Constructing a Participatory Approach for the Evaluation of Social Policies and Programmes

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This article discusses the evaluation of social policies and programmes in the perspective of evaluation research. It tries to develop a methodology that has a participatory content. Thus, the evaluation of social policies and programmes is considered in its full potential for the construction of knowledge. It is seen as a development of the processes of public policies that involves different subjects, who have different interests and rationalities. In the construction of a concept of a participatory evaluation research, the article takes into account its technical, political and academic functions. Therefore, it reaffirms two dimensions of evaluation research: technical and political. The commitment of the evaluator-researcher to the critique of reality in the search for its transformation is the reference for the development of a participatory approach in evaluation research.
The paper presents an introduction that describes the origins of what is considered as a participatory approach for evaluation of social policies and programmes, followed by developing reflections about evaluation as a part of the process of public policies; presents a concept of evaluation research in order to consider, in the following sections, details of the construction of a participatory concept and approach in evaluation research.

Key words: evaluation research, participation, social policy

1. Introduction

In this study, I discuss the evaluation of social policies and programmes[1] by examining them from the perspective of evaluation research, and highlighting the construction of a methodological approach in a participatory context. The evaluation of social policies and programmes, situated in the field of evaluation research, is considered in its full potential for the construction of knowledge,, and is seen as a movement of the processes of public policies. As a consequence, it is linked to the formulation and implementation of social policies, and is viewed as a modality of applied social research.

The reflection developed here has as its theoretical-methodological assumption the understanding that

> the evaluation of social policies and programmes must be understood in the dialectical relationship of two of its inherent dimensions, the technical and the political. In this sense, the evaluation of social policies and programmes is guided by intentions, by its political dimension, and by a set of scientific procedures that qualifies it as a generator of knowledge (Silva 2008: 89; my translation).

Taken in its participatory dimension, the evaluation of social policies and programmes has to critically consider social reality as a research object that demands the social insertion of the researcher. It requires the development of social policies and programs by considering them in their operational and political perspective.

It is in this perspective that the researchers of the GAEPP,[2] Group of evaluation and Study of Poverty and Policies Directed to Poverty, of the

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[1]   The development of this study was supported by the Fundação Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior – CAPES and the Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico – CNPq, two Brazilian government agencies focused on the training and education of human resources and research projects, as well as the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa e Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico do Maranhão – FAPEMA, an institution that supports research projects in the State of Maranhão in Brazil.

[2]   The GAEPP was founded in 1996 as an Interdisciplinary Group that gathers professors from different academic departments as well as undergraduate and graduate students of the Universidade Federal do Maranhão – UFMA. It is linked to the Departamento

Universidade Federal do Maranhão in Brazil, have been working in the field of evaluation research, which is seen as a critical area for the understanding and changing of public policies of a social nature. This is done with the purpose of transforming social policies into an instrument that meets the population's basic needs and broadens the citizenship of the lower social class. This perspective demands the involvement of the subjects of social policies and programmes in defining and implementing the evaluations, without aiming at carrying out what is called a participatory evaluation in a strict sense. A participatory evaluation approach has as one of its goals the establishment of an interactive process among the beneficiaries of the evaluated programme, considering them as directly responsible for the evaluation (Barrera 2000). The relevant aspect in such a practice is to see the "subaltern" level sectors of society as the main addressees of the knowledge produced about social policies and programmes. Its intention is to support their struggles and demands with information that has been historically denied to them or omitted from them, aiming to improve the democratisation and social control of public policies. This approach is based on the understanding that evaluation research should contribute to raise and systematise information designed for the public decision-makers but, before anything else, it should be directed toward the production of knowledge committed to social struggles and to the universalisation of social rights, while contributing to the social movement of the construction of citizenship. In this sense, I see that, beyond its technical content, evaluation research has also a political content, because it expresses interests and intentions.

This article discusses the experience of the GAEPP researchers from this perspective. It is an experience, which is always under construction and reconstruction, of a methodological approach to evaluation research that has a participatory nature. It also has as one of its objectives to extend the functions

de Serviço Social, associated to the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Políticas Públicas and is a member of the National Directory of Research Groups organized by the CNPq. It carries out research, consulting, advisory and training activities stressing the following themes: poverty, labour, social policies and income transfer programmes, but focusing on the analysis and evaluation of Public Policies (www.gaepp.ufma.br).

of evaluation research from the technical to the political field, linking the academy with the social movements.

In this paper, I try to situate evaluation as a movement of the process of developing public policies, followed by my view of what I characterise as a participatory approach in evaluation research, finishing the paper with some reflections as its main conclusions.

2. Situating evaluation in the process of public policies

Public policies are developed in a circular process that extends from the constitution of a problem that is incorporated to the government agenda, passing through the agenda, the formulation of alternatives, the adoption of the policy, the implementation or carrying out of social programmes, as an expression of the concrete aspect of the policy, to the evaluation of these programmes. It is a circular process involving different subjects, who have different interests and rationalities. In these dynamics several activities situated in the core of the political system are developed.

> This is a set of activities that constitute non-linear but articulated, interdependent and sometimes concurrent movements. Different institutions and different political subjects, interest groups, political parties, legislators, bureaucrats, the media, etc. take part in this process (Silva 2008: 92; my translation).

Each step of the public policy processes, including evaluation, must be regarded as a whole in a dialectical articulation within the process, which makes them become interdependent in a continuous process of reproduction and renewal.

In this sense, the Constitution of a Problem and of the Governmental Agenda is the movement consisting of problem-like situations that exist in society, become visible, require attention and may become a social issue obtaining attention from the public power once they are included in the government agenda. These are necessarily problems that affect individuals or groups of individuals and present possibilities of action that can be legitimised. In this initial movement of the public policies the important subjects are the political parties, the media and the pressure groups.

The so-called process of the public policies is, then, followed by the Formulation of Alternative Policies. This is the pre-decision movement, aiming at the formulation of a diagnosis about the problem-like situations; the formulation of alternatives in order to cope with problem-like situation; directed also to the situation; a) preliminary mapping of the general content of the programme that is to be suggested (what problem, what programme, coverage, scope, who is to benefit from it, when, how,…); the listing of possible resources (which ones, how much and the sources); the identification of the institutional apparatus required (public agencies, who is responsible, supporting legislation); and the preliminary definition of the responsibilities (bureaucracy, technical team, partnerships). Thus, this is a movement whose main subjects are the technical body and the pressure groups. In this movement of the public policy processes the bureaucracy and different lobbies play important roles. The bureaucracy is responsible for raising some alternative policies, and the lobbies present their interests and press the bureaucracy to adopt them.

> This development occurs especially within the state's bureaucracy, in the offices of interest groups, in legislation committees, in special working committees and in planning organisations, and alternatives suggested are developed by implementation technicians guided by the guidelines established in the leadership groups (Silva 2008: 95; my translation).

As the next step in the processes of public policies we have the movement that I call Policy Adoption, which materialises the decision-making movement of choosing one policy alternative in order to face a problem-like situation.

In this movement the legislative power is the main subject that looks for support in society as well as in other political subjects, so that the policy that is approved can have credibility and the possibility of being successful.

After being approved, the policy gives way to the social programmes, based on technical criteria established by its official formulators and on political criteria indicated by the legislative power itself or proposed by the executive branch. This means that an alternative of policy depends on the support of the majority of the legislative branch in order to be adopted.

Adopting a policy also includes the creation of laws, decrees, legal rules and the definition of the budget, so that the programme can be implemented.

Once the programme is approved, we have the Implementation or carrying out of the Social Programmes, which a development of the public policy processes characterised by high complexity, since it mobilises institutions, several subjects with different interests and rationalities, resources and power. As it involves all the activities that will render the public policy concrete, this is a development that can redefine the policy, involve the creation or re-structuring of organisations or the assignment of new responsibilities to already existing organisations. The supporting juridical apparatus is properly detailed and put into practice. The hiring or redistribution of personnel takes place, the budget is implemented and various activities are developed. This process, which is developed by administrative units that mobilise human, financial and material resources, requires constant decision-making and may result in a redesign of the programme (Arretche 2001).

As seen above, the implementation of social programmes is "understood as the phase of executing the services to meet pre-established goals and purposes, bearing in mind that the desired results should be attained" (Arretche 2001: 48; my translation). It constitutes the widest and perhaps the most complex phase of the public policy processes, so that empirical and conceptual difficulties may prevent a definition and a distinction between the implementation and the policy itself, particularly because, as Arretche (2001: 48) reminds us, the implementation is a field of uncertainties. The decisions made in the stage of implementation of social programmes can alter the course and the strategies initially established, determining the development of the programme itself. The decisions and the decision-makers are the main focus of the implementation because they express conflicts and disputes for alternatives, and there are moments of getting closer or moving away from the goals, means and established strategies (NEPP/UNICAMP, 1993: 34). In brief, the implementation is part of the policy, in such a way that the policy theory is formulated taking into consideration its implementation. As such, it will always develop and reformulate the policy, which means that the implementation is also connected with evaluation (Mojane/Wildavsky 1984). That is, the implementation is itself an important space for evaluating the actions

that are taking place. This means that evaluation must be considered as an essential part of the process of implementation of a public policy.

> Thus, my starting point is the view that a public policy, since its formulation, involves the mobilization and allocation of resources; division of labour (time); use of controls (power); interaction among subjects; different interests, adaptations; risks and uncertainties about processes and results; the notions of success and failure, and particularly the relevance of the social subjects in these processes and their rationalities. Thus, the processes of public policies involve, in their different developments, diverse subjects that enter, leave or stay in the process, are guided by different rationalities and moved by different interests, which means that the development of the public policies is a contradictory and non-linear process. These interests are mediated by the state, specifically by the political system, and the constitution of interests is explained in different ways by the three main paradigms of contemporary Political Science[3] (Silva 2008:97-98; my translation).

3. Construction a concept of evaluation research

In Brazil the expansion of evaluations of social policies and programmes can be seen since the '1980s, when the social movements started demanding the universalisation of social policies as a citizenship right. At that time, a more in-depth critique of the social policy patterns in Latin America, especially in Brazil, began to take place. This critique refers to the poor use of public funds and the failure in targeting the social programmes towards the most needy population groups. In this context the social movements also identify a

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[3] For Pluralists, who are guided by the liberal matrix, the constitution of interests is based on the rationality of the individual and the natural rights of freedom and equality, in which the social interest coincides with the individual's interests. Therefore, the pursuit of their own interests makes the individuals form groups of interests or pressure capable of maximising the collective well-being. For Marxists, there are no individual interests, but only class interests. The interests, therefore, depend on the fundamental class in which individuals are inserted and the accomplishment of these interests requires political action, through which the class constitutes itself as such. For Institutionalists or Neo-Institutionalists, guided by the Weberian matrix, the state is capable of constituting and defending interests that are expressed in specific purposes and are not necessarily due to certain groups or class interests (see Alford/Robe/Freidland 1985).

lack of transparency in the creation of social programmes and a lack of communication of their impacts upon the beneficiaries. At the same time the social movements demand the decentralisation of social programmes in order to allow popular organizations to take social control of those programmes. Therefore, this is a favourable context for emphasizing the evaluation of social programmes as a demand from social movements.

The dissemination of the evaluation of social programmes was expanded in the '1990s due to requirements made by international institutions such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank IDB, which demanded reforms of the social programmes, such as targeting them on the poor population groups, decentralizing their implementation as well as their privatisation. In this sense the financial institutions included the evaluation of social policies as a condition for funding them, and started demanding more rationality in the spending of public money. Thus, evaluation started to be carried out aiming at assessing the effectiveness in the application of those resources and measuring to what extent the programmes' goals were being reached. In this context a significant example is the adoption of the income transfer programmes that have been developed in several countries in Latin America since the '1990s. Among them, the "Family Stipend" programme created in Brazil in 2003 gained great national and international visibility. Until October 2010 this programme had already benefited 12,769,155 families, that is, about 48 million Brazilians who live in 5,565 municipalities and in the Federal District. These are poor families with a monthly per capita income of up to US$ 85.00. "Family Stipend" is a federal programme implemented in a decentralised way in the Brazilian municipalities.

It is, therefore, possible to say that in Brazil the evaluation of social policies and programmes initially did not constitute a systematic tradition. Rather, it was primarily motivated by an inspection-oriented, police-like, formal and bureaucratic rationale. In this framework evaluation was not seen as a movement that is part and parcel of the public policy process. Nevertheless, the expansion of the evaluation of social policies and programmes since the '1980s can be seen as a consequence of the re-democratisation of Brazilian society, as it expressed a claim by social groups organised around the demand for the expansion of citizenship; a demand for the universalisation of

social policies; a demand for improvement of the living conditions and a search for decentralised participatory practices in the processes of social policies, transparency, democratic social control and support of social struggles.

In the '1990s, in the context of the state reform, evaluation continued to grow, following an international trend, to adapt the country to the new world capitalist organisation. This development was located in the context of the productive restructuring determined by the state's fiscal crisis and by the influence of the Neoliberal Project. The latter was assumed tardily in Brazil, only from the '1990s onwards, and put on the agenda issues such as the liberalisation and the deregulation of the economy. In order to guarantee such processes, the reform of the Brazilian state was defined as a priority. In this reform process, the format of the state was redesigned. It became less interventionist and at the same time strengthened its roles as a funder and regulator of social programmes through the establishment of rules and the exercise of control. In this process of state reform, the degree of state regulation was defined and the size of the state was delimited through the adoption of privatisation strategies. In this context, the implementation of social programmes was largely transferred to organisations of the so-called third sector (non-state public sector, such as the Non-Governmental Organizations), which is regarded as less bureaucratic, more efficient and more dynamic than the structure of the state (Pereria/Grau 1999). The purpose presented was to increase the state's effectiveness in providing social services. In the context of the Brazilian state reform proposal, the evaluation of social policies and programmes began to be required as an essential mechanism of state control over the resources that were transferred to the third sector, whose organisations became the primary implementers of social programmes.[4]

Just to exemplify the transfer of the implementation of some programmes to third sector organisations, I point out the important action developed by the Brazilian government since the '1990s in the field of professional training for the labour market. In this context, the majority of the professional training

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[4] On the importance of evaluation in the context of the Brazilian state reform, see Guilhon (2005).

courses for youths and adults were held by social organisations. So, the role of state at that point consisted of funding and following up those courses. For that purpose, the state hired external research groups to evaluate those programmes. The evaluations performed by them were mainly centred on the criteria of the efficiency and efficacy of these courses, as seen above.

In this context, the evaluation began to be used mainly as a mechanism of social control of public policies by the state, with an intense participation of external evaluators, in a search for an effective spending of public funds and efficacy of the social programmes, by focusing on the poorest and more vulnerable groups of the Brazilian population. This was designed to overcome the state's financial restrictions through the reduction and control of public spending.

Still in the '1990s, the evaluation of social policies and programmes began to become a demand from the international funding institutions, which began to make their funding dependent on the evaluation focusing on the efficiency and efficacy of the programmes.

The determinations resulting from the state reform and the demands by the international organisations generated three consequences concerning the practice of the evaluation of social policies and programmes: the creation of a market of institutions and professionals competing for public funds, with a high increase of the evaluation performed by professionals from the outside, a transformation of the evaluation into a mere measurement of the results of social programmes, with their consequent depolitisation, and the prevalence or reduction of evaluation to its technical dimension.

In this context, the evaluation of social policies and programmes, even in Brazil, began to constitute a broad interdisciplinary field. In spite of the prevalence of econometric approaches, with predominantly quantitative features, there arose some interactive approaches that took into consideration contextual and process-like variables in the evaluation process. However, it is necessary to consider that the practice of evaluation of social policies and programmes was still restricted and developed more in the sense of controlling expenses than of revising the ongoing programmes. However, pressure from organised social movements was not absent in this process. They re-

quired transparency in the application of public funds and their effectiveness, in the sense of significantly reducing poverty in the country.

Trying to go beyond this evaluation approach, the evaluation researchers of the GAEPP have been developing a broader approach in evaluation research. We are trying to go beyond the efficiency criteria that are limited to reporting costs and results of social programmes and the efficacy criteria that examine the use of money in order to verify the level of accomplishment of the pre-set objectives of the evaluated programmes. Considering the importance of criteria such as efficiency and efficacy to evaluate social programmes, particularly in developing countries that have limited resources to fund them, we do take into account the relevance of the criterion of effectiveness when we are evaluating social programmes. That is, we try to identify the effects of the evaluated programme on the target population as well as on the whole population. For instance, in some evaluations that we have been developing on the "Family Stipend" programme, we try to identify impacts on the whole community as well as on the local community where the programme is developed. We also try to indentify the impacts of the "Family Stipend" on the local economy, on the political and social way of life of the whole population. To perform this evaluation, we apply participatory research techniques, like focus groups of discussion that make it possible to have a collective discussion with the participation of different subjects who are interested in the evaluated programme. Beyond the criterion of effectiveness, we also find it important to identify contextual variables other than the programme that are contributing to change the situation of the target population and the population in general. For us, this means going beyond the evaluation of the financial costs of a programme and finding out whether the pre-established goals were actually reached. The results of the evaluation are shared with the subjects who are primarily involved in the programmes, such as professionals and social organisations that develop some actions related to the programme.

4. Views and specifities in evaluation process: Constructing a participatory concept of evaluation

The evaluation of social policies and programmes begins to become the government's conscious effort to change the performance of a policy or programme. Its most relevant aim is to offer information to the political decision-makers about the impact of public actions designed to change behaviours and situations (the production of results and impacts). Seen from the perspective of citizenship, however, evaluation can become an effective device for the social control of public policies by society.

The decision-making process and the elements that influence the process, with an emphasis on goals and objectives and on the expected and the non-expected effects, are areas of concern for the evaluation. In this sense, the evaluation focuses on fundamental issues: How are these policies and programmes developed? What do they achieve and what are they expected to achieve? Whom are they targeted to and to what extent? What are their expected, non-expected, foreseen and unforeseen effects? What are the costs?

In the perspective of evaluation, public policies are governmental decisions that generate tangible, measurable or substantial impact by altering the living conditions of a group or population or producing changes in attitudes, behaviors or opinions. In this sense, the main focus of evaluation research has been the verification of the purposes accomplished (the results of a programme) or their impacts, using efficiency, efficacy and effectiveness as the evaluation's main criteria.[5] In the light of these criteria, evaluation research shows ambiguities, as well as a lack of tradition, and it encounters resistance. It faces three recurrent criticisms in the literature of the area: a methodological fragility that may compromise both its validity and credibility; irrelevance in the sense that its results are not meaningful or capable of influencing

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[5] We understand efficiency or economical profitability as the relation between the costs and the results of the programme; efficacy as the degree in which the purposes and goals were reached in relation to the beneficiary population, in a given period of time; and effectiveness as the relation between the results of the programme on the whole community.

decisions, or its results are not disseminated or, whenever they are, they are not actually used (Browne/Wildavsky 1984: 184).

Throughout these reflections, I highlight evaluation as a possible instrument that can be used by organised social segments to strengthen social pressure on the state with a view to the achievement of social rights, considering the information that the evaluation could generate and make available about social policies and programmes. In this sense, in our experiences of evaluation we try to use the same mechanisms to disseminate the results of the evaluations developed by our team of evaluation researchers through workshops and discussions with groups and organisations interested in the evaluated programme.

In terms of conception, etymologically, the term evaluation means attributing value, assessing real effects, determining what is good, bad, positive or negative. It necessarily involves a value judgement. Therefore, it is neither neutral nor external to the power relations, but is an eminently political act that is part of the context of a public programme, demanding objectification efforts, interdependence and interdisciplinary actions.

When first approaching the concept of evaluation, it is necessary to distinguish its narrow from its general sense. Considering its general sense, evaluating is a flexible term, involving different uses and a broad meaning. It means ascribing value to something by assessing its merit, that is, "evaluating is a way of estimating, appreciating and calculating" (Aguilar/Ander-Eggg 1994: 17). It involves the act of issuing an opinion or a judgement about something according to given criteria. As such, it is part of the everyday actions of daily life, representing what the literature calls spontaneous, informal, non-systematic evaluation. It is not necessarily based on sufficient and adequate information, and is directed to daily acts of weighing related to the need to make decisions. This is an evaluation associated to the everyday experience of human beings and is, therefore, of a private nature.

In the professional field, evaluations are deliberate, systematic and complex, guided by the scientific method, and are of a public nature. They necessarily include a technical-methodological and a political dimension, which are both also necessarily articulated. In other words, it is evaluation research that is designed to be applied and uses methods and techniques from social

research. Therefore, we think that the evaluation of social policies and pro-grammes can play important roles in offering data to enhance decision-making and concrete actions by the public administration as well as by social movements organised in society. The latter are the social movements that struggle for social rights and try to make sure that the needs of their members are actually met.

When the evaluation of social policies and programmes is viewed in this way, it has the following main characteristics:

– Evaluation research is a form of applied research, being, therefore, a systematic, planned and directed activity.

– It identifies, obtains and provides reliable valid information that is suffi-cient and relevant to guide a judgment about the merit or value of a pro-gramme or of specific activities.

– It shows to what extent results have been achieved.

– It serves as a basis for a reasonable decision-making about the develop-ment of programmes or actions, problem-solving and for the understand-ing of the determining factors for success or failure.

Evaluation is thus understood as

> a way of applied, systematic, planned and targeted social research; de-signed to identify, obtain and provide, in a reliable and valid manner, suf-ficient data and information to support the judgment of the merit and value of the different components of a programme (even in the phases of diagnosis, programming or implementation) or of a set of specific tasks that are being, have been or will be carried out, aiming at producing con-crete results and effects; by demonstrating the extension and the extent to which these achievements have actually taken place, in such a way that it serves as a basis or guidance for a reasonable and intelligent decision-making between courses of action, or to solve problems and promote knowledge (Aguilar/Ander-Egg, 1994: 31; my translation).

In this perspective, evaluation research is a systematic application of research procedures to assess the conceptualisation, design, implementation and usefulness of social programmes designed to intervene in a particular prob-lem-like situation. Thus, the evaluators use methodologies of social research

to judge and improve the way in which social policies and programmes are conducted since their initial stage of definition, drafting and implementation. It makes it possible to distinguish effective from ineffective programmes as well as to plan, design and develop new efforts that may effectively and efficiently produce the desired impacts on groups and populations (Rossi/Freement 1993: 5; my translation).

The underlying assumption is that social policies and programmes generate impacts and changes, since they alter the living conditions of people, groups and populations. It is not a neutral act, nor is it exterior to the power relations; it is a technical but also a political act. It is not uninterested, but it demands objectification and independence, and is founded on values and on the knowledge of reality.

The evaluation research founded on such a view values the critical analysis of the policy or programme under evaluation; it searches for the principles and theoretical-methodological foundations of the policy or programme; it takes into consideration the subjects and interests involved in the process; it is founded on values and concepts about social reality that are shared by the subjects of the evaluation, i.e. requesters, evaluators, beneficiaries and informers, it is opposed to the idea of neutrality and does not take a single path. In this sense, the results of any evaluation are regarded as partial and questionable, as is the case of any social theory. Thus, it does not have the power of an unquestionable truth, since all knowledge about society is always a historical, partial and relative interpretation.

In this perspective, evaluation research essentially performs three main functions:

– Technical Function: it provides help for the correction of deviations in the process of implementing a programme, by indicating in which sense objectives and measures take place and by offering aid for designing or redesigning the policies and programmes.

– Political Function: it offers information to the social subjects, so that they can base their social struggles for a better social control of public policies on that information.

– Academic Function: it unveils determinations and contradictions found in the process and content of the public policies, by showing the deepest meanings of these policies (their essence), for the construction of knowledge.

In this effort of spelling out the specificities and concepts of evaluation research, I reaffirm that it is regarded as a technical and political act, instituted by procedures capable of capturing the underlying project of society and the guiding values of the policy and programme under evaluation. It takes into account the correlations of forces present in society that express social demands. It refers to objectives, purposes, commitments and developments, in a "movement that transcends the conclusions and materialises itself in its applications" (Prestes 1999: 45). Thus, "the evaluation of social policies is not an 'uninterested' formal exercise. It is strongly anchored in a set of notions and values about social reality shared by the relevant members of the government's majority, including the political and bureaucratic elites, that allows them to distinguish between different alternatives of policies" (Melo 1998: 11). It is based on a methodology that is not reduced to procedures, but involves theoretical concepts of the evaluation itself and its object. It assumes the view that the method is not separated from the research procedures, and that evaluation is a demand to and a commitment by the state vis-à-vis its citizens. So, it should aim at the production of new theoretical-methodological knowledge with a view to new practices of transformation of the policies and the transparency of public actions (Saul 1999). As such, we can distinguish evaluation research from political evaluation, and from the analysis of public policies, although evaluation involves judgement, approval or disapproval, and refer, either implicitly or explicitly, to a concept of justice. Political evaluation means "an analysis and a clarification of the criteria or criterion that underlie a given policy: the reasons that make it better when compared to any other" (Figueiredo/Figueiredo1986: 2). It limits itself to the analysis of the political assumptions and the foundations of a given political action, without considering the programme's implementation and its results. The evaluation of the policy and programme, in turn, will identify changes, trying to establish the relationship between the evaluated programme and the changes identified in the living conditions of an individual, group or popula-

tion. For example, we have developed evaluations of the human resources training programmes and of the income transfer programmes developed by the Brazilian government. In such an evaluation, which we called political evaluation of the programme, we focused on the identification and problematisation of the foundations that justified the creation of the programme. We also considered its design structure represented by objectives, target population, source and amount of resources as well as organisations that are available to the programme. In order to evaluate the programme we focused on the changes in the living conditions of the target population and in the whole community. It essentially demands the development of an empirical research project.

5. Constructing a participatory approach in evaluation research

The idea of constructing a participatory approach in evaluation research requires that one defines the participatory dimension as a dimension that can be associated with the process of constructing knowledge, since I consider this research model as applied social research, oriented toward the production of knowledge in the field of social policies and programmes. Based on this view, the notion of a participatory approach points to two aspects: one of them is more debated and explored by the Latin American literature. This approach highlights the direct participation of members of the "popular" classes[6] as subjects of the process of knowledge. They are seen as popular researchers working side by side with academic researchers and scientists, producing knowledge to be used in their struggles. In this situation, both members of the popular classes and academic researchers construct knowledge that is applied to strengthen social struggles in the context in which they are inserted, because they are developing a joint social action. This is the participatory research known as action-research. The other understanding,

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[6] Despite the imprecision of the term, "popular classes" is used here as "a useful expression to capture the possible heterogeneity of this huge group of people who are located in the lower social and economic strata within the current capitalist system in Brazil" (SILVA, 2007, p. 138; translation mine). For further reflections on the category of popular classes, check the aforementioned reference.

which is the one I advocate, admits that knowledge can be used for the good of society even when it is produced without the direct participation of the popular classes. This participative approach does not place popular research and academic research in different fields. The most important thing is the knowledge constructed in the communities with the participation of popular subjects and researchers or within the academy. They are made available for the strengthening and advance of the social struggles, from the perspective of social transformations. Therefore, in my view the most important aspect is the role of knowledge in the development of a consciousness by the "subaltern" classes.[7] It is necessarily a proposal to construct knowledge committed to social change, which requires considering reality critically as an object of research. It also requires the social insertion of researchers in social reality and their identification with the interests and demands of the intermediate classes in society, which are the only subjects concerned with change. I am referring to a science that is committed, has explicit intentions, overcoming the notion of neutrality that positivistic science tries to impose on knowledge (Silva 2006: 126).

More recently (Silva 1991) I have discussed the possibility of contributing to change professional practices within institutions, which may result in the strengthening of social struggles. The consideration of professional practices implies the direct involvement of professionals in both the definition and the development of evaluation research projects in a perspective of critical investigation of their realities. In this path, the researchers at GAEPP have been trying to develop a practice in the field of evaluation research, which is regarded by us as "a space of analysis and modification of Public Policies. Thus, we see our experiences as an instrument to meet the basic needs of people, and as a direct instrument that becomes concrete in a movement towards the construction and broadening of citizenship of the subaltern classes of society" (Silva 2006: 137). It has to do with the involvement of the subjects inserted in the process of these policies and programmes in the

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[7] The category "subaltern" is taken as a Gramscian legacy, and refers to a diversified and contradictory group of situations, serving, according to Yazbek, to give a name to classes. "Subaltern" refers to the lack of power to exercise control, make decisions, create and direct (Yazbek 1993: 18).

definition and implementation of their evaluations, without intending to do what is called participatory evaluation in its broader sense.

Thus, for example, a group of GAEPP researchers developed, in 1999, an evaluation of the programme called Creche Manutenção – PCM. This was a Brazilian federal program implemented in the state of Maranhão. That evaluation was done by GAEPP members along with some professionals of the Social Development Administration of the state of Maranhão (GDS). The whole content of the evaluation research and its methodological aspects were defined in several meetings with the GAEPP staff, the implementers and the administrators of the programme. The evaluation researchers' contacts with the informers were facilitated by the programme professionals who were more directly involved with the implementers and beneficiaries in the municipalities of the state where the Creche Manutenção program was implemented. When the field investigation ended, a preliminary report was written, presented and discussed with the GDS professionals. When the systematisation and analyses of the data were concluded, they were discussed among researchers, implementers and administrators of the GDS programme. Then short reports were drafted in an informal language. Their goal was to disseminate the results of the evaluation among the subjects who had participated in the evaluation in each municipality. Besides that, articles with the findings of this evaluation were published. They were also made available on the GAEPP web site. In this way we try to reinforce the political dimension of evaluation research, making its results available to different subjects: administrators, implementers and beneficiaries of the programme.

In the context of evaluation research as defined above, a strong concern with the restoration of the systematised, ordered, written or spoken knowledge deserves attention. It must be highlighted that the purpose of knowledge must be to contribute to social change by universalising the access of the entire population to the goods and services necessary to guarantee a dignified way of life to everyone. As a consequence, the main addressees of knowledge are the subaltern sectors of society, so that they may be able to carry out their struggles and demands based on information that has been historically denied to them or omitted from them.

On the other hand, the social control of public policies by the popular classes has been emphasized more explicitly in Brazil from the '1980s onwards, highlighting the need to decentralise these policies so that, at the local power level, they may be more directly followed by the population and truly put at its service.

It is in this direction that evaluation research can contribute to support social struggles and to broaden citizenship. It challenges me to make an effort to construct knowledge in this field as a central object of my concern. This means to try to introduce it in my practice of evaluation-researcher, along with other colleagues with whom I share this understanding. For us evaluation research is primarily a commitment that should guide our efforts to produce knowledge. In this evaluation practice, the publishing of evaluation results is essential, and although not all the subjects of the policy and of the programme will become researchers, a researcher is necessarily someone committed to and inserted in social struggles (Silva 2006). The evaluation of social policies and programmes must be regarded as a condition for democracy and social control of the public policies by the subaltern sectors of society. It must become an experience in the context of citizenship and democratisation of Brazilian society (Gomes 2001).

In this direction, I develop evaluation research, aiming to contribute to raise information that is important to the public decision-makers, but, above all, information directed to the production of knowledge committed to social struggles, including the universalisation of social rights, thus contributing to the social movement of constructing citizenship, as mentioned earlier in this paper. Therefore, in my view the evaluation of social policies and programmes produces, besides technical knowledge, a political knowledge insofar as it expresses interests and intentions. "It is necessary to overcome the strictly economic and technical character of the evaluation founded on the functionalist or classical rationalist model that hides its political principles, without, however, denying the importance of the technical dimension of the evaluation of social policies" (Gomes 2001: 18; my translation).

I propose an overcoming of the quantitative bias, which makes wide use of economic methods in the evaluation of social policies and programs and ignores external contextual variables of the social programs being imple-

mented (Vianna/Silva 1989). In this perspective, a fundamental purpose of evaluation research is to contribute to the control of the social programmes perceived as actions of public interest. In the case of Brazil, this means overcoming a historical process that put the development of social policies under the criterion of merit, to the detriment of the criterion of need, thus producing more exclusion than inclusion and constituting what Draibe (1990) called a State of Particularistic Meritocratic Well-being. I am referring to a state marked by features of paternalism, welfarism and clientelism, which excludes the participation of the population in its formation process, leading to a selective, discriminatory inclusion and a transformation of right into privilege (Silva 2006: 134).

The references above characterize evaluation research as a mechanism of construction of critical knowledge about social policies and programmes that can inform public decision-makers and struggles for citizenship towards the construction of a fairer and more equal society.

It is in this direction that the GAEPP researchers have been developing their evaluation experiences, so that evaluation research may extend its functions from the technical to the academic and political field. In this sense, the examples of evaluation practices indicated above show the uniqueness of an evaluation proposal when it is developed with the participation of the evaluator-researchers, administrators and implementers of the evaluated programme and, whenever possible, opening it to the participation of segments of the programme's target population. Besides that, it is essential to socialise the results of the evaluations with all subjects involved in the programme.

Therefore, in the development of our experiences in evaluation research we are guided by two concerns:

> The first one refers to the identification and involvement of the different groups of subjects present in the process of public policies, and here I assume the notion that subjects are diverse and different at each moment of this process and are guided by intentionalities, interests and rationalities that are also different. The second concern refers to the application of the evaluation's results, which represents a weakness of the evaluation of pub-

lic policies, according to what has been demonstrated in our experiences[8] (Silva 2006: 136; my translation.

Regarding this aspect, we have pointed out two groups of subjects: the professionals, managers and implementers of social programmes on the one hand and their users on the other. Keeping in mind that we have been acting as external evaluators, we consider the involvement of the professionals in the programmes evaluated as essential. We are aware of the fact that the knowledge these professionals have about the programme and its beneficiaries is better than ours as external evaluators, which makes our knowledge fundamental and complementary. In this way two things become possible:

> A better mastery of the evaluation's object, which is indispensable in the evaluation processes, as well as a higher possibility of a certain involvement of the beneficiaries of the social programmes. In line with the perspective adopted here, they are more than just beneficiaries of the programmes or mere informers of the evaluation, but are also considered as subjects who have interests and are capable of contributing to and influencing the evaluation process (Silva 2006: 137; my translation).

In this process of constructing a participatory perspective in the evaluation of social programmes and policies, I am aware of the limits of such participation and of the application of evaluation results, particularly if we consider two subjects highlighted in this reflection: the professionals, managers and implementers and the beneficiaries of social programmes.

The former face primarily institutional limits that range from the political will of the leaders to the limitation of resources and to the lack of preparation of the professionals themselves. The programme beneficiaries face basic structural limits: the low level of the organisations of the subaltern sectors and the limited access their members have to the information generated in the context of the evaluation of social programmes.

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[8] I have already referred to the limited application of the results of evaluations of social programmes, considering that we can take into account the direct applications, which are normally done by the public decision-makers and the indirect ones, which can be the organisational learning and what I am referring to here as the support given to the social struggles of the subaltern sectors in society.

In this sense I would like to mention the specific case of the Management Councils9, which are regarded as fundamental subjects in this process, but are marked by profound weaknesses, including interferences in their composition, lack of training of their members and limited access to information (Silva 2006: 138). Nevertheless, these difficulties and limitations do not render impossible the efforts made by our team of evaluators-researchers to construct a participatory approach in the field of evaluation research, since we think that knowledge must be applied to the solution of the social problems that affect humankind.

I am proposing here a kind of knowledge that does not admit a dichotomy between subject and object in the investigation process, nor a separation between theory and practice, and which does not allow individualisation, generation of passivity or the denial of the problematisation of reality. I mean a knowledge that assumes a critical posture committed to social change. Thus, science is understood as historical truth, located and limited in terms of its scope, because it is marked by the values of a given society and constitutes a process that approaches its object in a successive manner. It is always unfinished in its explanation of reality, which is always moving and changing (Silva 2006: 147). It implies a commitment of the evaluator-researcher to the critique of reality in the search for its transformation.

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9 I refer to the councils instituted specially by the Brazilian Constitution of 1988 and designed to exercise the social control of social programmes in the field of the various social policies. They are made up of representatives of the public power and of civil society, and their role is to fulfill the constitutional principle of social participation.

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