
ESTUDIOS / STUDIES

Houses and Cultural Change: An Interdisciplinary Methodology for the Exploration of the Built Environment in Contemporary Rural Spain

Casas y cambio cultural: metodología interdisciplinar para el estudio del espacio construido en la España rural contemporánea

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an interdisciplinary methodology for the study of recent transformations in the households of rural areas in Spain. Houses constitute a key repository of the biographies and cultural memory of the communities inhabiting these territories, since they work as outstanding elements in shaping personal, family and communal identities. Therefore, houses are useful elements for the archaeological study of the social and productive transformations affecting rural areas in Spain. Indeed, the built environment is one of the most illustrative elements in the articulation of these changes in the everyday life of rural communities, in which the materiality of the households plays a key role. To fulfil these aims, this paper builds on two case studies in the districts of Maragatería (León) and Somiedu (Asturias), in Northwest Spain. In exploring these cases, this paper contributes to the theoretical and methodological development of other comparable archaeological, ethnographic and heritage studies research being carried out in Spain and elsewhere.

Key words: Household Archaeology; Heritage; Contemporary Archaeology; Modernization; Rural Landscapes Transformation.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo presenta una propuesta metodológica para el estudio interdisciplinar de las transformaciones recientes de la arquitectura doméstica en zonas rurales del estado español. Las casas constituyen un repositorio clave en las biografías y la memoria cultural de las comunidades que habitan estos territorios, funcionando como dispositivos destacados en la configuración de las identidades personales, familiares y comunitarias. Por ello, son un elemento adecuado para estudiar arqueológicamente las transformaciones sociales y productivas que atraviesan el medio rural del estado español. De hecho, el espacio construido es uno de los dispositivos más reconocibles en la articulación de estos procesos de cambio en la cotidianidad de las comunidades rurales, donde la materialidad de los espacios domésticos juega un papel clave. La investigación aborda dos casos de estudio localizados en Maragatería (León) y Somiedu (Asturias), en el Noroeste ibérico. La reflexión teórica-metodológica sobre nuestros estudios arqueológicos, etnográficos y patrimoniales en marcha, junto a la consideración de investigaciones semejantes desarrolladas recientemente en otras zonas rurales del estado español e internacionalmente, sirven de eje conductor a este trabajo.

Palabras clave: Arqueología de los espacios domésticos; Patrimonio; Arqueología contemporánea; Modernización; Transformación de los paisajes rurales.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This article provides an account of an interdisciplinary methodology developed for the analysis of domesticity in rural areas of contemporary Northwest Spain. Our research explores processes of cultural change currently underway in many European rural areas, where vernacular or so-called ‘traditional’ societies move towards postmodern and global patterns of relationality. To study this process, we analyze material culture in relation to the built environment of two areas, as well as the social aspects that influence the perception of these spaces and their construction as meaningful features. Aiming to do this, we have selected two case studies in rural areas of Asturias and León (North of Spain), where we have developed and tested the methodology critically assessed in this article. Our paper aims to encourage and facilitate the transfer of our methodology to other contexts where it might prove useful. First, we will discuss the theoretical underpinnings of our work in the context of

current theoretical and methodological debates in the field. Then, we will focus on the methods and strategies employed on our research. Finally, we conclude with some reflections and a brief discussion of some particular issues that highlight the usefulness of our approach.

2. OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESIS

Our case study areas are located in two of the so-called ‘empty’ or ‘emptied’ areas of rural Spain, in particular in the provinces of Asturias and León, comprising a set of six mountain villages in Somiedu and Maragatería (Fig. 1). During an early stage of our research in these areas, we wondered whether it might be possible to address contemporary processes of cultural change in rural Europe through an archaeological and material culture approach. Various processes have converged in the transformation of these peripheral areas over the last few decades. In particular, there has been abandonment



Figure 1. Location of Somiedu (1) and Maragatería (2).

of the rural, with a parallel process of reoccupation and development in terms of neoliberal governance, touristification processes and second residence phenomena. This research will help us to evaluate the potential of the interdisciplinary methods developed here and their potential application to other research in different areas of rural Spain, but also to other southern European countries, from Portugal to Italy and Greece. The built environment—a main concern of archaeological and anthropological research (Lawrence and Low 1990; Rapoport 1982)—provides a pertinent starting point to discuss these issues. Accordingly, this paper will assess the methodological potential held by the archaeological analysis of domesticity, focusing on what it can tell us about identity, behavior and socioeconomics in a context of daunting cultural change. To approach these issues, we developed a hybrid methodology that transcends the traditional disciplinary boundaries of the social sciences, freely drawing from archaeology, sociology, anthropology, heritage studies and geography.

One of our starting assumptions is that cultural representations of vernacular rural European identities have become objects of consumption in a global context where uniqueness and difference provide value (Rullani 2006). Therefore, the study of cultural change in these highly localized contexts cannot be understood without taking into account the broader global processes we have investigated in relation to our study area within the last few years. Social, demographic or productive changes affecting the evolution of the European countryside intersect with phenomena such as the transition to service sector economies and the rise of cultural tourism (González Álvarez 2019). Other factors have been the real-estate bubbles and associated corruption and patronage networks (Alonso González 2017b; Alonso González *et al.* 2018; Alonso González and Macías Vázquez 2014), as well as the heritagization of European rural areas based on urban imaginaries that reify and essentialize the rural areas as an unchanging reality (Alonso González 2017a; Alonso González and González Álvarez 2016). These exogenous processes characteristic of postindustrial capitalism are mostly beyond the control of local communities, but they shape and deeply influence the future of rural citizens and the articulation of their built environments. Therefore, one of our aims is to reveal the consequences for local communities of the implementation of such neoliberal forms of governance, which render politics a merely

neutral and technical affair (Rose 1996). These forms can include urban and spatial planning, cultural heritage policies, or tourism and agricultural development programs, from national level to wider scale EU structural funds such as LEADER. In this context, understanding changes in the perception, conception and creation of the built environment in domestic contexts can serve as tools to politicize these apparently neutral contexts which are, on the contrary, highly politically laden and usually involve highly unequal power relations.

3. THEORETICAL APPROACH: FROM ETHNOARCHAEOLOGY TO CONTEMPORARY ARCHEOLOGY

The last two decades have witnessed an upsurge of research sharing similar methodological and theoretical underpinnings to address the built environment (Barke and Parks 2016; Falquina Aparicio 2005; Gallego Vila 2016; González Ruibal 1998, 2003a; Millán Pascual 2015; Señorán Martín and Ayán Vila 2015). Those pioneering investigations were developed under the self-appointed label of ‘ethnoarchaeology’, which we used in our initial studies (Alonso González 2009; González Álvarez 2008). However, following González Ruibal (2008b), we started to consider our approach as ‘contemporary archaeology’ (Alonso González and González Álvarez 2016). This shift avoids the negative connotations implied by the abuses of processual ethnoarchaeology (Hernando Gonzalo 2006). The former ethnoarchaeological studies emerged with the New Archaeology in the 1970s and 1980s, when processualist scholars investigated ‘living’ pre-industrial communities to develop comparative and interpretive frameworks for the archaeological record through middle range theories (e.g. Binford 1967, 1978; Gould 1980; Kramer 1979). Ethnoarchaeological approaches devoted specific attention to the role of the built environment, focusing on houses and domestic environments (Agorsah *et al.* 1985; David 1971; Kent 1984; Kramer 1982; Yellen 1977). Their main objective was to establish analogies that supported the archaeological interpretation of the built environment in prehistoric societies.

Processualist ethnoarchaeology played an important role in the renovation and modernization of archaeological methods and theory (Trigger 2006: 405-407). Nevertheless, the research agenda of New

Archaeology paid scarce attention to processes of contemporary change that affected the communities under study. Similarly, there was a lack of reflection on subalternization processes in preindustrial societies, within the context of globalization (González Ruibal 2008a). On the contrary, it is possible and necessary to develop critical archaeological approaches to the contemporary built environment in rural communities. This can enable social scientists to engage these kinds of communities that are often marginalized within their own societies and also within the power-knowledge dynamics of Western modernity, including academic research. Therefore, we understand our own work as the application of politically informed archaeological methodologies to contemporary contexts where preindustrial rural environments intersect with global capitalist and urban dynamics (García Canclini 1990).

In fact, we consider that archaeology should study humans through material culture, transcending artificial geographical or chronological boundaries. Moreover, its methods can help to analyze contemporary processes of cultural change and their socio-political context, beyond exclusively studying recent armed conflicts (Schofield and Cocroft 2007) or areas of intense industrialization during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Rix 1967). Studies of material culture can be used to give voice to certain collectives and include them in historical narratives that have been subordinated to the margins of Western capitalism, such as homeless people in large cities (Kiddey and Schofield 2011; Zimmerman *et al.* 2010), and also peasants in peripheral rural areas. In fact, the house is one of the cornerstones of family life in rural Europe, the central site for socialization and the spread and naturalization of customs and values through the creation of a *habitus* (Bourdieu 1998). The built environment plays a role in structuring social reality and cultural identities (Hillier and Hanson 1984), while functioning as the fundamental symbolic reference and cultural repository for the identities, feelings and memories of its inhabitants (Herva 2010; Kus 1997; Rapoport 1990). Therefore, the archaeological analysis of domesticity can enable us to explore cultural change in depth. The sub-field of household archaeology, with great development in Latin America, is central to our methodology as it enables us to shed light on forms of life, symbolism and social organization, by analyzing the material culture of the built environment (e.g. Allison 1999; Funari and Zarankin 2003; Haber 2011; Kent 1990).

4. AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY FOR THE STUDY OF CULTURAL CHANGE IN DOMESTIC SPACE

Our interdisciplinary methodology basically drew on contemporary archaeology (Buchli and Lucas 2001; González Ruibal 2008b) and material culture studies (Miller 1998, 2010). However, to increase our freedom of analysis we prioritize hybridization of methods over disciplinary orthodoxy, so as to widen and deepen the debate as much as possible. Accordingly, our research was based on the study of material culture and the archaeological analysis of houses, but we also carried out spatial analysis of the villages under study, as well as interviews and ethnographic fieldwork. In addition, we delve into the case studies diachronically to gain a sense of real change, assessing the intensity and scope of the transformations under investigation. Finally, we connect our work with the analysis of heritage and spatial planning policies, to understand how and to what extent these policies can affect the built environment and ultimately social dynamics. These methodologies have been applied to two case studies where qualitative and quantitative assessments have been applied to six villages in Northwest Spain (Table 1), 3 in Maragatería (León) —Lagunas de Somoza, Val de San Lorenzo and Val de San Román— and another 3 in the municipality of Somiedu (Asturias) —El Puertu, La Peral and Llamardal—. Besides highlighting the analytical potential of each set of methodologies, we will present some illustrative examples of the procedures.

Case Study 1: Somiedu			
Villages	Population (2017)	Analized Houses	Inhabitants/houses
El Puertu	66	111	0,59
La Peral	21	55	0,38
Llamardal	15	19	0,79
Case Study 2: Maragatería			
Villages	Population (2012)	Analized Houses	Inhabitants/houses
Val de San Lorenzo	382	348	1,10
Val de San Román	92	115	0,80
Lagunas de Somoza	45	113	0,40

Table 1.

4.1. Formal Analysis of Houses

Following previous works (González Ruibal 2003a, 2005), the main focus of our methodology is an analysis of the formal features of every building in the villages we studied. During our ongoing fieldwork since 2007, we explored the changing forms in the external appearance of buildings, the materials employed, the predominant decorative styles, presence of ornaments, types of doors, windows, roofs or fences, and the presence or not of external areas with specific functions, such as swimming pools or garages. It was also necessary to understand the ideas and social dynamics underlying and guiding the construction, restoration or dilapidation of buildings, relying on field observations and ethnographic interviews conducted within the communities studied. The spatial patterning in the internal distribution of the houses was not considered in-depth, due to access limitations to private properties that would yield unrepresentative results. These qualitative and quantitative observations were collected in field notes and documented with photographs. This enabled a detailed inventory to be developed of all the houses, with descriptions of their formal and stylistic parameters. All this information is managed by GIS allowing us to visualize and map the data in a cartographical interface.

4.2. Spatial Analysis

This also allows us to carry out spatial analyses by combining the different sources of data, for instance looking at how certain formal styles are usually found in specific areas of the villages. In fact, the study of the spatial component of the built space was one of the most important tasks. Whenever possible, the internal distribution of houses and rooms was studied, although research in this regard was limited hitherto. Despite this, we are aware of the enormous potential of studies applying syntactic analysis of the internal built space (Ayán Vila 2012; Bermejo Tirado 2009; Hillier and Hanson 1984), as employed in other rural areas of Spain, which we see as a complement of our own work (Falquina Aparicio 2011).

Our analysis focuses on the relations between houses and their overall location in the village, and also with their surrounding space—the streets, squares, roads and neighboring houses—. For instance, we understand the variations in fences, walls and doors outside houses as devices that modulate the degree of material and social permeability between the public space represented by

the street and the private environment of the house. This relationship can vary, as social permeability is a changing concept related not only to the material structuring of the internal-external divide, but also the political economies of visibility. This becomes clear, for instance, in the Dutch case, where large un-curtained front windows blur the boundaries between public and private (Vera 1989)—. We also take into account the spatial relations between domestic units and their surrounding areas, both productive such as gardens, stables, warehouses or garages, and non-productive, including ornamental gardens, pools or barbecue areas. Therefore, the qualitative micro-analysis of spatiality allows us to understand the patterns of accessibility and privacy of the houses in relation to the public space. This kind of analysis also provides valuable information about the changing configurations of the social life of each familial unit. These patterns of private-public and internal household relationality can then be related with the different house categories developed during our research.

Regarding the macro level, the spatiality of domestic materiality is explored in the social construction of landscapes and the visual economies of the villages (Poole 1997). To do so, we assess the spatial preferences of people in terms of the location of houses and their distribution in each village, drawing on GIS visualizations. Spatial analyses are then brought together with the other analytical procedures, where they become meaningful and relevant. For instance, it is important to note the diachronic changes in the spatial configuration of villages. Therefore, we study their growth and identify the privileged zones of expansion of new houses in relation to the social groups building them, which are classified in terms of economic position and geographic origin (Fig. 2).

Similarly, the interrelation of ethnographic observations with spatial patterns reveals changes in the preferred areas for socialization of different familial units. In the case of Maragatería, the meeting points of neighbors gradually shift from public space to private or semi-private settings. Traditionally, people gathered around porches and arcades, sitting on *poynos*—stone benches placed in the streets, usually close to the main door and attached to the house façade—. However, as patterns of socialization changed, people started to move gradually to fenced spaces, porches and gardens. This is closely related to local policies of heritage governance. For instance, the municipality of Val de San Lorenzo banned the *poynos*, arguing that they posed an obstacle for car traffic. However, in reality, local elites considered the *poynos* anti-aesthetic and backward,

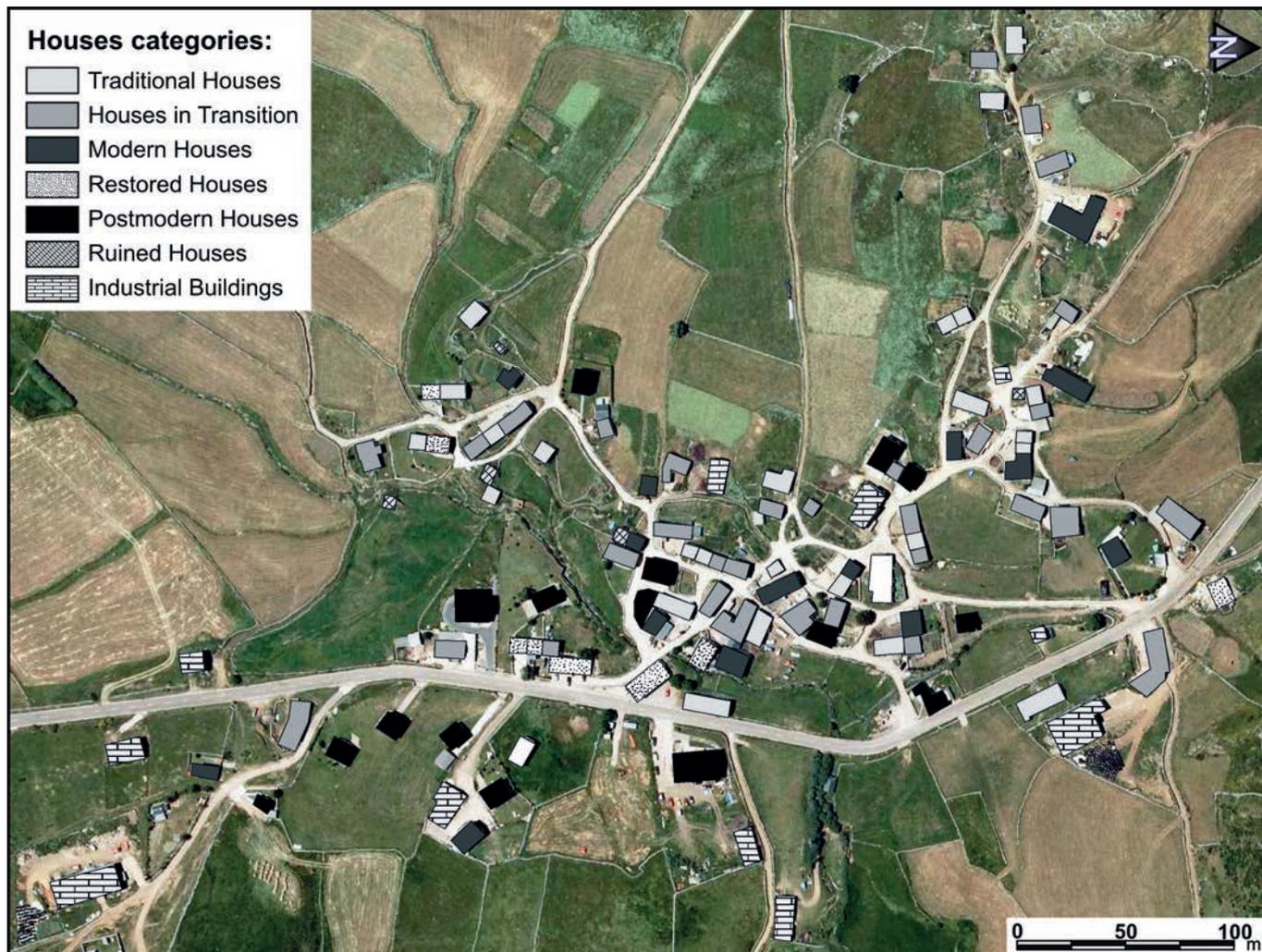


Figure 2. House distribution by category in El Puertu.

therefore unsuitable for the process of heritagization that the village was undergoing. The aesthetic ideology (urban in origin) that underlies the heritagization process tends to prioritize the visual over the lived experience. Therefore, the *pochos* were an impediment to the tourist gaze, seeking to neatly observe vernacular façades. In the words of Eagleton, structures of power were becoming “structures of feeling and the name for this mediation from property to propriety is the aesthetic” (Eagleton 1988: 333). This decision was taken against the wishes of the local population, and finally had to be withdrawn due to intense local opposition (Alonso González 2012: 234).

4.3. Ethnography

Our field methodology complements archaeological and material culture analyses with ethnographic and anthropological studies, drawing on previous experience mixing

both fields (Castañeda 2008; Hamilakis 2011; Meskell 2012). We carried out anthropological interviews—mostly informal and some semi-structured—in which we always took up the central issues of our research while leaving room for the free expression of the interviewee (Sørensen 2009). This procedure allowed us to expand our information about the built environment, adding qualitative depth and complexity to our quantitative analysis and field observations. Interviews played a fundamental role in revealing social and symbolic issues in relation to the materiality of domesticity (González Ruibal 2003b: 160). These sources allowed us to incorporate the views of various stakeholders involved in the local power dynamics and their perceptions of processes of social change with regard to the houses.

Materiality played a central role in our interviews. For instance, respondents were asked about the most suitable and attractive materials and forms to use in

building houses, the desirability of urban reforms in the village, the problems and benefits of maintaining agricultural production or promoting tourism, and their feelings about the display of rusted traditional agricultural tools on the façades of urban newcomers' houses, as well as about the derelict houses scattered throughout the village. Moreover, the interviews focused on issues of urban and economic policies, addressing people's perception of the relation between domestic space, community and broader socio-political contexts. This strategy deepens our knowledge of the *emic* meanings ascribed to material culture and the perception of its role in the processes of cultural change in rural areas.

4.4. Socio-Historic analysis

Cultural change is not a static process that can be understood in isolation. It has a large time-scale depth and a heterogeneous set of non-linear internal and external causes prompting change, influencing the social dimension over time. We consider that the politicization of contemporary contexts goes hand in hand with its historicization. Therefore, a proper understanding of these social contexts requires a historical approach to the genealogies of communities, through oral history and the study of local archives, letters and various forms of written records. Accordingly, our work comprises a diachronic study of the historical emergence of local productive forms during the modern and contemporary eras. It focuses on the processes of emigration and rural depopulation, modernization of the agricultural sector and the overall impact of Spain's entry to the European Union, and also the parallel touristification and heritagization of the rural. Read in the light of social theory and *emic* categories of local social actors, it is possible to discern how these processes take grip and articulate social perceptions and material configurations of the built environment.

Therefore, each set of analytical tools cannot be understood in isolation from other research procedures. For example, when we address the formal study of houses we always take into account the historical factors that shape the ways families transform their houses in different ways. For instance, the installation of 'modern' bathrooms in traditional houses cannot be understood without tracing the cultural biography of industrial bricks and concrete in rural areas, and the relationship with overall Spanish industrialization in the 1960s. However, the ways each family incorporates the new

toilets and the whole modern ideology of manners and aesthetics largely differs: some continuing the pre-industrial tradition of having the toilet or latrine outside the house, others adapting rooms inside the house, etc. Other processes involve the modernization of vernacular houses and the restoration of modern houses to 'traditionalize' them to create hotels or rural cottages that suit tourist perceptions of rurality. Such changes engage with global hierarchies of value (Herzfeld 2010) that both constrain and open up forms of interpreting and shaping the built environment. At the same time, these encodings of materiality reveal clues about the identities of the inhabitants and their changing relations with and within the community.

4.5. Governance, Heritage Policies and Spatial Planning

Given that our research aims to contribute to the improvement and democratization of governance in our study areas, we sought to relate socio-cultural transformations to contemporary politics and the implementation of specific policies. In this context, links appear between the perception and social and material construction of the built environment, as well as technical decisions regarding policies of urban and spatial planning, the management of natural areas, and rural and tourism development programs (Rizzo 2012). These actions involve a wide variety of institutional actors in the complex network of Spanish bureaucracy, including municipalities, European LEADER projects at local district level, the provincial and regional governments, and the centralized state (González Álvarez *et al.*, in press). Measures taken at these levels can include urban planning legislation defining areas for new real estate developments, the kinds of materials that can be used and where, or the elements that can extend outwards from the house into the public space, such as benches or gardens. In addition, environmental protection legislation or heritage rules can channel economic subsidies to an array of privileged building styles that align the local perceptions and ideas of the built environment with global aesthetic perceptions of authenticity and beauty (Alonso González 2017a; Graña García and González Álvarez 2015). This governmental apparatus shapes the lives and identities of the inhabitants of these areas, who are largely ignored and excluded from participation or consultation in decision-making. Policies are usually developed and implemented by non-local technical experts

and politicians in urban centers, who lack informed contextual knowledge about the historical, sociological or anthropological character of the areas concerned. Of course, the outcome is a high proportion of failed policies, with many projects being only partially implemented or achieving poor results overall. Similarly, the attempt by modern development policy-makers to ‘purify’ the aesthetics of the rural for tourist consumption results in ever more hybrids between the vernacular and postmodern ideal abstracts (Latour 1993), a gradient of cultural heterogeneity that is the main focus of our inquiry.

5. CASE STUDIES: CULTURAL CHANGE AND THE RURAL HOUSE

This necessarily brief account of our case studies describes a socio-cultural context in dynamic transformation between the abstract idealized phases of tradition, modernity and postmodernity. These phases should be considered not as ‘essences’, but rather as ‘provisionally dominant systems’, that is, dynamic contentious stages of socio-cultural change, not necessarily linked to linear chronologies or developmental stages (Guattari 1995). The vernacular-traditional ways of life presented a pre-industrial understanding of the familial unit, in particular regarding certain communitarian perceptions of social life that shaped their conceptions of the built environment, not so different from those present in other European contexts (Crone 1993;

Johnson 1993; Pina-Cabral 1989). These forms of relationality tended to shift towards modern, urban and industrial Western paradigms, and ultimately to post-modern social complexes in response to urban-centric and global flows of values and behaviors. However, there is no ‘evolution’ from one stage to another, but rather a multiplicity of hybridizations that co-exist in space and time.

Given this broad spectrum of situations, we have tried to simplify the reality for analytic purposes, acknowledging that every set of categories necessarily entails a reduction of complex social dynamics. This we have done by encapsulating the multiple variables into seven clearly defined categories according to formal, aesthetic and functional criteria (Table 2). As provisionally dominant systems, these categories have abstract limits, where we identify certain repeated patterns to establish abstract types or ideal models. Therefore, the typology is intended to provide a non-evolutionary view of built environment transformations that derives from the different rhythms, trends and temporalities of the ongoing cultural processes. In fact, during our fieldwork, many houses underwent structural modifications that signified mobility between categories, reflecting the dynamic variability of the built environment in the study area (Fig. 3). The following descriptions present these categories, providing examples to connect empirical data with theoretical and methodological issues arising from our ongoing research (Alonso González and González Álvarez 2016; González Álvarez and Alonso González 2014).

	Ruined Houses	Traditional Houses	Houses in Transition	Modern Houses	Restored Houses	Postmodern Houses	Industrial Buildings	Total
La Peral	6 10,9%	21 28,18%	14 25,45%	3 5,45%	5 9,09%	5 9,09%	1 1,81%	55 100%
Ľamardal	7 36,84%	3 15,79%	2 10,53%	4 21,05%	2 10,53%	0 0%	1 5,26%	19 100%
El Puertu	5 4,5%	25 22,52%	32 28,83%	15 13,51%	8 7,21%	15 13,51%	11 9,91%	111 100%
Lagunas de Somoza	21 18,58%	50 44,25%	17 15,04%	3 2,66%	22 19,47%	0 0%	0 0%	113 100%
Val de San Lorenzo	5 1,4%	99 28,44%	64 18,4%	73 22,9%	71 20,4%	19 5,4%	17 4,8%	348 100%
Val de San Román	22 19,13%	40 34,78%	20 17,39%	8 6,96%	25 21,74%	0 0%	0 0%	115 100%

Table 2.



Figure 3. A house shifting from one category to another during our period of study: a house from La Peral moved from 'Traditional House in Transition to Modernity' in 2006 (left) to 'Restored House' in 2009 (right).

5.1. Ruined Houses

Rural depopulation and the abandonment of traditional farming practices in the scarcely competitive rural areas of Northwest Spain (in global market terms) generated an abandoned derelict landscape in many villages, some of them completely deserted (Fig. 4). In this context, the issue arises of concepts like 'empty Spain', much discussed in current political and media debates (Del Molino 2016). The house in ruins is therefore a material memory, symbol and trace of traditional and pre-industrial ways of life in the European countryside. The gradual decline of Europe's rural areas since the nineteenth century reached its peak in Spain in the 1960s and 1970s, during the industrialization accelerated by the

technocratic policies implemented under the dictatorship of Francisco Franco. The process of houses falling into ruin also derives from patterns of social mobility within villages, as peasant families and their descendants tended to move into newer houses. Thus, it is relatively common to find families building and living in a 'modern house' next to a ruined house that belonged to their ancestors. Nonetheless, the abandoned or ruined house is not completely abandoned, as it is often used functionally as a chicken coop, pig sty, cowshed, garage or warehouse. Attitudes towards such ruins reflect the heterogeneity of the process of cultural change, as they can either be hidden or erased without trace, displayed as part of postmodern sceneries symbolizing the superseding of tradition, or just functionally reused as above.



Figure 4. Ruined Houses in Lagunas de Somoza (left) and Llamardal (right).



Figure 5. Traditional Houses in Val de San Lorenzo (left) and La Peral (right).

5.2. Traditional Houses

Houses in this category present the characteristic traits of vernacular architecture. They were usually built by families with the support of the surrounding community and based on artisan knowledge, without the intervention of the ‘expert’ (or scientific) knowledge of architects and engineers. Accordingly, construction techniques were adapted to environmental conditions, while materials are drawn from the vicinity of the village, including stone, wood, or clay for locally made tiles and bricks (Fig. 5). This resulted in an aesthetic homogeneity and resemblance between most buildings in the village, which reinforced its community ethos (González Ruibal 2003a). Their ground plans remained largely unchanged for centuries, but their building designs gradually became flexible and adaptable to new needs and requirements of modernity, in an organic fashion. Families used to share the house with livestock, living in the upper floor—if there was one—and leaving the domestic animals in the lower area. The kitchen with the stove and oven used to be a separate space, while there could be several rooms, a corridor and an external toilet. Usually, they had straw-thatched roofs, gradually replaced by tiles or slates during the twentieth century, as trade and industrialization made these materials available and affordable. More recently, fiber cement and corrugated metal roofs are especially widespread in stables and barns, which are separated from the house as individualized spaces. Few houses of this kind remain inhabited today and most have become barns, garages or coops. However, in Maragatería, a woman continued to live in one of these

houses without electricity, running water or toilet facilities until her passing away in 2012.

5.3. Traditional Houses in Transition to Modernity

This type of house presents the basic structures of vernacular architecture, although it incorporates substantial formal and functional changes that deviate from vernacular building traditions. There is an increased use of industrial and standardized materials and construction techniques, sometimes adding colorful paint and tiles. However, these foreign materials are mostly used under traditional designs and adapted to functionalities that differ from their characteristic uses in urban areas (Fig. 6). For instance, some outer walls are covered with industrial bricks or concrete blocks without cement coating or paint. Moreover, modern materials function as elements of symbolic distinction and purchasing power in traditional societies, and their characteristics and aesthetics are consequently exaggerated and highlighted. Similarly, new spaces such as bathrooms, garages, halls or lobbies are added to the house when new needs appear, using any materials available. This organic growth of space and the heterogeneous materiality of the built environment make them appear disorganized and chaotic in the eyes of urban dwellers. This is paralleled by a tendency to separate the human and animal spaces, as stables are moved to new buildings in the surrounding areas of the house or, according to new urban legislation, to the outskirts of the villages, as animals and their associated insects and manure bother urban newcomers to the villages.



Figure 6. Traditional Houses in Transition to Modernity in Val de San Román and El Puertu (right).

5.4. Modern Houses

Modern houses break with previous architectural styles. They are based on rational, modern and expert projections of space (Benton 1975). In them, decorative elements are usually despised in favor of an overriding functionalism and rationalism (Frampton and Futagawa 1985), which some see as a sign of power structures being imposed on social life through the house (Markus 1993). Each space is assigned a specific function according to the modern logic of individualism. This category comprises both new houses and those that have undergone in-depth refurbishment to modernize their structure (Fig. 7). ‘Expert’ knowledge and industrial materials replace vernacular architectural traditions and local materials. In turn, the individualistic trends of modernity lead to the fencing and walling of houses, while

the degree of ostentation and the search for visibility and differentiation within the village is enhanced, challenging the formerly prevailing egalitarian aesthetics. The case of El Puertu in Somiedo is a good example of how social actors prefer to build new houses on the main paved roads traversing the village to increase visibility. Thus, while the main road would be the least attractive space for urban newcomers seeking a new residence away from noise and pollution, it is the symbolic hot-spot for modernizing locals. Moreover, these houses tend to define their spaces to render them visible but not spatially permeable, thus employing low walls or fences, that let outsiders see the ornaments and symbolic elements arranged for display, without permitting access to them.

These houses are usually inhabited by families who work in the agricultural sector in general or in



Figure 7. Modern Houses in Val de San Lorenzo (left) and La Peral (right).

activities otherwise connected to rural local economies: construction, light industries and the like. In addition, some retired individuals or families built these houses or inherited them, returning to their home villages after their working lives in foreign countries or major Spanish cities. Other typical dwellers are descendants of local peasants and farmers, who spend their holiday periods or weekends there. One feature of these houses is the apparent will of people to endow them with an urban architectural appearance that includes cleanliness, neat walls and areas surrounding the dwelling. This expresses leaving behind the ‘past’ and ‘tradition’, usually associated with poverty and scarcity in these areas. Spaces for humans and animals are completely separate, and the kinds of animals shift from cattle, sheep, pigs and hens, to pets such as dogs and cats. Industrial buildings are constructed in metal if the family is moving towards the intense agricultural or farming production standards promoted by rural development policies. Similarly, productive vegetable gardens and orchards are progressively replaced by ornamental gardens, completely alien to vernacular building patterns. These provide a space for representation rather than production, halfway between the public and the intimate space of the house, with a gradual development through time, starting as ‘traditional houses in transition to modernity’ and consolidated as ‘modern houses’. Nonetheless, the design and use of the gardens generate hybrid features, halfway between productive and leisure functions. For instance, some spaces within the same area are used for growing vegetables and potatoes, and others for flowers and ornamental bushes

5.5. Restored Houses

Buildings in this category result from the restoration of traditional or ruined houses in the attempt to recover their ‘authentic’ aspect. The restoration highlights the most readily recognizable aspects of vernacular architecture such as stone façades, eaves, wooden doors and windows with carvings or external balconies (Fig. 8). This process is usually promoted by outsiders that project urban logic and assumptions about the rural onto their restoration projects. Of course, these processes generate sets of criteria and hierarchies of value that define what is ‘authentic’ and ‘valuable’ and what is not. This concern for the ‘aura of authenticity’ (Benjamin 2008) reflects the conception of the house as an artwork, and consequently the selection of the buildings considered to be the highest or most monumental expression of a certain vernacular style. Restoration projects are developed by specialized architects following the desires of the owners and attending to contemporary aesthetic tastes, and also the detailed restoration protocols established by urban heritage legislation and zoning policies. Although there is an alleged attempt to return to the original state of the buildings, local arts and crafts as well as vernacular forms of building are more often than not abandoned. Local people are not asked about the supposed authenticity of certain architectural features, or the suitability of certain technical solutions for the environmental context of the area. Accordingly, owners and architects draw on books on vernacular architecture and ethnographic accounts mostly by amateurs, even drawing inspiration from other areas and cultural contexts



Figure 8. Restored Houses in Lagunas de Somoza (left) and La Peral (right).

Furthermore, such buildings are promoted by real estate companies selling second residences to urban families. Usually, they buy old houses and refurbish them, reselling them at high prices —some of them in Maragatería ranging between a half and one million € (Alonso González 2017b), reproducing urban gentrification dynamics in these peripheral villages of overall low-income profiles. In other cases, local elites or urban entrepreneurs profit from the structural funds of the European Union channeled through programs such as LEADER. This usually involves the transformation of old houses into hotels, rural cottages or restaurants, thus adopting aestheticized forms that highlight the vernacular components, usually a requirement of the funding programs. Some of these restoration criteria are incompatible with the preservation of the buildings, and counteract ‘real’ vernacular and local building traditions. At the same time, local inhabitants attempting to carry on with their agricultural activities are compelled to adapt their modern houses and industrial buildings —required by development programs for agricultural modernization such as the EU Common Agricultural Policy— to these alien heritage criteria. In fact, they can be fined by local and regional authorities and are usually accused of spreading so-called ‘*feísmo*’ —ugliness associated with modern materials— in rural areas. Thus, while urban newcomers try to move back to an invented past, rural peasants are subjected to the schizoid postmodern requirement to modernize and be productive, while conforming to urban expectations of a rural idyll. This contradiction is not new in Spain, where for centuries intellectuals have considered rural peasants as ignorant subjects in need of modernization, while at the same time evoking the rural as a haven of peace and

the ultimate embodiment of national identity (Aceves 1978). In summary then, restored houses result from rational processes of design and planning that transform ruins or traditional houses into luxury homes. These function as cultural representations of ‘the vernacular’ and ‘the rural’, along with the positive values accorded to these signifiers by urban upper-middle classes, who consider them as precious consumption goods.

5.6. Postmodern Houses

Postmodern houses are buildings designed and constructed from scratch, employing modern techniques and materials, but attempting to recreate vernacular aesthetics. They are conceived according to modern rational architecture paradigms, but try to convey an ideal of organic development (Fig. 9). Postmodern houses are also designed and built by experts such as architects, in collaboration with professional artisans in charge of balconies, metal and wood work. Usually, the architectural style, materials and colors differ from the traditional features of vernacular architecture in the area, some even avoiding necessary adaptations to the local environmental features. Internally, they are usually high-tech, incorporating domotic technology, spas, and the like. A symbolic link with the vernacular is established by the traditionalization of the building envelope (Zaera-Polo 2008). Accordingly, modern materials such as brick and concrete are hidden, covered by old-looking tiles and stones, while modern garages are concealed behind old carved doors with windows. There is usually a profusion of decorative elements such as statues, forged metalwork, wooden craft objects and garden ornaments. Those are preferably displayed on



Figure 9. Postmodern Houses in Val de San Lorenzo (left) and La Peral (right).

the most visible façade, in the entrance or garden. These houses are the utmost representative of hybrid cultures (García Canclini 1990), where idealized representations of the local vernacular are manufactured by actors and knowledge detached from local ways of life and traditions. In fact, certain dissonant elements are drawn from other sets of highly valuable symbols in the postmodern cultural context, generally related with deeply rooted nationalist and regionalist ideologies. Delving fully into this issue goes beyond our scope here. However, it is apparent how representations of, for instance, Celtic features and symbols are related to politicized nationalistic and presentist narratives, which attempt to establish a symbolic connection between the vernacular past and the roots of regions or nations (Alonso González 2016; Marín Suárez *et al.* 2012). This eclectic assemblage of codes and material arrangements is a clear example of idealized representations of the local in a postmodern world. In short, the house becomes a visual representational device that individualizes its identity and functions as a metaphor of its inhabitants' identity.

These houses are inhabited by people alien to the local traditions of these largely peasant villages. Their inhabitants are usually highly individualized rational outsiders, coming from urban realities with knowledge of contemporary global trends. They use architecture as a symbolic device for non-verbal communication (Rapport 1982), which reinforces their individualizing traits and sets them apart from the locals. This process often involves the creation of cultural representations of identity in the built environment. These are usually conceived with other urban newcomers and tourists in mind. What matters is to be symbolically associated with notions of bucolic rurality and peace, in contrast to perceptions of

the urban as chaotic and unhealthy. Ultimately, this modern dichotomy equates the rural with a natural and idyllic space and the urban with culture and corruption (Gorton *et al.* 1998). This necessarily requires adapting constructive patterns to local traditions —‘becoming rooted’ in nature—, which incidentally also makes for a profitable real estate investment in a thriving second residence market. Therefore, the built environment is both shaped by, and shaping a wide variety of meanings and sets of domains and power relations, whose division into the fields of politics, economy, culture, religion, demography and legislation are of scarce use for analytical purposes.

5.7. Industrial Buildings

This category comprises non-residential buildings with predominantly functional and productive uses, both pre-industrial and industrial. Most of them are related with modern intensive agriculture and livestock production, but also with the light textile industries as in the case of Val de San Lorenzo (Fig. 10). Usually, these buildings are located on the outskirts of villages and owned by local families who live in ‘modern houses’ or ‘traditional houses in transition to modernity’.

6. FINAL REMARKS

Analysis of the built environment is a fruitful research area that can provide new interpretive pathways beyond archaeology and the mere typological description of materiality. Our ongoing research adopts an interdisciplinary approach, enabling us to participate in different strands of debate involving crosscutting issues of



Figure 10. Industrial Buildings in Val de San Lorenzo (left) and El Puertu (right).

materiality in relation to cultural change, rural population decline and second housing phenomena. Globalization and contemporary processes of identity building are also focused on, in close relation to regionalist or nationalistic political movements. Conceived as active devices that dynamically interact with people, houses can manifest the friction between the different articulations of pre-industrial and post-industrial identities, geographies of mobility and ways of life. Our study illustrates the structuring role of the house in the configuration and reproduction of cultural identities and forms of domination (McGuire and Paynter 1991), and how it stands in close relation with global and Europe-wide changes in rural areas. Such transformations affect local traditional worldviews and ways of life, reshaping the rural built environment. These new actors with different interests start to play a fundamental role in altering the cultural landscape and material environments of these communities.

In fact, the worldview of large areas of rural Europe, including our case studies, was structured around the nuclear family and the household, conceived as a metonymic representation of the familial unit's identity. Accordingly, we find vernacular houses resulting from the organic growth of the house and the constant deposition, reworking and addition of objects and spaces in relation to productive processes, familial changes and cultural interactions. In them, the spatial and temporal coordinates of everyday life and individual biographies are inscribed in diachronic sequences over longer time spans (Haber 2011: 26-27).

Currently, the voices and agencies of the inhabitants of rural villages have been largely relegated to the margins of political and economic power. Growing subalternization and proletarianization result from the industrializing and mechanizing forces acting on the agrarian sector. In response to these processes, peasant families and communities attempt to modernize their ways of life and homes according to urban standards and hierarchies of value. The traces of this shift towards modernity is reflected in a generalized attempt to modernize houses or build new ones. At the same time, production is intensified by means of industrial buildings hosting workshops, livestock or light industries. These processes of change in the identities and the built environment are not linear or evolutionary. Rather, they advance at different rhythms and undergo back-loops and hybridizations, as is clear in the 'houses in transition to modernity'. This again makes

us emphasize the need to consider the flexibility of the analytic categories employed. Modernization always implies mismatches and hybridizations, where it is difficult to discern the prevailing value systems. Similarly, cultural change can only be seen as a processual gradient consisting of other ways of life people tend towards (Saldanha 2007).

Meanwhile, the heterogeneous social group that we have broadly referred to as 'postmodern' arrives in these areas with a completely different mindset to that prevailing locally. However, their higher levels of expertise, education and social connections allow them to thrive in the complexities of the ruling neoliberal governmental apparatus (Rose 1996). This enables them to tap the resources provided by rural development programs and profit from real estate business. For others, these areas simply represent deserted spaces in which to settle and escape away from urban life. Generally, however, their use of the built environment differs largely from local groups. Houses are understood as representational devices, as 'monuments' rather than 'sediments' (following Haber 2011), acting as metaphors or symbols of their individualized identities. This includes 'restored houses' —the reworking of organic accumulations of sediments— and postmodern houses, which recreate vernacular monumental architecture *ex nihilo* under a completely different conceptual and formal context.

Therefore, our research reveals the fundamental role played by the built environment in the construction and representation of growing individualist patterns in contemporary society, intrinsically linked to globalization and the naturalization of neoliberalism (Hernando Gonzalo 2012). The transition of the house from function to symbol and from 'sediment' to 'monument' (Haber 2011) shows how domestic environments increasingly serve as cultural repositories to express the need for individualization felt by postmodern subjects. The relationships between humans and houses, households and communities change completely, as well as perceptions about public-private spaces and the sense of community and the individual. Accordingly, rural communities tend to shift from relational social patterns to more individualized behavior. This is reflected in the desire to modernize the house as a way to show off 'social progress' and 'success' (Sandoval-Cervantes 2017), still within a more or less stable framework of modern development, and eventually to turn it into a cultural

representation of individuality in the more fluid phase of this postmodern era.

Thus, houses and people become tightly inter-related at different rhythms and scales of time and space, assembling local traditions and hybridizing global hierarchies of value that function as universal metapatterns (Herzfeld 1992). In fact, the cultural representations of local identity become privileged objects of consumption in a global context where difference increases surplus value (Rullani 2006). What is consumed here is the house as part of an aesthetic complex and a visual economy, both designed for the tourist gaze (Urry 1993). It becomes an intangible value perceived and enjoyed as such. Things get more complicated in Spain, because most of the national built environment cannot be understood without shedding light on the agencies of those behind the speculative operations around the real-estate bubble that collapsed in 2007, with catastrophic consequences for the country (Naredo 2009; Observatorio Metropolitano 2013). Our investigation will add this qualitative variable in future studies, as the current semi-permanent state of crisis has become the provisionally dominant system. The consequences for the built environment are apparent. Not only do new sorts of urban dwellers, newly impoverished, return to the villages, but also the collapse of real-estate speculation and rural development funds generate new forms of abandonment and ruin. While many areas present partially built houses and infrastructures, some luxury houses and large traditional-looking hotels and restaurants can be found abandoned, decaying and collapsing.

In this context, we hope to spark further debate on the topic, opening up new avenues of research that may prove useful for the communities under study and to others undergoing similar processes throughout Europe. Our aim has been to offer them a critical look at the impact of spatialization of the state and neoliberal policies in their daily lives and surrounding built environments (Ferguson and Gupta 2002). In an alleged environment of liberal freedom and technical government, it turns out that decisions about such an intimate issue as the form, aesthetics and functions of one's home is conditioned by the desires of others — either institutional, economic or social 'others'. Archaeology can therefore play a role in nuancing and politicizing such apparatus for the management of social change. Presented as technical and neutral, it is largely ignored by critical scholarship, precisely because it seems to work all by itself (Althusser 2001 [1969]).

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