

Designing with communities of place: the experience of a DESIS Lab during COVID-19 and beyond

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ABSTRACT

Social distancing, lockdown, and the consequent intensification of online interactions brought by Covid-19 are raising new questions for design theory and practices. The lack of physical or face-to-face interactions blocked the design activities developed in public spaces. The article aims to share a DESIS Lab experience to overcome these limitations and continue in a contactless way. Firstly, a literature review introduces the Lab's theoretical and methodological approaches; then, a process started previously to the pandemic outbreak is presented, called *My Neighborhood*. It happens in a neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro, called Grajaú, with face-to-face activities developed in a public square. Secondly, a new initiative prototyped after the pandemic outbreak is described. *Grajaú Collab* is an online mapping that identifies micro-businesses and volunteers in the neighborhood. The Lab's theoretical and methodological approaches provided the orientation and adaptability to stay with the local community under the pandemic. *My Neighborhood* has moved online and generates *Grajaú Collab*; however, both remain closely referred to the neighborhood's physical space. Online and offline modalities become two complementary sides of the same open-ended learning process and, in the future, the lab team can restart offline and face-to-face participation in the neighborhood as a continuum of the same *infrastructuring* process.

Keywords: Design for Social Innovation, Infrastructuring, Placemaking, Service Design.

INTRODUCTION

Safety protocols used to reduce risk during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as social distancing and lockdown, forced millions to take different forms of online sociality and contactless interactions. This process blocked all activities based on face-to-face encounters in public spaces, including design initiatives for social innovation.

Rio DESIS Lab gathers students and researchers to explore how design can reinforce social innovation processes in Rio de Janeiro. It is a member of the DESIS (Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability) Network. The Lab was involved in *My Neighborhood* process when the pandemic arrived: it is a series of initiatives prototyped or improvised by members of Rio DESIS Lab, residents and other stakeholders in the neighborhood of Grajaú, Rio de Janeiro for more than one year. It is a mutual learning process with residents on design for social innovation and placemaking which includes regular encounters to identify shared felt concerns to be worked out in a transformational way.

Grajaú is a neighborhood in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro and is renowned in the city for its green areas, composed of tree-lined streets, squares and a park bordered by the Grajaú's Forest Reserve. It is also one of the few planned neighborhoods in the city, built in the early decades of the 20th Century. It became 'residential' between 1925-1930. However, it is not composed of standardized buildings; the planning action was concerned with the development and design of land use. Like many other city areas, it includes social inequality and spatial segregation: the neighborhood comprises four different slums, and residents from different socioeconomic backgrounds coexist. It looks like an isolated small city for residents and, for this reason, it was a good starting point for *My Neighborhood*.

However, in the social isolation scenario brought by COVID-19, *My Neighborhood* process was abruptly interrupted, and the Rio DESIS Lab team find themselves pressured to devise new ways to continue. The pressure did not come from external actors; it was a commitment with the residents and a need to stay with them through a difficult situation. Some Lab members reside in Grajaú and helped by bringing updates of the situation in the neighborhood.

The Lab has indeed reframed its activities to continue in a contactless way. The next paragraphs unfold the theoretical and methodological approaches followed by the Rio DESIS Lab in *My Neighborhood* – which started with offline and face-to-face activities in a public square - and how the process has continued online after the pandemic outbreak and generated a new initiative, the *Grajaú Collab*.

It is not my objective to evaluate or discuss the results of the two initiatives, but instead to describe, analyze and discuss how the Rio DESIS Lab continued to participate in the neighborhood processes in a contactless way. The shift from offline to online activities required by the pandemic brought about new opportunities instead of limitations and reinforced the initial *My Neighborhood* process.

The paper is structured as follows. The first session presents the theoretical approaches followed by the Rio DESIS Lab when working with design for social innovation in the city's neighborhoods; this session ends by describing *My Neighborhood* under these theoretical lenses and detailing our research and design challenge. The second session presents the methodological approach followed by Rio DESIS Lab in *My Neighborhood* and *Grajaú Collab*. The third session presents the situation of *My Neighborhood* process when interrupted by the pandemic, how *Grajaú Collab* started and its features. The final sessions analyze and discuss the findings.

1. THEORETICAL APPROACH

Some keywords, and related theoretical approaches, has guided the activities of the Rio DESIS Lab team in the neighborhood.

1.1. Design for Social Innovation

Cajaliba-Santana (2014) states that social innovation "is always related to collective social action aiming at social change," and it aims to bring up "social change that cannot be built upon the basis of established practices." It is also essential to consider its transformative character: "what underlies the path of social innovation is not a social problem to be solved, but the social change it brings about" (p. 3).

Design for social innovation is a constellation of design activities aimed at supporting social change processes, based on the recombination of existing resources to achieve socially recognized goals (Manzini, 2014). When applied to social innovation, design practices recognize the "ontological immateriality of the phenomenon" (Cajaíba, 2014, p. 44). It led us to focus on services as objects of our design practice, which are developed collaboratively as prototypes (Hillgren et al., 2011) or improvisations.

We must avoid fast and superficial approaches. A positive social change takes time. It includes improvements in human and social conditions and significant alteration in behavior patterns and cultural values and norms, yielding profound social consequences.

1.2. Places, small-scale and relationships

There is a large body of literature on placemaking, place-making, and placemaking (Matteo-Babiano and Lee 2020; Lew, 2017). I use the term placemaking inspired by some definitions in the literature (e.g., Schneekloth and Shibley 1995, Hes et al. 2020), but adapted to our focus on interpersonal relations, collaborative approaches, and *infrastructuring* – aspects that guide our steps on design for social innovation. It indicates a broad set of practices that seek to care for and transform places *together with* the people in them.

Two concepts, the sense of place and community participation (Kalandides, 2008), are at the center of our definition of placemaking. The first connects placemaking to processes of sensemaking in design (Cipolla, 2017). The second to processes of co-design (Corcoran et al., 2017). Here, the design approach to placemaking indicates small-scale updates that can increase the overall health and vitality of a neighborhood (Kahne, 2015).

This definition led us to focus on the primary purpose of *My Neighborhood* as a placemaking process: continuously prototype different initiatives to nurture meaningful relationships between people and spaces. The aim is to improve the overall quality of life referred to residents' needs and desires through meaning-creation (adapted from Hes et al. 2020). "Space provides the canvas on which meaning and identity can be affixed and contested, and the characteristics of the place also shape people's attachment to the place as well as their relationship with others" (ibid p. 280).

This focus on relationships (Prakash and Spinelli, 2016) and the articulation of multi-stakeholders (Djalali et al., 2019) on placemaking processes do not undermine the integration with the natural environment or the role of economic aspects.

The term placemaking may refer to destructive practices (Hes et al., 2020) that include marginalization processes, gentrification, and private developers or state agencies focused on placemaking processes to legitimize profitmaking or urban redevelopment projects. I use the words placemaking, hoping that the previous paragraphs adequately defined the design approach adopted, which is also related to Yi-Fu Tuan (1977, 1974) and Hassam Zaoual (2003, 2006). The first describes how an undifferentiated space becomes place: it happens over time based on interpersonal relations, and the latter calls designers to respect existing cultural processes.

1.3. Service design, social innovation and places

Placemaking processes may include perspectives on service design when requiring "professionals who provide services in order to enable local communities to propose

alternatives that may counter redevelopment" (Huang and Roberts, 2019, p. 2). However, service design practice on the Rio DESIS Lab requires an accurate description when related to placemaking.

Service design has grown as a multidisciplinary, human-centered, holistic and iterative approach, focused on creating new interfaces for value co-creation to meet people's needs and stakeholders' goals (Secomandi and Snelders, 2011). For us, service design plays a role in our view of placemaking – detailed in the next paragraphs - by providing processes and tools to connect people, organizations, communities and their resources in new partnerships (Wetter-Edman et al. 2014) constituted through an open-ended and collaborative design process. Within this context, it is more suitable to consider what Kimbell (2011) defined as designing for service, which "is seen as an exploratory process that aims to create new kinds of value relation between diverse actors within a socio-material configuration" (p. 42). The author, echoing Manzini (2011), suggests that "what is being designed is not an end result but rather a platform for action with which diverse actors will engage over time" (Kimbell, 2011, p. 45).

Design for Social Innovation brought to service design (or designing for services) the definitions of collaborative and relational services. The first notion came to light when research (Manzini, 2007) identified types of service interactions that have been called collaborative services in social innovation cases (Manzini, 2008) on which all participants are active co-producers of commonly recognized benefits. This analysis also led to the identification of a particular form of interpersonal interaction in services known as relational services (Cipolla, 2004; Cipolla and Manzini, 2009; Cipolla, 2012), where participants are not only collaborative but also relate with one another in an intensely interpersonal way.

1.4. *Infrastructuring*

Designers and design labs who find themselves involved with social innovation processes may consider *infrastructuring* (Björgvinsson et al., 2010), and this was the case of the Rio DESIS Lab team.

It is an approach that comes from participatory design tradition that differs from project-based design. It is an open-ended design process where diverse stakeholders can innovate together: "the activities that are carried out are aimed at building long-term relationships with stakeholders in order to create networks from which design opportunities can emerge" (Hillgren et al., 2011, p. 169).

Infrastructuring indicates that "a more long-term engagement could contribute differently, especially when it comes to the implementation phase and to having a real impact" (Hillgren et al., 2011, p.180).

1.5. *The broken city of Rio de Janeiro and the agonistic approach*

The process of placemaking culminate in shared decision-making. This may be difficult when democratic practices are restricted. The ways "people give meaning to places may even stand in stark contrast to each other. Local communities do not always have to be homogeneous, and they do not always coexist harmoniously" (Kalandides, 2018, p.150).

Social inequalities are deeply felt by residents in Rio de Janeiro and expressed with the term "broken city" (Ventura, 1994). It describes the fracture of the city, with the increased

distance between "hill" (favelas) and "asphalt" areas: each space and corner in the city, if not gated, includes tensions between residents. Therefore, it is evident that social interactions in public spaces involve political struggles for space, and this defines who is 'in-place' and who is 'out-of-place' (Cresswell, 1992, Matteo-Babiano and Lee, 2020).

Therefore, placemaking processes in Rio de Janeiro can consider agonistic democracy, which "does not presuppose the possibility of consensus and rational conflict resolution, but proposes a polyphony of voices and mutually vigorous but tolerant disputes among groups united by passionate engagement" (Björgvinsson et al. 2010, p. 48).

1.6. Hybrid-communities of place

There is a recognition that contemporary placemaking is "by necessity 'digital' due to the ubiquity of the smartphone and the Internet" (Toland et al., 2020, p. 271) and, in times of COVID-19, is a requirement. The constitution of place that emerges "under the 'digital condition' is less about geographical propinquity and more about imaginative and affective engagement and selective affiliations. It is increasingly delaminated from defined sites and communities, although they can often increase awareness about, and affinities for, specific localities (p. 271).

Manzini (2020) proposed a specific working hypothesis for design, a strategic orientation for the processes of placemaking motivated by the social distancing during the pandemic: the notion of hybrid-communities of place. It is "a system of digital relationships which, once the virus is over, could be capable of evolving and moving into the physical world" (Manzini, 2020, p. 3). It means "to cultivate in the digital space only (or at least mainly) relationships in-between 'neighbors.' That is, in-between a well-defined and localized group of interlocutors" (Manzini, 2020, p. 3).

1.7. Design and research challenge

My Neighborhood reflects the theoretical approaches presented before.

It is organized as an *infrastructuring* process to explore possibilities to prototype different collaborative and relational services as *platforms for action* to nurture placemaking and social innovation processes in the neighborhood. It is an open-ended and mutual-learning process developed between the Rio DESIS Lab members and residents on Grajaú.

It is a *design for social innovation* initiative when it seeks opportunities to support existing and new social change processes in the neighborhood.

It is a *placemaking* process that seeks to care for and transform the neighborhood through small-scale collaborative practices and nurture meaningful relationships between people and spaces.

Grajaú has tensions as part of the *broken city* of Rio de Janeiro. There are aspects related to social inequalities that cannot be ignored (and are impossible to be ignored) in a neighborhood that includes four different slums and where residents from different socioeconomic backgrounds coexist. This critical aspect lies underneath all past, present and future activities in the neighborhood.

These theoretical approaches were guiding the participation of the Rio DESIS Lab team in the neighborhood processes. They defined a set of values and possibilities for our involvement.

However, the pandemic outbreak brought the following design and research challenge: how a design team (Rio DESIS Lab) could reframe an offline and face-to-face *infrastructuring* process in a neighborhood, to continue online, without losing its previous values and possibilities?

Rio DESIS Lab team produced an initial answer to this challenge, described in the next paragraphs.

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This session presents the methodological approach followed by Rio DESIS Lab to participate in *My Neighbourhood* and *Grajaú Collab*.

The process followed by Rio DESIS Lab members in *My Neighbourhood* unfolds the concept of inclusion (Cipolla and Bartholo, 2014). Inclusion means to nurture the designer's relation with his or her own context of life. It provides a stimulus for activities 'where you are' to transform your own situation. *My Neighborhood* and *Grajaú Collab* teams include students that are residents in the neighborhood of Grajaú. It was not a requirement, and few of them are. All team members are stimulated to be multipliers and expand positive ideas and experiences in their own neighborhoods, now as students or later as residents.

The methodological orientation adopted by the Rio DESIS Lab team was inspired by the critical participatory action-research - CPAR (Kemmis et al., 2014), combined with design phases under a dialogical approach (Cipolla and Bartholo, 2014). CPAR is considered a social and educational process for all those involved: residents, students (some also residents) and professors. It is a self-formation and learning process mediated through practices.

The focus of the CPAR is "to make changes in our own situations to enact more satisfying, sensible and sustainable ways of doing things" (p. 68). *My Neighborhood* started – as recommended by CPAR – as a process that gathered the Rio DESIS Lab team around a question: how to transform the neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro through design? It moves the group to build up opportunities for other conversations in two different areas in the city. From this point, the group decided to get closed to a specific one (Grajaú). There the CPAR process continued in the interplay with residents.

Two features of CPAR are well-aligned with the theoretical approaches presented before:

- "the recognition of the capacity of people living and working in particular settings to participate actively in all aspects of the research process";
- "the research conducted by participants is oriented to making improvements in practices and their settings by the participants themselves" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 4).

My Neighborhood runs continuously as an open-ended process that includes two cycles of four months per year (March to June and August to November), which follows the academic calendar of the UFRJ (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro). It started in the first semester of 2019.

Action research works well with the process of *infrastructuring* (Hillgren et al., 2011): both do not perform a well-defined plan. However, it is possible to describe a sequence of steps – that performs a spiral of "self-reflective cycles" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 19) of CPAR – for each cycle, as described below.

- **Planning a change:** each cycle starts with planning a (small) and unpretentious change for the neighborhood to be defined in a participatory way, involving students, residents and a local partner. An initial program of activities is defined.
- **Acting and observing the process and consequences of the change:** continuous improvisations and adjustments occur during the cycle when performing the initial program. The process is registered in reports and includes photos, images (including print screens when online) and other related communicational materials. The original aims and program are continuously discussed and can be reframed. Adjustments are defined in weekly meetings.
- **Reflecting on the process and its consequences:** activities and results are analyzed to plan a new cycle. The analysis does not encompass evaluation in terms of failure because there is no rigid planning or expectations: it is a mutual learning process between participants.

This process continues in new cycles "- re-planning; - acting and observing; - reflecting, and so on..." (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 19). It is an open-ended process on which each cycle produces insights to start a new cycle in an open-ended process.

The first two cycles of *My Neighborhood* happened offline and face-to-face. The role of our *students-residents* in Grajaú was vital in the first two cycles while connecting with other residents.

The third cycle would follow the same direction, but the pandemic outbreak reframed it, and *Grajaú Collab* emerged. The same methodological approach guides both initiatives.

3. FROM MY NEIGHBORHOOD TO GRAJAÚ COLLAB

The next paragraphs present the first two cycles performed by *My Neighborhood* in 2019 with the only aim to present the situation of the process when interrupted by the pandemic.

Next, I describe the third cycle and the process that gave rise to *Grajaú Collab*, including how the phases of CPAR were performed and enable the team to continue active in the neighborhood.

3.1. My Neighborhood: situation

The process completed its first two cycles in the second semester of 2019, and the plan was only to visit the main public square in Grajaú (Praça Edmundo Rêgo) on the weekends. The aim was to create new situations in the square to nurture conversations between residents themselves and the Rio DESIS Lab team about the neighborhood. It included:

- casual conversations with passersby with the loose aim of forming an initial group of co-participants (figures 1 and 2);
- work out what is happening in the shared setting (the neighborhood) to identify a possible shared felt concern (figure 3);
- identify, feel and perceive the current sense of place among residents in Grajaú (figure 4).

Progressively the team started to propose specific prototypes (small-scale updates in the public square) as invitations for the passerby to gather and start conversations. It included invitations to residents:

- to gather around a breakfast table;
- to join collaborative boards that display personal stories, memories and the history of the neighborhood;
- to join collaborative boards that display opinions about the quality of life in the neighborhood, preferred ways of mobility and other issues;
- to play games with their children (hopscotch, adapted football, soap bubbles, slackline);
- to a 3D printer exhibition and presentations about maker culture, both as stimuli to talk about desirable futures (initiative *GrajaMaker*).

The group also identified in the neighborhood of Grajaú existing social innovation initiatives, some of which Lab members got involved. We established a partnership with members of a collaborative housing called Casa Anitcha, that have been very active in Grajaú since 2008. Every month they organize a well-known festival and market called "Let it go" to promote sustainable values and practices in Grajaú. The Lab team worked in the festival, got involved in the local urban garden, and started interacting with some local micro-entrepreneurs.

The prototypes worked well, and the Lab team became a regular and recognizable presence in the square. Experiences were registered along the way, reflected and considered as input for a new cycle for 2020, with some shared concerns in the neighborhood identified and organized.

However, the process was abruptly interrupted on March 13, 2020, when the university closed its doors to contain the spread of COVID-19. All gatherings in public spaces were progressively restricted or prohibited, including all *My Neighborhood* activities. The plan for 2020 was to continue and refine the previous prototypes, to invite an initial group of co-participants to develop a small practice around specific concerns identified in the last cycle and increase conversations with residents through social media.

Therefore, the Rio DESIS Lab team was unable to start this new cycle as planned. After a short period of recovering, the team began to think about a new cycle for *My Neighborhood* process.



Figure 1. Activities in the public square as opportunities for conversations: slackline (Rio DESIS Lab – archives, *My Neighborhood*).



Figure 2. Activities in the public square as opportunities for conversations: learning game about recycling; (Rio DESIS Lab – archives, *My Neighborhood*).



Figure 3. Work out what is happening in the shared setting (the neighborhood) to identify a possible shared felt concern: collaborative board about resident's perceptions and attitudes about the neighborhood (Rio DESIS Lab – archives, *My Neighborhood*).



Figure 4. Identify, feel and perceive the current sense of place among residents: collaborative board about Grajaú's history and memories (Rio DESIS Lab – archives, *My Neighborhood*).

3.2. Grajaú Collab: a new cycle

Rio DESIS Lab has continued its activities online since the beginning of the COVID-19, with two regular weekly meetings and parallel activities developed by its members. If the theoretical and methodological approaches adopted by Rio DESIS Lab provided the guidelines and strategic orientation for *My Neighborhood's* activities, the lockdown and social distancing measures stopped the process. New questions emerged: how could we continue activities intensively connected to interpersonal interactions performed on a specific space (a square in the neighborhood)? How could we continue the ongoing process of *infrastructuring* (Hillgreen et al., 2011) and more: how could we voice solidarity with other residents in the neighborhood and be useful during the pandemic?

My Neighborhood started a new cycle for the pandemic phase by following CPAR. This cycle is detailed below, organized by each phase.

Planning a change. A micro-entrepreneur referred to a DESIS Lab student - who resides in Grajaú - how she faced a relevant drop in sales due to COVID-19 restrictions. The entrepreneur is well-known among Lab members for providing food during *My Neighborhood* activities in the public square. The student also observed that residents were also facing barriers to offering volunteer services in the neighborhood during the pandemic due to mutual distrust. The team decided to propose a contribution to change this situation.

Acting and observing the process and consequences of the change. *Grajaú Collab* started to be developed as a mapping process to locate micro-businesses and volunteers in Grajaú. Residents can explore the area through the map to find small producers and suppliers, service providers and volunteers available in the neighborhood (figure 5). Participants fill a form to indicate the activities or help being offered and their specific location on the map. The initiative aims to facilitate new personal connections (i.e., volunteers offering to do grocery shopping for the elderly) or enable residents to discover new local suppliers for everyday products and services (i.e., local producers of bread, cakes, crafts, or local classes of yoga).

Members of a collaborative housing initiative (Casa Anitcha) are developing a complementary currency to run in the neighborhood, called NIT, and there is the possibility to include the currency in the *Grajaú Collab* process.

Reflecting on these processes and consequences. *Grajaú Collab* becomes a virtual unfolding of *My Neighbourhood*. Grajaú is the focus: those listed in the map are residents or are doing business and volunteering activities there. Until now, the map includes around 100 pins. Few volunteers joined the mapping process (less than 5). The mapping process comprised a survey about the conditions of working and volunteering activities in the neighborhood, composed by few questions. A small group answered (25). The team organized and sent the results to all participants. The proposal was to create for us (DESI team) and residents an opportunity for reflection about the initiative and situation under the COVID-19 restrictions.

The results of this CPAR phase revealed many opportunities to define a new cycle for the *Grajaú Collab* process; they are:

- progressively include more categories in the map to reflect the diversity of activities in the neighborhood: collaborative activities (such as urban gardens) and initiatives (such as cultural performances), beyond entrepreneurs and volunteers who were the first to answer the invitation and join the map;
- propose new invitations and explore possibilities to expand the map, to cover excluded areas in the neighborhood, particularly the favelas;
- the team could create opportunities for online conversations about what is being learned in the mapping process and generate new possibilities for co-designing processes in the neighborhood.
- produce a series of webinars with experts on challenges faced by micro-entrepreneurs (such as the use of social media for business purposes);
- actions, services or events to stimulate residents to "buy local";
- actions, services or events to stimulate mutual trust between residents to favor volunteering activities.

The cycle finished with a report produced by the Rio DESIS Lab team and a new cycle is being planned for 2021.

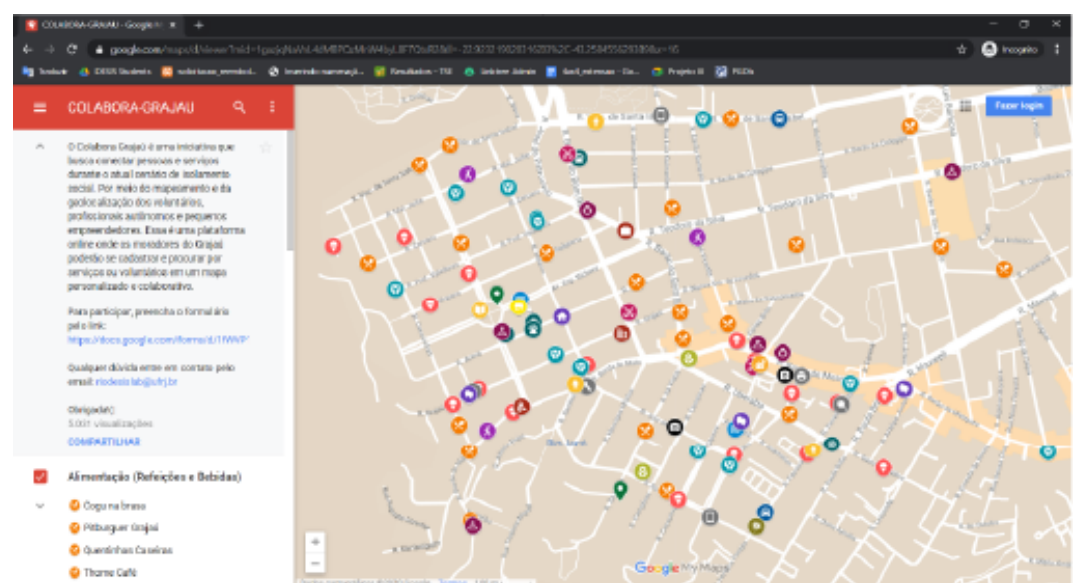


Figure 5: *Grajaú Collab* (Google Maps)



Figure 6: Examples of posts to disseminate map's features and clusters on social media

3.3. Technological and communicative features

The team decided to develop Grajaú Collab as a platform for action in the neighborhood. The process includes free and easy technological resources:

- invitations to participate in the mapping process sent to resident's groups on Facebook and Instagram;
- a Google Form used to invite participants to self-report their small-business and volunteering activities;
- a Google Form also used in the survey process;
- a Google Map created to include and organize the information by adding pins in the neighborhood map (figure 5);
- a dedicated link (<http://www.desis.rio.br/mapacolaboragrajau>) created to enable easy access;
- posts on social media (on the residents' groups on Facebook and Instagram) to disseminate the map, its thematic clusters (e.g., food providers, health services) and the results of the survey (figure 6).

3.4. Other initiatives

Rio DESIS Lab members also engaged in initiatives to provide quick answers to the pandemic. It included:

- let our 3d printers available for the networked production of personal protective equipment (PPE);
- develop a fundraising campaign for university hospitals (@doeufrij);
- start a communication campaign on social media to disseminate good news, practices and examples of social innovations, to inspire citizens and promote positive attitudes and initiatives under the pandemic outbreak.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The theoretical and methodological approaches followed by Rio DESIS Lab when participating in *My Neighborhood* and *Grajaú Collab* helped to continue connected to the neighborhood under the pandemic. Below I describe how each theoretical and methodological feature played a role.

Hybrid-communities of place (Manzini, 2020) provided the idea to move DESIS Lab activities online but stay connected to the physical area of Grajaú. *Grajaú Collab* can be integrated - in a post-pandemic phase - to the activities developed in the main public square and create a continuum between online and offline processes.

Infrastructuring (Hillgreen et al., 2011) provided the view of a long-term and open-ended design process. It was beneficial in times of crisis, such as COVID-19, on which previous knowledge and interpersonal relations are essential to identify new possible initiatives such as Grajaú Collab. A continuous learning process and a web of interpersonal connections allow the rapid identification of ongoing issues and explore new responses.

Inclusion (Cipolla and Bartholo, 2014) provided the idea to include students who are also residents of Grajaú in the *My Neighborhood* process. It helped the team to stay connected to the neighborhood under COVID-19. One of the students reported the neighborhood's situation, which led to the decision to start the *Grajaú Collab* process.

Service Design as designing platforms for action (Kimbell, 2011) provided the idea that the interruption of our visits to the public square in Grajaú did not mean to stop *My Neighborhood*. It guided the team to move online and prototype a platform for action, the *Grajaú Collab* as an invitation for residents to connect in the view of potential new actions and partnerships in the neighborhood.

Critical Participatory Action Research - CPAR (Kemmis et al., 2014) provided to the Lab team agility to quickly turn back to the observation phase and re-plan the third cycle under the pandemic. Two main aspects are relevant. Firstly, the process that results in *Grajaú Collab* did not involve residents in its conceptual phase, only the ones in the Lab team. Secondly, the Lab team quickly prototyped *Grajaú Collab*. From now on, only residents can make it useful and meaningful by accepting invitations for new initiatives related to the map or by developing it autonomously. Otherwise, it will be progressively deactivated. Secondly, the participation of residents in the research process, as recommended by CPAR, is being developed. We are exploring the possibility of introducing a complementary currency in the *Grajaú Collab* process, together with Casa Anitcha. It is a new perspective for us all and helps to strengthen the relation with an important stakeholder.

Placemaking (Kalandides, 2008) provided the idea that prototyping with residents small-scale updates in the neighborhood and creating opportunities for interpersonal encounters could increase the neighborhood's quality of life through meaning-creation. The lab team used to visit a public space in Grajaú, with many possibilities for interpersonal encounters and conversations. Now the process started online in *Grajaú Collab*. Still, there is much to be learned on nurturing interpersonal relationships and a sense of place in a contactless way. The online map that reflects the Grajaú's physical space is promising. It can progressively include the connections and relations between residents and nurture a sense of place.

The broken city (Ventura, 1994) was not considered until now in *Grajaú Collab*. The face-to-face activities of *My Neighborhood* in the public square, as a physical space of transit,

included considerations about interpersonal connections or frictions between residents and passersby from different social-economic backgrounds. Prototyped activities in the public square revealed these tensions. Now, in the online map, such tensions are still to be revealed.

Open-ended and participatory design process (Hillgreen et al., 2011). This orientation led the Rio DESIS Lab team to a discussion – still open - if residents should drop pins directly on the map - to indicate their position and information - or not. The DESIS Lab team learned about an open collaborative map in Brazil that was erased and decided to mediate participation in the map to avoid risks. Information from residents and local providers was collected in a Google Form and included in the map. This decision was not easy, and it is not final. It is a new step in the learning process about limits and possibilities for design practices. The COVID-19 emergency undoubtedly moves the DESIS team from a fluid and experimental open-ended process towards a more project-based process in *Grajaú Collab*.

5. CONCLUSION

The main answer to this challenge was to move online but stay closely related to the neighborhood's physical space. This idea guided the team to quickly prototyped a new initiative – *Grajaú Collab* as an invitation for residents. Rio DESIS Lab team has invited residents or those developing neighborhood-focused activities to the mapping process and is intermediating their participation in the map. The COVID-19 emergency pushed the Lab team towards a more project-based-approach, but the focus on the neighborhood's physical area helped the team to continue the *infrastructuring* process. The online and offline processes are now considered two complementary sides of the same open-ended learning process in the neighborhood. This orientation helped the Lab members to stay connected to the neighborhood's situation and demands when an extensive digitalization of everyday processes - promoted by social isolation and lockdown – result in the multiplication of platforms for different purposes, but without specific territorial references.

The Rio DESIS Lab's theoretical and methodological approaches helped to provide answers to our initial research and design challenge, and also the orientation and adaptability to stay participative and active in the neighborhood. They allowed the *infrastructuring* process in Grajaú to continue.

The online map reproduces the physical space of the neighborhood, but users can include locations and relations. It is a simple but promising platform for collaborations and conversations between residents and nurturing a sense of place.

Despite the personal challenges brought by COVID-19, the Rio DESIS Lab members got involved in *Grajaú Collab*, which has deepened our connections with the neighborhood.

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