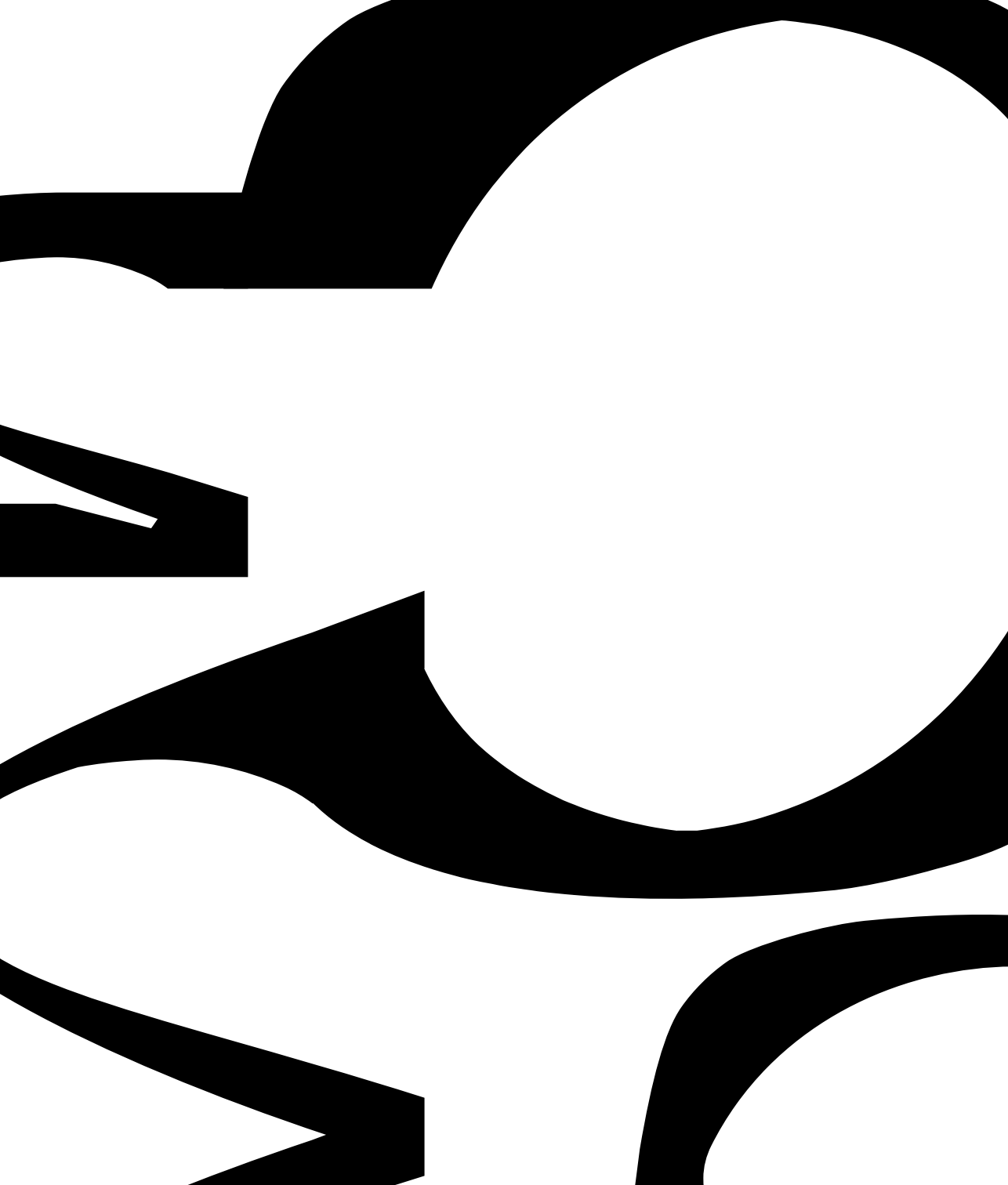


carina guedes
mariana borel

**architecture
in the urban
periphery:
cases, houses,
and construction
sites**

women at the
forefront of
production of space





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production studies series

This booklet is part of the *Production Studies Series* - a set of 12 publications, each introducing a case central to the formation of this new field of studies and exemplifying its concerns. The series has been created as part of the research project *Translating Ferro/Transforming Knowledge in architecture, design and labour for a new field of Production Studies* (TF/TK). Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo, the project was led by Professors Katie Lloyd Thomas and João Marcos de Almeida Lopes. From 2020 to 2024 TF/TK has brought together dozens of researchers, practitioners and activists from across various countries and institutions.

Sérgio Ferro's writings provided the common theoretical and critical ground for discussions within the project. His work, first presented to an English-speaking audience in 2014 during the 11th Architectural Humanities Research Association conference¹ at Newcastle University, has since gained international recognition, the singularity and analytic power of his work resonating beyond its native sphere of circulation in Brazil and France. A key achievement of TF/TK is precisely the translation and publication in English of a substantial part of his writings.² Each of these critical editions, overseen by Silke Kapp and Mariana Moura, have been meticulously carried out, through successive bilingual sessions, open to all affiliated researchers within the project and to guest collaborators, aimed at a collective reading of the translated pieces, text by text, chapter by chapter. From the beginning of the project, Ferro's writings have been a cornerstone of the research network, vital to the maturation of the field, stimulating debates and collaborations.

It was in this environment of intercultural and interdisciplinary exchanges that each of the volumes in this collection was produced, from its editorial conception to its circulation. Together with an edited collection, *Building Sites: Architecture, labour and the field of production studies*,³ which features chapters by the research team, with many crossovers of concerns with the *Production Studies Series*, they form part of a broader effort to define and structure a field of studies that we have been calling 'Production Studies'. Production Studies (PS) undoubtedly refers to already established interests, although often dispersed across studies of architecture, construction,

self-building, cultures of construction, and participatory design. The PS field is proposed here as an axis which is both methodological and empirical, capable of bringing together objects apparently as diverse as cooperative, participatory and collaborative practices of design and work; processes that connect and separate design and the building site; agents and relationships directly involved in the formal and informal production of space; public policies for habitat design and production, in the countryside and in cities; pedagogical and disciplinary experiences that privilege forms and relations of production in the built environment; technical experiments or formal dilemmas capable of interrelate to 'situations in conflict' relating to production, from traditional practices and forms of knowledge, to actors external to academic, scientific or technological institutions.

Production Studies (PS) provides an empirical axis revealed in the study of specific cases located in time and space, which illuminate methodological, theoretical and political concerns. Inspired by the work of Karl Marx, William Morris, Sérgio Ferro, ProBE (the centre for research into the Production of the Built Environment), Peggy Deamer and the Architecture Lobby, amongst many others, the aim of the *Production Studies Series* is to promote the study of architecture/construction at the clash of various dichotomies: labour and capital; production and consumption; knowledge and power; technology and domination; autonomy and heteronomy. It seeks to overcome the design 'of' production through a shift to design 'for' more equitable and joyful forms of production. PS proposes a methodological approach that examines conflicts within architectural works: in their built materiality - visible or indexical; within work processes and relationships; within construction sites; and understands design creations, or ideas and solutions for construction as material productions. It views them in their mediations with political economy, labour history, the social history of culture, the anthropology of technique, the sociology of labour and not least with the know-how of construction workers. This intellectual endeavour is inherently a political ambition, in an understanding of theory, technique, art as types of practice, as part of the praxis of production and, therefore, as a form of action in reality. As weapons of class struggle, these forms of practice either work for its reproduction or for its transformation and overcoming; we recognise that while all too often production functions as a weapon of domination, it can also be a means of emancipation.

The booklets published in this series stand independently, each with its own institutional, theoretical and empirical backgrounds, expressing authors' prior research and experience. But it was amidst the constancy and intensity

of face-to-face and remote meetings within the TF/TK network; in the influx of and contentions between different methods, interpretations and references; in the sharing of various practical experiences, that the relevance of each of them might be appreciated in the context of the Production Studies we set out here.

The cases in this collection each focus on the 'production' aspect of the built environment, aiming to expand our traditional methods of studying and understanding architecture and construction, thus emphasizing the material, practical, economic, social and even bodily dimensions of work involved. They are not interested in supposedly original or paradigmatic architectural forms. Nor are they distinguished by a peculiar attraction to the nature, advancement or particularity of construction techniques. Neither do they assume the existence of a pure, universal rationality of construction sites. Their purpose is instead to illuminate their contradictions and conflicts, to review productive and political experiments capable of facing the deterioration of working conditions in contemporary construction sites across the planet. Ultimately, it is about observing, from an architectural point of view, in its broadest sense, the effects of the social division of labour - including divisions of gender, race, nationality and class - in the production of the built environment and natural resources.

josé lira
katie lloyd thomas
will thomson

notes

- 1 Katie Lloyd Thomas, Tilo Amhof and Nick Beech (eds), *Industries of Architecture*. London: Routledge, 2016.
- 2 Sérgio Ferro, *Architecture from Below; Design and the Building Site; Construction of Classical Design*. Translated by Ellen Heyward and Ana Naomi de Sousa; edited by Silke Kapp and Marianna Moura. London: MACK, 2024.
- 3 Matt Davies, Will Thomson, João Marcos de Almeida Lopes, Katie Lloyd Thomas (eds). *Building Sites: Architecture, labour and the field of production studies* London: Routledge, forthcoming.

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I had even forgotten how hard I worked in life. Some texts about my trajectory remind me that, in my 'alone' moments, I always had someone. It was way too difficult to have a home, oh mercy! That implies carrying water on your head, a tent flying, rats, a male, loneliness, death threats, poverty, making it all turn into poetry so as not to die of pain. Being who you are is not easy!

Luhh Dandara, 2023

cases, houses, and construction sites

Arquitetura na Periferia (Architecture in the Periphery – AnP) is a technical advisory initiative that brings together and empowers women, giving them autonomy to renovate and build their homes. Through a method centred on knowledge sharing, it fosters the acquisition of design, planning, and construction skills for women with limited economic means. AnP seeks to highlight and strengthen the decision-making power of the participants in the advisory process by offering tools that allow them to expand their ability for analysis, discussion, prospecting, planning, and cooperation.

The initiative began in 2013, during the master's research of architect Carina Guedes, as she sought to work professionally with the housing demands of people self-building their homes.¹¹ She conducted an experiment with a group of three women from the Dandara community (located in Belo Horizonte, the capital of the state of Minas Gerais). During the experiment, Guedes developed her own working method based on the theoretical review of other experiences, such as the method used by Argentinian architect Rodolfo Livingston, the works of the Living in Other Ways (Morar de Outras Maneiras – MOM) research group at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), and the actions to assist people in extreme poverty carried out by economist Muhamed Yunus. After she achieved her master's degree, the project continued to be developed independently and expanded with the input of financial support and the inclusion of new collaborators in the technical team. In 2018, this group decided to formalize the project and founded the Institute for Advisory to Women and Innovation (Instituto de Assessoria a Mulheres e Inovação – IAMÍ), a non-profit association that has since legally represented the Arquitetura na Periferia project. Over the course of these 10 years, the project worked with 529 women in 18 locations within the Brazilian territory, reaching a total of approximately 4,700 people.

The segment of architecture and urban planning that provides services to the low-income population, referred to here as 'technical assistance', is more commonly known as ATHIS (Assistência Técnica para Habitações de

Social – Technical Assistance for Social Housing), a term adopted in federal legislation on this subject (Brazil, 2008). In addition to the discussion of these terms, properly explored in other texts, it is important to distinguish the theoretical-methodological basis that differentiates practices.²² In general, these are focused on developing design solutions and/or monitoring construction works without financially burdening individuals unable to afford such services. However, they generally use practices similar to those adopted in the conventional market targeting the middle and upper classes and tend to disregard the specifics of construction carried out by self-builder, thus reproducing the notion of a project or construction work as the desired final product. Here, practices tend to privilege the protagonism of the professional builder and their principles to the detriment of the individuals advised, their knowledge, and needs. Often, these actions involve a high degree of bureaucracy and little flexibility or adaptability in the face of different contexts (Borel, 2020).

In this scenario, it is worth bringing to light the critical reflection pointed out by Baltazar and Kapp (2016) on the welfare ideology that permeates work aimed at the low-income population. Based on the rationale outlined by Ivan Illich on humanitarian aid, the authors argue that the 'good intentions' of the ruling classes willing to 'help' other social groups end up imposing their own rules and worldview in standardized and prescriptive solutions. The practices of technical advisory and/or ATHIS may fall into 'assistentialism', hence inadvertently reproducing class domination.

AnP's technical advisory is not immune to the risks of this trend and even acknowledges that some of the aspects criticized above are reproduced in its initiatives, as theory is never faithfully replicated in practice. Nonetheless, in order to minimize such a tendency, it consistently resorts to the foundation of the theoretical-methodological apparatus guiding its technical advisory, as well as to constant critical reflection on its own operation.

Differing from more conventional practices in this sector, AnP views production not only as a final product but also as a broad set of social practices directed towards the transformation of space. These actions cover several aspects - beyond design decisions or work execution, in considering the social context in which they occur.

The work of AnP also stands out by focusing exclusively on women, recognizing their relevance in the struggle for housing, despite this being often hidden by hegemonic, macho and patriarchal structures rendering women invisible as decision-makers. Another striking feature of AnP is its consistent work with small groups, strengthening ties of cooperation between the participants.

Other constitutive aspects of the production of space, often overlooked in works focusing on the provision of conventional services or inserted in government initiatives, are significant in AnP's operation. These include, among others, technical-constructive skills disseminated in territories with a history of self-building, the history of a locality and its occupants' struggle to gain access to land, the impact of structural machismo that mainly affects women in domestic spaces, the collaborative potential for mutual help involving shared daily life, time dedicated to work management and execution, the urgency of interventions in response to current family issues, and access to materials and tools.

The technical advisory of *Arquitetura na Periferia*, characterized by a set of contextualized procedural actions rather than an exclusive focus on the architectural project or the result of its construction, opens up other perspectives for understanding and analyzing the production of space, which will be explored in this booklet.

The main goal of this booklet is to present the conceptual and methodological strategies as well as the detailed daily routine of *Arquitetura na Periferia*'s work in the urban periphery. Its starting point is the experiences of women who have already undergone the counseling process, bringing with them stories that can be unfolded into analyses and parallels with production studies and the works of Sérgio Ferro. It aims to present not only the progress of individual, collective, and modified spaces but also the numerous structural and contextual limitations that affect the reality of Brazilian women. It emphasizes the importance of shedding light on various factors that, in addition to technical and economic elements, also constitute the production of peripheral space from the perspective of the women who engage with it on a daily basis. Finally, this booklet brings reflections on how technical advisory practices aimed at advancing female autonomy can catalyze potentialities, question hegemonic logic, and focus on the empowerment of women.

The booklet is organized in ten chapters, the first of which provides an explanation of AnP's technical advisory method. The following eight chapters present cases of assisted women, their houses and construction sites, their life stories and how they relate to the actions carried out regarding the project. The last chapter provides the perspective of AnP's technical team, composed of women who interact with the participants and lay the foundation for the culmination of this idea-ideology-work. The cases are narratives incorporating direct quotes (in quotation marks), paraphrased reports of the women, and the perceptions of the authors, complemented by information retrieved from AnP's logbooks.³



Fig. 1: Map.

the method of arquitetura na periferia (AnP)

AnP's technical advisory work is carried out with groups of three to six women as this optimizes service and reduces operational costs, even though each project and the construction work are addressed individually. Small groups also allow for a more proportional participation among members than larger groups, thus generating an affective environment of trust and cooperation. Within the group, knowledge exchanges take place, which constitute important moments of empowerment among women and foster the dynamics of mutual help. Naturally, there are also frictions, shared problems, fights, and tensions. In such cases, strategies are sought to reach an agreement with the participants, architects, local agents, and psychologists collaborating with AnP to work with each group.

Group meetings are held weekly in locations where the women reside. The technical team, composed of an architect and urbanist, a local agent (usually a former participant in the project residing in the location), and an architecture and urban planning intern, list the topics to be addressed in the meetings and organize the group to execute the actions. The dynamics revolve around learning-by-doing and considering themes related to the planning and execution of projects and construction work. The work process follows a systematization that guides the activities yet unravels in different ways for each group, according to the situation of the participants and technical team. All topics proposed for discussion are selected by a collective decision from the group, setting up a flexible process that is open to participation and adaptation.

In this endeavour, the team makes an ongoing commitment to exercising empathy and listening. The reality of life for the participants consists of numerous socioeconomic difficulties in addition to issues of race, gender, and other types of violence. For more adequate support, each group can count on a volunteer psychologist, available for individual and collective care. In order to deal with the challenges faced by the target audience of the initiative, an effort is made to minimize bureaucratic barriers. In this sense, the project does not require any type of house or plot documentation, maximum and minimum parameters are not defined, and there are no rules for selecting participants according to specific profiles.

In general, the process is divided into four macro stages: mobilization, house and construction planning workshops, hands-on training workshops, and guidance.

The *mobilization* of new participants takes place in the selected territories between the end of the year and beginning of the following year, lasting an

average of four months. The local agents advertise the opening of new groups in the selected locations and meet with interested parties to explain the work proposal. This procedure includes referrals from former participants, invitations made by local agents, and promotion at bus stops, local facilities and businesses. For initiatives that are specific or carried out at other times, alternative forms of mobilization are set in motion, always attempting to seek the involvement of a local collective, facility or mobilizer in the chosen area.

After a series of meetings with interested parties, the group is formed and the technical advisory's action starts. The first step is listening to the participants' life stories and the details of their home construction. During these meetings, there are constant interpersonal exchanges, conversations, and sharing experiences, contributing to establish bonds of trust.

The *planning* stage consists of a set of thematic workshops that follow a logical order but are also open to group-by-group adaptation. The workshops aim to augment a group's knowledge of planning and management tools for house design and construction. Workshops focus on: reading architectural drawings, photography of houses, floor plan drawing, space measurement, scaling with the use of graph paper, design with the use of tracing paper over drawings, kits of miniature furniture and household items made to scale, personal finance, calculating materials, budgeting, hands-on training, and planning construction. In addition, technical visits are conducted alongside a master builder to assess the houses and the new construction or remodeling work required, as well as to research materials and prices in local depots. This stage lasts an average of six months and varies according to each group's availability. In the next stage, participants receive printed drawings that reflect the survey of their home in its initial condition and the basic design elaborated over the course of the workshops and discussions. At this point, participants are already familiar with spatial logic, have acquired new interests, and understand exactly what they want for their homes. They handle projects and drawings with ease as well as the evaluation of cost effectiveness for design and construction decisions.

It is worth mentioning that the hands-on workshops were requested by the participants of the first group formed in 2013, as they wanted to learn how to do practical work and save money used on labour. Ever since, these workshops have been highlights in the process and are highly anticipated. For planning, participants define the themes of the workshops, taking into consideration what they want to learn and the priorities for each house. The workshops are held at the women's homes and fulfill some of their needs, leading to resource optimization and immediate improvements.

The experience of working on an all-female construction site is transformative. It unravels another perspective on women's social role and potential, strengthening a critical sense against the limitations imposed by gender injustices. These are moments of mutual help, collective work, and joy, even though the heavy labour involves challenges, discomfort, and sweat. Still, at the end of this stage or the previous one (which varies from group to group), the project offers the possibility of taking (or not, depending on individual planning) a small interest-free loan for purchasing building materials or hiring labour. Subsequently, the participants pay back this amount in small installments from funds they save for that purpose.

Once the weekly meetings are concluded, the *guidance* stage begins, without a specific routine, following a natural flow dictated by the needs and interests of each woman. The technical team remains available to advise participants remotely, whereas the local agent is the point of contact in their respective locality. This stage has not been systematized yet and, like the entire process described so far, undergoes constant reformulation. However, AnP intentionally builds networks to keep former participants of the project mobilized and active, both for AnP initiatives and matters of interest to the women and their communities.

The work of AnP is associated with reflections presented by Sérgio Ferro in his works as he seeks to incorporate strategies detached from the hegemonic model of production of space. Ferro states that 'the fundamental function of architectural design today is to enable the commodity form of the architectural object' (Ferro, 1982, p. 2), having the task of 'imposing from the outside the constitution of the collective worker, the re-union of labour dispersed by the destruction of simple cooperation among workers, which results from the appropriation of the material means of production by capital' (Ferro, 2015, p. 103).

In fact, these statements illustrate the function of architectural design when inserted in the context of the capitalist mode of production. However, it is possible to draw a counterpoint to this with evidence from the work context of AnP, self-building for housing purposes does not follow the conventional logic of capitalist production of space that features commodity design or a 'design-product'. Hence, when giving technical advice to self-builders, AnP seeks to elaborate a different logic for the use of design, regarding it as a tool for emancipation rather than for dominance over production in order to extract more value. In addition, in the technical advisory model proposed by AnP, design functions as a procedural tool, developed and utilized by the group of women who will construct or manage the construction of their own spaces. Therefore, it does not constitute a design that is separated from them or configures an 'external imposition'. Instead, it functions as a facilitator for self-builders to engage in decision-making regarding their space while gaining an overall understanding of the construction work.

Ferro also emphasizes a point about the logic of the construction site operation: 'The teams, and especially the workers, are confined to limited tasks within a restricted area. Technically torn between the not always easy autonomy of the artisan and the empty availability of the industrial worker, the manufacturing worker seems like a servant to his trade' (Ferro, 1982, p. 11).

AnP's work highlights that, in addition to dominance over the worker, capital also generates another mechanism of exploitation: structural machismo, which places women engaged in building their homes in a submissive position. This even happens on their own construction sites in relation to a partner, relative, or service provider. Such a scenario reinforces AnP's efforts towards female empowerment and the rejection of this logic of submission and exploitation.

Nonetheless, despite these efforts to foster an actively collaborative planning process, establish a less oppressive construction site, and engage in the feminist struggle, AnP's work still encounters obstacles and inconsistencies inherent to an operation inserted in the capitalist context, as explained in many of Ferro's criticisms. The construction techniques utilized are still exhausting and physically demanding; the most commonly used construction materials, such as cement and reinforced concrete, are manufactured by large industries through the exploitation of workers and natural resources. Additionally, there is a recurrence of poorly executed services that not only result in the waste of materials and increased construction costs but also reinforce the aesthetic requirement for finishes.

adriana and drawing as a tool for emancipation

This business of drawing has changed everything. I mean, of drawing the house. Why? I pictured my home in a different way because I didn't see a house project in it. And with the drawing on paper, I was able to see where I could put a door, change everything. Then I shaped, like, the house itself. You can see it's a house. It didn't look like one before. It looked like a weird little cage lying around.

Adriana Martins, 2013

Adriana Martins reluctantly joined a group of women who were to learn how to remodel their homes and design the alterations they had long desired. She and her three children lived from day one in the Dandara occupation, an area established in April 2009, in the Northern region of Belo Horizonte, the capital of the state of Minas Gerais. Dandara had been in existence for five



Fig. 2: Doing it without fear.

years when architect Carina Guedes managed to gather three women – Adriana, Ana Paula, and Luciana – to form the first group for the project *Arquitetura na Periferia* (AnP).

Adriana's children were nineteen, seven, and four years old, respectively, at the time Carina invited her to participate in her master's experiment. Juliander, the teenage son, worked every other day and attended high school. The youngest, Gilvander, who was named in honor of the priest who helped Dandara residents in their struggle for the right to housing, attended school full-time. Lucas, the middle son, studied in the morning and needed special care, requiring his mother to frequently accompany him for medical treatment.

It was not, and had never been, easy for Adriana to be a single mother and head of the family, even though that was, to some extent, a common family scenario in Brazil. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), households headed by women in the country have reached 50%, and their number has been growing to the point of doubling in the past 25 years.⁴ In Adriana's situation, getting a stable job with a signed contract seems impossible, so she relies on Lucas's support as an important source of family income. To increase her earnings, she takes on cleaning jobs, however, due to the responsibilities for her children, Adriana can only occasionally accept offers of work. She also sells handmade adornments, small roses shaped from pieces of fabric.

Adriana defines herself as a person with no regular occupation but a lot of disposition to work with anything. She is feisty, a typical attribute of the women of Dandara.

Upon receiving an invitation to participate in the project, she became suspicious and at first resisted joining it. In her view, there had already been so many people approaching the Dandara community only to take advantage of others, that AnP's initiative might be yet another attempt to deceive the residents. Her suspicion eventually gave way as work was carried out and trust was built among the women in the group.

Adriana's house had four rooms, all without plastering, flooring, or finishes. It comprised two bedrooms, a living room combined with the kitchen, and a bathroom. Despite its limited comforts, there was an affectionate bond with that space. Certain ornaments and features, which revealed Adriana's personality, made that affection evident. An example of this was an arched wall Adriana insisted on adding, even if precariously, just to have her 'American-style' kitchen in Dandara.

Adriana joined the AnP project only a month after the last two rooms were completed. It had not been easy to get to that point, and her idea was to include finishes for the family to finally enjoy a cozy, comfortable home.

What Adriana didn't know, however, was that she was about to face a new challenge. Right from the start, the first meeting involved 'homework'. For the next meeting, she had to provide a drawing of her house in its current state, in addition to measurements and photos of the property. To facilitate this, she received a kit containing a folder, tape measure, clipboard, pencil, eraser, sharpener, and pen, along with white paper, backing paper, tracing paper, labels, a notepad, working guide, and camera.

During the meeting, the architect taught the participants how to use the kit and take measurements and thus apply their newly acquired knowledge at home. They also learnt to read and decipher common elements of architectural plans so they could draw their own. The drawing with measurements, which architects call an architectural survey, was to be presented the following week. Adriana got excited about the idea and felt valued, in high spirits to do something new.

To her surprise, completing this first task was not hard at all. She made the drawing of her house almost at the last minute, in the usual rush, and, for the first time, did not view her residence as just 'two boxes.' Now, she could see it was a house indeed: that drawing 'hanged everything' for her. She even identified an issue that had been bothering her in no small way. It turned out that, in order to access her bedroom, she had to walk through her teenage son's room. It was such an inconvenience that Adriana even hired a bricklayer to solve the problem. He, nonetheless, was taking his time to start the job and nothing had been done so far. That ended up being beneficial, as now Adriana realized that the solution proposed by the bricklayer did not solve the problem entirely, and her children would still need to access the bathroom through her bedroom. Looking at the drawing on paper, she realized that to solve the problem it was sufficient to close a gap in one wall and open a passage in another. Her anguish and uncertainty, caused by the construction work, which had been postponed indefinitely by the bricklayer, without her knowing how much it would cost or if she would have the means to pay for it, were replaced with confidence from drawing up and following a plan.

Ideas matured at each meeting but not without many comings and goings. Adriana decided to design a new bedroom for her eldest son, so the younger ones could also have a room of their own and she would no longer need to share hers with them.

This, however, turned out to be not such a simple task. It would be necessary to give up either a portion of her vegetable garden, located at the back of the plot, or her banana tree, planted in front of the house. She valued both and had made sure to incorporate them in her drawing of the house.

Eventually, after much ‘walking’ around the plot and once Adriana had learnt to calculate areas, volumes, the quantity of materials needed, and plan the construction stages, adding all costs, the new room was no longer a priority.

In order to save even more on renovations, the three participants in the AnP project came up with the idea of learning basic construction. Architect Carina Guedes then contacted Cenir, a master builder involved with AnP to this day. She taught the women how to get their hands dirty, which greatly excited the three Dandara residents.

Adriana ‘trembled like a leaf’ on the first day of the construction workshop. There were three workshops in total, between November and December 2013. Led by Cenir, Adriana and her colleagues learnt how to execute masonry, plastering, plumbing, and demolitions. For women, learning how to build was already unprecedented, let alone with a female master builder! The participants were responsible for providing the tools and materials that would be used in their homes. In one workshop session, plastering was applied to a wall in Adriana’s house; in the next, they worked on the plumbing in Luciana’s house. However, it was during the third session, when they erected walls in Ana Paula’s house, that Adriana noticed a significant change that transcended physical space: ‘I realized that I didn’t need to depend on others any longer, that I was able to take care of what I wanted myself.’

It was said and done. Adriana herself solved the inconvenience related to the bedrooms: she purchased bricks, cement, and sand, demolishing one wall and building another. Now she no longer needed to go through her son’s room to access her own. It was the first step in a series of changes that would take place in her home and her life. ‘So, I’m moving forward from now on, putting all my energy into purchasing materials and building without fear, since I have the ability to do it,’ she says.

luhh dandara and female empowerment

This project showed me there’s no specific area for me; I can choose whatever I want. There’s nothing preventing me from building my house [...] sometimes, we stumble upon the awareness of knowledge, right? I mean, knowing how to work and having the awareness of our physical strength. As women, we think we won’t be able to carry bricks and concrete, but I ended up realizing I have the strength to do it.

Luhh Dandara, 2017

For women, it's an opportunity to learn how to make improvements and break ties with the macho process that constitutes the construction of a house. Doing this from a female perspective improves a woman's life and allows her more time for activities beyond the household demands.

Luhh Dandara, 2017

People living in a community don't need an architect; instead, they need a lawyer, a doctor, and a dentist, Luciana da Cruz used to say. However, she received an invitation from an architect named Carina to participate in a project she was developing in the Dandara community, where Luciana lived. Even though she found that to be a crazy idea, considering she was 29 years old and had three children, Luciana decided that she was even crazier and chose to participate in the *Arquitetura na Periferia* project. She joined it in 2013 as a participant and mobilizer, and stayed on until the present. It has been ten years of partnership so far. Today, Luciana prefers to be called Luhh Dandara, carrying in her signature the name of the community. In addition to serving as a local AnP agent and a reference for women willing to participate in the project, she is one of the founders and current executive director of the Institute for Advisory to Women and Innovation (IAMÍ).

Before arriving at Dandara, Luciana went through various situations in the search for housing. At first glance, her trajectory seems lengthy for such a young person. She has lived in other occupation plots, in *favelas*, alongside a highway and even on the steps of a church. At the age of four, she had already experienced living in a canvas tent with her mother and brother, where they remained until her mother built a house in New Aaron Reis, a place with no electricity available even for an illegal connection. Drinking water was only delivered by a water truck while at the same time there were floods due to the nearby presence of the Onça Stream.

After the birth of her first daughter, Luciana left her mother's house, and her struggle to find housing continued until she arrived at Dandara. Among her experiences, she shared that she had spent countless nights standing by the bunk bed in her shack, fearing that one of the numerous rats would bite her four-year-old daughter.

When she heard about Dandara, she decided to move there, not trusting government housing programs, to which she had applied without ever receiving a response. At the time, she worked as an office assistant but made a point in attending the community coordination meetings, which took place twice a week. Luciana would show up with guts and determination, until she finally got her plot at Dandara. She was starting to build a tent there when



Fig. 3: I create whatever I want to happen.

a coordinator removed her from the plot, declaring she should live with him because she was a single parent. Faced with this and afraid of being misunderstood by the residents if she denounced the harassment she was suffering, Luciana decided to leave the occupation area. However, being strong-willed and good at doing business, the next year she was back. Determined to make herself respected, she sold her shack by the Onça Stream and purchased land in Dandara. By February 2010, she and her two daughters were living in the occupation area.

Three years later, when she joined AnP, her house had a garage that served as a bedroom, a room split into a sleeping area and a living space, and a kitchen in the shape of a long corridor, as she described. All was rough, without plastering, finishes, or coatings. At the time, she lived with her husband and three children. When Carina, the architect for the project, asked her about the improvements she wished to make, her answer was always: to build columns and a roof slab for her home. Luciana feared it would fall down as it lacked a concrete structure. This fear originated from a past experience and was a serious concern for her. Luciana also wanted to build a second floor to fulfill each child's dream of having their own room.

By then, AnP, which was still an experiment and part of Carina's master's research, had the goal of advising women to solve specific problems and carry out simple remodeling. Luhh's requirements for constructing a structural framework, a roof slab, and a new floor went beyond that. Over time, however, this type of request became a regular occurrence for AnP. Today, the team understands that the size of a remodeling endeavour does not matter. The work is done so participants have access to the knowledge, tools, and even the encouragement they need to achieve their goal, big or small. Luhh herself explains that, in the project, participants find space to express their ideas and how they wish the advisory process to develop.

Luciana's trajectory in the AnP points to another significant element of this work: the collective construction executed by women. At the beginning of the process, when she presented her house drawing for the survey, along with photos of what she liked and disliked, what she enjoyed the least was the tap. It was the only water outlet on the premises, and, in addition to being outside, the tap was installed so low that it was not possible to place even a bucket under it for carrying water to the utility sink at the back of the plot. So, to get water, Luciana had to go to the neighbour's yard.

It should be noted that women from the urban periphery spend, on average, up to five times more hours on unpaid care work than men.⁵ It was no surprise, then, that Luhh's husband promised to fix the tap but never got

around to do it. The problem was solved by participants from the AnP group. When they suggested learning basic construction to save money (that was how the AnP construction workshops were born), Carina invited master builder Cenir to teach them how to cut, sand, glue, and assemble the pipe connections to raise the tap. Furthermore, they also installed a flush toilet.

Luciana managed to start the construction of the columns with an interest-free loan from AnP. Some time later, after her group had disbanded, she sent Carina a video with a memorable scene: Luciana carrying the last bucket of concrete on her shoulder to complete the slab. That sparked a great celebration.

Luhh Dandara's home also became a centre for the community. AnP meetings continued to take place in her garage, with new groups of women forming. She also hosted the classes of Cursinho Dandara on the premises, an initiative she helped to establish, aimed at assisting students from the urban periphery to enter a university, among other activities. However, the deciding factor for converting a portion of her house into a communal space was the development of her own project, named Dandara: a Aura da Luta (Dandara: the Aura of Struggle). Due to (another) abuse that occurred in her family, Luhh created this movement, which functions as a support network for women who are victims of violence. With the establishment of Aura in 2018, she was determined to resume the construction of her second floor.

The following year, AnP got support to hold its first Masonry for Women training course, and the second floor in Luhh's house was the perfect place to host it. The workshop days were intensive, involving many hands, sweat, and tears as fifteen women learnt to erect the walls of the house designed by Luhh back in 2013.

Today, Aura da Luta's installation, with its yellow gate featuring a large purple logo in the centre to signal the symbol of feminism, is a reference point in the community. Luhh lives on the second floor, which is mostly completed and exudes her personality, with artistic paintings she created herself on the walls in each room. There are three bedrooms, a balcony, an office, and, for her own use, a bedroom with an en-suite bathtub: it is a luxury that Luhh Dandara definitely deserves.

Besides acknowledging this space and making it a home as opposed to a mere housing construction project for the family, I usually say that I remodeled my house and myself, my body and my ways... Everything in me has changed; I shaped myself through these construction experiences and learnt to see my home beyond just a place for resting after work or starting work

once again... It's the space that I have built and holds a lot of me, as well as of several other women, as it was made through a collective endeavour. I worked on the house, but not by myself. Others worked with me. That changed not only me but all of them, in the way we see, respect, and care for one another. That changes relationships, we meet on the street with a welcoming stance, we chat, think and care for one another.

Luhh Dandara

simone and collective work for leverage

I had been discouraged, living with my daughter already for a while without a bathroom, and the project gave me purpose.

Simone Alves, 2018

I think my self-esteem was the first thing that changed. I discovered something I was able to do. It was great.

Simone Alves, 2021

The first permanent structure built in the Eliana Silva occupation, where Simone Alves lives, was the community nursery. In 2012, most people fighting for the right to housing there were women and mothers. Soon, there were many children in need of a safe place, in the midst of the violent process that usually unfolds when a group of people claim the right to housing in Brazil. It is one of the most unequal countries in the world, historically marked by social injustices that are reproduced to this day. In fact, one of the slogans of the movement that founded the occupation, the Struggle in the Neighborhoods, Villages and Favelas Movement (Movimento de Luta nos Bairros, Vilas e Favelas – MLB), is that as long as housing is a privilege, occupation is a right.'

The occupation, which bears the name of a woman, Eliana Silva, an MLB activist who dedicated her life to the struggle for housing, resisted. Nowadays, Tia Carminha Community Daycare serves children not only from the occupation but also from the surrounding area. The women managing the place, often as volunteers and with great sacrifice, do so to allow other mothers to leave the house and work to support themselves and their children.

Simone was working at Tia Carminha Daycare when, in 2017, she was invited to participate in the first AnP group in that occupation. The invitation



Fig. 4: The first thing to change was self-esteem

came from a colleague who also worked there. Incidentally, all five participants in this group worked in the daycare centre and knew about Simone's hardship. This led them to insist that she consider joining the project, even though she was quite dispirited.

At the age of 33, newly separated, Simone found herself a single mother, living with her five-year-old daughter Duda in a two-room house with no bathroom. The house had been designed and built by her former partner. He had even started building a bathroom, located outside the house which did not make any sense for Simone. However, when he left, the construction was abandoned with only a few rows of bricks in place. The situation of not having a bathroom greatly embarrassed Simone, but she did not believe she would be able to solve the problem amid the more pressing challenges in her life at the time.

In the first conversation with the group, the women asked Simone what she would like to do in her home, and the immediate reply was: 'To build the roof slab.' The other participants and the AnP team were puzzled, for the two rooms in her house were already covered with a slab. She then explained: 'I want to build a slab over the whole plot.' In an attempt to understand her desire, the others asked why she wanted to cover the entire property. The answer was simple: 'Because that's what people do, they build slabs.'

Following the AnP technical advisory method, in the initial stage Simone learnt how to take measurements and draw the floor plan of her house. Then, she was instructed to use the transparent backing and tracing paper she had received, placing the sheets on top of the survey she had prepared, and try to design the house with the intended changes. In the next meeting, upon her arrival, Simone said she could not imagine things 'like this... so far beyond.' She had indeed made more than a simple drawing. Instead, she had designed a completely new house, which would be built over the current one by executing the slab covering the entire plot.

Her idea was to live upstairs and rent out the space downstairs. However, to build everything, she would need to invest a significant amount of money while still living in that two-room house with no bathroom for an unknown length of time. Furthermore, once the slab was constructed, the current house would become dark and unventilated. At that moment, the women participating in the meeting could not tell if Simone unconsciously resisted examining her existing house because something there still caused her too much pain. Realizing the subtleties and feelings behind Simone's design allowed the group to provide her with support and help her, at least, come up with something that would bring more comfort to Simone and her daughter in the short term.

Grabbing pencils and placing a sheet of baking paper on top of the house survey, they started to test other options. Simone also held a pencil; Carina, the AnP architect, did the same, more so to encourage her than to actually draw. Hence, the design of the house, finally including an indoor bathroom, was done. In addition, it featured a new location for the utility sink area, more protected from the rain, and a room for her daughter Duda. From then on, a few more meetings were carried out, during which Simone learnt new skills such as measuring areas, quantifying materials, and planning the stages of construction work, as well as the basics of personal finance. Little by little, Simone realized she was capable of doing much more than she had expected.

When it came to planning the construction workshops for the group, the AnP team explained that each participant would have a workshop in their home. The goal was for them to master the skills needed for desired improvements or those they were interested in learning. Simone's case, however, posed a significant challenge. A construction workshop alone would not be enough for her to materialize the sketched toilet. That was when the women in the group decided to join forces to make it happen. Together with the AnP staff and residents of the occupation, they dug holes for the foundation. Thus, the first collective effort of *Arquitetura na Periferia* was born, and it turned out to be quite different from conventional efforts.

While the women worked on the construction site, the men cooked lunch in the kitchen. During an extended holiday, the group carried out construction, enabling instructor Cenir to conduct the first workshop and teach the women how to prepare the steel structure and perform the concreting. After a few collective efforts, brick donations, and a masonry workshop with Cenir, Simone's bathroom began to take shape, with the walls at half height.

Construction undertaken this way, through collective effort, progresses slowly. The work is carried out only on weekends and based on the availability of participants. Nevertheless, when Simone saw her emerging bathroom, she was moved. Now she knew what needed to be done. Simone then found a way to obtain additional resources and, not wanting to wait any longer, hired a contractor to finish the construction.

Taking part in a learning process with an all-female group, with whom she could share her fears, difficulties, dreams, and limitations in a safe and welcoming environment, facilitated a major personal transformation in Simone's life. In her own words, it felt like she had woken up. The myth that it is up to the man to decide what the house should be like, while the woman is put in the uncomfortable position of waiting, had been debunked. She realized what needed to be done and, with the support and encouragement of some of the women around her, gained the confidence to make her wish a reality.

The construction of the bathroom inspired me to tackle other things. If you ask me to carry out a project, I can more or less manage that. We erected walls and installed the window in my bedroom. It felt good to get my hands dirty and realize I could build my home to make it more comfortable.

Simone Alves, 2021

chay and the path towards autonomy

I had never pictured myself making changes beyond material and concrete aspects. Things happened from within to materialize without, though. Knowledge brought me a sense of empowerment. I realized I could go beyond what I had imagined: that I could have autonomy.

Cheyenne Miguel, 2019

Cheyenne Miguel was 33 years old when she joined Arquitetura da Periferia in April 2018. She had been interested for some time in the project when a former participant told her another group was about to be formed. So Chay (Cheyenne's nickname) was excited and quite eager to get started. Her eyes twinkled. She saw the chance she had been waiting for to improve her home and quality of life.

Once she joined the project, she was pleasantly surprised as the experience exceeded her expectations. Reflecting on AnP's work with women, she notes that the meetings and workshops go beyond merely teaching something new. They are about joining forces, which enhances technical learning but also involves developing empathy, collaboration, inner strength, and personal growth.

Before joining AnP, Cheyenne was the coordinator of the Struggle in the Neighbourhoods, Villages and Favelas Movement (Movimento de Luta nos Bairros, Vilas e Favelas, MLB) in the city of Contagem, in the state of Minas Gerais. She lived there with her son in a rented property. Previously, while still married to his father, she had missed a much sought-after vacancy in the Paulo Freire occupation, in the Barreiro area of Belo Horizonte, the capital of Minas Gerais. Thanks to the domestic violence she suffered, all her efforts to avoid renting were in vain. After separating from her husband, she continued to fight for the movement and earned her right to a plot in the desired location in June 2017. At the time, Cheyenne did odd jobs and photographic work. Currently, she is a professional model and also a local agent in the



Fig. 5: I have a vision of the future.

project, providing support for the technical advisory actions. She is also a member of the Institute for Advisory to Women and Innovation (IAMÍ), where she holds the position of director of Community Relations.

As a single mother to her son Yan, Cheyenne lived for a long time on her own in a room assembled from plywood at the Paulo Freire occupation. Meanwhile, her son was temporarily left in the care of relatives in Contagem. To construct a two-room house with a bathroom utilizing masonry, she hired a bricklayer and helped him as a labourer. This took place before she joined the AnP project. Therefore, when it started, the three rooms had already been constructed, even though the brick was still exposed, and the house had no finishes.

Chay and a neighbor were the first participants in an AnP project from another area. Despite being based in Paulo Freire, she and the neighbour joined the group in the Eliana Silva occupation, located approximately one kilometre away. It was the first time the AnP team tested a hybrid group, bringing together women from two nearby locations. Since Paulo Freire was still a recent occupation and had a high demand for advisory services, it was a way to initiate contact with the residents of that area. It worked out so well that, soon after, the project opened a new group there.

Chay said she was over the moon with the opportunity of joining the project to learn how to improve her house. She was assiduous in the meetings and tasks, always very committed. During the work with the group, she expressed her need for a workshop on laying ceramic flooring in her kitchen. The group then carried out the activity, guided by Cenir. Soon after, Chay applied her new skills to lay the entire kitchen floor herself. Gradually, she implemented further improvements in her house using the knowledge she had acquired within the group and later as a member of the technical team.

Cheyenne often says she learnt so much from Cenir that her own reputation has now spread throughout the Paulo Freire occupation. This led her to conduct an on-site workshop with a new AnP group. The participants were eager to learn, and upon discovering Chay's skills, they arranged to hold a ceramic flooring workshop without the project's technical team. In addition to improving her own home, Chay has been sharing the knowledge she gained. In her view, the mutual aid in AnP projects demonstrated that women could learn from one another and ensure the work flowed smoothly. According to her, the workshop she taught was wonderful, and even better, it showed that the ladies were able to replicate her teachings at home. The experience of being on the 'other end' was an incredible accomplishment for Chay.

Furthermore, learning construction jobs, typically dominated by male

know how, evidences a gain of autonomy for the women. In the context of construction work, Chay says a woman may be the property owner, but the bricklayer will try to influence her and direct her down a path that does not align with what she wants. She herself experienced this after instructing a bricklayer to install a door on one side of the house; when she returned home from work, she saw that the door had been installed on the other side. This is why, she says, learning construction with women makes all the difference. She had never met a female master builder, even more so a great one like Cenir, who admonishes the students and teaches them how to do a good job.

In a live session with architect Mariana Borel, streamed during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Chay concludes: 'I was able to pass on everything I learnt. Being on the other end, teaching, is an amazing experience. When I joined the project, I wouldn't dream of having the ability to do this. I can't put into words my joy when I watch the ladies build their children's rooms, kitchens, bathrooms... when I see dreams come true out of paper.'

For her, the crucial factor for achieving all these changes was the sensitivity of the women teaching and learning and helping one another out. Moreover, she emphasizes the importance of putting oneself in someone else's shoes to understand each individual's specific needs, as each person has their own way of learning.

With all this accumulated knowledge, Cheyenne was able to safely and independently carry out the expansion of her home, attaining the desired results. Her plot at Paulo Freire is situated on a steep slope. The access street is at the top, and from there, the land descends towards the back of the property. Chay constructed her house on this lower portion of the terrain. She did that following the suggestion of a bricklayer who had initially assisted her with the construction. According to him, building the house on the lower end would reduce immediate costs. Now, for her expansion project, Chay planned a new construction on the upper end, leveled with the street access to the property. She designed a garage, a larger kitchen, and a living room. For a long-term construction, several project possibilities were studied: initially, the new building would be connected to the old one via a staircase, remaining with two levels; later, Chay considered adding a second floor to the new building and then isolating the access to each floor to rent out the lower floor, where she currently resides.

Joining AnP changed her perspective. When asked about what has changed in her life, she replies straightforwardly: It's not about what's changed but rather about what's changing. It's an ongoing process to this day.' In addition to installing ceramic floors in her kitchen, she also tiled the bathroom, adjusted the position of the toilet, ran electrical wiring for sockets and

switches, and plastered the indoor walls, thereby ensuring greater comfort in the house. For now, the only room with finished floors is the kitchen. Nonetheless, Chay is quite happy because, as she says, from now on she will be able to handle everything without relying on anyone.

On the outside, she managed to solve the most pressing and risky structural problems. Since the house was constructed below street level, and with no public drainage infrastructure installed, water would run down into the house whenever it rained. To address this, she initially built a retaining wall, thus preventing potential landslides from the upper to the lower portion of the terrain. Then, she redirected the flow of water to prevent rain from entering the house. Finally, she constructed a permanent access staircase. Previously, Chay had an improvised wooden staircase that, in her opinion, was quite dangerous. She also started laying the foundation for the new building, which is progressing well.

Chay achieved all of this with clarity and confidence in her decision-making, even incurring debt (now almost fully paid off) to solve the structural problems that caused her great concern. She is indeed a self-management paradigm. First, she created a financial plan and considered the logic of budgeting for materials and labour before commencing construction. She quoted prices, made purchases, hired contractors, and managed the worksite while also getting her hands dirty. Little by little, she has transformed the house according to her project and is filled with pride for all these achievements.

She sees herself growing on this journey, alongside *Arquitetura na Periferia*. Chay was already quite active in AnP as a volunteer, but when formally invited to integrate in the project, she was taken by surprise. Being valued and having her ability acknowledged made her 'flip the switch,' as she was recovering from emotional frailties that at one point had shaken her deeply. Looking at herself and seeing beyond the pain was difficult. However, according to Chay, spending time and sharing experiences with other women made it possible. As she looks back, she sees much struggle in her life. But from now on, Chay is confident that the victories will be far greater than the battles.

First, before you learn something new, you meet new people. In the project, I had the chance to meet people who wanted to use their knowledge, what they had studied, to help others. This opens your eyes and influences how you perceive your house. Every time I enter mine, I view it from a different perspective. I envision the future. I envision how things can improve and what I can do.

Cheyenne Miguel, 2019

carla, fabíola, and a taste for construction work

Learning these skills was very satisfying because, until then, I had to hire contractors and pay them to fulfill my needs. Not anymore. I no longer have to depend on others; I already know which materials to purchase and how much I'm going to spend on the job, so it's just wonderful.

Carla Renata, 2022

A woman working in construction is rare, let alone a group of women working together. Carla Renata da Silva and Fabíola Hoffmann are neighbors at the Paulo Freire occupation. They joined the same advisory group for an *Arquitetura na Periferia* project in 2018. Months later, they were preparing the foundation of a wall to dig the caissons, tie reinforcements, and pour concrete for the structure's columns.

The wall was to enclose the front of Carla's house – a much desired and needed addition to provide more security for her and her daughters. In addition, it would block the wind, which was quite strong in that spot. This endeavour was only made possible thanks to the masonry training course they had attended through AnP in 2019. With their training and Cenir's guidance, the wall was successfully erected. It marked a milestone in the history of both women as the first construction job they undertook together.

Before joining the project, they were already friends and, along with other members of the group, spent time together working on collective initiatives in the occupation or looking after each other's children. Like their colleagues, both had already participated as helpers in other construction projects and, therefore, had basic knowledge in this area. The duo's enthusiasm for the opportunity to get their hands dirty was obvious. Brimming with pride, they told their companions about the small repairs they had already done at their friends' homes, whom they assisted from time to time.

The prospect of improving the quality of life at home without depending on partners, husbands, or bricklayers was central to Carla and Fabíola's AnP group. It inspired the participants, encouraging them to strengthen their network of mutual aid in the project and beyond it. An example of such initiatives was the workshop the women organized with Chay to learn from her how to install the bathroom flooring in the house of another participant, Michelle.

It was not exactly easy, as several unusual obstacles arose along the way, and they had to resort once more to Cenir's guidance. Among other things, they operated a borrowed jackhammer to unclog an old pipe in the bathroom,



Fig. 6: A sense of freedom.

covered with concrete by mistake. Setbacks, however, are a part of the learning process and construction work. The workshop was successfully concluded, the ceramic flooring was laid, and Michelle later installed it in other parts of the house as well, applying the techniques she had mastered that day.

Their thirst for knowledge grew, sparked when they were taught how to draw their own houses using a tape measure and clipboard, graph paper and tracing paper. These tools helped the duo gain a deeper understanding of the challenge and explore possible solutions to overcome it. At the time, the walls of Fabíola's bathroom still had the bricks exposed, which greatly annoyed her. It made cleaning difficult and gave the place a dark and unpleasant, unfinished appearance.

Once the women mastered floor installation, they requested AnP to conduct a workshop on wall tiling in Fabíola's bathroom. There, participants learnt how to mix mortar, prepare the walls, level the first row of tiles, use spacers, and install the rest. Thus, the bathroom walls were partially clad by the women.

The workshop at Fabíola's took place at the end of 2019 and in mid-2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the world scenario changed. The need to stay home, both due to social isolation and the lack of jobs, brought the duo of friends even closer to continue their work. Since all the materials for the bathroom had already been purchased by Fabíola, Carla decided to help her finish the wall cladding. Although they were aware that they hadn't fully mastered this technique yet, the two put their practical knowledge into the task. They were open to trial, error, and success.

In high spirits, they exchanged banter, laughed, and exuded pride for the small and big breakthroughs in their work. This is evident in a photo of Fabíola and Carla laying the ceramic tiles. The image captures the moment when the white tiles had already covered nearly the entire wall. Fabíola poses on a scaffold with a trowel in her hand and a smile on her face. Carla, shown in profile, stands on the floor, laughing and looking at the person behind the camera. Next to them, on the scaffolding, there is a plastic basin filled with mortar. Their joy is almost palpable, and the image exudes involvement and movement. It is an iconic photo.

Throughout their collaborative project, both women maintained constant communication with the technical team at AnP. They would often send questions, share their adventures, and show their progress.

In general, during the isolation period of the pandemic, a large volume of construction work was carried out at the participants' homes. In addition to being stuck at home, the women received emergency aid from the federal

government, which, along with their savings, allowed for the purchase of building materials. For AnP, the continuity of the improvement works in the houses, even without the physical presence of the technical team, confirmed the relevance of work based on knowledge exchange. Unlike a proposal that delivers ready-made housing improvement, the educational angle and active participation of the women involved allowed them to develop and execute their projects independently, even if they required support at times.

Fabiola accurately defines her sense of autonomy when the new skills began transforming her relationship with her own home: 'Now we enjoy staying indoors far more. We feel more comfortable, and it's much better. There's great satisfaction in knowing how to do it, that you can do it indeed, and did it yourself. You proceed with more care, love, and affection. You do everything the right way.'

Carla, on the other hand, shares that she was in the process of separating from her husband at the start of the project. It was a difficult time for her. She says that, if it hadn't been for the psychological support offered by AnP and the encouragement provided by the collective work, it would have been far more painful. She was one of the first women assisted by the team of volunteer psychologists that was established in 2018 with the aim of addressing other aspects of the lives and subjectivities of women from the urban periphery. In addition to the psychological support she received, the excitement of learning new skills was crucial for Carla to muster the courage to rebuild her life after separation.

In the process, she discovered something that, until then, she did not know about herself: a taste for construction work. She clung with such force to the idea of learning and having autonomy to improve her home, that she turned the experience into a career. From then on, she never stopped.

In 2021, still during the pandemic, Carla and Fabiola were invited to participate in a bioconstruction project to be executed with - earth plaster and paint for a renowned exhibition of Brazilian architecture. This project adopted non-industrial techniques that went beyond the ubiquitous use of cement, requiring a lighter preparation and execution — earth paint, for example, is made of natural pigments derived from the earth. Unusually, it involved a female-only construction site like those of AnP, and their work was a success. In this job opportunity outside the occupation, for which the women were paid, they gained more confidence and respect for the skills they had developed. During the project, they learnt interesting techniques that they wanted to try at home as well.

Architect Mariana Borel, who had coordinated the Paulo Freire group, was taken by surprise when, later, she stopped by Carla's house and found one of the walls entirely coated in earth paint. Featuring a dark background framed by

a number of white lines, the wall formed a pattern of small bricks. Carla explained to Mariana that she had enjoyed preparing and manipulating earth render. Using it in her home was an opportunity to put into practice what she had learnt. So she grabbed it and, as she tells, 'I started doing crazy stuff out of my head.'

Carla's creative autonomy points to a path towards craftsmanship, offering greater freedom compared to traditional practices (or 'know how' in the words of architect Sérgio Ferro). On that wall, she used her knowledge without focusing on providing a service or fulfilling an order envisioned by a contractor. She was, therefore, able to link technique with experimentation, attaining the desired result. This is vastly different from the dynamics on construction sites, according to Sérgio Ferro. He emphasizes how the labour situation on hegemonic worksites, dominated by capital and focused on its interests, leads the worker to 'sectioned' situations, performing 'limited tasks reduced to a narrow area.'

Since then, Carla has installed ceramic flooring throughout her terrace and used metal scraps from her daughter's toy to make a railing for the stairs. She also plastered the entire house, laid new flooring in the bedrooms, hallway, and kitchen as well as changed the position of a window, installed a kitchen sink, and even renovated the wall constructed in 2019. Fabiola made significant progress as well: she executed the subfloor and installed ceramic flooring throughout her house, constructed a roof slab, applied ceramic finish on the kitchen walls, assembled a countertop, which she also coated with earth paint, and finished her bathroom.

The confidence they acquired with these experiences led to Carla and Fabíola making a name for themselves in the construction market. Opportunities in the sector began to emerge, providing them with financial autonomy and security to support their daughters, in addition to enabling both to continue investing in improvements to their homes. Today, Fabiola works for a construction and home repair company with an all-female team. Carla, in turn, worked on other construction projects alongside Cenir and was eventually hired as a staff bricklayer by a construction company. She is also a teaching assistant in the AnP workshops, guiding women and taking part in other activities.

Despite their numerous achievements, the construction scene remains challenging for them as the duo still faces machismo and oppression on the construction site. Before their current jobs, where there is more acceptance, they went through bad experiences, being mistreated, and belittled by colleagues on the construction site. The inclusion of women in construction

work further highlights the precarious and hostile environment faced by workers in this industry in general.

By understanding the gender challenges and recognizing the specific difficulties of working in construction, we gain a clearer understanding of how important it was for Carla and Fabíola to start their learning process and practice within a female-only group. This allowed them to expose their fears, difficulties, dreams, and victories in a safe and supportive environment. It made them stronger and enabled them to reject certain conditions, show discernment in choosing the best options, and to fight battles along the way.

The AnP project taught me virtually everything I know in the construction sector. I will cherish it for the rest of my life as it gave me a sense of freedom. Today I feel free, I don't depend on others to do things for me. So I think the main thing the project gave me is freedom.

Carla Renata, 2021

vilma and the women's construction site

How can I put it? Everything relied on their strength because I didn't believe that it would work or that I could pull it off. I had no means whatsoever to pay a bricklayer or purchase materials. It's pretty complicated, you know? I took a gourmet ice cream course and became a street vendor. So I used to think: 'If I sell enough ice cream to buy one bag of cement for us to work on the next day, I'm happy.' On an occasion, I made enough for three bags. That's how we managed to work. I'm so grateful, you know? I'm grateful to each woman who left her mark here, on these bricks.

Vilma Dias, 2023

Constructing your own house is a steep challenge, and yet that was the goal of Vilma Dias, 53, when she joined the Arquitetura na Periferia project in 2019. Saving a portion of her pension while on leave from work due to a serious depression, Vilma was able to buy a plot in Ravena, in the metropolitan area of Belo Horizonte, the capital of the state of Minas Gerais. However, before she could complete the foundations of her house, she was diagnosed as cured and lost her benefit. That came as a shock. From then on, Vilma could only count on her husband's retirement pension, so the couple urgently needed to eliminate rental costs altogether.



Fig. 7: The house is just as I wanted it.

Geraldo, her husband, nicknamed ‘Little Blind Man’, had lost his eyesight in a work accident a few years back. Faced with the difficulties imposed by his condition, Vilma would have to manage and supervise the entire construction work by herself. Determined, she said she would do it by using her own eyes and the knowledge of Geraldo, who had been a bricklayer himself, following the steps of his father. Moreover, she has had several boyfriends in that same line of work. Her sister mused that Vilma had always dreamed of owning a house, hence her ‘attraction’ to construction workers. Vilma helped her partners, stopped by their worksites, brought them lunch, sifted sand. She liked that environment and enjoyed watching walls being erected. Thus, the intricacies of a construction site were not alien to her. Still, her present challenge was a major one. It would not be enough to build a room or two and later expand, as is usual. Her husband needed a spacious house to provide him with the minimum of autonomy and security. She could not risk, for instance, having Geraldo leave a room and accidentally bump into something hot on the stove.

With approximately six thousand residents, the district of Ravena is mostly rural. It is a place, like so many in Brazil, without access to public policies that could otherwise help Vilma in the construction of her house. With no options and her savings invested in the underground foundation that was not even visible, Vilma considered selling the plot and returning to her family home in Belo Horizonte. It would be the end of her dream of owning a home, she had thought in dismay. To make ends meet in such a difficult situation, she did odd jobs teaching crafts, sewing, selling snacks, and offering sessions of Reiki and massage. She also created a Facebook page entitled ‘Building Little Blind Man’s House’ to raise funds as well as give an account of the work in progress. And thus, always devising new ways to fulfill her dream, in mid-2019 she joined a group organized by AnP, after a referral from Romênia, one of the participants.

In the first AnP meeting, Vilma explained that the construction of her house was at the final stages of the foundation. As for the architectural design, she said her neighbour had adapted its measurements from a project found on the internet. During the weekly meetings with the women of the group, which lasted a few months, Vilma improved and modified that project, changing the location and dimensions of the doors to ensure accessibility and safety for her husband. She also incorporated a room for her Reiki practice and a professional kitchen to carry out the activities that were her source of income. Together with the group, she learnt to do calculations, thus being able to quantify the materials needed to construct the walls and roof slab.

Everything was going well, and the time came to organize the eagerly awaited construction workshops. The women of the group decided what they

should learn and in whose house each workshop would be held. Usually, each participant gets a workshop conducted in their home. Since Romênia had moved from Ravena and was living in a rented property, the participants decided to carry out the workshop assigned to her in Vilma's plot. Thus, the merging of Romênia's and Vilma's workshops allowed the women to learn masonry skills, much sought-after in AnP groups and a recurring requirement for their projects. This craft demands a longer learning period as it involves several techniques widely adopted in construction, such as using the plumb line and mason's line, leveling, and preparing mortar, among others. Therefore, by attending two workshops on masonry instead of only one, the participants had a better chance of actually learning how to construct walls.

Additionally, AnP had established partnerships at the end of 2019 that would enable Vilma's construction to receive bricks and cement bags for free. Now the group only had to wait until the end of the rainy season to get their hands dirty. Then, in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, and what initially seemed like a dystopian prospect for only a few weeks ended up lasting for more than two years. During that period, the women saw their income drastically reduced as the already scarce work opportunities became nonexistent. There were reports of acquaintances being admitted to hospitals, and families lost their loved ones.

It was a time of great anguish, fear, and insecurity. In response to this, AnP reinforced psychological support for the women through online group chats. The conversations were guided by volunteer professionals, and Vilma actively joined them. In addition, AnP launched an ongoing campaign to collect and distribute food and hygiene kits, which brought some relief in the face of so many uncertainties. After a few failed attempts due to the constant pandemic fluctuations, on August 21, 2020, the group finally held the first masonry workshop to begin erecting the walls of Vilma's house. The activity was only made possible because it was carried out in an open area with enough room for keeping social distance.

Ironically, the workshop took place on the National Housing Day, a date established by the military dictatorship to commemorate the founding of the National Housing Bank, in August 1964. The construction of Vilma's house was in full gear. On the worksite, affectionate exchanges occurred and relationships were strengthened, creating openings, even momentarily, in such an oppressive and unequal socioeconomic system that, most of the time, stands like a vast, impenetrable wall.

The members of the group; Soninha, Ludmilla, Rosângela, Romênia, and Vilma, organized a series of collective efforts with local residents. Interestingly, most who came by to help were also women. That construction site was different.

The work posed numerous challenges, but the atmosphere was joyful and relaxed. This was largely because it did not adhere to a formal hierarchy, such as the one typically found among male engineers, architects, master builders, masons, and labourers. Consequently, it avoided the exploitation associated with this type of work organization. This also occurred thanks to the absence of another ever-present element of oppression in women's lives, still predominant in construction: machismo. In the construction setting at Vilma's, an educational and collaborative dimension prevailed.

The relaxed atmosphere was such that at one point the wheelbarrow became a toy cart, in which one woman would carry another around. As hard as life was, the women in the group were there for one another. At the end of 2020, Vilma organized a crowdfunding campaign to buy the iron components for columns and bracing. In mutual agreement with her group, she decided to take a loan from the AnP project to purchase the slab materials. With that, it seemed that few elements were lacking to complete the job. In mid-2020, the pandemic changed the scenario.

By January 2021, Brazil had reached 200 thousand deaths from COVID-19 and became the second country in the world with the highest number of deaths from the disease. April 2021 was the deadliest, with 82,500 recorded deaths. In this context, collective efforts were suspended, and Vilma's construction virtually came to a standstill as it became more challenging to procure materials and labour.

The solidarity demonstrated by people at the beginning of the pandemic had dissipated, and isolation was even harder to bear. Then Vilma faced the steepest challenge in her endeavour to build a house. Due to severe inflation in the country, when the crowdfunding money was finally transferred to her account, it covered only half of the required materials. Construction remained at a standstill.

As the women's collective efforts were interrupted and Vilma needed to resume construction, she hired some of the men who had worked on it in the past. It was a big mistake, as she later concluded. From then on, many tasks were carried out poorly, leading to a significant waste of materials. However, she could not afford to fix mistakes and there was no turning back, especially with rent costs strangling her financially. It was a matter of moving forward, or else, as she described afterward.

On December 30, 2022, Vilma and her husband moved into their new, unfinished house. The roof slab was leaking, but she brushed it off, saying it was nothing serious, and they just had to step away from the dripping. After all, rain is a blessing, and one must be grateful for it.

Six months ago, I was desperate to move into my house. Today, being here, I can feel the strength of women, as it was through our collective efforts that everything began, you know? This was only made possible because a group of women assisted by Arquitetura na Periferia, as well as other women from the community, joined us in our endeavour. It's something that can't be expressed in just a few words. Today, the inner walls of the house are plastered and painted. The living room, kitchen, and the flooring of the two bedrooms have received ceramic finishes. I added a utility sink area and no longer need to do laundry in the blazing sun, not to mention the inside of the house is wonderful. Now we must finish the roof, plaster the exterior, and build a small porch for my plants.

Vilma Dias

Lucineide, Jennifer, and spatial imagination

The experience of attending the AnP course changed my life. Today I have high expectations because I want to fulfill a dream: to see my house finished. Before, I thought I couldn't do it, and achieving this goal seemed difficult. It's still challenging today, but I know I can do it, use my energy, and go for it. The project made me stronger and gave me more balance.

Maria Lucineide de Souza, 2022

Jennifer de Almeida has been in the Dandara occupation for seven years, and Maria Lucineide de Souza for eleven years. They live there with their husbands and daughters, having joined an AnP group in February 2022. The two wanted to learn how to remodel their homes and stop depending on their partners and bricklayers. They knew nothing about construction and could not even assess dimensions with a tape measure. Their wish could be summarized as follows: they wanted to 'change things in the house without having to ask others to do it.'

Jennifer bought her plot at Dandara with funds from her grandmother. The property already included an unfinished room built with bricks and roof tiles; then, she and her family added another room and a bathroom using masonry. Her stepfather designed the house, presenting Jennifer with two plans for her to choose from. At the time of the construction work, her relatives organized a collective effort, with each one contributing something, and together they built the house.



Fig. 8: I thought I could never do it because I'm a woman.

Lucineide's plot was purchased by her husband, a professional bricklayer, who had traded a vehicle for the land. He constructed the house while she worked in a supermarket to earn money for building materials. She also helped him in the construction on weekends. Previously, they lived in a rented property, and their landlord was kind enough to allow them to remain there for four months without paying rent. The couple intended to save the money in order to have more funds available for construction. Hence, construction had to move fast.

The construction of Jennifer's house as well as that of Lucineide's tell emblematic stories about the lack of autonomy in women's decision-making when it comes to their own homes. Their participation in the AnP technical advisory group changed this scenario.

As Lucineide was usually at work and spent little time at home, her husband was the one making all decisions. He proceeded to build the bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen, which all ended up small. Over time, the couple expanded the house, adding a living room and another bedroom for their daughter. Today, the house comprises two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a living room, kitchen, and garage, plus a stairway to access the roof slab and a store where Lucineide sells snacks. At the time of the project, her main complaint was that the house was too dark and poorly ventilated, since the plot was built over to its full extent, featuring a roof slab covering the entire area. To make matters worse, the couple's room, located at the back, was windowless.

During her participation in the group, Lucineide went through a delicate situation with her husband, who was undergoing cancer treatment. He experienced great discomfort inside the stuffy house as he spent most of the time resting in the windowless back room or on the sofa in the living area. In her initial drawing, Lucineide had included a second floor. However, due to her husband's illness, constructing it would require an investment beyond their means. Her priorities shifted to quicker, more economical alternatives focused on improving his quality of life.

This was discussed collectively, at length, during the group meetings. The participants were eager to support Lucineide in that difficult moment but could not come up with an effective solution. Initially, the participants and architects considered addressing the garage at the front of the house. The idea was to replace one of the large opaque asbestos tiles with a translucent one and install ventilation blocks above the garage door, which would not only enhance air circulation but also improve the incidence of light in the house. This intervention, however, would still not remove the stuffiness in the room at the back, where the bedridden husband rested. The group thought hard and yet could not come up with a quick and economical option.

However, during their brainstorming, one simple idea suggested by Jennifer stood out for its effectiveness. While analyzing the architectural plans, she proposed altering the layout of the house. Since the couple's bedroom had no window and was quite stuffy, the solution was to convert it into a living area integrated to the kitchen by demolishing a wall. The sleeping area would then be transferred to the former living room, which connected to the garage through a wide glass door. To implement this, all that was needed was to knock down one wall and rearrange the furniture. Thus, the couple's bedroom was repositioned to receive better ventilation and lighting. It was a simple, practical, and low-cost adjustment that took a little more than one day to be implemented but vastly improved the daily life of Lucineide's family.

This case was quite symbolic. The architectural proposal put forward by a participant, with no direct intervention from the technical team, confirms the relevance of the educational approach of the AnP technical advisory model. The project articulation suggested by Jennifer evidenced how the lessons learnt, along with spatial understanding and analysis tools, are conducive to the development of new skills. They enable participants to discuss a design problem autonomously, arriving at efficient, cost-effective solutions.

The execution of the work was also carried out by the members of the group in an on-site workshop. Everything had to be done fast as there were many tasks to be performed in one day. First, the women insulated the floor with canvas and wood, and then they demolished the wall between the kitchen and the old bedroom. The demolition was the most demanding activity, but they all mastered it. They dismantled the wall from top to bottom, carefully ensuring the alignment and preservation of the existing ceramic elements in the kitchen. As soon as the job approached conclusion, they prepared mortar to finalize the edges of the newly opened gap. Using their masonry skills, the women also sealed the gap that connected the new bedroom to the kitchen, thereby isolating the social area from the private area.

At the start of the demolition, Lucineide felt apprehensive. She doubted whether she and her companions would be able to handle it. Once again, she was struck by the thought that construction is a male activity, beyond the capabilities of a woman simply because of her gender. Her heart skipped a beat when the first bricks began to fall. Yet, the job was properly executed. Sometime later, Lucineide invited the participants to get together at her converted house, with a sofa already in place in the new living room. Everyone was happy to find the area furnished and the integration with the kitchen working well. Throughout the meeting, Lucineide was quite

emotional and said she had more peace of mind now that her husband could enjoy a more comfortable room. She told her companions that, before, she could hardly pay attention to him, as he spent his days and nights on the living room sofa, while she slept in the bedroom. After the remodel, they were able to sleep together again, cuddle, and have greater 'entertainment,' as she jokes.

The situation faced by Lucineide and her husband involves complex logistics, including the utilization of public health services, long commutes, and an overwhelming load of caregiving and work, among other factors. A comprehensive understanding of this situation calls for the AnP project policy to accommodate flexible schedules, dates, meeting locations, and other details. This is done to ensure that such challenges do not hinder the ongoing involvement of women in the advisory and housing implementation process.

When her husband fell ill, Lucineide was in the early stages of the technical advisory procedure with AnP and thought she might not be able to continue. There were days when she could not attend the meetings because she had to administer medication to her husband or accompany him to the hospital. On those days, the group either delayed the start of the meeting or met at her house. She emphasizes the importance of being part of the group during those moments as it alleviated her stress. Afterward, she would return home to care for her husband feeling stronger.

The women in the group are wonderful, and our bond is for life. If I could, I would join the AnP project every year, but we must allow other women to have this opportunity, just like I did.

Maria Lucineide de Souza, 2022

juliana and overcoming through group support

There's always this struggle for improvement... and I will never, never, never do anything only for myself. I always find a way to help someone else.

Juliana Estanislau, on her relationship with housing, 2022.

As I see it, AnP fostered this support among women, something I had never experienced before. I felt included right away.

Juliana Estanislau, 2023.

‘A special full-time mum is how I call myself,’ Juliana da Conceição Estanislau jokes when describing her profession. Always accompanied by her daughter Alice, then a nine-year-old neuro-atypical child, Juliana followed a different path to reach *Arquitetura na Periferia*. Usually, the AnP project organizes small groups of women from the same area. In the case of Juliana, what brought her group together was the fact that all members were leaders in their communities. This particular AnP group gathered participants from various locations with the purpose of focusing on women who were always caring for others and seldom had a chance to look after themselves.

The group was formed in 2022, shortly after the burden of female unpaid care work had been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The project was named ‘Who Cares for Those Who Care’ and came to life through a crowdfunding campaign on social media. This group was also different in adapting the usual AnP method. Given that the participants were extremely busy with numerous commitments, the project team proposed a streamlined format, featuring immersive meetings once a month instead of the typical weekly meetings. The goal was to remove these women from their hectic schedules and bring them to a peaceful location, close to nature, where they could dedicate time to exchanging experiences, learning, and, of course, being nourished. Delicious food was provided by Cenir, who in addition to being a master builder and construction instructor, hosted the meetings at her farmhouse.

When invited by Luh Dandara to participate in the project, Juliana’s only question was if her daughter could come along. One of AnP’s principles is to show respect and a welcoming attitude towards participants who need to bring their children to the meetings. In Brazil, more than 11 million mothers are raising their children on their own.⁶ Most are like Juliana – black women living solely with their children, without a close support network. For AnP, no woman should be excluded from participating in activities she is interested in for this reason, so children are always welcome.

At the first AnP meeting, all participants were encouraged to share a bit of their life story. Juliana, always observant, was the last one to speak and commented that hers was ‘small’ compared to the others. All women disagreed, and rightfully so. Born in the interior of the state of Minas Gerais, Juliana arrived in the capital, Belo Horizonte, shortly after coming of age. Prior to that, she had endured years of aggression, mistreatment, and abuse within her family. She recalled having a hard time at school because of the aggressive way in which she expressed herself, often leading to misunderstandings. Nonetheless, she had always been a good student. Juliana thought



Fig. 9: A web of solidarity.

that education was her 'ticket out of misery.' At the age of sixteen, she reported her mother and father to the Public Prosecutor's Office and relocated to a shelter with her three younger brothers. 'One of them suffered from epilepsy and had seizures. I studied at night, never having stopped,' she recalled.

In Belo Horizonte, she graduated from high school in 2005 at the age of twenty. Around that time, she met a man thirty years her senior and, once again, was subjected to abuse. At that point, her self-esteem was crushed. However, after six years, Juliana put an end to the relationship. Shortly thereafter, she met the father of her daughter. She became pregnant early in the relationship and then discovered his involvement with drugs. And she thought, 'this is too much for me.'

Today, Juliana lives in the Terra Nossa occupation, located in the Eastern area of Belo Horizonte, alongside approximately 380 other families. Juliana moved to the community in 2020 to avoid incurring additional rental expenses, despite the challenges inherent to construction at the site, the initial lack of infrastructure, and the difficult access for getting building materials up to her plot.

Her house was built with the help of relatives and friends. Despite being grateful to have a place to live, Juliana realized, after presenting the architectural plan of her house at an AnP meeting, that the construction had not been done to her liking. Then after attending the AnP workshop, she felt the urge to tear everything down and start from scratch. 'It's amazing how ignorant we can be about these things,' she said. Perhaps this had contributed to her decision, after attending the AnP meetings, not to hold a workshop at her home. The main reason, though, was that she did not know if she would be allowed to stay there. Some families living in the upper part of the plot had already been removed, and Juliana suspected hers could be next. That was especially true since, less than a hundred metres away, a mining company operated illegally without being questioned by public authorities.

Even though she had decided not to remodel her house, Juliana remained in the project, as for her it had become a welcoming space for learning. A participant who expressly rejected making any improvements to her home was something unprecedented for AnP. It was even slightly uncomfortable at first. On the other hand, it reinforced the potential of the initiative to promote transformations that transcend construction. In addition to participating in the three workshops within her group, which entailed redoing the roof at Alessandra's house and applying colorful texture and painting at Lucimar's house, Juliana discovered a strong interest in learning how to erect walls. Hence, she asked Carina, the architect coordinating the group, if she could

participate in the workshops of other groups. And then, once again setting a precedent for AnP, she left her home early, on a holiday in the middle of the week, to attend a masonry workshop taking place in the Paulo Freire occupation, located 36 km away.

In February 2023, nine months after going to the first meeting of Arquitetura na Periferia, Juliana sent the WhatsApp group⁷ a message that filled everyone with joy: she had just entered university. As she received congratulations, she thanked the women of the group. Juliana told them that the admission test included several questions about the current situation of Brazil, addressing topics already discussed during the AnP meetings. Finally, she thanked the group for having encouraged her to seek improvement not only in her home but also in her life.

Even though Juliana still feared eviction, she had recently found two scorpions in the house and decided to plaster the walls. Coincidentally, this happened in the same week Carina had sent out an AnP form, looking for houses to host the project's training workshops. Juliana applied, and her house was selected. As a result, eleven students worked there for one week while they learnt plastering. 'It was magical,' Juliana said. Besides plastering the walls, the women also applied a burnt cement finish to the floor in the bathroom to correct the unevenness causing water puddles. Until then, she was always dismayed when she entered the bathroom and stepped into puddles all over the floor. Now the problem was solved.

You have just joined the most amazing group of women. I would like to wholeheartedly thank Arquitetura na Periferia for saving so many lives. It saved us from depression and the belief that we're worth nothing, that we're nobodies. We gathered with women who showed us that we can be whoever we want.

Juliana, speaking to the students of the
AnP construction training course in June 2023.

architects and technical advisory work in the third sector

Arquitetura na Periferia was born out of a sentiment of unease with the field of architecture. In 2013, architect Carina enrolled in the master's degree program at the School of Architecture of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG). Her goal was to work professionally addressing the needs of people who usually have no access to architecture and urban planning services. In Brazil, this includes the majority of the population.⁸ Under the guidance of Professor Silke Kapp, Carina developed her work drawing on reflections and research conducted by the organization Morar de Outras Maneiras (Living in Other Ways – MOM),⁹ along with

theoretical concepts from authors¹⁰ like Sérgio Ferro. These concepts question the social dynamics within the architecture field and its limitations when attempting to meet the demands of social groups with less economic and political power.

Almost ten years later, in a survey with the AnP team in July 2023, it was found that this sentiment of unease remains a common discomfort among architects choosing to work in the technical advisory sector. One can observe that the common thread aligning architects' interest in working at AnP encompassed several shared elements. Clara Ciotto sums up this unease: 'It's a profession seen as elitist and considered a luxury.' Mariana Borel, stating her own motivation to seek theoretical tools and adopt a more coherent approach to work, pointed to the disparity between conventional university learning, focused on large construction projects, and the reality of the labour market in the Brazilian socioeconomic context, in which the majority of people can only afford minor remodeling projects. At that time, she could not even name the kind of work she was looking to do, and the term 'technical advisory' was not part of her vocabulary yet.

On the other hand, architects like Livia Gonçalves and Juliana Freire, who encountered the term during their academic studies, saw the AnP initiative as an opportunity to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Jessica Santana, in turn, has the perspective of someone holding a degree in architecture and urban planning obtained through public policies aimed at the inclusion of low-income individuals in higher education. The daughter of a bricklayer and the first member of her family to attend a federal university, she found that the more she understood the contradictions within her chosen profession, the stronger her desire became to give back to the community the knowledge she had acquired, intending to apply it in the most 'accessible and broad' manner possible. The sentiment expressed by Jessica is also echoed in the experiences of other AnP team members.

In addition to this aspect of the profession, my involvement in the project led me to assimilate and become aware of many issues related to class struggle, housing, and particularly feminism through my interactions with women.

Livia Gonçalves, 2023

Just like the participants in the project, the technical team is also transformed by this work. The group of architects in the AnP team is, to this day, predominantly composed of white, middle-class women. Beyond an idealistic desire to be part of the social transformations promoted by the project's actions, the experience compels them to confront their own prejudices, contradictions, and privileges, realizing their role in a society marked by vast inequalities. Conversely, their

ability to listen, empathise, and apply critical thinking is reinforced as they acknowledge their privileges.

Working closely with project participants also sheds light on race, gender, and class oppressions that are continuously intertwined, exerting a direct and significant impact on these participants. Even though Carina was aware of the existing structural machismo in the country, she was taken by surprise when the first participant in the project left because her husband did not approve of her participation. The struggle of mothers witnessing the state violence that violates, imprisons, and kills their children is also constantly present in the work. For the team, being close to these injustices enhances their critical thinking in relation to the Brazilian social context and deepens their understanding of the importance of organized struggle to assert rights through social or collective movements.

Determined to advance their initiative and ensure its financial sustainability, in 2018, the four women running the *Arquitetura na Periferia* project decided it was time to establish a legal entity and opted to form a non-profit association. It was not an easy decision, though. Formalizing the project legally would entail a substantial rise in ongoing expenses and workload, encompassing tasks that were previously scattered, including administrative, financial, and managerial responsibilities, as well as all other elements necessary for the operation of an institution. Faced with these challenges, the second significant question arose: should the institution be a for-profit or nonprofit? The concept of social business, popularized by economist Muhammad Yunus (2010), had gained traction and could potentially offer a solution for AnP. After all, for-profit companies enjoyed greater managerial autonomy, making their operation much simpler for as small a team as AnP's. Nonetheless, what prevailed in the team discussions was the certainty that they wanted to continue working with the same target audience – namely, women living in the urban periphery, with scarce or no resources to afford a remodeling project and an average monthly family income ranging from zero to three times the minimum wage. Thus, the Institute for Advisory to Women and Innovation (IAMÍ) was born.

The creation of IAMÍ implies a continuous commitment to raising funds to support *Arquitetura na Periferia*. In principle, the team adopts strategies to maintain flexibility in construction, in contrast to projects executed through public resources and public notices, which must strictly follow approved procedures. These strategies involve raising funds in various ways such as organizing donation campaigns, holding events, submitting projects to philanthropic funds, providing services, and forming partnerships, among other things. This has been a conscious effort to avoid constraining fieldwork and preserve its procedural, open, and educational core.

The third sector, however, does not escape the functional logic of the capitalist mode of production. As the institution supporting AnP matures, the team often finds itself moving in directions that they might have readily rejected when they were simply a group of women engaged in voluntary social work. An everyday example of this dilemma are social networks, once mere tools for communication to report on activities, now transformed into powerful fundraising and marketing tools. Despite the discomfort experienced by these architects-researchers-students-critics of capitalism while navigating within this system, they adopt a managerial/director 'façade' and continue to weigh the pros and cons of each decision that must be made, taking into consideration not only their convictions but also the institute's actual need for financial stability.

Another dilemma faced by the team is the constant demand for records of 'impact,' which, at first glance, seem to contradict AnP's proposal to be an initiative focused on procedural gains and gradual transformation, rather than immediate results, numbers, and the 'final product.' Dealing with issues like these while maintaining the project's essence and original aims has been a major challenge. To tackle it, the team seeks training in a variety of subjects related to the third sector (such as fundraising, management, and digital marketing) in order to acquire tools that help them understand how structures function and, thus, be able to come up with new options for responding to demands.

Amid the typical challenges of a non-profit organization, the team has observed in recent years the growth of another type of operation, which adopts the Technical Assistance for Social Housing (ATHIS)¹¹ approach and promotes 'low-cost remodeling' as a 'niche market.' The inability of the state to ensure access to housing is hence considered a business opportunity. This work model is configured to meet market demands and attract financing companies precisely because it is specific, cheap, and quick, generating favourable statistics. In this scenario, AnP's initiative is often confused with a 'remodeling social business,' and potential partners have difficulty understanding and valuing the peculiarities of AnP's goal of offering long-term technical advisory that is also focused on training and empowering women.

In 2023, IAMÍ employs thirteen paid staff members, in addition to eleven volunteers from different areas working in institutional initiatives and field-work. Despite the team's growth and the inclusion of individuals with diverse educational backgrounds, a shared mission persists – fighting for gender equity, broader access to specific rights, and increasing self-esteem and self-confidence among women. Additionally, AnP aims to expand the discussion on technical advisories in architecture and urban planning, as well as to promote this type of initiative through practical actions and the accumulation of experience.



Fig. 10: Building walls and knocking down machismo.

notes

- 1 See Mendonça, 2014.
- 2 Baltazar and Kapp (2016), Cardoso and Lopes (2019), Borel (2020).
- 3 The logbooks are documents prepared by the team shortly after each meeting with the assisted women, in which the events of the day, as well as quotes, important enunciations, or perceptions, are recorded.
- 4 Source: Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). Elaboration of the National Continuous Household Sample Survey (PnadC): DIEESE 2022
- 5 Oxfam (2020).
- 6 Available at: < <https://blog-doibre.fgv.br/posts/maes-solo-no-mercado-de-trabalho>>. Accessed on: July 26, 2023.
- 7 The WhatsApp group Together We Exceed was created at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020. With the aim of promoting closeness and care among AnP women, it is still active, with 53 members as of July 2023.
- 8 According to research conducted by the Brazilian Council of Architecture and Urban Planning (CAU) in partnership with the Datafolha Institute, 85% of individuals building or renovating in the country do not seek the technical services of architecture and urban planning. Available at: <<https://caubr.gov.br/pesquisa2015/>>. Accessed on: July 26, 2023.
- 9 More details at: <http://www.mom.arq.ufmg.br/mom/index.html>.
- 10 Bourdieu (2007), Stevens (2003), Ferro (1979).
- 11 As designated by Federal Law 11.888/2008.

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Technical Assistance for Women.

First Published in Great Britain in the
Production Studies Series by TF/TK,
Newcastle-upon-Tyne. March, 2024.
<http://www.tf-tk.com>

Printing: Statex, Newcastle, UK.
<https://statex.co.uk>

Typefaces: Frutiger; Sergio

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ISBN 978-1-7390913-4-7

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