approached from an educational perspective. It included the presentation of two experiences. First **Maria Adelaida Lopez**, Executive Director of **aeioTU**, presented: **Río, juego y aprendo (I laugh, I play, and I learn)**. This project seeks to promote a favorable ecosystem that allows improving the quality of education for boys and girls from pregnancy to eight years of age in Caquetá, with an emphasis on rural areas. For this, learning through play constitutes the cross-cutting axis of this project since it enhances and enriches the educational trajectory of each child.

The project will reach nearly 800 teachers from Caquetá, 10 municipalities in the department, 320 leaders and decision-makers, and more than 9,500 parents, potentially impacting the lives of 11,000 boys and girls.

In order to carry out the initiative, they have joined forces with the Pies Descalzos Foundation, the Universidad de los Andes, and the LEGO Foundation. Additionally, joint work is carried out with the Colombian government represented by the Presidential Advisor for Children and Adolescents, the Ministry of National Education, and the Family Welfare Institute -ICBF.



This work is backed by research and scientific evidence. Play, within the framework of this initiative, is understood as an experience, as interactive and significant, as an enabler of development throughout the person's life cycle. Different types of play (free, guided, with rules, and instructions) are identified, which enable different roles between children and adults, in such a way that the participation of the adult is key and changing. The pedagogical environment is also essential, which should be safe, appropriate, and promote different interactions.

The project has 3 lines of work. The first one is a capacity-building model, which seeks to transform pedagogical practices with learning through play, in a way that fosters joyful experiences where children, teachers and leaders are involved, that are significant, that allow for the formulation of hypotheses and promote socialization and collaboration between peers and with adults in order to contribute to improving the quality of education. For this, the project proposes training and support strategies for teachers of initial and basic education (up to the third grade in elementary school), teaching coordinators, and principals. The second line is a leadership program for early childhood "SUMA", a course designed by the School of Education of Universidad de Los Andes, aimed at public officials and policymakers to strengthen their understanding of childhood development, and enhance their leadership and management skills. The third line corresponds to the management, knowledge, advocacy, and sustainability strategy, where the learnings that arise from the implementation of the lines of work are documented and capitalized, research and collaborative work are promoted, and the academia is engaged, as well as local and national networks to enable ongoing learning and sustainability of actions.

Next, **Carolina Casas**, Senior Director of Education and Research for Latin America at Sesame Workshop, presented the experience of **Sesame Workshop (SW)**. Carolina shared that the relationship between play and learning in SW's work model is very close, to the point that the organization defines playing as learning with joy. The SW model is based on an iterative and collaborative process between education, production, and research. Each of these three disciplines is led by subject matter experts. At the center of the model is an educational plan for comprehensive development that includes all areas of child development (social, emotional, physical, and academic), with educational plans that are reviewed regularly in the different territories to ensure that they are responding to the most critical needs, both educational and social, of early childhood.

Although Sesame Street has been present for more than 50 years in Latin America, in recent years it has extended its work from television to direct services in the territory. Within the framework of one of its "Play Every Day" programs, play is understood as a catalyst for benefits for the development and strengthening of bonds between adults and children. This program focuses on the promotion of a specific form of play known as "guided play" or "accompanied play", which is directed and led by children with certain structures provided by adults. This play modality has shown to be a very effective way to achieve positive educational results in preschool children. Play Every Day is aimed at strengthening the abilities of adults to participate in guided play, changing their perceptions about the value of play and its relationship with learning, and bringing resources to families so that they can practice play in their daily lives. With this strategy and its portfolio of programs, it is sought to promote play as the main form of learning in early childhood, as a transformer of everyday life into a playful learning experience for problem-solving.

Finally, she said that "Play every day" was evaluated, and the caregivers who participated indicated that they had spent more time playing with their children, that they increased their confidence to be facilitators of guided play, and that they better understood the value of play in child development.



The panel received comments from **Sandra Duran Chiappe**, Dean of the School of Education of **Universidad Pedagógica Nacional**, who began her speech by specifying the different perspectives from which play and its contributions to education have been studied: from the psychological perspective, contributions are made about how play helps to understand the development of childhood; from pedagogy, the forms of teacher accompaniment in play are recognized; and from socio-cultural perspectives, play is thought of as a reflection of culture and society. From these frameworks of understanding, she proposes to reflect on Catherine Garvey's statement, a psychologist specializing in early childhood, who said that "the child does not play to learn, but learns when he plays", emphasizing that, in play, a desire is expressed to know and learn.

Play in education opens paths for the understanding of the world, for the approach to reality, culture, contexts, objects, others, and ourselves. It offers possibilities to create and recreate our own reality, it enriches interactions with others and with ourselves, and is an opportunity to build bonds.

Play is the path that adults should travel to relate to children and vice versa: it is the first mode of relationship of the adult with the child, and of the child with the culture represented in that adult. Play helps the child to solve problems and, therefore, contributes to socio-emotional, corporal, communicative, and cognitive development, as well as to the development of mathematical, scientific, and logical thinking.

Professor Durán clarifies that she tries to keep aloof from perspectives that instrumentalize play, turning it into a tool and/or strategy. She recognizes the power that play has for itself, and not merely as a means. She insists on play to approach the socio-cultural context and daily life through interaction with objects and spaces, to build oneself in relation to others.

She closes her intervention by affirming that the two experiences presented lead us to ask ourselves who are the boys and girls and invite us to think about the question of what type of play is more pertinent for each milestone or moment of development, to ask about the context: where do they play? The types of games: what do they play? The objects: what do they play with? And the interactions: with whom do they play? Play invites us to think about the materials, the narratives, and the stories that spaces and objects tell, and particularly invites us to think about how to accompany teachers and other educational actors. Dean Sandra closes with a question on how education schools, foundations, and institutions can implement complementary schemes that invite to believe in play, to trust children and teachers, and to believe in the knowledge that is built through play.

Panel "Play, Upbringing and Family"

This panel was opened by **Ruth Camelo**, Director of Corporación Juegos y Niñez, who presented the project on **Loving Parenting + Play (Crianza Amorosa + Juego)**. The project was born in 2019, framed within a purpose of the National Development Plan, which set forth that play is an equally vital human need throughout the life cycle, as supported by a survey carried out by the Ministry of Health on problems of violence affecting boys and girls. The initiative is formulated by a technical team from the two organizations and is defined based on public policy parameters for children and teenagers in the country to be executed by Corporación Juego y Niñez and under the leadership and call of the Advisor for Children and Adolescents.



She highlighted that the experience has been successful because it has been implemented from the territories, together with those from whom, based on learning and unlearning processes, it feeds on the experiences of families from all over the country. *Loving parenting + play (Crianza amorosa + juego)*, addresses affective bonds and sees play as an end in itself and as a protective factor, which should be in every home, in every family, contributing to changing imaginaries, practices, and beliefs about upbringing methods based on love and respect. These actions of Loving Parenting + Play have impacted 100% of the municipalities, governor's offices and mayor's offices of capitals, and their important experiences show the great possibility of implementing the national pedagogical strategy to prevent physical punishment from Law 2089 of 2021.

She argued that when children play, they exercise their right to play; play happens without stereotypes and penance. Play is not a tool, but it is a language, it is honest, and it is enjoyed. She stressed that the candidates must be told that they must play, and that play is a serious matter. It is within this framework that a call was made to public administrators to allocate resources in order to give continuity to the *Loving parenting + play* program. When families reflect through Loving Parenting + Play, they give themselves every opportunity to review and reflect on these imaginaries and parenting practices to become aware of and commit to turning Loving Parenting around and with a playful methodology where play is enjoyed.

Finally, she proposes play libraries as spaces to observe free play. Play is not only for children, but also for adults. When adults play, we favor our playful dimension, and like girls and boys when playing, we exercise our right to play.

For her part, **Ana Rita Russo**, Director of the Psychoaffective Development and Emotional Education Program –*Pisotón*, of the Universidad del Norte- shared the experience of **Pisotón**. This program has been accompanying families, children, and teachers in the area of emotional development, which is a key area of development. It is done through 3 programs. The first is the *Psychoaffective Development and Emotional Education* program, which aims to facilitate, through playful-educational techniques, the expression of emotions, self-awareness, and the proper management of conflicts in girls, boys, and their families, in order to promote emotional maturity and the resolution of individual and family processes.

The second is the *emotional recovery* program, which aims to promote psycho-affective recovery in girls and boys in conditions of interference in development, through the recognition, expression, and resignification of emotions and traumatic experiences that enable the proper course of psycho-affective development, its potentials, and relationships with the surroundings. The third is the *Let's have a family adventure (Aventurémonos en familia)* Program, which was created as a result of the pandemic and seeks to create a space for the recognition, regulation and emotional recovery of girls, boys, young people, and families in general who are living in potential violent contexts triggered by Covid19.

In addition, all the programs aim to facilitate emotional development and are mediated by playful-educational techniques, where play has a vital role in the expression of girls, boys, and all families.

For Pisotón, play:

- Is a fundamental and urgent right of girls and boys.
- Constitutes one of the vital and essential activities for human development.
- Contributes significantly to physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and moral development.



- Each story and game are based on the needs and conflicts incident to child development, and thus facilitate it.
- Play also helps to control anxieties, for example, playing hide and seek to control separation anxiety, acquire experiences, and learn social norms.
- Play is not a means, but rather a mediator for boys and girls. Play is a pleasure-generating activity, and various children's internal needs are realized and satisfied through playful action.
- Play is also a form of reparation. This is seen in psychotherapy, and it allows us to see the reality of what boys and girls have experienced. It also allows us to release and work on tensions. That is why, in many situations, children try to remove all tensions and create situations.

After both presentations, **Daniela Duque**, Project Director at **Movilizatorio**, mentioned some points that she considered relevant. On the one hand, she highlighted the systemic vision of both experiences and the fact that both prioritized families, decision-makers, and those whose work focuses on children, as well as the fact that social-emotional development is at the center of these experiences. Likewise, she maintained that the experiences presented echo the needs that parents and caregivers are facing and demanding, and that is why these programs must continue to be implemented, as families are the first transformative environment of childhood. For this reason, it is very important to target the programs to families. When playing as a family, it is not only the boys and girls who are transformed, but also adults, and positive and transformative interactions can take place. Through play, there is also a development of learning and new skills.

On the other hand, in relation to the management and development of socio-emotional skills, the *Join the Game* exercise stood out, which developed a survey to understand the relationship between play and socio-emotional well-being in four cities in the country. From this exercise, it was found that 95% of the parents surveyed consider that their children improve their emotional skills when they play. That same proportion of mothers and fathers consider that the well-being of their children is strongly related to their socio-emotional skills. The need for parents and caregivers to have adequate tools to enjoy play and have outdoor spaces to play more was also stressed.

Finally, she underscored the importance of strengthening the territorial approach and recalled that needs vary from one territory to another. It is in this framework that alliances take on special relevance, since they allow reaching other territories and audiences, with the capacity to transform and multiply scopes. As a final message, she stated that investments in early childhood and play during that stage should continue to be emphasized, stressing the importance of positioning play across high-level spaces to recognize its importance.

Panel "Play in public space"

The last panel of the meeting began with the presentation of **Victoria Chavez**, Coordinator of the Urban 95 program of the **Bernard van Leer Foundation** (based in the Netherlands), who shared **Urban 95's** experience. She shared that what is sought is to adapt our cities to strengthen the development of the youngest children. The central question of her work is: If you could experience the city at 95 centimeters from the ground, the height of a 3-year-old, what would you change?



Boys, girls, and their caregivers move through the city differently, and these experiences could positively influence their development. During the first years, specific interactions with space are required. Urban95 encourages its partners and others to consider and empathize with the needs, abilities, and priorities of pregnant women and children ages 0-5. It argues that if cities are suitable for early childhood, they are suitable for the entire population.

With the Urban95 initiative, they help their partners work on various aspects of urban design and city life, in order to improve health and well-being, as well as foster healthy interactions between young children and their caregivers. And on a broader scale, to think about neighborhood planning that allows access to key services with sustainable mobility.

When we talk about public space and play, the need to experience the city as an open space is at the center, not just thinking about parks, it is in public space in general where the lives of boys, girls, and their caregivers unfold. Which brings us to the question of what kind of game do we want to see in the public space? This question gives rise to two lines of discussion: the first one, play and risk, which refers to the need for play spaces for the development of skills and abilities, and the second one, play and learning, linked to the need for educational play spaces.

The last presentation was given by **Camilo Valenzuela**, Coordinator of Education in the **International Rescue Committee**, who presented the “**Play to Dream**” experience (Jugar para Soñar). This is a strategy that is developed jointly with Corporación Juego y Niñez and is targeted at Venezuelan migrant families who are on the Colombian routes. It began with a process of mapping organizations and field research, starting with the identification of children's needs, seeking to provide a play-based response to migrant families. From the investigation, it was possible to contrast some assumptions and identify situations and patterns of family transit, key inputs in the design of the pedagogical proposal. The first thing that was identified is that play is essential for children, but this was not the case in their families, as they did not recognize it as something important.

The strategy includes a pedagogical proposal whose central elements are adult characters: the magician Cororoco (representing the importance of play in child development), a female teacher (representing loving upbringing, non-violence, the importance of recognizing stress factors and establishing guidelines for loving parenting) and children (representing different cognitive and socio-emotional skills such as empathy, sociability, creativity, among others). It also includes mobile play spaces that are coordinated with other humanitarian response actions with the aim of providing comprehensive care to families.

It seeks to accompany families to reduce stress factors and violence towards boys and girls, through the recognition of the value of play. The background is a great concept of play as adventure and journey, supported by a web platform and accompaniment through different channels, as well as a traveling backpack (toys, puppets, notebook, etc.) that makes it possible for play not only to be present in the mobile scenarios, but that the children and their families continue playing throughout the route.

The closing message is strong and refers to the importance of play as a determining and protective factor in emergencies: *“Play transforms the lives of people who are in an emergency situation”*



Mauricio Galeano, Deputy Director of Cultural Facilities of the **District Institute of the Arts-IDARTES**, commented on both presentations and emphasized the need to value the aesthetic and political components of play. His first reflection is about the spaces where we generally do not think of children, the “inappropriate spaces”, and precisely the ways in which they inhabit and incorporate them, which poses challenges in terms of public policies. This requires decision-makers to make comprehensive and critical readings of how children play and inhabit the street and public spaces in general. It is the boys and girls who, through their ways of playing and taking ownership, help us to think about the transformation that public spaces require.

His second reflection is on the need to question the leading role of the toy, as defined by commercial categories (the one that is bought), and think about how unstructured elements expand the spectrum of play and how, based on this expansion of the spectrum, any object can become a toy from the different narratives that can be generated by children who play. He closes his intervention by affirming that to the question of how we make public spaces conducive to play, the answer lies in the observation of boys and girls.

The closing of the event was hosted by **Diana Ibeth Urueña Marino**, advisor to the **Presidential Advisor for Children and Adolescents** who said that we have set out to put this conversation about play on the national and regional agenda. She also underscored that the contributions of each panelist shed light on what has happened in the transformation of play in recent years within the framework of what is proposed by policies for the comprehensive development of children.

From that perspective, at a height of 95 cm, we must continue to build and connect with play from the human dimension, which allows us to understand how play connects and allows us to understand the moment that boys and girls are experiencing, with the permanent possibility of growth for adults as well. Keeping faithful to play requires connecting with all the things proposed in the meeting. There is no single way or path.

Play is typically human and compels us to connect it with all the children around the country in its full diversity. Play is not only for children who apply for services but is also for children in different contexts (such as the hospital environment, migrant children, etc.).

These dialogues leave us with more questions than answers, which allows us to continue building. Therefore, the invitation is to make this an ongoing conversation about play.

Event recording and website:

<https://www.thedialogue.org/events/serie-de-eventos-el-juego-en-la-ninez-en-colombia-educacion-familia-y-espacios-publicos/?lang=es>

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