



## Bulletin 1: Participation November 2025

This research bulletin is part of a series of three issues that will present an overview of three core thematic areas of CIESPI/PUC-Rio: participation, decoloniality, and intergenerationally. The analysis is based on the articles that comprise the bibliographic database Child and Youth Participation - Academic Production in Latin America (2005-2023) and includes different aspects of citizen participation and empowerment of children, adolescents, and young people in Brazil.

The database was developed within the scope of the project Citizen Participation: Child and Youth Population in Focus coordinated by Professor Irene Rizzini (PUC-Rio/DSS/CIESPI), with the support of FAPERJ (CNE - Process E-26/201.113/2022).

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### 1.0 - Introduction

The social participation and protagonism of children and adolescents encompass a set of studies that has been expanding in Latin American countries in recent years, and gaining prominence in academic research, discussion forums, and in public policies. In this text, we highlight aspects of these developments from the perspective of theoretical contributions and the paradigmatic shifts that have occurred within the scope of human rights.

Social participation is a fundamental concept for democracy. However, it poses complex challenges to be achieved, promoted, and respected. The right to participation of children and adolescents involves the right to express opinions and influence decision-making on matters that concern them, in addition to ensuring safe spaces and access to information that enables free expression and the decision if and by what means to participate (Rizzini 2018, 2024).

The International Convention on the Rights of the Child (CDC/89) constitutes the main framework underpinning the participation of children and adolescents in signatory countries. According to the Convention, the right to child participation is linked to the articles related to cultural life, disability, and judicial proceedings, specifically Articles 12, 13, 14, and 15 that address the right to express opinions freely, the right to freedom of thought,

conscience, and religion, as well as the right to organize and peacefully assemble. In Brazil, the Children and Adolescent Statute (ECA, 1990) aligns its principles with the Convention.

The realization of the right to participation is related to the development of critical awareness, which is learned and improved through practice (Giorgi, 2010; Gallego-Henao, 2015). Among the benefits highlighted in the literature, the following stand out: the development of cognitive and social skills; broadening of interests; greater involvement in family and community spheres resulting in improved communication processes; and greater protection against potential abuse and violence (Magistris, 2018; Cussiánovich, 2010; Alfageme; Cantos; Martinez, 2003).

In this research bulletin, we present an overview of the main themes included in the bibliographic database Child and Youth Participation - Academic Production in Latin America (2005-2023). The database currently contains 254 articles in Portuguese and 189 in Spanish, totalling 443 academic publications available for consultation. This is a specialized database of great relevance for understanding what has been produced, thought, and discussed on the topic of child and youth participation in Brazil and in other Latin American countries.

## 2.0 - Main research themes

The studies published during the period covered by the research (2005-2023) reflect the changes in the relationships between children and adults in the various contexts in which they interact. These studies highlight the importance of recognizing the capacity for active participation of children and adolescents at each stage of their lives. In Brazil, most of the publications analysed focus on child and youth participation in the school context. While respecting the specificities of the educational environment, whether in early childhood education or in the final years of education, Latin American studies share the understanding that schools constitute a privileged space for the exercise of social participation, leadership, and citizenship development. Thus, the school context presents itself as fertile ground for studies, experiments, observations, and analyses, which is reflected in the significant volume of research focused on this field.

In Brazilian literature there is a large volume of studies that relate the importance of participation to learning processes from a socio-affective and human development perspective. In general, studies that analyse pedagogical approaches aimed at promoting active student participation, especially among young children, stand out. Amid the participatory formats for children and adolescents, Brazilian articles highlight participation in school management and budgeting which, in some cases, involve student unions. Student unions are frequently underlined as a tool for pedagogical action and an educational space for civic and political development of children and adolescents in Brazilian public schools.

Publications in other Latin American countries emphasize mechanisms and pedagogical approaches that promote the participation and empowerment of children and youth focusing on participatory methodologies, including pedagogical planning, the development of daily dynamics, school radio projects and student newspapers. In some cases, expanding these formats to encourage community involvement and the exercise of citizenship.

It is noted that socio-political participation constitutes the second most frequently addressed topic in publications, both in Brazil and in other Latin American countries. In the Brazilian context this type of participation is often described as citizen participation. The concept of citizen participation refers to the social participation and engagement of

children and adolescents as citizens (Rizzini, 2024), understanding it as a form of exercising citizenship, albeit limited by legal restrictions. The experiences classified as political participation are, to a large extent, linked to institutionalized programs and projects, highlighting the relevance of organized initiatives.

## 3.0 - Emerging issues in child and youth participation

An additional viewpoint concerns innovation in academic research on the participation and empowerment of children and youth. In recent years, studies on the participation of children, adolescents, and young people in the development, implementation, and evaluation of public policies in Brazil have gained prominence, being consolidated as one of the recent trends in academic discussion. Important milestones include regulations that institutionalize participation in spaces for debate and development of public policies. These advances may be related to the increase in initiatives that promote participation in conferences, rights councils, forums, and/or government or institutional programs (Figueiredo; Rizzini, 2024). Among Brazilian initiatives, one example is the participation of adolescents and young people in the Brazilian Parliament, which reinforces the importance of fostering spaces for citizen participation as part of political education and training. The relevance of this debate is evidenced by the increase in publications. Furthermore, initiatives and policies for environmental preservation have begun to be analysed in recent studies, demonstrating that interest in political activism among children and adolescents is an emerging trend (Pereira, 2016; Santana, Santos, 2016; Silva et.al., 2018).

Another field of interest in Brazilian publications is the right to children's participation in the context of health care, based on regulations related to the right to participation, information, and the principle of the best interests of the child (Ele & Albuquerque, 2019; Maia et. al. 2021; Guaranha, Antunes & Motta, 2023).

Internationally, especially in Latin American countries, there is growing regard in the participation of children and adolescents in an increasingly digital world (Serrão; Sarmiento; Santana, 2021, 2022; Tomaz, 2023). These studies analyse how media transform intergenerational interaction and un-

derline children's protagonism in virtual spaces. The use of Information and communication technologies (ICTs) by youth, as well as adolescent digital activism, has become a relevant focus, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, and may become a significant trend in academia. Finally, another emerging theme is the relationship between the migratory movements of Latin American children and adolescents and the social protagonism of these groups (Vera-Álvarez; Riquelme-Sandoval, 2022).

#### **4.0 - Research gaps: Challenges for academia**

In this final section of analysis, we will discuss gaps and further developments required in academia for studies on participation of children and adolescents in Latin America. As previously mentioned, participation in decision-making and public policy-making spaces is emerging as a relevant topic in the contemporary Brazilian academic landscape. However, while it is being consolidated as a research trend in Brazil, there is a significant scarcity of academic production on the topic in other countries in the region. We identified only one article in Spanish addressing this topic (Corrales-Soto; Morales-Villalón; Rivadeneira-Valenzuela, 2022) highlighting the incipient nature of discussions, and indicating the need to recognize and value the participation of younger generations; for example, young officially elected representatives in policy-making spaces focused on children and youth.

In the Brazilian context, the right of children and adolescents to participate in the judicial system is linked to the Best Interest Principle (UN, 1989). However, studies indicate that in practice the representation of children is often mediated by adults, disregarding the voices of children and adolescents, and revealing the predominance of adult-centric stances in which the right to participate and be informed about issues that affect their lives depends on the judgment and decisions of adults.

Other topics that deserve attention include low academic production on subjects such as the participation of children and adolescents in institutional care or under socio-educational measures (Barros, 2017). These issues were sparsely identified in the sample of articles. This gap may reflect both social invisibility and methodological and ethi-

cal difficulties of conducting studies in these institutions.

Furthermore, the participation and leadership of indigenous or rural children and adolescents are also underexplored, indicating limits and challenges faced by researchers attempting to address these contexts. On the other hand, these topics reveal promising opportunities for future research developments.

Equally important, albeit in small numbers, the participation of children and adolescents as co-creators and coresearchers is a recurring theme. Existing studies proposes significant changes to researchers' approach, encouraging inclusive and participatory methodologies to foster respectful and empathetic recognition of the perspectives of children and youth, reflecting a paradigmatic shift in academia.

#### **5.0 - Concluding remarks: Research trends and cross-sectional themes on child and youth participation**

By exploring emerging themes, we identified a trend toward studies on methodologies, tools, and educational formats that promote child and youth participation and empowerment. In Brazilian publications we have included studies since 2017 that address pedagogical practices connected to the so-called "digital natives" through educommunication (Dutra, 2019; Rodrigues, 2023). Although educommunication is not an unknown tool in the educational field, it can be effective to promote empowerment and participation through access to information. The use of digital platforms and the development of technologies aimed at learning takes on new perspectives, especially if we consider the recent challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, offering new perspectives on the implications of technology use during childhood (Batista; Alves; Rufca, 2021; Medeiros; Von Wangeheim; Hauck, 2021; Sena; Serra, 2021).

We also identified conceptual and cross-sectional analytical categories in the Brazilian literature. The field Sociology of Childhood stands out as the main theoretical basis, while in Education there is an emphasis on theoretical contributions by Piaget and Paulo Freire. Additionally, there are infrequent theoretical frameworks and analytical approaches. For example, there is a study on youth protagonism

from the perspective of Michel Foucault (Ferreira, 2021), while another explores the relationship between youth protagonism and the construction of organic intellectuals from the perspective of Antonio Gramsci (Reis, et. al. 2023). An emerging theme is child participation from a decolonial, intergenerational and intersectional perspective (Salva; Shütz; Mattos, 2021; Oliveira; Ruchel, 2019). Intersections that integrate issues of race, class, gender, and generation have broadened the academic debate, offer-

ing contributions to understanding this topic in different contexts (Cubillos-Celis; Rojas-Novoa, 2021). These approaches present interesting developments to the field.

We conclude this brief overview by reaffirming that the broad and diverse perspectives obtained through this analysis reinforces the importance of continuing to promote and deepen studies on the participation of children and adolescents, especially in the Latin American context.

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