Socio-spatial groups or whom technical advisory practice serves

Grupos sócio-espaciais ou a quem serve a assessoria técnica

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Abstract: *The concept of socio-spatial groups proposed in this paper aims to provide a critical reflection on the research and practice of technical advisory services in architecture, urban design and urban planning. It designates groups for whom space is constitutive, and who, conversely, constitute (produce) space. We begin from the premise that technical advisory practices – as opposed to assistance – should strengthen group autonomy. The first section explains the context of the discussion, and the difference between notions and (theoretical) concepts. The second part demonstrates why technical advisory practices have to overcome notions such as client, user, beneficiary or community. The third explores sociological approaches to social groups, demonstrating that the concept of socio-spatial groups is neither tautological nor merely incremental. The final section illustrates and summarizes approaches of technical advisory practices that work reflectively with socio-spatial groups, i. e. that possess a concept in order to understand and discuss those that they serve.*

Keywords: *Technical advisory practices; Social group; Socio-spatial research; Autonomy; Production of space.*

Resumo: O conceito de *grupo sócio-espacial* proposto neste artigo visa à reflexão crítica de pesquisas e práticas de assessoria técnica em Arquitetura, Urbanismo e Planejamento. Ele designa grupos para os quais o espaço é constitutivo e que, inversamente, constituem (produzem) espaço. Parte-se da premissa de que a assessoria técnica – à diferença do assistencialismo – deve fortalecer a autonomia desses grupos. O primeiro item explica o contexto da discussão e a diferença entre noções e conceitos (teóricos). O segundo, argumenta o porquê de a assessoria técnica precisar ultrapassar noções como cliente, usuário, beneficiário ou comunidade. O terceiro, explora abordagens de grupos sociais pela sociologia, para mostrar que o conceito de grupos sócio-espaciais não é tautológico nem apenas incremental. O último item exemplifica e sintetiza abordagens de assessorias técnicas que trabalham, refletidamente, com grupos sócio-espaciais, isto é, que dispõem de um conceito para compreender e discutir a quem elas servem.

Palavras-chave: Assessoria técnica; Grupo social; Pesquisa sócio-espacial; Autonomia; Produção do espaço.

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THE CONTEXT OF THE PROPOSITION

Concepts are the elements of which theories are made - rational efforts to understand reality. They derive from experience and represent aspects of experience, but they also add an *explication* to it or, literally, an unfolding (from the Latin *plica*, fold). They are essential to critical thinking because, although a relation of domination may well survive socially without any concept to apprehend it, it could hardly be questioned and transformed without such a concept. The possibilities of discernement and action expand when concepts are available.

The aim of this paper is to propose the concept of *socio-spatial groups,* drawing on experiences of technical advisory practices (*assessoria técnica*) in architecture, urban design and planning, i.e., situations in which specialists perform services for a group that does not master the same knowledge, and that socially occupy a worse position. Some prefer to characterize such situations as technical assistance (*assistência técnica*), following the wording of Brazilian Federal Law n.11.888/2008, which 'ensures the right of low-income families to free and public *technical assistance* for the design and construction of social housing'[1] (my emphasis). But *assistance* connotes uncritical adherence to the assumption of social inferiority of those being assisted, bordering on welfare and philanthropy, whereas *advisory* complies more with a critical perspective of these relations of domination. The reason is not theoretical or etymological, but rather historical: if the State prefers the term assistance, popular movements that have somehow either achieved or aimed at self-management have preferred the term advisory. The first hirings of architects by self-managed social movements in Brazil (with the collective Usina in São Paulo, and the administration of Mayor Chico Ferramenta in the city of Ipatinga) were inspired by Uruguayan housing cooperatives, which refer to the work of architects as *asesoramiento técnico* (cf. Nahoum, 2008). In contrast, the abovementioned law was inspired by the integrated Brazilian health system (*Sistema Únicode Saúde*), aligned with the ideology of needs or the 'human condition as one of dependence on goods and services' (Illich, 1990). In this sense, assistance and autonomy are opposites. Similarly, in academic fields involving social and spatial questions, the preference for assistance or advisory tends to correspond, respectively, to a greater interest in the use of space or its production[2].

Just as the words assistance and advisory carry certain premises, the name that professionals use – verbally or mentally – for the people they address indicates the social structure they reproduce. Doctors treat *patients*, lawyers defend *clients*, public policies are for *beneficiaries* or *communities*, while architects, conventionally, design for *clients* or *users*. But these terms express notions, not concepts. We adopt them in the flow of language, without reflecting upon them. Only when new constellations disturb the usual practice, do they suddenly seem inadequate. Should we call the recipients of technical advisory services clients or users? Changing names does not necessarily signify that the reasons for such inadequacy, and previous notions and practices have undergone critical thinking. Sometimes a new nomenclature sediments itself with the same naturalness as the old, becoming available to any free association of meanings. Jargon produces authorized words, used side by side without ever confronting one another, many of them in

1 This and all citations hereafter from Brazilian and German sources have been translated by the author, unless otherwise stated.

2 Jean Rémy (1993: 265) attributes this polarization to French urban sociology, but I feel that it applies to a broader context, including research in architecture and urban design: 'The French Urban Sociology is divided amongst people interested in the appropriation of space and others interested in the production.'

reference to a celebrated name and in ignorance of the content that would justify its celebrity.

A debate in Belo Horizonte's housing council I witnessed years ago illustrates my point: the secretary of housing was strongly defending the 'right to the city' and opposing self-management with the exact same vehemence – '*we have already seen that this does not work*'. Everywhere we look, the concept of 'right to the city' coined by Henri Lefebvre has suffered from this phenomenon of absorption and neutralization, not only in Brazil. Along the same lines as the ideology of needs, it has usually been identified with having access to a set of urban goods and services, while ignoring the central idea of a collective right to imagine and to produce the city: 'right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habitat and to inhabit. The right to the *oeuvre*, to participation and appropriation (clearly distinct from the right to property), are implied in the right to the city' (Lefebvre, [1968] 2000, p. 174). David Harvey and others have insisted on a clearer understanding of this concept (Harvey, 2008, Stanek, 2011, Kapp, 2012).

When I was an architecture student, the very word *concept* used to be applied in such a diffuse, imprecise manner. Any design would need to 'have a concept', meaning that it needed to aspire to something more than the equation of rooms and square meters within a given terrain. Various forms of fiction served as an inspiration so as to invent forms and to fulill design descriptions (cf. Maciel, 2003). I do not know if our professors were aware of the fact that *the concept* had migrated to the architectural field from the so-called conceptual art, for which the adjective *conceptual* was mainly a counterpoint to (material) crafts, in the sense of a creative idea or something like so. Given that for architecture this is a mere pleonasm[3], *the concept* would never have made a career in our field had it not been for an article by Peter Eisenman (1970) that referred to *conceptual* as being the allusion of philosophical contents in architectural designs (or in the discourse surrounding them). In contrast, the wellknown *Introduction to Architecture* edited by Snyder and Catanese (1979, p.210) stated that *parti* and *esquisse,* scheme and sketch, were also synonymous with concept. The understanding was rather elusive, in part because *conceito,* in Portuguese, just as *concept,* in English or French, covers two semantic fields: the idea that motivates a process of creation or planning, also called *conception* (in German, *Konzept*); and the elements of a theory (in German, *Begriff*).

3 Already Alberti ([1450] 1988, p. 3) defined the architect as opposed to execution: 'I should explain exactly whom I mean by an architect; for it is no carpenter that I would have you compare to the greatest exponents of other disciplines: the carpenter is but an instrument in the hands of the architect.'

To prevent misunderstandings, the meaning that is important herein is the latter. Concepts are 'fundamental explanatory units, at the same time constitutive of any theoretical construction [...] and nourished by theoretical approaches' (Souza, 2013, p. 9). A (theoretical) concept synthesizes a (theoretical) reasoning. It is not an image, not an intuition, nor a form. Concepts may inspire artistic conceptions or integrate theories that motivate or are the grounding for actions, but they should never be confused with them.

As previously mentioned, the concept I propose herein aims to provide a critical reflection on technical advisory practices and research. As a preliminary definition, the term socio-spatial group denotes a group of people that relate to one another in a space, which is constitutive of the group and, conversely, constituted by the group. The link between space and social nexus is *necessary* and *dialectical*: necessary because the group would not exist without it; dialectical because it is

tensioned and always in process. To use Henri Lefebvre's language, a socio-spatial group produces a space, and is produced by it. A group that is able to constitute itself by producing a space, or has the prospect of doing so, will contain an idea of autonomy, however fragile it may be. Technical advisory practices strive to strengthen this autonomy, unlike most public programs.

In the following section I elaborate the argument that technical advisory practices need to exceed the notions of client, user and beneficiary, and I briefly indicate why replacing it with the notion of community provides little guidance for technical advisory practices and research. In the third section I discuss some approaches to social groups in sociology to demonstrate that the concept of socio-spatial groups is neither tautological, nor just incremental. The final section attempts to exemplify and synthesize technical advisory approaches that work, reflectively, with socio-spatial groups, i.e., approaches that possess a concept to understand and to discuss whom they serve.

CLIENTS, USERS, BENEFICIARIES, COMMUNITIES

For ancient Romans, *cliens* was a plebeian under the protection of a patrician. The word comes from *cluere*, to listen, to obey. The patrician represented the *cliens* in court and received loyalty in exchange; the *cliens* was required, for example, to pay him regular visits, and join his entourage at public appearances and during war. The greater the *clientele*, the greater the patrician's power. The legendary prince who resorts to an architect to design palaces would never be featured as a client. Take, for example, the situation of Filarete at the court of Duke Francesco Sforza in mid-fifteenth century Milan[4]: he emerges from the social milieu of master builders and does everything possible to legitimize his belonging to a 'favored circle', even mobilizing tools for the Duke to co-author his designs (the nobleman's scribbles ennoble the action of drawing). In the ancient sense, Filarete would have been the client, Sforza's protégé, not vice versa. However, there is one aspect of their alliance that already indicates what later came to define the client of an architect, since one of Filarete's tasks was to rationalize the building site, protecting the Duke's interests whenever they opposed the interests of masters, masons and laborers.

4 Antonio Pietro Averlino, the Filarete, wrote and illustrated the *Libro Architettonico* or *Trattato di Architettura* around 1460. It is a fictious work on the construction of the city of Sforzinda, which nevertheless contains many real elements of his relationship with the Duke and with the building sites (cf. Filarete, 1965).

The situation most familiar to us, with an architect of modest fame designing for a non-noble owner, has emerged with the rise of the bourgeoisie and the urban real estate industry. *Le guide de ceux qui veulent bâtir* (The guide for those who wish to build, 1781), by Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, bears witness to this. By addressing real estate owners who plan to build and cannot afford to lose money or allow their land to lie fallow, he 'represents the architect as a specialist employed [...] to give practical advice to his client' (Picon, 2000, p.16). Mézières (1781, p. 4-5) first paints the horrors of badly planned undertakings and fraudulent contractors, and then recommends his own services: 'I am an architect [...] I will never let myself be driven by a vile interest. You can count on my advice'; 'It is my concern to defend you'. Client and architect are in similar social positions, and the work that results from their relationship will be expedient for the accumu-

lation of economic and symbolic capital of both. This does not exclude internal conflicts, of course. But whether with flattery or arrogance, mutual panegyrics or wrestling, the characters of such a relationship are solidary within their class interests.

The groups for which technical advisory practices are intended – such as the homeless and landless movements, labor cooperatives, so-called indigenous and traditional peoples, spontaneous urban settlements or organized occupations – are not clients in this modern sense, because in the social structure they are not as equals to the technical team. The characterization as client would apply to them only in the old sense of a plebeian who submits to a patrician to represent him in institutions of power, since he lacks access credentials to do it for himself (hence, *clientelism*). *Mutatis mutandis*, the groups of today would submit to architects in exchange for representation in local governments, banks, and other institutions with which they do not negotiate alone, due either to objective interdictions or to subjective constraints. This is indeed a prevalent reason for groups to seek technical advisory services even when they are convinced that they do not need them as a means to equate spaces and constructions. If at the very least everyone were aware of this, then the advisory services would take on their advocacy function without imposing unwanted technical services. Nonetheless, the relation would create new dependencies, being at odds with the purpose of strengthening the group's autonomy (not to mention the risk that the advocacy function itself would require technical services not demanded at the beginning of the process).

User is a more recent term, emerging together with the idea that non-mathematicians could use computers. Users are those who receive a certain finished operating system, which they may employ with some creativity and even subvert, but not to decide upon. The abovementioned *Introduction to Architecture* – a true treasure trove for the profession's clichés – explicates this understanding: 'users seldom participate directly in project decisions; they must rely, therefore, on the professionalism of the architect to consider their interests' (Parsons, 1979, p.78). It sounds nice that at least architects have such consideration, but the following sentence already demonstrates its limits: 'time and funds are often insufficient for the architect to fully explore with future users of a building their goals and aspirations'. Remarkable is the case that illustrates the conflict between those who rule the space and those who use it: 'a university's desire for durability in its dormitories may lead to concrete block walls and built-in furniture, while students who want to personalize the space they live in may prefer warm materials and movable furniture'. Note the rhetorical subtlety: the institution has a *desire*, as if it were a subject and its control were gentle, while the students, rebels by nature, *want to* customize. The author suggests that architects rely on psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists who 'can provide specific information about user groups and behavior patterns', which would solve the problem of dissatisfaction. If before, the client's interests were threatened by the building site, then *the user* has become the new problem of a society in which both producers and consumers need to be orchestrated on a large scale.

Designs have increasingly received support from environmental and behavioral studies No matter how good the intentions of the professionals who employ them, and even acknowledging their usefulness in certain circumstances (public

facilities, stadia, etc.), the primary contradiction remains. Designing for users is like designing for zoo animals. Here a careful architect will also turn to specialists to learn about anatomy, habits, and behavioral patterns of each type of animal, and create cages with maximum comfort and minimal conflict, given the unquestionable circumstance of caging. One objection may be that behavioral studies give voice to users through interviews and other techniques. However, zoologists would do the same if they could. Listening to users is a data collection procedure that neither presupposes nor implies their recognition as political subjects with autonomy of decision and action. If technical advisory practices start from this recognition, they will not approach the advised groups as users.

As for the beneficiaries, their role combines forms of submission from both the old *cliens* and the modern user. While a *cliens* submits to the patrician in exchange for protection, apart from the occasional services, he is allowed to take care of his own life. While the user does not decide on the devices that will be used, although as a consumer, he or she may still choose between one or another of these devices. But from the beneficiaries, the protection received requires full submission to a device that they are not allowed to choose.

It would be fair to acknowledge that, since the mass housing production of the 1950s, several participatory methods have emerged to break the heteronomy imposed on users and beneficiaries. My arguments are not intended to invalidate any of them a priori. In part, they have been fruitful and must be resumed and improved. The question refers to the often nebulous conceptual apparatus that sustains these methods. Strictly speaking, the so-called user participation – in reality almost always beneficiary participation – is an oxymoron because someone who participates in production would not just be a user or a beneficiary, while a production process that restricts non-specialists to the role of users or beneficiaries is not participatory. This may seem like nitpicking, but the fact that participation appears as an accidental attribute of subjects whose essence supposedly lies in use (users) or shortage (beneficiaries) has consequences. Participation held for a mere bonus may be trivialized, staged or suppressed without affecting the undertaking itself. In contrast, if the process is understood as collaboration (from *collaborare*, to work together) between the technical advisory team and the advised group, the suppression of one party's agency implies the end of this process.

And what about *community*? The term indicates a collective subject, suggests common space and engagement, and has been employed in technical advisory practice, as well as by the advised groups themselves. Colloquially, there is nothing against it. However, in a theoretical discussion of some precision, it becomes problematic because its meanings may range from absolute misery to the acme of political articulation, including all nuances in between. Tönnies ([1887] 1922) contrasts society (*Gesellschaft*) with community (*Gemeinschaft*), as a traditional, solidary, closed formation, belonging to the past. Max Weber ([1922] 1978, p.40-41) calls communal relationships (*Vergemeinschaftung*) social relations based on a 'subjective feeling of the parties, whether affectual or traditional, that they belong together', and associative relationships (*Vergesellschaftung*) social relations based on a 'rationally motivated adjustment of interests'. Community studies, 'a particular variety of empirical research [...] of social networks, kinship ties and face-to-face social relations that constitute the social structure of a clearly defined

geographical locality', attempted to find enclaves of communities in the midst of society, but then favored non-spatial or 'liquid' communities, constituted via remote media by citizens of the globalized world (Blackshaw, 2010, p.56 *et seq.*). Studies of 'traditional rural communities' in Brazil have found formations based on the conjugal family and on a fragile interfamilial collaboration dominated by *coronelismo* (the rule of a local agrarian oligarch or *coronel*)[5]. For international community development programs of the 1960s, community was synonymous with anomie and precariousness[6]. For liberation theology it was synonymous with active, emancipatory grassroots organizations. In an Urbanism seminar by Gaston Bardet in Brazil in 1953, 'community scale' equaled neighborhood (Brandão, 1956). Yet the idea of community that Marx formulated after the Paris Commune would be the *Aufhebung* of State and civil society, without territorial or scalar boundaries[7]. For political grassroots movements, community has meant 'organizations, often temporary, formed on the basis of common, very specific and restricted goals, which occupy a relatively small part of people's lives and time' (Durham, 2004, p.220). An online research in the so-called academic community reveals dozens of other meanings, mostly permeated by an ideology of altruism that disqualifies precisely the individuality (or 'individualism') whose recognition would be indispensable for any form of productive association. While not ignoring that the notion of community sometimes serves social movements in their political struggle as a wildcard, it may be best not to overload it further, nor attempt to extract from it a concept for (reflecting on) technical advisory practices.

5 Durham (2004, pp. 131-179) lists and synthesizes several of these studies in the essay *'As comunidades rurais tradicionais e a migração'* (Traditional rural communities and migration), originally published in 1973.

6 For these variations of understanding related to *favelas*, cf. Valladares, 2005, especially chapter II, 'The transition to social sciences: valorizing the favela and discovering fieldwork'.

7 Cf. Pogrebinschi (2009), especially the chapter entitled 'The place of the political: the real community.'

SOCIAL GROUPS IN SOCIOLOGY

In a lecture I gave outlining the present discussion, a sociologist pondered that the current concept of *social group* already presupposes a shared space or, less elegantly stated, that my concept of socio-spatial group was mere tautology. In view of this objection, an explanation is required as to why I do not regard the topic of social groups and the corresponding tradition of research in sociology sufficient to understand group-space relationships, as required in technical advisory practice.

Generally speaking, any set of individuals may be called a social group, even class fractions or statistical strata. In a more precise sense of micro-sociology and social group studies developed since the 1940s, social group signifies at least three people who have a common purpose, have interacted fairly continuously over a relatively long period, and have developed a sense of belonging and identity, as well as an internal system of norms and a defined division of tasks and roles (Schäfers, 1999, p.20). Classical topics are households, neighborhoods, kinship, and groups linked through work, self-help and other affinities. Space is not constitutive of the conception of social groups first adopted in sociology. The fact that people are in the same place does not in itself configure a social group and, conversely, such a group does not always depend on a physical space (even less so when there are more options of remote interaction). However, since it is evident that real groups usually coincide with certain spaces, it would be of considerable

interest to understand how such spaces enter research studies and discussions. Instead of attempting a panorama, I will concentrate on a book from the early stage of these studies, which in my view is exemplary of their typical approach towards space; an approach that has persisted throughout sociological currents dealing with (small) social groups even after the 'spatial turn'[8].

Here, I refer to *The Human Group* (1951), authored by George C. Homans, a sociologist at Harvard University. The book is a theoretical systematization of ethnographic and industrial studies carried out some years before (the author himself did not take part in any of them). The use of qualitative empirical data obtained in real settings was advanced for the time. Opinion research techniques based on laboratory observation of groups had spread during World War II to assess the effects of mass communication and had become commonly used in studies on groups[9]. Although they had refined their methods over time – for example, with collective interviews subtly centered on a certain focus (*focused interview*) instead of the clumsily directed census interrogation[10] – their obvious shortcoming was the decontextualization of the interlocutors' everyday spaces and activities[11].

Another reason for the success of Homans's book was the provision of an analytical apparatus that was allegedly applicable to any social group and would allow them to be compared. For this he proposed three interdependent variables: *activity,* comprising any individual or collective action; *interaction*, consisting of verbal and non-verbal communication amongst the group members; and *sentiment,* which signifies subjective motivations of social behavior (Homans [1951] 2004, chapter 2, 'The Elements of Behavior'). Activities, interactions and sentiments form the inner nexus of a small 'social system', provided with 'boundaries' and enough cohesion to be analyzed. Homans subsumes all other features affecting the group under the category 'environment', which in turn he analyzes from their physical, technical and social aspects: 'Everything that is not part of the social system is part of the environment in which the system exists' (Homans [1951] 2004, p.87). Homans thus includes one of the dimensions that laboratory experiments are unable to encompass (activity) but takes as a mere background the other dimension suppressed in these experiments (space). He describes the 'physical environment' in which the group exists – and which it sometimes even actively produces –, but makes few indications of related practices, and no difference between a given heteronomous space and space transformed or managed by the group itself.

One of Homans' empirical cases originates from the Hawthorne Studies, conducted from 1927 to 1932 at a Western Electric Company plant, with collaboration from the Department of Industrial Research at Harvard. Funded by the company in order to improve scientific management along the lines of Taylor, the research first assessed the effects of the physical environment on productivity, and then expanded to factors such as motivation and collaboration, with extended direct observations and more than twenty thousand interviews[12]. Homans used data from the last phase, *the bank wiring room experiment,* headed by psychologist Elton Mayo (1933). The experiment involved a telephone equipment assembly team, which was set up in a separate room and observed full time (embarrassment caused by the observation seems to have ceased after a few weeks). A method of payment was established, so that the group was credited collectively per piece,

8 The expression "spatial turn" was first used by Edward Soja in *Postmodern Geographies* (1989), and then by Fredric Jameson in *Postmodernism* (1991). However, the discussion of space as a forgotten dimension of critical social theory goes back to the 1960s and 1970s, especially to the work of Henri Lefebvre'.

9 The Austrian sociologist Paul Lazerfeld founded the Office of Radio Reasearch at Columbia University in 1939, in which Robert Merton and the emigres from the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research also took part.

10 This technique was more widely known later in the trivialized version of the *focus group*, used in market research. An account of the transformation may be found in Merton (1987).

11 The preface by Robert Merton in the first edition of *The Human Group* (1951) emphasizes this innovation.

12 The case became known by as the *Hawthorne effect* or the finding that worker productivity was more influenced by the fact that they were being observed than by the variables tested.

while each worker's share followed individual productivity. Mayo had expected that they would compete with each other to boost their individual income and at the same time collaborate to increase the group's earnings. Instead, they set a daily average production, individual and collective, at a steady but not exhaustive pace, and took care to avoid deviations. Homans' analysis focuses on the play of interactions that controlled these work activities. With regard to the 'physical environment,' he notes that the group's condition in a separate room created greater internal cohesion than would have occurred in the large plant, and that the arrangement of benches and equipment favored certain relationships: 'the sheer geographical position of the men within the room had something to do with the organization of work and even with the appearance of cliques' (Homans [1951] 2004, p.88). However, he does not elaborate on this observation nor conceive of the possibility of the group changing the workplace through its own initiative. In a context typical for industrial wageearners, Homans assumes that they would always operate in a space defined top-down by specialists. Furthermore, the spaces of the factory, of the urban environment, of routes or everyday life beyond the workplace are never mentioned. For Homan, a social group constitutes a social system within an environment – basically similar to a laboratory – to which it has to adapt, and which, if necessary, could be adjusted by the specialists. Nevertheless, the environment remains outside the boundaries of the social system that the group constitutes.

Another group analyzed by Homans originates from the ethnographic research of William Foote White, published in 1943 under the title *Street Corner Society: The social structure of an Italian Slum*, which later became a classic of urban sociology. Homans understands the environment of the Norton Street gang as being the social context of recession, unemployment and lack of opportunity. It does not seem relevant to him that the group defined itself by territory, that is, by a particular street within a structure of other streets and gangs in the particular urban situation of Boston's North End. As in the wiring room case, Homan takes as a natural fact that the young boys on Norton Street operated within a given space, and that the transformation of this space by the group itself would be unlikely.

Paradoxically, the same heteronomous relation between social group and formalized space, peculiar to urban industrial society, underlies Homans' analysis of groups that actually produce their spaces, constituted within this production process, without which they would be unthinkable, i.e., groups that are more than social, but socio-spatial. One such case is a New England community, to which Homans resorts to discuss processes of social disintegration (his sources for the case are Zimmerman [1938] and Hatch [1948]). Space remains an unacknowledged category, although the data lead us to suspect that when the inhabitants first occupied the territory and took responsibility for its physical structure there was greater internal cohesion and political autonomy, whereas the decadence of the group coincided with the gradual increase of interventions by federal and state governments inside that territory.

However, the case that best illustrates the paradox of socio-spatial groups, analyzed without considering their production of space is the island of Tikopia in Polynesia. Homans relies on anthropologist Raymond William Firth, who conducted lengthy fieldwork there. Firth's texts (1936, 1939, 1940) explain the

process of how the island was transformed by its inhabitants, with houses, infrastructure and an arboriculture that radically recreated native forests, and thus gave rise to a truly ecological history or historical ecology (cf. Kirch, 1997). Nonetheless, Homans does not view this as a constituent of the social groups in question. He describes the island's geography; he mentions water channeling in villages and stone walls built as fishing weirs; he speaks of the complex system of land use control; he takes 'the house itself as a physical object' as a starting point to analyse the family; he notes the homonymy between the island and its inhabitants (*tikopia*), and between the words for house and lineage (*te paito*); and he also notes that the house name was assumed as a personal name by the man who became its chief. (Homans, [1951] 2004, p.204-207). Notwithstanding, the 'environment' figures as something external, and the Tikopians as its users, except that this time it is a space provided by nature, not by specialists.

The Human Group exemplifies a mid-twentieth century conception of social group and its gaps, which in retrospect we are able to identify. It is fair to concede that it belongs to a period of struggle against geo-determinism and the Nazi ideology of *Lebensraum*, which partly explains why Homans avoided the theme of reciprocity between social relations and spaces. On the other hand, it was the golden age of the Keynesian state and Fordist capitalism, which depended on space control, whether on national territory, in the factory or in student residence halls. The topic of (small) social groups was on the agenda to elucidate weighty subjects for this political-economic context, ranging from social appeasement and productivity at work, to consumer marketing and the humanitarian aid industry. Not that research projects were always conducted for the service of conservative positions. However, between traditional theory and critical theory, they belonged to the former: rather than questioning, they described, analyzed, and classified phenomena of the social world (see Horkheimer, 1937, 1989). Furthermore, the social world in which they developed was not in favor of groups that produce space having any autonomy, whereas it very much favored the conception of space as an 'inertial system' that 'exerts effect on all corporeal objects, without them exerting a retroactive effect on it' (Einstein, 1960, p. XIV). Their space is absolute, an object of measurement, mapping, delimitation, planning and ownership, but not part of a bottom-up political dispute (Harvey, 2004).

I mentioned before that the space presupposed by Homans has persisted in sociology even after the spatial turn or the period in which several fields first discovered space so as to explain reality. I would like to define this statement. In French sociology, Maurice Halbwachs (1938) already discussed the relations between space and social groups stressing the interdependence between materiality and collective representations (Jaisson, 1999). In the 1950s, Lefebvre and other members of the *Center d'études sociologiques* attempted to move towards this direction and to 'leave behind the concepts of territory or milieu, employed in French rural history, sociology, human geography, and ethnography, in order to develop the concept of socially produced space' (Stanek, 2011, p. 16). However, the ramifications of these critical approaches by authors such as Manuel Castells, David Harvey and Lefebvre himself have focused on broader scales, from urban to planetary, while they have hardly touched on theories and qualitative empirical research methods concerning (small) social groups.

To mention one example, Martina Löw proposed a sociology of space (*Raumsoziologie*, 2001) drawing on the concept of *relational* space, as opposed to the absolute space of mid-century American sociology. However, relativization here refers to symbolic appropriation, while the understanding of material production remains almost the same: Löw deals with planned spaces where social groups do nothing more than *behave* (well or badly, according to the point of view). Löw's interpretation of an ethnographic study by Paul Willis highlights the issue. Under the title *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (1977), Willis describes how the rebelliousness of a group of male students in a British secondary school resulted precisely in the reproduction of their original social position. Löw examines Willis' data, and collects any reference to space, an aspect only marginally considered by the author. She is then able to demonstrate that the behavior of the 'lads' – as they called themselves – created a 'countercultural' space within the school, dissolving its limits in relation to the street: the lads acted in the school as if they were on the streets, breaking all the rules (remain seated, do not leave the school gate during the break, do not smoke). Unable to rearrange physical objects, they used their bodies and minor actions to subvert the given layout; they moved around from one place to another all the time, they walked together as a gang, they blocked the way of other people, they lay down on the tables, they flicked cigarette stubs around, and drew graffiti on the walls. Löw concludes that 'the analysis of spaces may not [...] be restricted to the analysis of the structuring effects of spaces already institutionalized. In the everyday constitution of space these orderings are constantly subject to dispute, and are displaced – for example, by movement and self-positioning –, suspended and sometimes even dissolved' (Löw, [2001] 2012, p.246).

All this may serve to understand the empirical contexts to which Löw refers, and perhaps phenomena such as the *rolézinho* in Brazilian shopping centers (a kind of flash mob of mostly black working-class young people), but it does not serve to understand the contexts in which technical advisory practices operate. There is no point in approaching a *favela*, an urban occupation or a settlement of the Landless Workers' Movement with concepts developed to explain the friction between formal spaces and groups living only in this kind of space. A perspective of the 'everyday constitution of space' by social groups restricted to the attribution of symbolic meanings or minimal gestures of appropriation, such as the teenagers' cigarette stubs in school or the draped curtain in a modernist housing unit, is not enough for a massive material self-production that represents an elemental endeavor of survival, and also sometimes of political counterproduction.

I thus return to the objection that space – and hence the concept of socio-spatial groups – is already part of the current concept of social groups. I do not believe this, unless I have overlooked a sociological approach that actually connects social groups to space through *production*, in the full, emphatic sense of the term. Turning once more to Lefebvre, what seems to prevail is the recognition that social groups produce spaces of representation without acknowledging that they may produce representations of space (self-planning for example) and transformative material practices. But while 'liquid' relationships are being discussed, the solid construction of suburban social housing is progressing like never before (and speaking of which, there have never been so many material resources consumed as in this time of the alleged dematerialization of almost everything).

SOCIO-SPATIAL GROUPS IN TECHNICAL ADVISORY PRACTICES

Passengers on a bus or customers in a supermarket share spaces, but do not form social groups. The Norton Street gang or the wiring room workers share spaces and form social groups, but they do not produce the spaces they share. Teams of urban planners designing neighborhoods, or teams of jurists writing urban legislation form social groups and produce space (in normative terms), but this space does not constitute them as a group; they could easily be designing commercials or legislating on any other topic. The concept of socio-spatial groups does not apply to any of these cases.

However, limits are not always so clear. Imagine a public school on the outskirts of a Brazilian city. The building construction is ready, teachers and managers have been recruited, students are enrolled. In the early days people operate in a space where nothing has been decided or done by them. As the routine becomes established, so the physical and institutional place produces a social group (with subgroups) and changes begin to take place: students paint a mural in the corridor; the cleaning staff put furniture in a coffee corner; the principal is transferred to a smaller room on the ground floor so as to give way to a computer room; the front gate moves to a side entrance, which is easier to control; a group builds the aviary in the yard right where another group wants to plant the vegetable garden; a bricklayer helps to extend the library into the next room; they find a contractor to cover the central courtyard, which now becomes stuffy, albeit dry; in a joint effort they build a room to keep the props for the theater class, etc.

At what point does the group cease to be just social and become socio-spatial? It is hard to say. There will certainly be a definition when the external body in charge decides to put an end to what they understand as kludges. Architects hired to design the renovation proceed in the conventional manner: physical survey and assessment, meetings with the principal, programming (this time with laboratories, coffee corner, and a larger library), design, construction. The building recovers a certain formal integrity, and the group becomes what it once was: a social group in a top-down defined space. Then the bottom-up changes begin again, only with less vigor and care, because everyone knows that sooner or later they will be undone.

Another possibility would be a technical advisory practice that recognizes the group's potential, and seeks ways to support and broaden initiatives, bring conflicts to light, facilitate negotiations, provide technical information, or foster a better understanding of the implications of envisioned changes. If the group concludes that it needs designs to solve particular issues, the advisory team will undertake them with the appropriate expertise. Its main task, however, is not to design the school, but to create interfaces so that the group may continue to produce the space that constitutes it as a group and can do this better than before. The goal is not an integral architectural object, but an active socio-spatial group. If advisory practice is successful, those in the school are likely to acquire more ability to imagine, negotiate, decide and implement changes. Perhaps the experience will even encourage them to extend this performance to a neighboring plot or to the street outside, which would open a new chapter of interactions.

Now imagine a quilombola group pleading for collective property of the land it occupies. The anthropological report required for land regularization registers language, music, houses, habits, festivities, dishes, etc., evidencing a collective history, and the identity of the group as a traditional population entitled to that land. In parallel, the quilombo receives from social programs equipment arranged in collective or private spaces: outdoor fitness devices, a water tank, prefabricated toilets. Architects then come on scene to draw boundaries, improve the sanitary conditions, and design the local association headquarters. They read the anthropological report, map, clear the documentary chaos, draw and present plans to the community leaders, who agree after a few remarks, although they have not understood everything. The quilombo becomes similar to other quilombos, with the same equipment and septic tanks, and very much like land ordinances and communal buildings. However, plans for the road that will soon run nearby have not yet been discussed. When it comes to realization, the group is literally overruled, and unable to oppose the new external order. An advisory practice that recognized the socio-spatial nature of the group would open alternatives in this process. Instead of wishing to adapt the space to a supposed quilombola identity, it would understand that space is part of that identity as much as music, food, celebrations and all the rest. Its first task might be to stimulate a reconstruction of collective spatial history by the people who created it, and to seek ways to better inform the group about the decisive external interests at stake. In an optimistic scenario, the group could strengthen and organize itself to the point of defining its own demands, against or with external institutions. Instead of septic tanks and other solutions to problems they did not even have before the specialists arrived, perhaps the focus of discussions would be water contamination due to agribusiness or that road-building plan. The group would become self-managed: it would hold 'knowledge of and control [...] over the conditions governing its existence and its survival through change' (Lefebvre, [1990] 2003, p.252).

Many other imaginary examples and real experiences (both positive and negative) could illustrate the issue, but I conclude with a provisional synthesis of the idea that technical advisory practices in architecture, urbanism and planning serve socio-spatial groups:

- The group's social and spatial nexuses constitute a process (fragile or vigorous). A heteronomously imposed finished spatial product, even if it accommodates demands raised at a given time, or weakens or disrupts this process.
- Social space groups (both actual and potential) differ in space, time, and internal organization. Some share a history of collective production of the space they occupy, but have no formal organization; others have no room, but are part of a long-lasting movement; yet others have been brought together by external circumstances, and have reached no inner cohesion.
- The group is a political agent (actual or potential). It not only operates *with* a given space, but also *against* that space, and this entails substantial confrontations.
- The space of the group matters more than the individual spaces of its members, and advisory practices matter more for decisions taken collectively than for private. (Proposals such as the Elemental in Chile, or Habraken's support-infill scheme do not favor socio-spatial groups because their openness to change over time is restricted to the private realm.)

- The history of collective space production, when it exists, matters more than any deficiency of its products. Advising a group involves creating ways for people to realize what they have already produced, how, and why. (Why did their actions result in a narrow alley? And why did they preserve the football pitch?)
- The group's social structure is or will be related to its spatial structure in a way that must be understood, and not presumed. This means suspending automatic correlations, such as between space and activity, between use and ownership, or between territory and community. Many socio-spatial relations do not fit into formal patterns (like the simple shortcut that crosses someone else's yard).

Concepts tend to deny variability, movement, and change of what they apprehend, so that they end up nullifying the experiences they should explain, reflect, and criticize. Adorno calls it the hypostasis of the identity principle: thinking postulates that reality is this or that and maintains the postulate regardless of experience. Dialectic means thinking against this tendency to self-preservation of concepts without ceasing to use them (Adorno, [1966] 1990, p.157). Therefore, the concept of socio-spatial group proposed herein should be understood as part of a theory in process, not as a finished product.

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