

A View on the Methodologies of *Viva o Verde* Project from the UN-Habitat and São Paulo City Hall Partnership

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Uma visão sobre as Metodologias do Projeto Viva o Verde do convênio ONU-Habitat e Prefeitura de São Paulo

RESUMO

Objetivo – apresentar e refletir sobre as metodologias, que são os princípios e os processos de trabalho adotados pelo Projeto Viva o Verde SP, desenvolvido no convênio entre a ONU-Habitat e a Secretaria do Verde e do Meio Ambiente da Prefeitura de São Paulo para o diagnóstico e para propostas para os parques públicos municipais. As metodologias da ONU-Habitat vinham acompanhadas por roteiros ou guias, chamados instrumentos, que são também apresentados no artigo.

Metodologia – adotou-se abordagem qualitativa e descritiva, estruturada como estudo de caso. A pesquisa baseia-se em participação ativa da autora no Grupo de Referência e em análise documental dos relatórios narrativos publicados entre 2023 e 2024 pelo ONU-Habitat e pela Secretaria do Verde e do Meio Ambiente de São Paulo, complementada por referências da Agenda 2030 e dos Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável (ODS).

Originalidade/relevância – O Projeto Viva o Verde buscou inovar para a promoção da sustentabilidade urbana, inclusão social e gestão ambiental no contexto paulistano, mas ele é sempre apresentado como uma iniciativa positiva e promissora, sem que sejam abordadas questões de efetividade e das suas limitações. O artigo é um esforço de tornar conhecidas as metodologias e refletir sobre o processo, de forma preliminar.

Resultados – As metodologias inovadoras, ainda que tenha havido dificuldade para a participação social, podem ser adotadas e adaptadas para outros projetos e programas públicos. Também é importante seguir atualizando e ampliando os produtos do Projeto Viva o Verde.

Contribuições teóricas/metodológicas – As metodologias e os instrumentos do Projeto Viva o Verde representam um avanço no diálogo entre o Poder Público e a sociedade.

Contribuições sociais e ambientais – Parques públicos são espaços em que preservação ambiental alia-se a usos sociais. O Projeto Viva o Verde buscou ampliar a participação social, especialmente de grupos menos representados nos espaços públicos, como as meninas e adolescentes. Há relação direta e estruturada com 13 ODS.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: ODS. Prefeitura de São Paulo. Parques.

A View on the Methodologies of the Viva o Verde Project from the UN-Habitat and São Paulo City Hall Partnership

ABSTRACT

Objective – To present and reflect on the methodologies, which are the principles and work processes adopted by the Viva o Verde SP Project, developed through the partnership between UN-Habitat and the Secretariat of Green and Environment of São Paulo City Hall for the diagnosis and development of proposals for municipal public parks. The UN-Habitat methodologies were accompanied by guides or manuals, referred to as instruments, which are also presented in the article.

Methodology – A qualitative and descriptive approach was adopted, structured as a case study. The research is based on the author's active participation in the Reference Group and on documentary analysis of narrative reports published between 2023 and 2024 by UN-Habitat and the Secretariat of Green and Environment of São Paulo, complemented by references from the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Originality/relevance – The Viva o Verde Project has sought to innovate in promoting urban sustainability, social inclusion, and environmental management in the São Paulo context. However, it has always been presented as a positive and promising initiative, without addressing issues of effectiveness and limitations. This article is an effort to make the methodologies known and to reflect on the process in a preliminary manner.

Results – The innovative methodologies, despite some difficulties in ensuring social participation, can be adopted and adapted for other public projects and programs. It is also important to continue updating and expanding the products developed under the Viva o Verde Project.

Theoretical/methodological contributions – The methodologies and instruments of the Viva o Verde Project represent progress in the dialogue between public authorities and society.

Social and environmental contributions – Public parks are spaces where environmental preservation is combined with social use. The Viva o Verde Project sought to enhance social participation, especially among underrepresented groups in public spaces, such as girls and adolescents. There is a direct and structured relationship with 13 SDGs.

KEYWORDS: SDGs. São Paulo City Hall. Parks.

Una visión sobre las metodologías del Proyecto Viva o Verde del convenio entre ONU-Habitat y la Alcaldía de São Paulo

RESUMEN

Objetivo – Presentar y reflexionar sobre las metodologías, entendidas como los principios y procesos de trabajo adoptados por el Proyecto Viva o Verde SP, desarrollado en el marco del convenio entre ONU-Habitat y la Secretaría del Verde y del Medio Ambiente de la Alcaldía de São Paulo, para el diagnóstico y la elaboración de propuestas para los parques públicos municipales. Las metodologías de ONU-Habitat fueron acompañadas de guías o manuales, denominados instrumentos, que también se presentan en este artículo.

Metodología – Se adoptó un enfoque cualitativo y descriptivo, estructurado como estudio de caso. La investigación se basa en la participación activa de la autora en el Grupo de Referencia y en el análisis documental de los informes narrativos publicados entre 2023 y 2024 por ONU-Habitat y la Secretaría del Verde y del Medio Ambiente de São Paulo, complementado con referencias de la Agenda 2030 y de los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS).

Originalidad/Relevancia – El Proyecto Viva o Verde buscó innovar en la promoción de la sostenibilidad urbana, la inclusión social y la gestión ambiental en el contexto paulistano. Sin embargo, suele presentarse únicamente como una iniciativa positiva y prometedora, sin abordar cuestiones de efectividad y limitaciones. Este artículo constituye un esfuerzo preliminar por dar a conocer las metodologías y reflexionar sobre el proceso.

Resultados – Las metodologías innovadoras, aunque enfrentaron dificultades para garantizar la participación social, pueden adoptarse y adaptarse en otros proyectos y programas públicos. También es importante continuar actualizando y ampliando los productos del Proyecto Viva o Verde.

Contribuciones Teóricas/Metodológicas – Las metodologías e instrumentos del Proyecto Viva o Verde representan un avance en el diálogo entre el poder público y la sociedad.

Contribuciones Sociales y Ambientales – Los parques públicos son espacios donde la preservación ambiental se une a los usos sociales. El Proyecto Viva o Verde buscó ampliar la participación social, especialmente la de grupos menos representados en los espacios públicos, como niñas y adolescentes. Existe una relación directa y estructurada con 13 ODS.

PALABRAS CLAVE: ODS. Alcaldía de São Paulo. Parques.

1 INTRODUCTION

In 2022, an agreement was signed between the São Paulo City Government, through the Municipal Secretariat for Green and Environment (SVMA), and UN-Habitat Brazil for the implementation of projects and studies aimed at improving the management of and access to green public spaces, with a focus on inclusion and sustainability. The project included the assessment of 111 municipal urban and linear parks in the city and the production of 14 theoretical and practical outputs, such as park evaluation reports with gap analyses and recommendations; in-depth diagnostics for 10 priority parks; management plans for eight parks, based on participatory workshops, financial innovation, and social participation; and staff training for new diagnostics and park-related projects.

A technical team was assembled by UN-Habitat Brazil, coordinated by Jordi Sánchez Cuenca, and was responsible for adapting the methodology to the São Paulo context, implementing it, supervising technical quality, and ensuring alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SVMA team, particularly the Parks Management and Biodiversity sectors, contributed local knowledge, institutional coordination, and implementation. Launched in April 2023, the project was scheduled to last three years and is being concluded in 2025.

This article presents reflections on the methodologies and on the work carried out within *Viva o Verde* Project. The author was a member of the Reference Group (GdR) during this period, representing the Brazilian Association of Landscape Architects (ABAP) and the Quapá Laboratory. The Reference Group (GdR) was composed of representatives from civil society organizations, academia, and professional entities to monitor and validate the methodology. *Viva o Verde* Project is grounded in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and focuses on participatory governance and spatial equity. Efforts were made to broaden social participation, especially among groups less represented in public spaces, such as girls and teenage girls. Communication materials from UN-Habitat, the city government, and the media about *Viva o Verde* Project consistently present it as a positive and promising initiative, without highlighting effectiveness, challenges, or limitations. With the work only recently concluded, the assessment of results is still limited, but we seek to offer reflections, identify progress, and reinforce the need to build upon its legacy.

Assessment methodologies for urban spaces represent the effort of technical teams and researchers to contribute tools and analytical methods that support the planning and design of urban spaces, and aid planners in decision-making and in directing public investments to meet real demands with the aim of improving population quality of life (Andara Ramos et al., 2020).

The expansion in the number of parks, most of them in peripheral areas, has made the need to continuously strengthen park management urgent. To do so, it is necessary to refine knowledge, evaluation, and typology of parks while also involving the population (Casimiro, 2017; Sakata, 2017). Monitoring allows new planning, restoration, control, conservation, and environmental preservation measures to be developed, supported by new definitions of public policies (Ribeiro et al., 2019).

The research that informed this article adopts a qualitative and descriptive approach, based on the author's active participation as a member of the Reference Group and on a

documentary analysis of narrative reports published between 2023 and 2024 by UN-Habitat and the São Paulo Secretariat for Green and Environment, complemented by institutional references from the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. No selection was made of specific actions, outputs, or events from the program; instead, the goal was to construct an introductory overview for other researchers.

2 VIVA O VERDE PROJECT

The objective of the project is to transform the management of green areas into a public policy based on evidence, equity, and social participation, and to promote urban planning with a gender and sustainability lens — a model that UN-Habitat intends to replicate in other major cities.

By reinforcing the role of parks as urban green infrastructure, the project aims to contribute to climate resilience, biodiversity conservation, and the reduction of inequalities in access to urban green spaces, especially in peripheral areas.

Among the parks to be assessed, those managed by the state government were naturally excluded. Of the 111 municipal parks, others were also excluded, and in the adaptation to the São Paulo context, the analysis was defined to include 73 public parks representing different typologies (urban, linear, or waterfront parks). The two natural parks were excluded because their management is atypical: despite being in an urban context, they are treated as preservation areas with highly controlled use, including requiring prior scheduling. Other outputs of *Viva o Verde* Project developed after the diagnostic phase included different numbers of parks, depending on the objective of each product.

2.1 Reference Group (GdR)

To monitor the work, a consultative Reference Group (GdR) was formed, as required by the main methodology. The group was considered the project's primary mechanism for democratic participation. Created through a public call, it brought together 19 entities from civil society and academia, representing different genders, age groups, and people with disabilities. At the 1st Ordinary Session (Figure 1), members from invited entities participated, including environmental collectives, representatives of disability rights groups, people experiencing homelessness, universities, and professional associations such as the Institute of Architects of Brazil and the Association of Landscape Architects. It was a highly diverse group with experience in environmental and social advocacy in the city of São Paulo.

This first meeting focused on group formation and conceptual alignment of the methodology to be applied. The group was asked to develop interview questions based on the methodological dimensions, as well as to identify quality indicators. There was another in-person meeting to validate the data collection instruments.

Figure 1 – Second day of the first meeting of the Reference Group, in June/2023



Source: Francine Sakata (2023).

Figura 2 – Last meeting of the Reference Group, in August/2025



Source: Viva o Verde Data base (2025).

The following meetings were held bimonthly and remotely, and were mainly focused on communicating the progress of the work, always serving as a space for evaluating products and recommendations, ensuring transparency and representativeness within the Project. The final meeting (Figure 2), held in August 2025, took place in person but no longer gathered the same group as at the beginning. Environmental NGOs continued to participate in other meetings, but groups linked to social rights, such as organizations representing persons with disabilities, did not.

2.1 SDGs

The project establishes a direct and structured relationship with 13 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN 2030 Agenda, explicitly listed in all reports: SDGs 5.5; 10.3; 11.6; 11.7; 13.1; 13.3; 15.5; 15.9; 15.a; 17.16; 17.17; 17.18; and 17.19. Highlights include:

- **SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities (11.6 and 11.7):** the central axis of the project. Viva o Verde sought to expand equitable access to public green spaces, focusing on social inclusion, safety, and urban sustainability. Its actions support the achievement of target 11.7, which aims to “provide universal access to safe, inclusive and green public spaces.” Additionally, target 11.6 is addressed through integration with the Park Management Plan and PLANPAVEL, which aim to improve urban environmental quality and reduce pollution.
- **SDG 13 – Climate Action (13.1 and 13.3):** the project aimed to promote urban resilience, climate adaptation, and environmental education through training and participatory methodologies. The reports highlight alignment with São Paulo’s Climate Action Plan (PLANCLIMA), reinforcing targets 13.1 (resilience to climate-related hazards) and 13.3 (awareness-raising and institutional capacity-building).
- **SDG 5 – Gender Equality (5.5):** the project adopted a gender-sensitive approach throughout all stages. Training sessions and workshops prioritized the participation of women, girls, and vulnerable groups, aiming to ensure equal opportunities in decision-making processes related to urban planning. In the 2023 training sessions, 80% of participants were women, with attention to intersectionality regarding race, age, and disability.
- **SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities (10.3):** Viva o Verde operated in areas with socio-environmental inequalities, promoting territorial inclusion and community participation in vulnerable territories, thus addressing target 10.3 by reducing inequalities in access to services and green infrastructure.
- **SDG 15 – Life on Land (15.5; 15.9; 15.a):** actions involving regeneration, conservation of native vegetation, and management plans for parks and green areas strengthen urban biodiversity and integrate land-use and nature-conservation policies, in line with targets 15.5 (halting biodiversity loss), 15.9 (integrating biodiversity into urban planning), and 15.a (mobilizing financial resources for conservation).
- **SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals (17.16–17.19):** the project was built on an international cooperation model between the São Paulo City Government and UN-Habitat, integrating civil society, academia, and the public sector. This collaborative governance structure materializes targets 17.16 (multi-stakeholder partnerships), 17.17 (effective public-private cooperation), and 17.18 and 17.19 (strengthening data collection and monitoring of environmental and social indicators).

3 METHODOLOGIES AND PRODUCTS

The methodologies introduced by UN-Habitat comprise the set of methods, techniques, procedures, and principles used to achieve the project's objectives. In other words, they are suggested pathways for addressing identified problems. UN-Habitat brought methodologies already developed, mainly two: **City-wide Public Space Assessment (CPSA)** and **Public Space Site Assessment (PSSA)**.

The **City-wide Public Space Assessment** methodology operates at the urban scale, aiming to map and analyze the distribution, quality, and accessibility of public spaces throughout the city. Its focus is strategic, allowing for the identification of territorial inequalities and the definition of priority areas for intervention. The **Public Space Site Assessment** methodology operates at the local scale, applying qualitative and participatory tools to assess in depth the use, perception, and conditions of a specific public space. In Viva o Verde Project, the first methodology was used to select priority parks based on a broad territorial perspective of São Paulo, while the second deepened the diagnosis of these spaces, supporting the development of Park Master Plans.

The methodologies are described in instruments—publications that provide methodological guidelines. These instruments guide the preparation of inventories and participatory diagnoses of urban public spaces at the municipal scale and aim to support the development of evidence-based urban policies and strategies aligned with more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable cities.

There is an emphasis on social participation, with a focus on vulnerable groups such as women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and marginalized populations. To this end, other methodologies addressing ways to engage these groups are presented, such as the **Her City** guide and the **Block by Block Playbook**, which justify and support the participation of underrepresented groups—women, youth, children, and persons with disabilities—in urban design and revitalization processes. These methodologies are therefore tools used to produce outputs required within the broader public-space assessment methodologies.

One of the products requested by the São Paulo City Government—park management plans—did not have a predefined methodological framework and was developed according to a plan designed by the local UN-Habitat team. According to the project coordinator, this process will be documented and transformed into an additional methodology available to other cities in a publication by UN-Habitat.

The methodologies were developed to be flexible and replicable. The instruments include operational guidelines, form templates, ethical protocols, and case studies applied in different global contexts. The publications are visually well designed, with photos and illustrations, and the text is concise and typically organized into itemized sections (Figure 3).

The methodological proposal (Figure 4) is organized into four main stages: (i) pre-fieldwork; (ii) data collection and quality assurance; (iii) preparation and validation of reports; and (iv) post-assessment activities, such as strategic planning, implementation, and monitoring.

Estrutura metodológica

	Participativa		
	Adicional (Atividades de projeto recomendadas que não fazem parte da avaliação)		
	Atividades	Ferramentas	Resultados
Pre-avaliação	1. Preparação do projeto	Mapeamento de partes interessadas Cronograma do projeto Definição de valores e objetivos comuns	Mapa das partes interessadas e estratégia Cronograma do projeto
	2. Pesquisa documental		Coleta de informações quantitativas e qualitativas (mapas, artigos, imagens, etc.)
	3. Observação	Caderno de observação Mapeamento Fotografia / vídeo Medições e registros digitais Contagem de pessoas	Cartão organizado da dados: fotos, medições e registros digitais, mapas e medições (incluindo contagem de pessoas)
	4. Pesquisa no local	Definir uma amostra representativa Como formular um questionário digital Pesquisa online	Dados digitais limpos
	5. Entrevistas	Formulário de consentimento	Transcrição ou pontos-chave de cada entrevista
Coleta de dados	6. Caminhada exploratória	Mapa de percursos a pé Definir uma amostra representativa Como formular um questionário digital Pesquisa online	Mapa de percursos e paradas Dados coletados a partir do questionário
	7. Discussões em grupos focais	Lista de participantes Mapeamento Programação da S.W.O.T. Análise S.W.O.T. Formulário de Avaliação	Análise S.W.O.T. Coleta de mapas
	8. Mapa afetivo	Mapeamento Lista de indicações	Cinco mapas afetivos - um para cada dimensão
Análise	9. Pontuação de qualidade	Definir uma amostra representativa Como formular um questionário digital Pesquisa online	Dados digitais limpos
	10. Recomendações	Formulário de consentimento	Transcrição ou pontos-chave de cada entrevista
	Oficina Bloco a Bloco	Mapa de percursos a pé Definir uma amostra representativa Como formular um questionário digital Pesquisa online	Mapa de percursos e paradas Dados coletados a partir do questionário
Análise	Oficina com especialistas	Lista de participantes Mapeamento Programação da Oficina Análise S.W.O.T. Formulário de Avaliação	Análise S.W.O.T. Coleta de mapas
	11. Descobertas comparativas	Lista de indicadores Fotos Formulário de consentimento Contagem de sessões	Fotos comparativas (antes e depois) Lista comparativa de indicadores e gráficos Lições aprendidas e ações futuras

Dimensões & indicadores

A avaliação da qualidade do espaço público considera cinco dimensões principais: usos e usuários; acessibilidade; instalações físicas; conforto e segurança; e verde. No total, 20 indicadores foram selecionados para visualizar rapidamente cada dimensão apresentando um desempenho num.

Dimensão	Indicador	Subindicador
Usos e usuários	2	11
Acessibilidade	4	17
Instalações físicas	7	30
Conforto e segurança	4	20
Verde	3	13

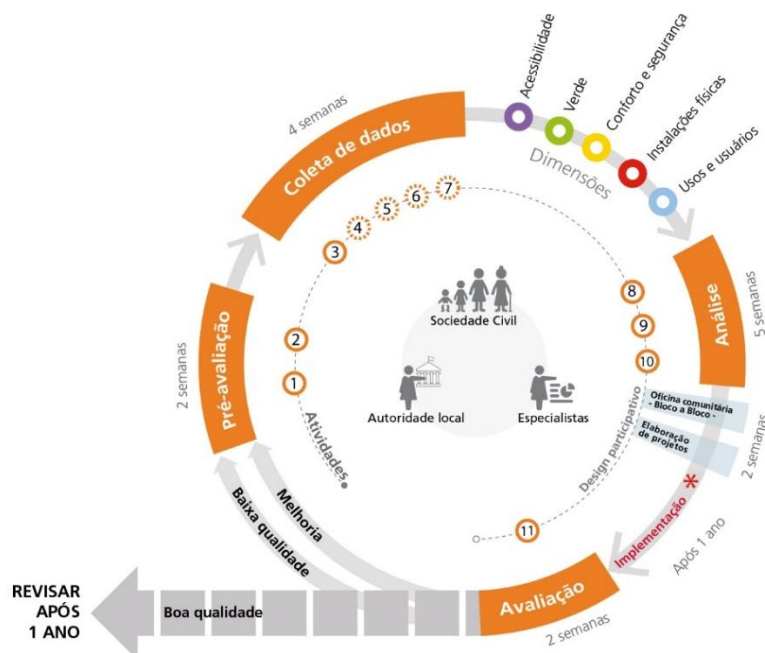
Usos e usuários

Esta dimensão se concentra em como o espaço está sendo usado e por quem. Um espaço público de boa qualidade é aquele projetado para acomodar todas as pessoas, onde possam passar um tempo considerável aproveitando o espaço, especialmente os grupos historicamente vulnerabilizados. Através desta dimensão, pode-se analisar o quão inclusivo é o espaço através da observação da variedade de pessoas que o utilizam e do tipo de atividades realizadas.

☒ Obrigatório ☐ Se aplicável		
Indicadores	Escala	Subindicadores
Número e variedade de pessoas que acessam o espaço público	* Espaço Público	Número de pessoas usuárias durante o dia
	* Espaço Público	Número de pessoas usuárias durante a noite
	* Espaço Público	Variedade de pessoas usuárias no espaço, considerando idade, gênero, deficiências, raça e etnia, etc.
	* Razo	Quantidade de pedões de uso misto
Número e variedade de atividades observadas no espaço público	* Espaço Público	Presença de unidades vagas nos térreos da frente do parque
	* Espaço Público	Presença de diferentes atividades inclusivas no espaço público ao longo do tempo (para crianças, idosos, pessoas com deficiência, etc.)
	* Razo	Presença de atividades não planejadas, temporárias, organizadas pela autoridade local e pela comunidade
	* Espaço Público	Presença de regras de restrição para atividades específicas (ex: piquenique, brincadeiras, bicicleta, etc.)
	* Espaço Público	Presença de interações sociais
	* Razo	Presença de atividades econômicas formais e informais (ambulantes, quiosques, etc.)

Source: ONU-Habitat (2020).

Figure 4 – Graphic summary of the Methodology



Source: ONU-Habitat (2020).

3.1 The *Her City* Methodology

The methodology presented in the *Her City* instrument (or guide) proposes a planning approach centered on girls and young women in urban development. Developed by UN-Habitat in partnership with Global Utmaning, the document sets out a nine-step methodology aimed at incorporating the perspectives of girls and underrepresented groups into urban design and regeneration processes. The proposal is based on the recognition that urban public space—often planned *by* and *for* adult men—tends to reproduce gender inequalities, undermining girls' right to the city. By recognizing girls as experts in their own urban experiences, *Her City* proposes a new paradigm for the production of urban space, grounded in spatial justice and gender equity.

In São Paulo, the workshops were conducted in partnership with the CEUs located near the parks, with technical support from the Municipal Secretariat for Green and Environment (SVMA) and UN-Habitat. In general terms, the activity plan included:

- Exploratory walks through the parks to identify problems and potentials;
- Discussion circles on safety, belonging, accessibility, and leisure;
- Creation of physical models and digital models in Minecraft, expressing how the girls wished the park could be transformed;
- Presentation of proposals to technical teams and the community;
- Collective prioritization of the most relevant ideas (using the “Prioritization Wheel” tool).

The *1st Narrative Report* (2023) had already identified as a risk the “insufficient representation of the city’s social diversity in the workshops” and the need to “encourage and strengthen the active participation of women and girls” in the project activities. The *3rd Report* (March 2024) indicated low participation in the training sessions—especially among women—highlighted as a risk to implementation and as a need to revise the engagement strategy.

The *4th Report* (September 2024) confirmed that the “percentage of women from vulnerable groups in the training sessions was lower than planned,” recommending a review of participant lists with City Hall leadership to ensure greater female representation. Even so, the report also noted progress in the overall gender indicators: around 8 out of 10 workshop participants were women, and 65% of the civil society participants identified as Black or Brown, demonstrating an effective intersectional approach.

3.2 The *Block by Block* Methodology

The *Block by Block Playbook* presents the support methodology (including for the *Her City* methodology) for participatory urban planning using the digital game Minecraft, in which participants create and modify virtual environments. Developed by UN-Habitat and Mojang Studios, the idea is that Minecraft—by enabling three-dimensional visualization of urban proposals, combined with active listening—facilitates communication between residents and public-sector technicians, overcoming generational barriers.

The guide structures the activity into phases: site selection, data collection, digital modeling, participatory workshops, refinement of proposals, and implementation. The document also provides practical resources such as checklists, timelines, evaluation templates, and recommendations for scaling.

The steps for its use may be summarized as:

1. **Learning the tool** – initial contact with Minecraft, guided by facilitators;
2. **Modeling proposals** – recreating the park in the virtual environment, where the girls inserted new elements (benches, shaded areas, playground equipment, lighting, trails);
3. **Public presentation** – showcasing proposals to the group and debating feasibility;
4. **Documentation and systematization.**

In *Viva o Verde* Project, the *Block by Block* methodology was intended to serve as the central tool for citizen participation and co-creation in the workshops for the 10 selected priority parks. In practice, however, the use of Minecraft faced technical and contextual limitations during implementation in *Viva o Verde* SP Project. As recorded in the 2023 and 2024 narrative reports, operational difficulties emerged related to the availability of compatible equipment, internet access, and participant familiarity with the software.

Because of these challenges, the technical team of the project chose to adapt the participatory process to analog formats, such as drawing workshops, hand-drawn maps, and physical models, while preserving the principles of inclusion, collaboration, and gender-sensitive engagement that characterize *Block by Block*.

This adaptation allowed the community engagement process to continue, maintaining the focus on spatial expression of ideas and on valuing participants' local experience, even without the originally planned digital support. The technical team documented all proposals to inform the design recommendations.

3.3 Park Assessment

For the diagnostic assessment of municipal parks—one of the planned deliverables of *Viva o Verde* Project—interviews were carried out in combination with structured observations and secondary analysis of institutional data, following the methodological tripod of public space assessment established in the parent methodology.

The assessment covered **seven analytical dimensions** and **42 quantitative and qualitative indicators** of public space (Table 1).

Table 1 – Dimensions and Indicators of the Public Space Assessment of the City

Dimension	Representative indicators
1. Distribution	Proportion of parks per district Average distance between public spaces
2. Accessibility	Walkability Infrastructure for persons with disabilities Opening hours
3. Comfort and Activities	Presence of shade Urban furniture Availability of activities and equipment
4. Social Inclusion	Perception of safety Representation of diverse groups
5. Governance and Management	Existence of a management plan Partnerships with civil society Maintenance frequency
6. Vegetation and Biodiversity	Tree density Preservation of native species Shading
7. Water Bodies	Water quality Preservation of springs and riverbanks

Source: ONU-Habitat (2020).

Two main types of interviews were conducted: with park users and with park managers. The interviews with users aimed to capture perceptions of comfort, safety, accessibility, infrastructure, and overall quality of the space. Interviewers were hired and trained specifically for this activity. The interviews were conducted in person within the parks themselves over 60 consecutive days, across three daily shifts (morning, afternoon, and late afternoon), ensuring temporal variation in the sample. Each park had an average of 60 interviews applied, totaling 4,410 respondents across the 73 evaluated parks.

Interviews with park managers sought to understand institutional structure, challenges faced, and ongoing initiatives. These questionnaires addressed aspects such as partnerships with civil society, maintenance difficulties, socioenvironmental risks, social profile of managers, and previous experiences with participatory planning. Data collection took place between October and November 2023. The combination of user perceptions and management data provided a basis for understanding both the everyday appropriation of parks and their structural governance.

This material was organized alongside structured on-site observations regarding infrastructure, accessibility, comfort, safety, vegetation, and other indicators, as well as secondary data collection on management, maintenance, environmental risks, and social use of the spaces, resulting in the publication *“Public Space Assessment in the City: Municipal Parks of São Paulo.”*

3.4 Management Plans for Parks

Viva o Verde Project promoted 12 territorial participatory workshops to carry out active listening with user communities and residents surrounding the eight parks selected for

Management Plans. Held between April and May 2024, these workshops mobilized 253 participants, including residents, local collectives, educators, children, older adults, and representatives of environmental groups. Activities included affective mapping, participatory visualization exercises, and qualified listening to understand community desires and perceived challenges within the parks. Each workshop was adapted to the specificities of its territory, and the collected data were directly incorporated into the development of the management proposals for Augusta, Paraisópolis (Figure 5), Alto da Boa Vista, Água Podre, Aristocrata, Córrego do Bispo, Jardim Apurá (Búfalos), and Fazenda da Juta parks.

The technical and participatory reports produced after the workshops compile community perceptions and collective guidelines for local application and served as inputs for the management plans. Developing these plans required creating a specific and unprecedented methodology for São Paulo. This methodology adapted frameworks from UN-Habitat (Public Space Management Plans) to the City Hall's 2021–2024 Goals Program, integrating technical diagnostics (infrastructure, vegetation, management, and use), participatory diagnostics (listening sessions, workshops, and HerCity data), and guidelines on maintenance, safety, accessibility, and shared governance.

Figure 5 – Workshop at Paraisópolis park, in April 2024



Source: Francine Sakata (2023).

3.5 Other Deliverables

In addition to the park assessments and the eight management plans, *Viva o Verde* Project also delivered:

- a prioritization matrix identifying 10 priority parks for intervention, validated by SVMA and the Reference Group;
- training for contractors and SVMA staff in methodologies for conducting physical,

social, and environmental diagnostics;
proposals for hybrid financing models (public and community-based);
projects and proposals for parks.

Development of park projects and proposals was based on combining the outcomes of participatory workshops with technical surveys. During the workshops, the community—especially women and girls—was invited to co-create ideas. In the systematization process, these ideas were transformed into project and placemaking guidelines. Community proposals were incorporated into the technical plans for park improvement. In this way, participatory methodologies initiated gender-responsive urban design and provided a replicable model for community-based public space design.

4 CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 Project Challenges

The reports identify three major challenges encountered during implementation:

1. Logistical and operational challenges due to the complexity of data collection across 106 parks, including primary data collection and field observation;
2. The need to integrate diverse methodologies required intensive training and continuous technical adjustments to ensure coherence among results;
3. Issues of representativeness and gender intersectionality — although 80% of participants were women, only 31% identified as Black, Brown, or Asian, and 5% as persons with disabilities, revealing the difficulty of reaching the 50% intersectionality target.

In the first session of the Reference Group, it was possible to gather individuals with knowledge and engagement in struggles for the rights of minorities in São Paulo. There were representatives of persons with disabilities and marginalized social groups, many of whom face significant difficulties using public space and accessing public parks. Many did not participate in subsequent sessions due to personal constraints and their voluntary involvement in other forums. Nevertheless, they left important lessons for technical teams and fellow members of the Reference Group about new paradigms in the production of urban space.

This group brought forward issues related to municipal parks such as food security, accessibility for different groups of people with specific needs, improvement of the parks' surroundings, and participation. These are highly complex issues for municipal public parks, which currently lack management councils, governance models, and sufficient resources.

According to the official reports of *Viva o Verde* SP Project (2023–2024), there were partial difficulties in the participation of girls and women, especially those in more vulnerable situations, even though the gender inclusion goal had been central from the start of the UN-Habitat and São Paulo City Hall agreement. User groups including mothers and children were able to participate in weekend workshops held in the parks. I attended the workshop held at Parque Paraisópolis, where participation was broad and substantive. Based on simple questions posed by the technical team, park users contributed insights drawn from their lived experiences.

As a member of the Reference Group, I assess that logistical and operational challenges, as well as the need to refine methodologies, were overcome thanks to the commitment and capacity of *Viva o Verde* and SVMA teams. The challenges of representativity and effective public participation were not fully resolved, as there remains a wide gap and mutual unfamiliarity between the administrative apparatus and the population. However, significant progress was made. Regardless of the methodology used, engaging people in their territories and giving them a voice empowers both speakers and listeners and reduces distance and unfamiliarity. This methodology had the merit of enabling this process according to an internationally recognized standard applied across the city of São Paulo and its 106 parks within a feasible timeframe.

4.2 Follow-up and Legacy

According to the 4th Narrative Report (2024), the main lines of follow-up are:

1. Incorporation of participatory methodologies into SVMA's routine planning as tools for diagnostics, monitoring, and social participation in parks and green areas;
2. Adoption of the eight Park Management Plans as governance instruments and reference models for other parks in the city;
3. Expansion of technical and community training;
4. Interdepartmental and international integration — the project strengthened a network among SVMA, the Secretariat for International Relations (SMRI), and UN-Habitat, creating conditions for new international cooperation agreements;
5. Continuous monitoring based on the georeferenced data platform created for *Viva o Verde*, enabling periodic reviews of the 106 assessed parks.

The project trained over 200 people through training sessions, educational materials (guides, booklets, manuals), and methodological transfer to SVMA teams and civil society. The coordinator of *Viva o Verde* Project stated at the conclusion of activities that he hopes the methodologies and deliverables will be institutionalized so that the knowledge produced does not end with the project's contractual cycle but becomes a permanent public policy within the São Paulo City Hall. In fact, the appropriation of these results remains uncertain and depends on human, political, and economic resources.

Casimiro (2017), in his study of São Paulo's parks, and Sakata (2017), in her evaluation of the creation of public parks across the country, demonstrated that park provision shifted from a model of *public production of leisure spaces* to one more oriented toward environmental conservation, supported by legislation, funding, and public opinion linked to environmental issues. Politically, this has meant organizational change and a paradigm shift in programmatic and design approaches, relegating leisure to a secondary role. *Viva o Verde* Project, by giving voice to park users—even while emphasizing environmental concerns—helps rebalance the environmental and social roles of public parks.

4.3 Challenges for Parks and the SDGs in São Paulo

Viva o Verde SP served as a local implementation instrument for the 2030 Agenda, acting simultaneously in the environmental, social, and institutional dimensions. It sought to translate the SDGs into concrete urban actions—such as training, participatory methodologies, and the development of management plans—and generated local sustainability indicators to guide public policy.

United Nations institutional discourse, particularly in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), frequently references socioenvironmental justice and socio-spatial segregation but avoids explicitly identifying the most privileged and most oppressed groups. One can infer that this more conciliatory and universalized language aims to expand the political and discursive reach of global agendas, facilitating dialogue with countries and publics of differing contexts and ideological orientations.

However, whether neutral or more confrontational, institutional discourse does not have the power to overcome socioenvironmental injustice and socio-spatial segregation entrenched in Brazilian society. This challenge exceeds the scope of Viva o Verde, SVMA, and even the municipal government itself. There is a risk that political and financial agendas may deprioritize—if not oppose—the improvement of existing parks.

In recent years, with very limited resources for park maintenance, the public sector has sought private concessions as pragmatic responses to budget constraints. Private management has been drawn to parks in higher-income neighborhoods, creating governance arrangements that have appropriated park spaces for events and have not safeguarded public use and equitable access.

SVMA itself has an agenda to expand the park system, including areas with natural resources that are not yet designated as parks and whose preservation is not fully guaranteed. This is legitimate and important, and requires human and financial resources.

The challenge of improving public spaces in lower-income neighborhoods, often justified by resource scarcity, tends to be perpetually pushed “to the end of the line.” The hope for change may lie in increasing public participation and community advocacy.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

I, Francine Gramacho Sakata, declare that the manuscript entitled “An Overview of the Methodologies of the *Viva o Verde* Project under the UN-Habitat and São Paulo City Government Partnership” meets the following conditions:

1. **Financial Relationships:** No funding institution or sponsoring organization was involved in the development of this study.
 2. **Professional Relationships:** No professional relationships relevant to the content of this manuscript exist.
 3. **Personal Conflicts:** No personal conflicts of interest related to the content of this manuscript have been identified.
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