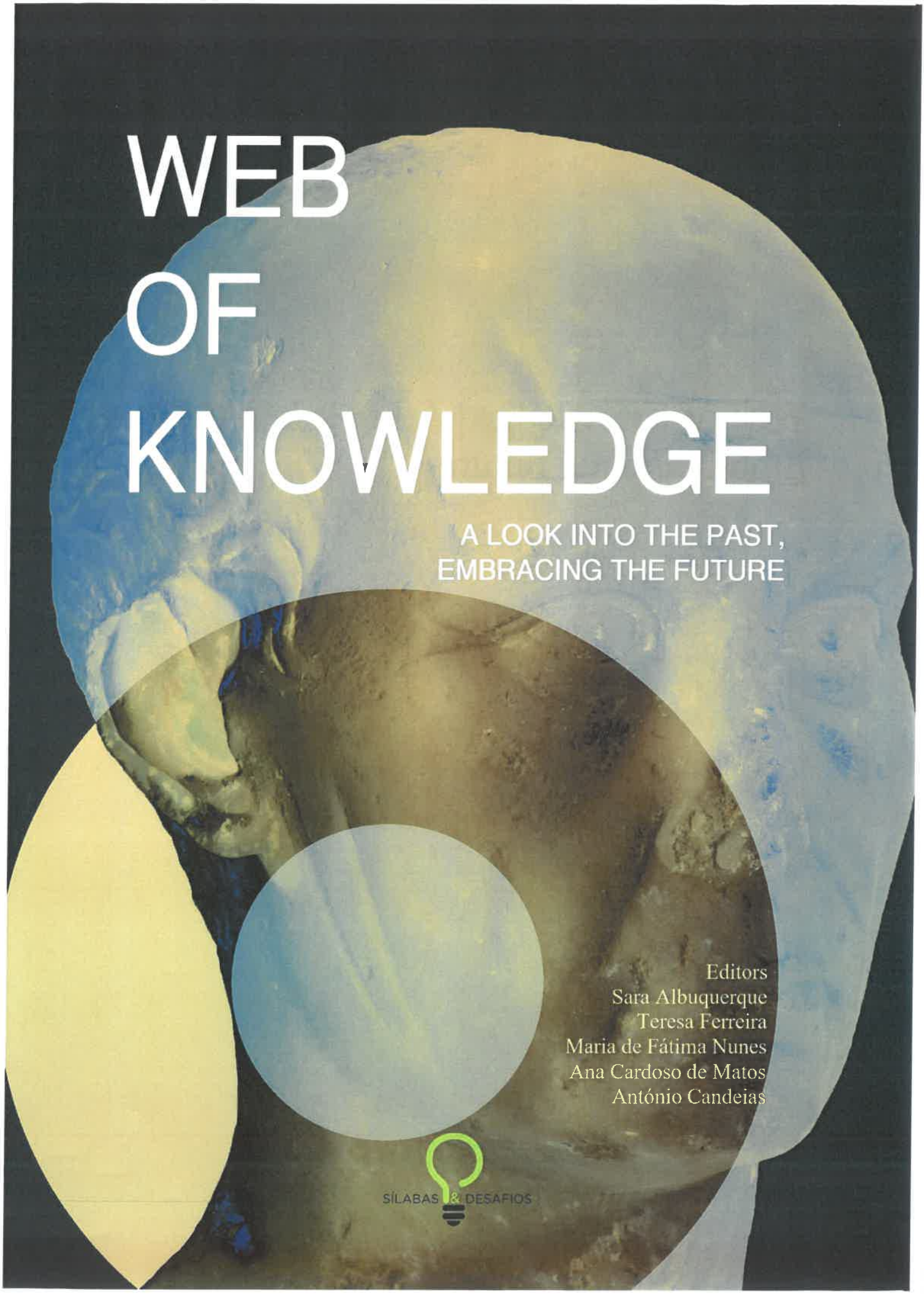
WEB OF KNOWLEDGE

A LOOK INTO THE PAST, EMBRACING THE FUTURE



Editors
Sara Albuquerque
Teresa Ferreira
Maria de Fátima Nunes
Ana Cardoso de Matos
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SÍLABAS & DESAFIOS

Web of Knowledge | A Look into the Past, Embracing the Future

Editors

Sara Albuquerque, Teresa Ferreira, Maria de Fátima Nunes, Ana Cardoso de Matos & António Candeias

Universidade de Évora, Portugal

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1920's economic housing in the magazine A Architectura Portugueza

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ABSTRACT: In the beginning of the 20th century, industrialization was at the origin of a lack of housing for those who were leaving the rural plural and heading to the city in search for work. The awareness of the increasing population and the housing crisis found an echo in the architects through the periodic Portuguese press dedicated to architecture issues. The magazine A Architectura Portugueza, issued between 1908 and 1929, published architecture projects and opinion articles that addressed this social problem. Since the architect's social responsibility is reflected in their own projects, the analysis of the published works, assisted by the RIC project, is believed to provide an understanding of the stance of this professional class in this period.

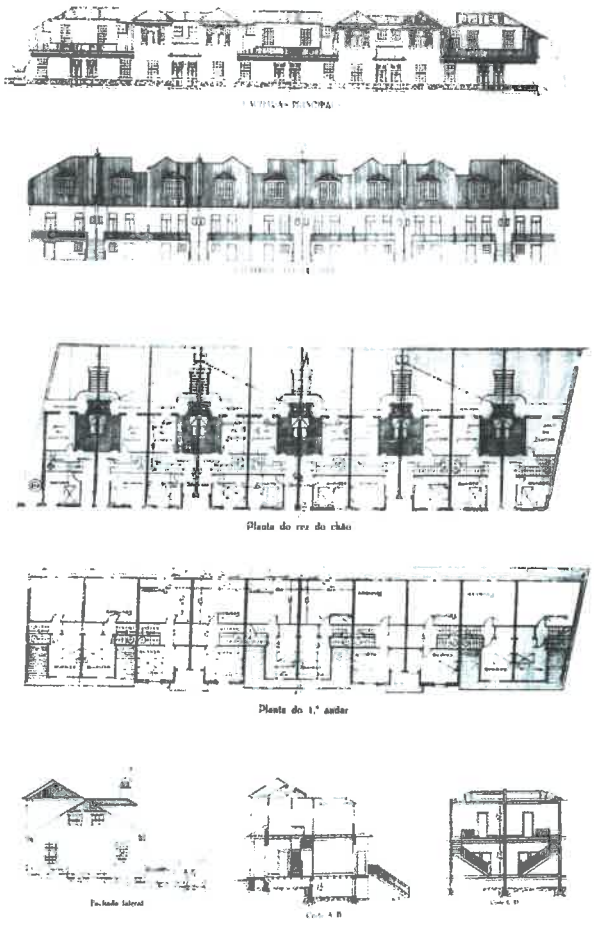


Figure 1. Project of a group of ten dwellings, by the Architect José Ferreira Penêda. In A Architectura Portugueza, December 1926, nº12, p. 3

1. THE PROBLEM

At the beginning of the 20th century, in Portugal, the shortage of economic houses was a growing problem. At the origin of this problem was the increasing population in urban areas due to the rural exodus of those who were heading into the cities in search of work provided by industrialization.

This need for housing to accommodate a new working class found a response in the private sector, by developing a rental market, using precarious housing with minimal areas, without the minimum conditions of hygiene and health. Lands that remained unbuilt so far were occupied with the *ilhas* in Oporto, and the *pátios* in Lisbon (Teixeira, 1992). These houses were built by the workers themselves, in a land of their working factory owner with limited resources and capital, or by the owner himself, resulting in low-quality dwellings. In Lisbon, *pátios* were never built as much as *ilhas* of Oporto, as Teixeira (1992) points out: "in 1905 there were 233 *pátios* in Lisbon, with a total of 2278 dwellings and housing 10,487 people. Some years before, in 1899, there were in Porto 1048 *ilhas*, with 11129 houses and 50.000 inhabitants" (p.69).

Informed by experts' knowledge on medical care and wellbeing, architects soon started to develop solutions to solve the problem, namely by promoting better living conditions through materializing hygienic measures in the domestic interior space (Serra-no, 2011).

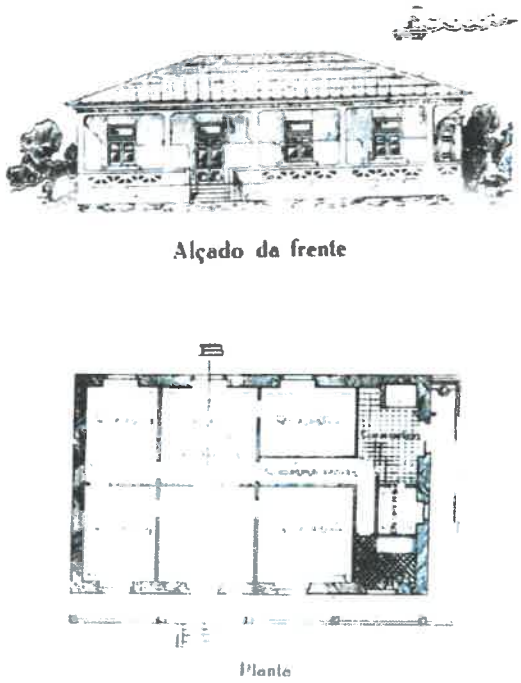


Figure 2. Project of an Economic House for S. Martinho do Porto, by the civil engineer António Birne Pereira. In A Architectura Portugueza, October 1928, n°10, p.6

Figure 3. Economic neighborhood of Ajuda, Lisboa, 1934. In Tiago, 2010, p.270

Figure 4. Economic neighborhood of Arco do Cego, Lisboa, 1934. In Tiago, 2010, p.270

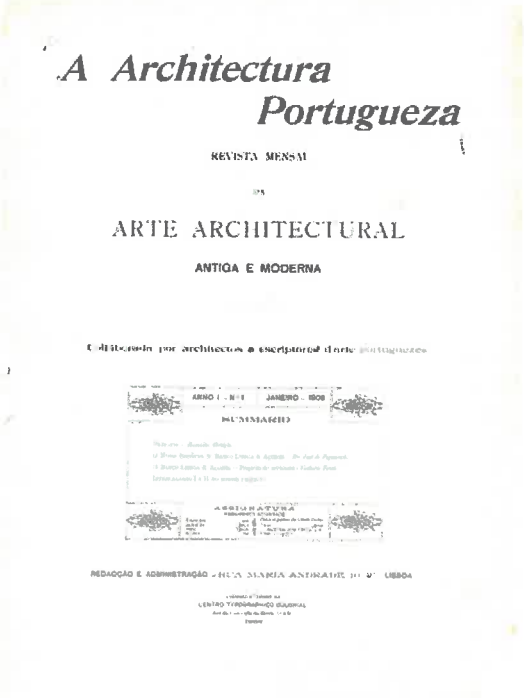
Furthermore, architects also developed a broader debate on health promotion by sharing the knowledge gained at international congresses in articles published in architecture and construction magazines such as *A Construcção Moderna* (1900-1919), *Annuario da Sociedade dos Architectos Portuguezes* (1905-1911) and *A Architectura Portugueza* (1908-1929) (Mesquita, 2010). As a result, architects raised their awareness of the rising problem of urban hygiene and economic housing.

2. THE SOLUTION

In spite of a notable interested in establishing new laws and regulations in the beginning of the 20th century, which dealt with issues related to the housing quality of construction, ventilation and plumbing, the Spanish flu outbreak that occurred during World War I relaunch the debate, after having caused in Portugal a high number of victims until 1919 (estimated in more than 100 thousand) (Teixeira, 1992). As a response to this problem, the state launched a program on economic housing (Figure 1, Figure 2). In 1918, the Republic issued the Decree No. 4137 (Tiago, 2010), on the promotion of the construction of social neighbourhoods, in a context of economic, political and social difficulties due to Portugal's participation in World War I. In this very year the projects for economic housing began, such as: the *Bairro da Ajuda* (Fig. 3) soon followed by the neighbourhood of the *Arco do Cego*, both in Lisbon (Fig. 4). However, the construction of these neighbourhoods would only be concluded in the *Estado Novo* period between 1934 and 1935.

In 1929, the *Sociedade dos Architectos Portuguezes* (1903-1933) participates in the jury for a public tender for the elaboration of project-type of economic houses, promoted by the Society of Economic Houses. Raúl Lino (1879-1974), represented the Society in this jury which highlights the importance of the subject at the time (Ribeiro, 2002). Tavares (2015) observes, in that same year the publication of the proceedings of the II Congress of CIAM subordinated to the topic of "The Minimum House" in the weekly newspaper Notícias *Ilustradas*, questioning a group of young architects on "what would be the most urgent work to do? "(França, 1985, p. 118-119). Among the interviewees, the architect Pardal Monteiro (1987-1957), argues that the priority should be given to the construction of neighbourhoods of economic houses. During the 1920's, the program of economic housing played a decisive role in the planning and the construction of the city of Lisbon. A special concern on beauty was also expressed through the design of the buildings façades as it aimed to build an identity and to avoid the "de pressing typical character of working neighbourhoods, constituted by monotonous alignments of uniform and

unadorned houses" (Pereira, 1994, p.522). These issues reflect the social role of the architect in the transformation process of the city itself, as it accommodates economic housing for an emerging working class.


A Architectura Portugueza

REVISTA MENSAL

DE

ARTE ARCHITECTURAL

ANTIGA E MODERNA

Figure 5. Front page. In A Architecture Portugueza, January 1908, nº1

A ARCHITECTURA PORTUGUEZA

PREFACIO

Figure 6. Editorial board objectives. In A Architectura Portugueza, January 1908, nº 1, p.2

3. ARCHITECTURE MAGAZINES

The study of *A Architectura Portugueza* magazine can contribute to filling a theoretical void within the Portuguese architecture's history of the beginning of the 20th century since there is a lack of published books on this topic (Figueiredo, 2007). In particular, the study of *A Architectura Portugueza*, can help to understand the thinking, arguing and building between 1908-1929 (1st series), in the article published in a total of 114 issues (Fig. 5). Thus, the design of a research aiming to understand modern perceptions and expressions of the art of designing and building, and to identify technical developments in construction of our architecture legacy can find in this architecture magazine a relevant source of information.

With the aim to respond to the problem of the working classes, architects developed proposals and discussed the topic in the magazine *A Architectura Portugueza*. The study of the social housing published in this magazine is believed to provide a relevant contribute to establishing an understanding on the position of the professional class, on the promotion of well-being and comfortable housing in economic dwellings.

The analysis of the published works may widely benefit from the use of the *RIC* project. The study of the 20th century's Portuguese architecture magazines can shed some light on the modern ideas that shaped the socio-cultural atmosphere of this period. With opinion articles on issues such as architecture, construction, arts, history, materials, engineering, cultural events, artists, from Portugal and abroad, the study of such historical records may reveal new concepts and ideas about modern perceptions and theoretical and technical movements of architecture, art, design, building and urbanism (Mesquita, 2011).

4. THE RIC PROJECT

The visible and usable component of the *RIC* - *Revistas de Ideias e Cultura* (Magazines of Ideas and Culture) is a website that provides access to full collections of the most relevant magazines of the last century that discussed ideas and cultural issues in Portugal (see http://www.ric.slhi.pt/).

Acknowledged as an important source for research, and recognizing the relevance of architecture for society, *RIC* research team have recently embraced this cultural area. Therefore, *RIC* provides a tool that contributes to the study of economic housing as addressed by the architects. Following the on-going work of *A Construcção Moderna,* the next magazine to be included in the *RIC* program is *A Architectura Portugueza*, and a research using the issues published in the 1st series (1908-1929) will be conducted.

In 1908 (Fig. 6), the magazine editorial clearly expresses its objectives:

- *to provide a service in line with the technological progress of architecture through the dissemination of articles on the housing hygiene, contribu-*

tions to the use of new materials' and construction techniques, as well as the new electrical equipment and modern furniture, besides aiming also to promote the smaller arts such as joinery, locksmithing and sculpture (nº1, p.2).

The remarkable quality of its graphic elements, such as the project drawings and photographs (Fig. 7), "make the *A Architectura Portugueza* an essential documentary repository for the study of the architectural culture in Portugal in the first quarter of the 20th century" (Gomes 2003, p. 238). This statement supports a research approach as a case study in which the study of economic housing can bring new knowledge to architecture history.

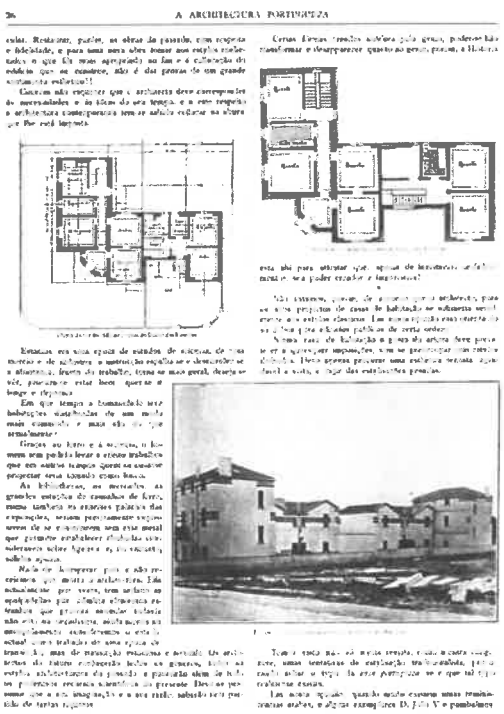


Figure 7. Neighbourhood of Roseiras, by the architect Álvaro Machado. In A Architectura Portugueza, July 1910, nº 7, p. 26

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In summary, by the beginning of the 20th century, there is a lack of studies regarding the publishing of economic housing projects and debates in architecture magazines. The *A Architectura Portugueza* magazines published between 1908 and 1919 has not yet been studied from this perspective and the availability of a research tool as *RIC* is in itself a very useful tool.

Research on this topic is needed to understand the relevance given to the topic in this period, and the architectural solutions, proposed for the problem of economic housing.

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