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# Play (Action) Box

Manual

Turn a public space into a temporary play area!

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## What is the Play (Action) Box?

The Play (Action) Box is a tool kit that involves various elements of **light, sound, wind, earth, bridge, time, and stories**. Elements that activate spaces, people, and dialogues, making tangible imaginative ideas and building other forms of relationships and affection. From a creative and playful point of view, each action in different public spaces mobilizes different elements, creating compositions that are activated through people's play and participation. The box's proposal is to make available to children objects that stimulate sensory play, as a way to explore the possibilities of creating play spaces in the city.

# 3 Reasons to start a Play (Action) Box

**1. We need to play with occupying public spaces!** In most cities, people are encouraged to use only private spaces. The use of public spaces, both as meeting places and as platforms for creativity and collectivity in cities, provides better social cohesion and stimulates a closer look at our cities and societies, leading us to interact with a great diversity of people. Play, in this sense, encourages people to meet and reinvent the uses of public spaces.



**2. Children need to be in the city!** Children are often confined to closed and protected spaces. This causes them to grow up not knowing how to be in public spaces and not relating to different people. Moreover, public spaces allow for healthier and larger play spaces, especially in dense cities where spaces are expensive and limited. Children have the right to be in the city, and we have the right to have children in the city. They have the right to opine, transform, and occupy the city like any citizen!

### **3. We need creative play!**

Confining play only to closed, pre-designed spaces also limits children's creativity and freedom, reducing their repertoire and autonomy to change and create their environments. Considering our current context of digitalization of everything, children are increasingly faced with pre-programmed and extremely controlled learning and play moments, causing profound effects on socialization, learning, and creativity.

# How does it work?

The Box was created from seven categories, discussed for months by an interdisciplinary group of designers, architects, and educators, with a focus on activating spaces, people, and dialogues, building alternative forms of relationship and affection between individuals and between individuals and spaces.

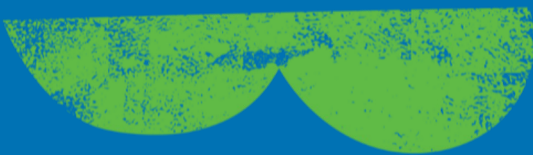
Starting from the perspective of a creative and playful look at urban spaces and the communities that inhabit them, the toolkit mobilizes various elements, creating compositions that are activated through play and people's participation. The Box was used in different public spaces throughout São Paulo, Brazil, in all regions of the city.

Based on interviews conducted before and after the events (a total of 170 questionnaires administered), we found that, on average, after using the Play(Action) Box, there was a 30% increase in the number of people who saw the city as a place that encourages play, and there was an 18% growth in the number of people who see the spaces where Box was used as suitable for play.



The current version of the Play (Action) Box, listed below, is just one of many possible configurations. If you plan to make your own, we invite you to also think about the materials available where you live, adapting them to your reality, but trying to have at least one element from each of these categories:

- 1. Bridge**
- 2. Light**
- 3. Wind**
- 4. Earth**
- 5. Sound**
- 6. Time**
- 7. Stories**



# Bridge

**Between people, spaces,  
and objects, there are thousands of  
connections, and it is on these  
bridges that play emerges.**

Ropes, rubber bands, and hula hoops were designed to stimulate collective body movements that allow children to experiment with the potential and limits of their bodies.





**Bridges can be understood, in practice, as the act of connecting different spaces. Or, poetically, as a way to create new relationships between people.**

## **Element Ideas**

### **Ropes**

*Tip: tie the rope to a pole or a tree and play jump rope!*

### **Rubber bands**

*Tip: rubber bands can be tied between trees or posts, creating a new space, where the game is to try to pass through them or create tension in the elements to open up spaces for passage.*

### **Hula hoops**

*Tip: You can do a hula hoop course. Challenge others to throw a ball through the hula hoop, play at walking around while keeping it rolling around your waist... just be careful not to break it!*

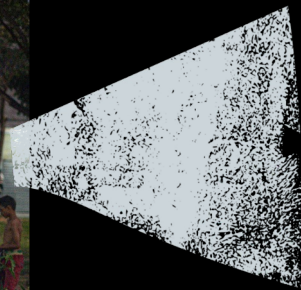
### **Strings**

*Tip: choose a tree with many branches and invite the children to create compositions with the strings. They can also become clotheslines of drawings or objects. You can hang a branch from the tree (by attaching a string to each end) and play at trying to balance other objects on it. Using cans or cups, you can also make a cordless telephone!*

# Light

**We can only see what the light touches, and the square itself plays hide-and-seek.**

Playing outdoors encourages children to come into contact with the sun and paves the way for playing with the heat, the changing light throughout the day, the shadows, and the twilight. In addition, elements that play with light allow children to transform the space when the afternoon begins to turn into evening.



**Think of elements and dynamics that make people pay attention to how light transforms the space.**

## **Element Ideas**

### **Lanterns**

*Tip: you can play around with giving the children challenges, like lighting up some animal or something that is out of place... or even start a shadow theater!*

### **LED Hose/Flasher Light**

### **Projector**

*Tip: It is great fun to play with the shadows that are formed with a projector! You can challenge people to make sculptures by joining their shadows.*

### **Mirrors**

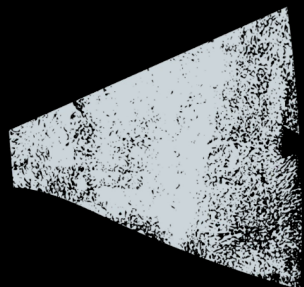
*Tip: with mirrors, we can play with the light during the day. Just be careful that the children don't throw light into each other's eyes.*

### **Kaleidoscopes**

### **Light table**

*Tip: You can buy a light table or build your own using a box, a transparent material, and a flashlight.*

### **Colored glasses**



# Wind

**Everything comes from the wind. It is something invisible, but it moves the treetops and it moves us too!**

Windssocks, inflatable structures, and balls are objects that draw themselves through the air. So they can be made, undone, or reinvented in different ways, according to the wind, the action of running, or even when we stand still!



**Think of all that can be done when we play with air.**

## **Element Ideas**

### **Windstock**

### **Inflatables**

*Tip: inflatables can be purchased balls and couches - or you can build your own inflatable structure with reused plastic bags and an iron (including a fan to inflate it). Inflatable sofas can be used as a seating area, but we have also seen them being used for sack races, as a playful activity of running to fill them up against the wind... As for inflatable balls, it's great to seek a variety of sizes and shapes since each one is suitable for different types of play. Pilates balls are good for pregnant women, pool balls are great for younger children, balloons for kids, volleyball or soccer balls for teenagers...*

### **Soap bubbles**

*Tip: make giant soap bubbles! Take a bucket and mix seven cups of water, one cup of detergent, and five tablespoons of sugar. Build a structure with two sticks and a weft of string between the two. Then, just dip the string in the water and use the wind to create the bubbles!*

### **Hammocks**

*Tip: look for hammocks made of waterproof and resistant materials, which can be tied between trees - this element is useful for mothers with babies as well as for swinging.*

# Earth

**It is where everything is born, including games. We live on the ground, and from it we climb, create paths, and build worlds, balancing between the will to climb and gravity.**

EVA boards, fabrics, tunnels, cones, and mountable bamboo structures make it possible to interact with the floor in new ways, creating new paths and games of balance and structure. Construction elements such as cups, wood, and sponges invite children, especially in early ages, to exercise their creativity and imagination by building and telling stories about what they have built.





**Think of elements that lead to construction, to courses, ups and downs, and to new relationships with the ground.**

## **Element Ideas**

- Foam boards**
- Fabrics**
- Tunnels**
- Cones**
- Sobraprima**

*Tip: What materials are available where you are that would be wasted? Gather these scraps to turn them into a playful building and matching game - they can be pieces of wood, cardboard, or plastic! Cut these materials into similar sized pieces and create a pattern by painting the different pieces as if you were playing dominoes. Now the game is to combine the pieces, making the parts of the same color meet!*

- Plastic, wooden or foam blocks and cups**

*Tip: With very simple elements, such as plastic cups, children play at building huge towers!*

- Bamboo or PVC pipes**

*Tip: With a kit of bamboos or pipes, and sticks or joints that allow you to combine them, you can build many new structures!*



# Sound

**What can you hear where you are?  
Everything makes a sound, and it travels  
far! Like birds, we play our rhythms.**

Sound elements, such as whistles, drums, and rattles, are ways to communicate desires, discover new animals, and create new ambiances in public space. With these elements, we invite the children to pay attention to their surroundings and also to express themselves. Think of the thunder, whose sound comes only well after the lightning!



**Think of elements that produce sounds! They stimulate both creativity and expression (especially in the youngest, who can't speak yet), and attention to the surroundings!**

## **Element Ideas**

### **Whistles**

*Tip: set up a music corner! Gather all the instruments on a cloth laid out on the floor and leave someone to look after them, because they usually break or get lost more easily.*

### **Drums**

### **Rattles**

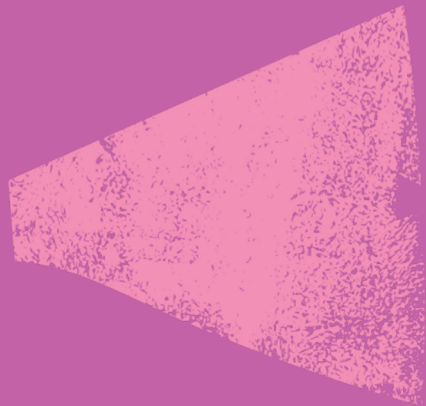
### **Wind chimes**

*Hint: What if you had a workshop to build wind chimes?*

### **Snappers**

### **Megaphone**

*Tip: the megaphone can even be used to call more people to play!*



# Time

**The games we play go back in time, and we play as our great-great-great grandparents played.**

Elements such as spinning tops, shuttlecocks, burlap sacks (for a sack race), or spoons and lemons (for an adaptation of the egg race) are simple toys whose forms of use are already widely known, allowing a simple entry into the universe of play.



**What are the typical games in your region? What were the popular games of the past in your country? If you can't remember many, ask someone older, and make a point of including these games in your play!**

## **Element Ideas**

- Spinners**
- Shuttlecock**
- Burlap bags**

*Tip: in Brazil, we use the bags to make the so-called *corrida do saco* (sack race), where whoever crosses the finish line the fastest by jumping on the bag, wins.*

- Chalk**

*Tip: with chalk, by painting the floor (or using paints, if you have the permission to make a permanent change in the space), you can make all kinds of traditional games, like hopscotch, for example.*

- Hose**

*Tip: find a faucet (or ask a neighbor's permission to use theirs). Playing with water goes back to a time when our cities were friendlier and less polluted, helps cool us down on hot days, and helps reconnect us with Nature.*

- Circus elements**

*Tip: Skill games, such as walking on stilts, balancing plates on sticks, juggling, or even riding a unicycle are games that are in the popular imagination and encourage children to test their own abilities.*



# Stories

**Stories are passed down from generation to generation. And it is all partly fact and partly fiction.**

Coloring and drawing instruments are ways of communicating and telling stories, real or invented, that invite the participants to reflect on what message they want to leave for others, or how they would like to mark their presence in that space. The elements in this category can consist of pencils, paints, brushes, and stencil templates.





**Think of elements that help people share their stories or invent new ones!**

## **Element Ideas**

**Pencils, chalk, pens, and paper**

**Paints and Brushes**

*Tip: If it is not possible to have an adult supervise the use of the paints, it may be better to use pencils or chalk, to prevent children from staining their bodies and clothes.*

**Stencil Templates**

**Masks, costumes and puppets**

*Tip: With very simple materials such as paints, scissors and cardboard, we held a very successful mask workshop, which ended in a caravan of masked people parading through the park!*

**Books**

*Hint: reading is for all ages! If the child is playing, you can sit in the shade with a book. Try to have books for all ages and encourage parents or guardians to read to children - it is very important for child development and creates a love of literature for the rest of life.*



# There is play for all ages!

## time



chalk

bur

hose

## stories



books

pencils and  
chalk

mas  
pup

## wind



hammocks

inflatables

soap bubbles

## earth



tunnel

co

## sound



musical  
instruments

Construction  
elements

## light



kaleidoscope

## connection



string

ru  
bo

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0-18 months 18-36 months 3 years 6

lap bags

spinners and shuttlecocks

circus elements

masks, costumes and  
puppets

paints and  
brushes

windsocks

cones

bamboo and  
pvc pipes

megaphone

light table

flashlight

rubber bands    hula hoops  
rope

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**years 9 years 12 years 16+**

# Now what? How to do it?

## 1. Define a location to be activated by the game and invite your community!

Choose a public space that is underused in your neighborhood - a park, a square, or even a round-about! Start inviting your neighbors, and if there is a school or community center nearby, be sure to contact them, because they can be important allies.



## **2. Read this guide carefully and define which materials you will choose to make your Play (Action) Box**

By reading the guide, try to understand all the categories that make up the Play (Action) Box and the importance of each one. Next, convene some members of the neighborhood for a workshop, where you will decide what the contents of each of the seven categories of your Play (Action) Box will be.

In this workshop, start by talking about what play is for each person. Then brainstorm: what are the things that could be bought or made for each of the seven categories in the Play (Action) Box?

On the next page, we share the elements of our Play (Action) Box, so you can get inspired. Then we have a template page for you to print out and fill in with the elements that will make up your own Play (Action) Box. You can also print this page separately.

Then it is time to choose what to actually buy or build. For these decisions, keep in mind what the available budget is, what materials are available nearby, and look for solutions that will generate less waste. Sometimes a neighbor already sews dolls, for example, and buying from him is better than ordering from abroad or online. Don't forget to think about the box in which you will store all the materials. We also recommend that you leave some money in reserve so that after the first test with the Play (Action) Box, you can replace broken elements or buy more elements that worked well. Be sure to have elements from all categories!

# Our Play (Action) Box

## 1. Bridge

- Ropes
- Rubber bands
- Zebra Tape
- Strings
- Hula hoops

## 2. Light

- Lanterns
- Kaleidoscopes
- Sunglasses with colored lenses
- Flashing Light String

## 3. Wind

- Windstock
- Inflatable sofas
- Inflatable balls
- Windsocks
- Soap bubbles kit

## 4. Earth

- Foam boards
- Fabrics
- Tunnels
- Construction cones and cups
- Bamboo Construction Kit
- SOBRAPRIMA (giant wooden dominoes kit)
- Sponges

## 5. Sound

- Children's musicalization kit (whistles, tambourines, drums)
- Bird Whistle Kit

## 6. Time

- Spinners
- Shuttlecock
- Burlap bags
- Chalk (hopscotch)
- Spoons and lemons (adapted egg race)

## 7. Stories

- Chalk
- Crayons
- Flipchart easel
- Masks
- Books



# Set Up Your Play (Action) Box

Person in charge: \_\_\_\_\_

## 1. Bridge

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## 1. Light

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## 1. Wind

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## 4. Earth

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## 5. Sound

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## 6. Time

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## 7. Stories

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- \_\_\_\_\_



Note here if any elements have been damaged or need to be replaced (also note new games created)

### **3. Buy (or build) all the materials that will make up the Box**

Use your available budget to buy the materials and collect donations around the neighborhood to supplement the play possibilities. You can also turn this step into a series of toy building workshops. Remember to have a good mix of traditional and already recognizable toys, and freer materials that can have different uses and stimulate unplanned play and children's imagination. Since we want to transform entire squares into play spaces, think about large elements that have a visual impact, so that, from afar, people's curiosity is already activated. Don't forget to make sure that all the elements fit in the box (or boxes) you bought or built, and that the boxes are easy to transport. Also take into consideration where the box(es) will be stored.

## **4. Invite everyone to the launch day of the Play(Action) Box!**

Set an opening date for the Play (Action) Box and invite everyone! We usually distribute stickers with the symbols of the Play (Action) Box to invite the children. We recommend calling on a few people to act as monitors, promoting different games and encouraging the children to interact with the different toys and materials.

For the appointed day, it is important that one person is responsible for putting everything neatly back in the box(es) at the end of the game.

## **5. Keep playing!**

Meet with your team after the first experience with the Box and discuss what worked, what can be improved, and decide on what new materials to buy. Make a schedule for using the Play (Action) Box - frequent activation helps create a culture of use and a collective awareness about the importance of caring for the materials. And then, keep playing. Will any of the children volunteer to organize one of the play days?