Analysis of the Spaces of the Municipal Centers of Early Childhood Education of the Municipal Schools of Valinhos/SP

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Abstract: The work presented here analyzes the characteristic elements of the spatial configurations of each one of the eight Municipal Centers of Early Childhood in the city of Valinhos/SP. The intention is to systematize them, preserving spatiotemporal memory, and to relate them to the concepts of the Geography of Childhood, contributing with reflections for the elaboration of future educational public policies in the municipality so that the specificities of education and the care of babies and of very small children are contemplated in the constructions and arrangements of these spaces of collective coexistence.

Keywords: Children’s institutions. Early childhood education. Physical spaces. Geography of childhood.

Introduction

The ideal physical space of a Municipal Center for Early Childhood Education (CEMEI) is one that offers conditions for the full development of each one of the babies and each one of the children who attend them on a daily basis. So, the space must have a physical structure with different qualities, such as: natural lighting and ventilation, light colors in the surroundings, thermal comfort, possibility of relation with the elements of nature. In addition, the arrangements of each of the environments and their furniture need to allow wide circulation and allow children to make their different choices in the different moments of living in these spaces.

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Each one of the eight CEMEIs of Valinhos is dedicated to the education and care of babies and very small children\(^3\) and each one of them presents characteristic elements in its own physical spaces: four of them were built by the municipality; one is the result of an agreement signed with the Federal Government; two were installed in adapted buildings and one works in a donated building.

**Work Objectives**

To present the characteristic elements of the physical space of each one of the eight CEMEIs of Valinhos, locating each one of the constructions in the map of the municipality and chronologically locating the inaugurations, with the intention of not “to summarize it to its footage” (FARIA, 2003, p.70, our translation)\(^4\), but rather to produce historical documentation that preserves the space-time memory of institutions and reflects on the relationships between childhood experiences and the places where they are lived. (LOPES and VASCONCELLOS, 2006, p 112)

Thus, some specific reflections will also be systematized within the scope of the Geography of Childhood, articulating geographic spaces and the socio-historical constitution of the infants and children who attend these institutions on a daily basis\(^5\), contributing with discussions for the elaboration of future educational public policies in the municipality in a way that the specificities of education and child care should be included in the constructions and arrangements of these spaces of collective coexistence.

**Methodology**

The knowledge of the characteristic elements of the configurations of the physical spaces of each one of the CEMEIs was constituted by the realization of visits (registered by photos and notes) and survey of the floor plans in the municipal archives.

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\(^3\) Categorization used in the document *Práticas Cotidianas na Educação Infantil: bases para a reflexão sobre as orientações curriculares*, elaborated by a technical cooperation agreement between MEC and UFRGS, 2009.

\(^4\) “resumir-lo à sua metragem” (FARIA, 2003, p. 70).

\(^5\) Babies and children can stay up to eleven hours a day at these units on a daily basis.
This material, empirically collected, was analyzed from the theoretical basis systematized in the Bibliographical References.

**Main results**

The inauguration of the first CEMEI (CEMEI-1) took place in 1999, since until then, the care of infants and children was exclusively carried out by philanthropic entities linked to the Secretariat of Social Assistance. The building was donated by a family to the municipality to become a nursery school, thus honoring a religious promise. So, the physical space of this place is originally a home which was adapted to enable the education and care of babies and very small children⁶.

CEMEI-1, which will be 20 years old on the anniversary of the municipality in 2019, has already undergone a reform process in 2014 due to the risk of collapse of the retaining wall, built at the back of the site. In addition to the reform of the wall, it was carried out to adapt to meet the requirements of different instances - Sanitary Surveillance, for example - and to allow greater circulation of air and natural light - with the exchange of small windows by balcony doors in each one of the reference rooms of the classes⁷, thus changing the layout of the institution.

In the first half of 2002 two CEMEIS were inaugurated: CEMEI-2 in February and CEMEI-3 in May.

The CEMEI-2 building was the first to be planned and built with municipal funds. Its plant differs from the other three plans also planned and built by the municipality (inaugurated in the years of 2004: CEMEI-4, 2006: CEMEI-5 and 2009: CEMEI-6) specifically for the education and care of babies and very small children.

While CEMEI-2 contemplates various spaces, both internally and externally, the other three have a similar rectangular construction, with a central corridor - covered by a tile that ends

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⁶ Children who are from four months and one day old to four years old.

⁷ The classes are formed according to the age criterion, following the norms of the Common Regiment of the Municipal Schools of Basic Education and the Municipal Centers of Early Childhood Education of Valinhos: Nursery I (babies of 4 months and 1 day to 1 year); Nursery II (1 year and 1 day to 1 year and 11 months of age); Maternal I (from 2 years to 2 years and 11 months of age) and Maternal II (from 3 years old until legally stipulated age for pre-school admission).
up warming the environment on hot days - from one end to the other, dividing the side of the reference rooms and the side where the other rooms are located.

We must also note that each of these three units has its specific characteristics in the external area: two of them (CEMEI-4 and CEMEI-6) have a grassed area with specific buildings in each one of them; already CEMEI-5 has its entire cemented space, with a sand tank in a small space at the back of the building.

In the second half of 2011 CEMEI-7 was inaugurated, built on the agreement between the municipality and the Federal Government, through the Proinfancia Program\(^8\).

Its floor plant contemplates a spatial diversity, having, for example, eight reference rooms, all with access to the solariums, with internal divisions delimiting the space of the rest; video library; computer room. In the outdoor area there is an arena theater, a covered patio and a large open space. The architectural configurations make it impossible for the children to move through the different external spaces of CEMEI-7 on rainy or windy days.

The CEMEI-8 opened in 2012 and CEMEI-3 (which opened in May 2002) were allocated to renovated buildings, with the necessary adaptations made to the functioning of educational institutions for infants and very young children. This CEMEI-8 was the first rural day-care center in the municipality (inaugurated in 2012), but it only started its operation only in 2014.

Despite being located in a rural area, the daily living, until the end of 2018, happened mainly in the internal part of the unit: the external space is limited and all cemented (in a way that is not safe for the accomplishment of the locomotion of the children). There is no park, trees and sand.

Even with the existence of these eight CEMEI\(s\), the demand for vacancies has always exceeded the existing quantity. For this reason, in the year 2008 was promulgated Municipal Law No. 4,308 authorizing the establishment of an agreement between the public power and educational institutions of the private network of Early Childhood Education of the municipality. However, the problem has not been completely resolved: the demand continues to outpace supply.

\(^8\) The Program was established by Resolution No. 6 of April 24, 2007.
Currently, the construction of the ninth CEMEI - through an agreement signed with the State Department of Education, through the Education Development Fund - is in the process of being finalized, and its inauguration is expected to be completed by the end of the first quarter of 2019.

**Final Considerations**

If human history produces the geographical space, the landscapes, the territories and the places, are the ones that make possible the human processes themselves. The new generations, when they are born, find a history of mankind presented in the spaces built on the earth's surface. (LOPES, 2018, p. 50, our translation)⁹

Most of the Municipal Centers for Early Childhood Education built in the city of Valinhos have characteristics that resemble school space organizations, historically centered in the rooms and in the inner part.

We can find trees in the outside of four institutions, but in only two there is the possibility of children playing in the shade. Sunny evenings or rainy days are demarcators of the exclusive use of the internal part of the majority of them. Windows that allow all children to see what is on the other side, can be found in two CEMEIs. Natural lighting and ventilation are also compromised in most buildings. Another aspect that is in the process of re-signification is the issue of children's choice and access to toys and certain materials, which also involves changes in adults' practice / work through training.

Acquisitions of materials (of different types and for different purposes, according to the different daily necessities) and of toys (for use in internal and external spaces); as well as some services of maintenance or reform, are made with own funds of each one of the CEMEIs, collected from the accomplishment of different events with the participation of the community and added to the federal money sent annually.

⁹ “Se a história humana produz o espaço geográfico, as paisagens, os territórios e os lugares, são esses que possibilitam os próprios processos humanos. As novas gerações, ao nascem, encontram uma história da humanidade presentificada nos espaços erguidos na superfície terrestre.” (LOPES, 2018, p. 50)
All these elements are essential to think and analyze the possibilities of experimentation that can be promoted daily in these spaces, constituting the subjectivity of each of the babies and each of the children and peculiarizing the ways in which childhood is and will be lived from the possibilities or difficulties posed to children's actions.

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