TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL HOUSING: FROM THE DISCOURSE TO CONSTRUCTING THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

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Abstract

In this article, we propose a dialogue between the concepts of Technical Assistance and Support for Social Housing (ATHIS), starting from a common point: the professional activity of architects and urban planners. We discuss the history of actions taken in this area, together with the recent discussions and activities that have been undertaken after the approval of Law 11,888/2008, mainly by the entities that represent these professional groups. It is our belief that this dialogue may foster the construction of a new professional ideology and an agenda that defines more clearly what could constitute the field of action for professionals dedicated to ATHIS. Since the enactment of the above-mentioned law, while there has been an effervescence of debates among architects and urban planners regarding the subject, a strong consensus has never been reached on how to structure the technical and political format of actions. While the disputes continue, the lack of clarity has enabled the appearance of controversial proposals and discussions that do not contribute to introducing structural changes regarding the way of supporting or even producing social housing.

Keywords

Technical Support; Technical Assistance; Social Housing; Social Housing Policies; Professional Practice.

ASSESSORIA E ASSISTÊNCIA TÉCNICA PARA HABITAÇÃO DE INTERESSE SOCIAL: DO DISCURSO À CONSTRUÇÃO DA PRÁTICA PROFISSIONAL

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Resumo

Neste artigo, é proposto um diálogo entre as noções de Assessoria e Assistência Técnica para Habitação de Interesse Social (ATHIS), partindo de um ponto em comum: a atividade de arquitetos e urbanistas. São comentados o histórico de ações voltadas a essa área e as recentes discussões e atividades realizadas após a aprovação da Lei nº 11.888/2008, promovidas sobretudo por entidades representativas desses profissionais. Tal diálogo, acreditamos, poderia fomentar a construção de um novo ideário profissional e uma agenda capaz de delimitar mais claramente o que poderia se constituir como campo de atuação dos profissionais dedicados à ATHIS. Desde a sanção da referida lei, há certa efervescência de debates entre arquitetos e urbanistas sobre o assunto, mas sem um consenso sedimentado sobre qual deve ser o formato técnico e político das ações. Enquanto seguem as disputas em torno do tema, a falta de clareza abre brechas para o surgimento de propostas controversas e discussões que não contribuem para introduzir mudanças estruturais na forma de assessorar ou mesmo de produzir a moradia popular.

Palavras-chave

Assistência Técnica; Assessoria Técnica; Habitação de Interesse Social; Políticas Públicas de Habitação; Prática Profissional.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL HOUSING: FROM THE DISCOURSE TO CONSTRUCTING THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE[1]

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Introduction

Enacted in 2008, Federal Law No. 11,888 (BRASIL, 2008) ensures a free service of architecture, urbanism and engineering for social housing. Known as the law for Technical Assistance and Support for Social Housing (ATHIS),[2] it was considered by many architects and urban planners to be a major achievement, since it enabled the broad participation of these professionals in the search for solutions to the housing problems experienced by the very poorest in the population.

However, more than a decade after the enactment of the law, there have been very few consolidated experiences within the area. Architects and urban planners have discussed ways in which to implement actions based on the ATHIS law – or, at least, elements from within its scope – by promoting meetings, seminars, working groups and publications, many of which have been promoted by their representative entities and regulatory bodies, namely the unions, the National Federation of Architects and Urbanists (FNA), the Brazil Institute of Architects (IAB) and the Council of Architecture and Urbanism (CAU). To date, while no structural changes have been introduced regarding the way of supporting or even producing

2. All the acronyms used throughout this article have been included in their Portuguese form as they appear in Brazil.

affordable housing, the content of these discussions has demonstrated that, among architects and urban planners, there are still profound differences concerning the nature of the ATHIS activities and the way in which this practice should be consolidated.

In the midst of an effervescence of debates regarding the subject,[3] discussion has taken shape around the meanings brought by the terms that are intended to designate this activity: the availability of a specialized technical service to support specific actions for producing and providing housing, as well as for promoting housing improvements. This discussion, semantically speaking, calls into question the terms "technical assistance" and "support": does "assisting" carry the same meaning as "supporting"? What is the relative position of those who are "assisted" in relation to those who receive "support"? Should these meanings be fine-tuned or adjusted? To what extent does any "semantic slip"[4] (TELLES, 2001, p. 105) compromise what is effectively carried out as a practice, immersed in the irritatingly contradictory movement of real life?

The problem that we raise herein is that there is still no strong consensus on what the *technical and political format* of actions by ATHIS should be. Identifying the opportunism related to the term "assistance" and the virtuous practice with regard to the word "support" only elides what we defend herein as being central: *the technical and political dimension of this activity*.

Faced with these issues, the practices of ATHIS are immersed in a context of profound contradictions, as will be seen below. If, in part, these contradictions have resulted from a process traversed by countless contingencies (places, temporal, practices, etc.), thereby preventing us from achieving a broader appropriation of the entire ensemble of relationships that this activity involves, on the other hand, there is still no theoretical body that, in a consolidated manner, is able to make part of some analytical amalgam that could enable us to encompass the ensemble of such contradictions. Not for the time being.

For now, some authors have circumvented the discussion that we would like to raise herein, as in the case of Thiesen (2015), who investigated the social responsibility of the architect and urban planner based on the contribution from

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3. A variety of activities have taken place across the country. Among some of the more recent were the national seminar promoted by CAU, FNA and BrCidades in Rio de Janeiro, in November 2019, and the I Fórum de Assessoria Técnica Popular do Nordeste [1st Forum on Popular Technical Support in the Northeast], held in Recife, in February 2020.

4. We have borrowed this term used by Vera Telles (2001), when dealing with the different displacements of meanings related to social issues, in the context of the national public scenario.

the work of the philosopher György Lukács. From another perspective, Tonsig (2020) addressed the performance of the Escritórios Modelo de Arquitetura e Urbanismo [Model Offices of Architecture and Urbanism] (EMAUs) in Brazil, bringing references for a discussion on the formation of architects and urban planners and the practice of university extension programs.

That said, the article intends to establish a dialogue between the notions of "assistance" and "support", starting from a common point – the activity of professional architects and urban planners – thereby helping to strengthen the information, facts, references, trajectories, contexts, among others, to situate the main debates on technical assistance and support. Thus, the aim is to contribute to the construction of a new professional ideology and an agenda that provides a clearer delimitation of what may be constituted as a field of action for professionals dedicated to ATHIS, by sketching out the possible strategies for implementing public policies within the area. The theoretical efforts to apprehend all the dimensions involved in a practice that contemplates complex social and political interactions must come precisely from this strengthening process to which we have proposed to contribute.

1. Technical Assistance for Social Housing

The proposal to institutionalize technical assistance in the legislative sphere is directly linked to the activities of the representative entities of architects and urban planners, which began in the 1970s, within the context of the Union of Architects in the State of Rio Grande do Sul (SAERGS). It was through the union that a team of architects and urban planners linked to the entity formulated the Technical Assistance Program for Economic Housing (ATME). The proposal, which was supported by the Regional Council of Engineering, Agronomy and Architecture of Rio Grande do Sul (CREA-RS), was presented in 1977. As may be observed in Figure 1, the ATME Program was later published in book form by SAERGS.
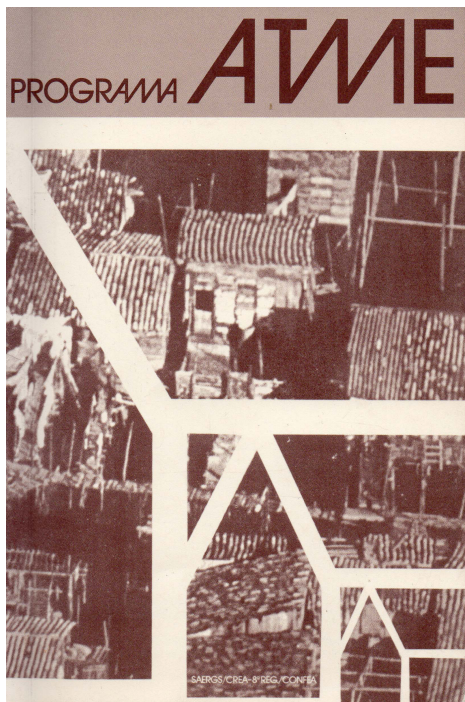
Figure 1. The front cover of the book *Programa ATME* (SAERGS, 1977-1978)
Source: National Federation of Architects and Urban Planners (2008).

At the time, union leaders placed the discussion on the agenda regarding issues related to Brazilian housing problems, and motivated by professional experiences, felt the need to bring their actions closer to the housing demands of the poorest families, in order to promote improvements in the housing conditions of those who were not covered by housing policies. It would thus be possible to reduce the amount of self-built housing through the free services of architects and urban planners. This motivation was the basis for constituting a commission within SAERGS in order to discuss the matter – and this was the first step towards constructing the ATME Program. The union leaders were also linked to CREA, which facilitated the support of the council, which sponsored the construction of a more elaborate project (FNA, 2008).

Clovis Ilgenfritz president of the union at the time, was one of the members of this commission. He reported having witnessed during his professional work a number of experiences that had left him uneasy. As an inspection agent for CREA/RS, he had mediated several situations related to the regularization of works, in direct contact with sectors of the city halls in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. In these instances, it was possible to observe how residents of irregular housing were subjected to a process in which they were exploited by the technicians of the municipal administration. The regularization of these situations resulted from a

process that was merely bureaucratic, for which it was necessary for a project to be signed by a professional, although no concern was given to the quality of the service, to the monitoring of the families in the process or even to the construction (Clovis Ilgenfritz interview published in CARDOSO, 2021).

The proposal of the ATME Program emphasized that most of the small constructions were undertaken by laypersons. Therefore, the assistance of a qualified professional was necessary, but given the financial conditions of its residents, this became unfeasible. Besides which, in other areas, such as health and the judiciary, public services were already provided.

> We wanted the SUS[5] of architecture. A family, an architect, a house. When architects become involved, they transform housing into a home. Because it is already within that environment. So, it begins to match the gains that have already been achieved. Water, electricity, sewage, nearby schools, day care, paved streets, everything that had been conquered by the *vilas*.[6] (Clovis Ilgenfritz interview published in CARDOSO, 2021).[7]

After presenting the proposal to CREA, Ilgenfritz continued to divulge it, with the aim of making it become a reality. In addition to his involvement with the unions, he remained in politics – in 1988, he was elected as a local city councilor for the Workers' Party (PT), in the municipality of Porto Alegre, a position he held for three terms. That was when he proposed making the ATME Program become law. In 1999, Complementary Law No. 428 was approved (PORTO ALEGRE, 1999), which became the first municipal law to regulate technical assistance in the country (CUNHA; ARRUDA; MEDEIROS, 2007). However, the regulation only remained on paper, i.e., it resulted in no practical implementations.

On a national level, in 2001, technical assistance appeared for the first time in a federal regulation, in the *Estatuto da Cidade* (City Statute) (BRASIL, 2001). In addition to regulating articles 182 and 183 of the Constitution, linked to urban policy, the regulation presented technical assistance as a legal and political instrument, providing for its implementation free of charge for disadvantaged groups.

In the same year, Ilgenfritz was summoned to replace Federal Deputy Ary Vanazzi (PT-RS) in the National Congress from 2001 to 2002. It was at this point that

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5. The Brazilian National Health System.

6. In the state of Rio Grande do Sul, informal settlements are commonly called "vilas". What Clovis reports in this speech is that many settlements had already achieved improvements with the implementation of infrastructure and urbanization, but the housing was still very precarious.

7. This and all non-English citations hereafter have been translated by the authors.

the possibility arose of transforming the ATME Program into a federal law. Since Ilgenfritz did not continue his term in office the following year, Zezéu Ribeiro, an architect and federal deputy elected by PT in the state of Bahia in 2002, continued the process.

Before the project was presented again to Congress, the initiative was widely disclosed and, subsequently, a participatory process was established in order to write the text of the law, by holding a series of regional seminars, which preceded the *I Seminário Assistência Técnica Um Direito de Todos: Construindo uma Política Nacional* [1st Seminar for Technical Assistance – Everyone's Right: Building a National Policy], held in Campo Grande (MS), from October 3 to 5, 2005. The national event was organized by a partnership between the FNA, the Federal Council of Engineering, Architecture and Agronomy (Confea), CREA/MS, the Ministry of Cities and the Caixa Econômica Federal Bank (CEF), with the participation of architects and urban planners and their representative bodies, social movements, public managers and students (CUNHA; ARRUDA; MEDEIROS, 2007).

Among the topics addressed, issues were discussed related to interdisciplinarity, institutional models, financing and popular participation in the provision of technical assistance services. Multidisciplinary actions were also highlighted by several participants, who proposed the inclusion of work by other professionals in the services. However, this suggestion was not adhered to, since it was considered that the law intended to regulate the activities of architects and engineers, which did not exclude, at the time of designing public policies, the possibility of including the work of other professionals (CUNHA; ARRUDA; MEDEIROS, 2007). The issue was made clear in Zezéu Ribeiro's speech:

> We understand that there were laws already in existence that guaranteed social assistance, legal aid, the Public Prosecutor's Office for legal defense, but did not cover the right to technical assistance, for which there should be a specific law. This issue was constructed and discussed with the Ministry of Cities itself. The need for a law in relation to technical assistance, design, construction, renovation, and expansion. (Zezéu Ribeiro interview published in CUNHA; ARRUDA; MEDEIROS, 2007, p. 140).

For Zezéu Ribeiro (Interview published in CUNHA; ARRUDA; MEDEIROS, 2007), this participatory process enhanced the discussion, by showing the possibility of associating the right to technical assistance and the right to housing. According to Ribeiro, during the 1970s, technical assistance was a struggle only for architects and urban planners, over the years, however, it has also become a banner of society, social movements and other professionals. This has occurred through a series of

processes, initiated with the popular demands of the constituent assembly and the struggle for urban reform. Subsequently, this construction was complemented with the experiences of the Luiza Erundina government in the city of São Paulo, based on the production of housing with self-managed collective efforts and technical support services in São Paulo, a fact that led social movements to claim for the National Fund for Social Housing, established in 2005.

> When I return to the discussion which Clóvis initiated and took to Congress, we already had a much broader social base. The project no longer belonged to the category of professionals, and became a project of society, incorporating other professions and the social movements, in the struggle for housing. (Zezéu Ribeiro interview published in CUNHA; ARRUDA; MEDEIROS, 2007, p. 139).

After the project had been in progress for two years, Law No. 11,888 (BRASIL, 2008) was enacted, which was highly celebrated by architects and urban planners. In addition to instituting technical assistance for social housing, the regulation changed Law No. 11.124/2005, which created the National System of Social Housing (SNHIS) and the National Fund for Social Housing (FNHIS). Thus, the FNHIS programs encompassed technical assistance.

Linking technical assistance to the FNHIS was considered an important step, given that it was linked to the Ministry of Cities. Zezéu Ribeiro remained optimistic regarding the possibility of incorporating technical assistance into the programs of the Ministry of Cities, involving, in addition to the work of architects, social assistance and legal aid, everything within the recently created National System of Social Housing (Zezéu Ribeiro interview published in CUNHA; ARRUDA; MEDEIROS, 2007). The moment was opportune and generated a climate of optimism across part of the professional category: it was a period of great investment in urban policies and the creation of several participatory bodies, bringing together society, professionals, social movements and other organizations in the public management of policies and resources.

Indeed, action took place within the scope of the FNHIS aimed at ATHIS, in which municipalities, states and non-profit entities were able to access resources in the fund through selection by public edicts. Called "Social Housing", the program ran from 2007 to 2011 and included an action for the "Provision of Technical Assistance Services". The resources were directed by the proponents to hire professionals who developed projects or work for housing improvements and for the production of new units, land regularization and also social work to mobilize the population involved. However, the initiative had little representation

– according to data provided by the Ministry of Regional Development in 2019[8], 978 proposals were contracted during this period, with a total investment of R$ 89.33 million. Of these, only 18% were actually completed. In fact, although the entire legal and institutional framework was focused on housing policy, in practice few ATHIS actions were consolidated.

Other initiatives are currently being promoted by CAU, which allocates 2% of its collected revenue to promoting technical assistance. Through public edicts, the council selects proposals from civil society organizations (such as NGOs, unions, associations and cooperatives), sponsoring actions that involve project practices, the creation of popular urbanization plans, plans for land tenure regularization, in addition to training courses and events. However, the actions sponsored by CAU are very specific – even though the public edicts open the possibility for more architects and urban planners to work with ATHIS, these initiatives are not configured as a policy that guarantees low-income families broad access to decent housing, given the limitations of the council's performance, due to the manner in which it is configured.[9]

Even though there have been few experiences since the law was enacted, architects and urban planners continue the search for alternatives to implement technical assistance, often in a specific manner and through autonomous initiatives. The representative entities remain actively involved in disclosing the subject, in promoting debates, events, publications and working groups, through which it is intended to effectively implement technical assistance in practice.

2. Architects and social movements for housing: the actions of technical support

Unlike *technical assistance*, which was constituted on the basis of a text of law and disclosed with the engagement of architects and urban planners in the flow of practices although with little foundation or any major critical conformations, *support* practices emerged with a distinct character, involving strong links with social movements in their struggle for housing. The context was the city of São Paulo, between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s.

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8. Data provided by the Ministry of Regional Development, via e-SIC.

9. CAU is a federal autarchy that guides, disciplines and supervises the profession of architects and urban planners, in addition to seeking to enhance their professional practice. Therefore, creating public policies is not one of its functions.

A number of experiences[10] at the time ultimately consolidated a form of action by architects and urban planners in partnership with the movements fighting for housing, based on the principles of self-management and mutual help, in which future residents actively participated in the design, work and decision-making processes. Later, these practices inspired the creation of the Funaps Comunitário (Funacom) program, in force during the administration of Luiza Erundina in the city of São Paulo, from 1989 to 1992. In the program, professionals and social movements were positioned side by side, as the protagonists of public policy, with support and resources from the State for the production of affordable housing more adapted to the needs of the population and with a higher quality to that produced by the market, which made such experiences[11] become important references for architects and urban planners (MARTINS, 2019).

Funacom promoted the creation of new groups of technical support consultants and circulated this form of action,[12] which became particular to the state of São Paulo and later received national recognition. However, the end of Luiza Erundina's administration also resulted in the end of the program, i.e., the doors of several support services were closed, due to the lack of resources to keep them operating. Even so, several groups continued to act supported by other programs, such as the joint efforts of the State Government of São Paulo (1990s), the Solidarity Credit Program (PCS) and the Entities modality of the Minha Casa Minha Vida [My Home, My Life] Program (PMCMV), both in force in the 2000s.

Funacom's design, which was built on the basis of a partnership between technical support consultants and social movements, enabled autonomy and management by the movements, leading to a strengthening of their base of action, as was the case with the União dos Movimentos de Moradia [The Union of the Housing Movements] (SANTO AMORE, 2004). The experiences of self-management encouraged these movements to organize themselves in an intense national articulation, in favor of the approval of the first law of popular initiative, which

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10. This is the case of the experience in Vila Nova Cachoeirinha, in the North Zone of São Paulo, encouraged by the engineer Guilherme Coelho; of the Community Village project, in São Bernardo do Campo; and the actions promoted by the Housing Laboratory at the Faculty of Fine Arts of São Paulo. For more information, see LOPES, J. M. de A. *Sobre arquitetos e sem-tetos: técnica e arquitetura como prática política* [On architects and the homeless: technique and architecture as political practice] 2011. Thesis (Habilitation) – Instituto de Arquitetura e Urbanismo, Universidade de São Paulo, São Carlos, 2011

11. The work of Martins (2019) presents an inventory of the production by the São Paulo support services. We highlight here the projects of the Paulo Freire Complex, conducted by USINA in partnership with the Paulo Freire Residents Association; and the complex in Jardim Brasília, by the Associação Pôr do sol and Recanto das Estrelas with support by Oficina de Habitação and Peabiru.

12. For more regarding the professional actions of the technical support consultants, see Santo Amore (2004).

demanded the institution of the National Fund for Popular Housing.[13] The project was implemented only fourteen years later, with the establishment of the FNHIS in 2005. A few years later, with the launch of the PMCMV, in 2009, the country's housing policies were centralized into this program, relegating the FNHIS to a secondary role.

> By launching the MCMV, the Government ended the FNHIS, bypassed the system and left the Movement out. On the day it was launched in Brasilia, no one from the Movement was called to speak and we protested. Only businessmen and contractors had been called. Then the Movement organized itself once again and pressured the Government[,] which, finally, created the Entities with which the Association or movement may directly access this funding and be the manager of the Project. (EDMUNDO, 2014, p. 37).

Based on previous experiences, the social movements pleaded for the PMCMV Entities modality, in which the figure of the technical support consultant reappears, albeit with certain contradictions. The design of the program made the entities assume several functions that were previously shared with the technical support consultants. In turn, these were reduced to mere service providers, diminishing the perspective of the idea of self-management (CAMARGO, 2016). In short, the programs did not prioritize the work of these groups, despite the successful experiences of the 1990s.

> [...] the PMCMV, as well as the PCS, could have represented an attempt to continue and redeem – on a federal level and with significant resources – the experiences initiated during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, but what is observed is that the structure of these programs caused this network to shrink. Many professionals who worked in the aforementioned decades moved their work to other areas (private sector, teaching, etc.) and there are few technical support offices that have kept this practice active. (BARROS, 2019, p. 189-190).

The actions of the technical support consultants, one of the objectives of which was to democratize architecture through an autonomous action, independent of the State and the market, were faced with a series of contradictions. In practice, it is known that it is practically impossible to be disassociated from the State with regard to the production of affordable housing, since public programs ultimately condition the actions of these professionals.

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13. One million signatures were collected to take the bill to Brasília in 1991. The moment was emblematic, as the volume of packages with signatures was such that several representatives, pushing wheelbarrows, climbed the congressional ramp to deliver them to the Speaker of the Congressional Chamber.

At the same time, these contradictions reveal identity crises in relation to what constitutes support, a situation validated by a kind of limbo that they witness while acting as a commercial office or an NGO. By accumulating experience in operating programs, these groups have become service providers to the government. In the direct relations with the movements, they retain traces of support, but have gradually become assistance. "They may even play the role of support for the administration, but together with the community they even do a specific type of social assistance of a physical nature (housing and urbanization projects and work)" (SANTO AMORE, 2004, p. 75).

This reflection became more evident with the enactment of Law No. 11,888/2008 (BRASIL, 2008), which established the term *technical assistance* in the legislative sphere. Although the eight articles of the law encompass the actions of the technical support consultants, in the way they are developed in São Paulo, there is a frequent discussion that seeks to differentiate these two terms. In addition to their origins having a different root, it is possible to observe that the discourse of those who defend assistance differ from those who preach support as a form of action.

3. Technical assistance as law and technical support as a practice

At various moments in time, the text of Law No. 11,888 (BRASIL, 2008) led architects and urban planners toward a dispute over the meanings of the terms "support" and "assistance". The legislative scope into which "technical assistance" is inserted ultimately consolidated this expression at the national level – even though the groups of "technical assistance" whose work has become established in this field are particularly in the city and state of São Paulo. According to these professionals, support is understood as a collective work, with the participation of the population and incentives for forming popular movements, while assistance is of a merely technical character – of the design and construction of the building - and is even assistentialist. This issue is made clear in the words of Silke Kapp:

> [...] *assistance* connotes an uncritical adherence to the assumption that those being assisted are socially inferior, verging on assistentialism and philanthropy, while support is more consistent with a critical perspective of these relations of domination. The reason is historical, not theoretical or etymological: if the State prefers the term assistance, then popular movements, which to some extent conduct or aim at self-management, have preferred the term support. (KAPP, 2018, p. 222, author's emphasis).

Within this rationale, there is also a critique on how Law No. 11,888/2008 has been worded, considering that it has a purely technical character, failing to encompass participatory issues and popular organization (DEMARTINI, 2016). On the other hand, there still exists a large portion of the population, which is not properly organized into social movements, which is the community with which technical support consultants work. Those who defend technical assistance understand that this condition should not be a limit to the care they receive. Hence, the services, considered part of the right to housing, must also include individual care for families (SANTO AMORE, 2016).

Indeed, the work of the technical support consultants was consolidated into serving groups that were formed by organized social movements, and at this point a difference may be identified in relation to the discourse of those who preach "assistance" – in broad terms. In a manual for the implementation of ATHIS, developed by the IAB, a program format is suggested based on the relationship "a family – a professional – a project – a construction" (IAB, 2010). Thus, families who were interested in the services could find architects in offices located near the areas where they live. In other words, this was similar to what was advocated by the ATME Program in the 1970s. This type of relationship already occurs in the provision of these services to the classes with a higher purchasing power, with the difference that, in this case, there would be subsidies from the public authorities to pay for the architectural service. In this matter, there is a fundamental difference between assistance and support. In the role of technical support consultants, architects seek a different form of professional performance, using a critical spirit that incorporates the population into the entire process related to housing production. On the other hand, assistance is not another form of action, but rather, it covers another market, one that encompasses popular housing. In assistance, the architect is the agent that helps an under-assisted population, which is unable to solve its housing problems autonomously. In other words, those who are assisted never conform to being *political agents*.

Although there may be differences in the way the terms have emerged, at certain times assistance and support have been positioned side by side, with support practices being taken as examples of what could be consolidated as ATHIS. Resuming the debate on technical assistance initiated a decade earlier in the capital of Mato Grosso do Sul, in 2015, the FNA organized the event *Campo Grande +10: Seminário Nacional sobre Assistência Técnica Pública e Gratuita – Evolução, Experiências e Perspectivas Futuras* [Campo Grande +10: National Seminar on Free, Public Technical Assistance – Evolution, Experiences and Future Perspectives]. At the event, perspectives of public programs were presented, including technical

assistance and support experiences, with the presence of USINA – Center of Projects for the Built Environment. In an event promoted by IAB Santa Catarina in September of the same year, it was the technical support team from Peabiru – Community and Environmental Works that contributed to the debate, by sharing examples of its work. During the following year, in cooperation with the São Paulo State Architects Union (SASP) and sponsorship by CAU/SP, Peabiru organized the Technical Assistance Workshops for Social Housing, which took place in several cities in the state of Sao Paulo. The initiative, based on the experience acquired by the group over more than twenty years of activity, sought to encourage the exchange of experiences, the construction of readings and propositions, as well as the protagonism of the participants, with the objective of discussing the practice and bringing architects and urban planners together in the context of urban precariousness, including visits to places where ATHIS experiences had taken place. The organizers stressed that technical assistance should not be a corporate agenda for architects: but rather, it should be understood as a right of the low-income population and an agenda for the whole of society.[14]

On the other hand, several discussions that addressed technical assistance emerged with the advent of the law, but disregarded the experiences of the technical support consultants, as if the service of architects and urban planners to the low-income population for housing production was a new practice. This situation was evident at the ATHIS Seminar, promoted by CAU/SP at the end of 2017, when the contribution of the work of technical support consultants was explicitly ignored, even though the event took place in São Paulo. The seminar was a good example of how controversial the role of the council has been in designating what should have been configured as an ATHIS practice, in addition to demonstrating the distance of architects and urban planners from the problems faced by the poorest population. At this event, a proposal by the Ministry of Cities was exposed, which involved the *Cartão Reforma* [Renovation Card] (Federal Law No. 13.439/2017) and through which the low-income population would receive an amount for the purchase of material intended for small renovations to their homes. In this case, the actions of technical assistance were restricted to an inspection service that sought to prove whether the amount offered to families was being used in the renovation of the residence. In other words, the existence of a project prior to undertaking the renovation was never considered – which constitutes a contradiction, if we consider that the event was promoted by an instance that, supposedly, should have acted for society to

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14. The event produced a booklet with a summary of the activities, that may be accessed at http://www.peabirutca.org.br/?painel_projetos=oficinas-athis.

valorize the profession. At the same event, it was still possible to observe, with each example of "technical assistance" presented, how the discussion was centered on the issue of the Technical Responsibility Registry (RRT). It was constantly questioned who would be responsible when signing for a renovation in a self-built residence, when the practice itself had not even been defined, nor had any ways even been proposed to serve the population.[15]

Another controversial point concerns the valorization of certain proposals involving the private sector, quickly presented to the public as technical assistance. From the viewpoint of CAU, technical assistance could easily be implemented through actions of entrepreneurship. At these events proposed by the council it has become common to present private sector initiatives, such as the Vivenda Program. This was a start-up that promoted quick, low-cost renovations, focusing on low-income populations. Founded in 2013, the company entered into a partnership with a securitization company, thus enabling the first social impact debenture in the country, with the objective of obtaining resources to provide lower interest credit for families that receive the services.

In addition to Vivenda, other ventures emerged in the private sector, with a variety of projects.[16] This is the case of Grupo Mangalô, which promotes entrepreneurial social impact projects. Among them is Ecolar, an initiative that enables the construction of ecological houses for low-income families, made possible at a low cost, resulting from partnerships with companies, volunteer work and resources from investors. Another example is Inova Urbis, which calls itself the "popular architectural office", and develops projects for low-income families, in partnership with the Leroy Merlin store, which finances the costs of the architects' work. Inova Urbis does not work with the execution and monitoring of constructions, it only offers the project to customers and recommends Leroy Merlin for the purchase of materials.

In the absence of investment and public policies that encompass ATHIS, the private sector has presented itself as an alternative for making services viable, influencing architects who aspire to work with social housing. The CAU/BR, through the Professional Policy Commission, continues to encourage these

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15. It is evident that the issue related to the RRT must be thought through. What we question here is the fact that this topic has become central in the debate. In this regard, in June 2019, CAU/BR approved a new resolution creating the Social RRT. It is a kind of registry aimed only at HIS projects, with a lower cost.

16. Juliana Linhares shows a brief overview of other initiatives in the area, analyzing their ways of acting. LINHARES, J. de F. *Atuação do arquiteto na produção do espaço urbano autoconstruído pela população de baixa renda* [The actions of architects in the production of self-built urban space by the low-income population] 2018. Dissertation (Master's degree) – Escola de Arquitetura, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, 2018.

"business" initiatives with the promotion of the *Seminário de Empreendedorismo e Novas Tecnologias em Arquitetura e Urbanismo* [Seminar on Entrepreneurship and New Technologies in Architecture and Urbanism]. The event has already had editions in several states, including São Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul, Rondônia, Amapá, Maranhão, Pará and Tocantins (REVISTA PROJETO, 2018).

Within the context of the action of CAU aimed at technical assistance, the technical support consultants were also involved in the discussion, by proposing guidelines for the design of public edicts in the state of São Paulo. Some support bodies, such as Peabiru, Usina and Brasil Habitat, together with other institutions, research groups and the IAB/SP, prepared a letter to the CAU/SP councilors, in which fundamental points were proposed for the choice of initiatives envisaged by the CAU public edicts. The document emphasized the importance of the council in distributing and constructing ATHIS practices, as well as the need to promote actions to publicize and discuss them. For the promotion of actions, it was suggested that the council should prioritize actions of a collective nature, avoiding individual and retail assistance to families. Furthermore, the importance of involvement and participation of families and the community is highlighted, "through workshops, direct support, guided visits, working groups, assemblies, plenary sessions or other activities aimed at the broad participation of members and family representatives, in addition to group leaders and coordinators" (IAB et al., 2017, p. 3).

The subject of collective support and the participation of families in the process is also a field of dispute between architects and urban planners. It is common to associate "assistance" with individual support, and "support" with collective and participatory support, due to the very way in which these proposals have developed throughout history. In this regard, Silke Kapp (2018) defends collective support and states that architects must play a critical role, overcoming circumstances of an assistentialist nature. In supporting groups, collective spaces matter more than individual spaces, just as support is important in decisions taken collectively. Thus, the autonomy of the groups being supported should be promoted, considering that they are political subjects, with the freedom of decision and action in their own space.

Although ATHIS addresses the social perspective of the services of architects, at other times it has been viewed as an "opportunity" or "market niche" for architects. Currently, it is common to defend this area as an opportunity for young architects, whose actions in technical assistance could enable a form of professional insertion. Is this because young people are naturally more willing to "venture" into complex situations, as in the case of facing precarious housing, or is it because

architectural services for low-income people are considered to be "cheaper" and, precisely because of the bad working conditions, these professionals are willing to receive less?

> Working for the low-income population does not appear publicly exactly as a job... It is almost a "good deed", since "authorial" work is still the reference for professional success. It is ultimately necessary to build and argue for the work aimed at this group, not only as a "viable market", but as a structuring part of the training and performance of the professional. (SANTO AMORE, 2016, p.16).

Another important point is related to the formation of architects and urban planners, generally of an elitist character. Very often, on undergraduate courses, social content is rarely addressed; programs involving large equipment, such as hospitals, cultural centers and art galleries, prevail as objects of design disciplines, leading to a practice that "feeds a mythical vision of the 'architect as author', who cuts a good figure in magazines, electronic sites or specialized pay TV programs" (SANTO AMORE, 2016, p. 7). As a result, on the job market, the major projects of architectural offices are highlighted, and these seem to be a reference for other architects.

In the specialized periodicals, projects produced by renowned architects are most prominent. Probably because the theme has been extensively discussed by architects and urban planners, in 2018, *Revista Projeto* published a special edition focused specifically on social housing, an exception in the universe of architecture journals. Even though this social side of architecture was presented, the journal based the analysis of its reports using the same language – with which it deals with large authorial projects. Social housing projects produced by renowned offices were exposed, illustrated by images that valorize the shape and design of buildings and in which architecture is elevated to the category of protagonist, given the absence of people using such spaces. The reports highlighted projects that contain "designs and expressiveness that represent an exception in the architecture of social housing" (REVISTA PROJETO, 2018, p. 65), or the presence of vibrant colors that "breaks with the idea that housing aimed at the low-income population lacks identity" (id., p. 76). On the other hand, little relevance is given to financing so as to enable construction works and projects, or to the forms of service to the population or even to the opinion of the residents regarding this housing production. The language of the journal was nothing more than a reflection of the usual way in which architects practice their profession, which in turn reflects their formation aimed at the elite.

Based on this discussion, Lopes (2018) suggested a review of the architect's craft. For him, extension activities, as well as those conducted by students in model offices, could help us to destitute this universal model prefigured by the personage of the architect from the specialized periodicals. He also mentions a more intense approach between students and technical support groups.

Thus, the Professional Residency in Architecture, Urbanism and Engineering, implemented by the Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA) has sought to train professionals in ATHIS. The project, which began in 2013, aims to put Law No. 11,888/2008 (BRASIL, 2008) into practice, training professionals and citizens to enable social inclusion projects (GORDILHO SOUZA, 2013). Another recent initiative was the institution of a professional course in technical assistance and support for social housing, promoted by the Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo at the Universidade de São Paulo, in early 2019. The course addressed topics related to fields of action and policies and provided practical activities in an occupation organized by a movement in its struggle for housing.

In the profession, there is a frequent debate not only regarding the social function of architects, but also about the manner in which they are valorized by society, based on the assumption that it is a job with a social character, currently more than necessary in a country where only 15% of Brazilians who have already built or renovated their homes have hired the services of architects and/or engineers, as demonstrated in the famous survey promoted by CAU/BR in partnership with Instituto Datafolha (CAU/BR, 2015). A large section of this 15% is represented by individuals from the higher classes; and it was also shown that 85% of the population have never used these services, mainly due to financial reasons; thus, a major part chose to hire bricklayers or foremen (id., ibid.). The Brazilian reality is reflected in this research, which demonstrates the absence of professionals who meet the low-income housing demand.

Even so, thus far, few of the ATHIS practices have been consolidated. In terms of public policies, apparently, the best structured program is found in the Federal District, in a local action proposed by the Housing Company of the Federal District (CODHAB). The "Habita Brasília" program has ten technical assistance centers for families living in precarious situations, with projects for improvements in housing and public spaces, such as parks and streets, as well as mediating conflicts in land regularization areas. These actions were circulated throughout the country by the architect and urban planner Gilson Paranhos, former president of CODHAB, through his participation in several seminars and debates among architects. It is not by chance, Paranhos is a member of the Upper Council of the IAB, an entity of

which he was once president. His presence and actions have reinforced that the diffusion of technical assistance, once again, has as its central role the figure of a professional in the area of architecture and urbanism.

Final considerations

We have briefly seen how practices with very similar objectives, but with different discourses, have originated. Technical assistance was established within the federal legislative framework, but with little consolidation of practical propositions; technical support, in turn, has remained on a local scale, despite having been consolidated in the execution of actions since the 1970s. Although with different geneses, it may be stated that both have certain traits in common, especially when dealing with an area in which the work of architects and urban planners is more than necessary.

Support services have made progress in several aspects – in approaching the population and social movements, in multidisciplinary work, in collective construction and also in technical and design aspects. They have innovated by proposing solutions that have entered into dialogue with the needs of users, producing different housing to that which has become standardized by public programs, highly criticized by architects and urban planners. Within the spirit of critique, they have approached the poorest population and helped various groups in the conquest of more dignified housing.

With regard to technical assistance, despite the disputes, there is no doubt that the enactment of Law No. 11,888 (BRASIL, 2008) was a step forward. Since it is a federal law, the issue becomes national in scope, and is able to rely on resources from the Union and on funds such as the FNHIS. With a succinct text, the law is not self-applicable, and its regulation is necessary. Therefore, it still fails to articulate a national system aimed at the practice of technical assistance. Even so, this may prove to be an advantage since it opens up greater possibilities for maturing the theme and presenting proposals with different actions.

It is not a question of detailing the terms "assistance" or "support" in a definition of different activities. Nor is it a question of "re-inventing the wheel", as if technical assistance and care provided by architects to the low-income population were something new; nor does it involve seeking to build something new based on decontextualized and corporatist discourses, with terms such as "client", "market niche" and "opportunity".

The role of CAU and other class entities is important, since these bodies are able to act as articulators for future ATHIS actions, with the creation of networks among professionals – both those who wish to work in the area and those who

already have some experience in the subject – as well as educational institutions, whose role is to produce critical and duly trained professionals, society and the Government. Despite the contradictions observed in the performance of the council, some more recent actions have presented possibilities. These would include cases such as the initiatives of CAU/RS and CAU/AL, which signed partnerships with the Government to create programs with ATHIS.[17]

It is also important to emphasize the need for the council and class entities to approach the reality and social problems experienced by the lowest income population, through dialogue with social movements and other instances of civil society representation and an understanding of the population as being those with rights. It is therefore necessary to consider ATHIS as a right that must be guaranteed and consider this action as a component of a broader public housing policy.

In addition, it is essential that the very field of action organizes itself, aiming to contribute to the construction of the format of the practice in a reflection of its own notion of what this modality of work actually is. Thus, those who already work in the area – the architects of the homeless – should also occupy the spaces of discussion, seeking to build networks and establish, together with class entities, the format and conception of this professional activity.

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17. For further details, see the seminar *O papel dos conselhos profissionais no fomento à ATHIS* [The role of professional councils in promoting ATHIS], available on the CAU/SC channel on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8W_hHCpBrU&list=PLOouYfCVi65Yf8hupG2hnomMcLWkUn16j.

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