

Article

Migration Architecture and Its Impact on the Rural Territory in Saraguro: Consequences of New Construction in the Quisquinchir Community

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Abstract

The indigenous community of Quisquinchir, in Saraguro (Loja, Ecuador), is facing a process of transformation of the rural Andean landscape associated with internal and external migration, as well as the influence of foreign architectural models. The new buildings symbolize, in the collective imagination, modernity and progress; however, they are alien to the natural environment characterized by the practice of agricultural and livestock activities. Although previous studies have described the loss of Andean vernacular architecture, its recent evolution in clear typologies has not been systematized. The objective of this study is to assess the current state of traditional dwellings and understand how migration reconfigures the landscape, collective memory, building traditions, and cultural identity of their inhabitants. Based on direct observation, photographic and stratigraphic analysis, and secondary sources, five typologies were identified: traditional one-story, traditional two-story, hybrid one-story, hybrid two-story, and eclectic. This classification indicates the replacement of earthen walls with cement blocks in 37% of the dwellings and of tile roofs with zinc roofs in 29%. However, 35% of the houses retain their traditional morphology and materials. These results and their classification are fundamental contributions to the design of local public policies that generate adequate interventions respectful of the environment.



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Keywords: abandonment; cultural heritage; indigenous population; migration; vernacular housing

1. Introduction

Landscape is the spatial unit of human geography that evidences the tangible and intangible elements of social transformations. The landscape is modified by the territorial dynamics derived from modernity and eco-economic and social transformations, including migration. Migration is an implicit fact in the history and development of human beings and is studied from the economic, social, environmental, and cultural spheres. Territory is evaluated as a space of experimentation, movement, and meaning, where migrants, through their displacements and experiences, construct diverse ways of understanding and living in space. However, the territory feeds on lived experiences, where the action of inhabiting transforms the physical space into an environment loaded with meanings, being the subject–space relationship, which gives identity, emotion, and meaning to the territory.

The effects of migration are reflected in both the societies of origin and destination. At origin, there is a change in the population structure, territorial organization, culture, and

economic activities because of remittances, which contribute mainly to the consumption of recipient households but also encourage investment. According to Maldonado and Harris [1], 10.8% of remittances in Latin America are invested in real estate. In the rural sector, migration influences the shortage of agricultural labor, since it is mainly men who leave, leaving the households in charge of the women and their children. However, it is undeniable that remittances have a positive effect as an economic pillar for those who stay behind; according to FAO [2,3], approximately half of international remittances go to the rural sector.

Theoretically, according to Boccagni [3], migration is the antonym of home, while home refers to something rooted or permanent; migration is a displacement. For those who stay, home is a belonging, while migration is abandonment. Home bridges the gap between the fixed and the mobile, the private and the public, and the present and the absent. Hence, transnational practices, such as sending remittances and building homes, as analyzed in this study, become ways through which the migrant builds a symbolic space between being and belonging. Through these actions, the migrant seeks to adapt, establish social networks, and create a space of representation that articulates both their place of origin and destination.

Similarly, transnational refers to the links that migrants maintain between the country of origin and the country of destination. Thus, remittances constitute a transnational practice through which they transmit their economic achievements and/or failures but also their desires and aspirations. Conceptually, transnational practices are maintained over time; however, according to Rinken [4], as migrants become socially and occupationally integrated in their places of residence, the remittances sent tend to decrease. Similarly, it is women who maintain the number of remittances sent for a longer period compared to men [1].

Theoretically, remittances exhibit an economic link with the country of origin; according to Durand [5] (p. 222), “salary remittances” contribute to the basic expenses of families, and, once this basic level of support is exceeded, the migrant tends to invest in durable goods, such as land, a house, or a car, while “investment remittances” can become capital remittances when the house allows the installation of a workshop. However, remittances can be in kind, such as social and systemic remittances. Social remittances are intangible and involve the inter-exchange of ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital between sending and receiving communities. Thus, Rapoport et al. [6], in a country study, find that cultural remittances are the main driver of cultural convergence.

Indigenous communities whose daily life is based on communal ties, through migration and remittances, begin to experience transnational practices; a reflection of this is the construction of their houses as a product of salaried work abroad, which is invested in their communities. Thus, the new homes are a promise of return and a symbol of family triumph [7]. These transnational investments in housing are an indicator of migrants’ connection to their communities of origin and their expectations of return [3]. Indigenous communities whose daily life is based on communal ties, through migration and remittances, begin to experience transnational practices; a reflection of this is the construction of their houses as a product of salaried work abroad, which is invested in their communities. Thus, the new homes are a promise of return and a symbol of family triumph [7]. These transnational investments in housing are an indicator of migrants’ connection to their communities of origin and their expectations of return [3]. Regarding the use of remittances, in a first phase, there are the salary remittances, which finance the basic needs of the receiving families, which, once overcome, allow these to be used as remittances for family capital, which finance the construction of housing, cars, or education [8].

Migrant architecture, as defined by Klaufus [9], arises from the remittances of international migrants. On the one hand, it is criticized by architects for breaking with local traditions, as they consider it an undesirable result of globalization. Conversely, it reflects success, identity, and modernity, incorporating decorative, functional, and symbolic elements that transform the urban environment. For Gyurkovich [10], the term “hybrid” refers to the mixture of two different genetic forms. García Canclini [11], on the other hand, understands it as the fusion of customs, techniques, materials, and purposes, generating unprecedented spaces. In contrast, eclectic architecture, according to Ferro [12], is characterized by the diversity of styles from different eras and origins combined in the same building. Domínguez [13] adds that contemporary eclecticism is distinguished by its conceptual flexibility, its dialogue with memory, and its ability to adapt to current conditions, whether social, technological, or environmental.

According to Freddi et al. [7] (p. 25), “the most evident transformation brought about by remittance architecture has to do with construction materials and the subdivision of spaces.” Therefore, atypical patterns of migrant housing are evident, particularly in rural sectors, which show the continuity of migratory systems. Smith and Mazzucato [14] highlight the transnational relationships behind housing investments, since these are not built by migrants but depend on actors in their country of origin.

In this sense, Riboulet [15] recognizes the home as a reflection of migrant identity, in which unconscious processes of integration, survival, and identity construction are manifested. Housing not only implies a change in the way of living but also in the customs and values that change with migration. Therefore, the home becomes a key indicator of rootedness: it defines whether the migrant has reached their destination and represents a migratory achievement. It is an emotional investment that allows the migrant to associate their belongings with their place of origin, even from a distance.

Thus, housing is a social construction; that is, it is constructed and transformed as a product of the intervention of man and society in the physical environment. Therefore, housing is considered to change over time according to the historical moment in which it is subjected to such transformation [16].

However, it is important to remember, as stated by Bourdieu and Wacquant [17] cited in Herrera [18] (p. 1), that “before being an immigrant, one is a migrant,” which highlights the importance of connecting the place of origin with the place of destination in studies on migration and of recognizing that these processes modify the lives of those who leave, of those who leave and of the societies of destination.

The migration of the indigenous population has a significant impact on their culture; to understand this, it is necessary to conceptualize culture, which, according to Andrade Martínez [19], is a space of constant creation and recreation, where the values and meanings that sustain social life are negotiated and redefined. Culture can be analyzed through different theories, such as evolutionist, historicist, diffusionist, and functionalist structural [20]. For Cepeda [21], cultural identity is the sense of belonging to a social group with which cultural traits, customs, values, and beliefs are shared. This identity is not fixed but is continually nurtured through external influences and interactions with other groups. Therefore, it is linked to a specific territory and is defined historically through other aspects such as language, social relations, rites, ceremonies, and collective behaviors. In other words, a territory can have multiple identities coexisting in conflict or solidarity.

Perhaps the concept of identity is more evident in indigenous communities that still preserve their traditions despite the passage of time. For Villegas [22] and Kravsoc [23], indigenous cultural identity is transmitted from generation to generation, primarily through oral tradition and the family’s role. This identity is essential to preserving the cultural richness of indigenous peoples, which is threatened by globalization and the lack of interest

from new generations, which can lead to their loss and cultural regression. Within cultural identity, we must speak of the tangible represented in the architecture, being more intuitive and recognized as vernacular.

Vernacular architecture is that which is distinguished by its forms, functions, and spatial quality, directly reflecting the reflections of its occupants on their environment and needs. In addition, it is characterized by using locally available materials, avoiding superfluous elements and external stylistic influences—without neglecting aesthetics—and focuses on the construction of useful spaces, considering the climatic conditions of the place. Mileto [24] defines vernacular architecture as a category of cultural heritage with its own identity, deeply linked to the landscape and recognized by international treaties such as the European Landscape Convention, highlighting its value in the evolution of the modern concept of cultural heritage. Ali Asadpour [25] defines vernacular architecture as a complex cultural construction, approached from aesthetic, biological, material, sociological, and anthropological perspectives, highlighting its evolution towards more subjective, symbolic interpretations centered on human experience.

Its constructions are the result of a continuous process of materialization and adaptation of the cultural patterns of a community to the environment and particular circumstances. Vernacular architecture not only has formal and constructive values, but it is also a significant document that helps to understand a human community in its historical context, which is strengthened by the constructive practices that merge the use of local materials and construction techniques transmitted from generation to generation, where functionality is related to their way of life in the rural environment where it is located. These practices are not static but evolve as time goes by and are nurtured by new needs, as well as by the incorporation of new materials, such as those used for the construction of sanitary batteries.

The vernacular heritage is in danger because any disconnection between the community and its traditions can negatively alter its permanence. One of the most important factors is migration, since those who leave their tierra become involved in new customs and ways of life that, upon their return to their native place, they want to replicate; thus, an architecture out of context is born, which follows models or fashions, known as migration architecture. This can be defined as architecture with foreign influences in a region, which provides proposals for solutions to problems related to a way of life [26] (p. 159).

The link between migration and architecture has been widely studied, from the field of territorial transformation [27,28] to social archaeology [29] to the relationship between being and belonging of the migrant through ethnoarchitecture [30]; changes in Andean rural architecture [31], in addition, highlight the benefits of earthen construction such as thermal conductivity, spatial organization, beliefs and ancestral customs that occur in these dwellings [32,33]. While Cervantes et al. Gutiérrez-Romero [34] have analyzed this relationship as a social phenomenon that alters the habitat due to the different displacements that have occurred throughout time, starting with the migrations of original ethnic groups, such as the Incas, who had their presence in the south of the country only during the last fifty years before the arrival of the Spaniards, communities such as the Saraguro emerged as a result of their presence, which historically was the seat of Mitma migrants from the Tahuantinsuyo [35].

The study addresses the following research questions: What is the current situation, and what changes has vernacular architecture undergone in the Quisquinchir community as a result of migration? What architectural typologies does it exhibit? Therefore, the hypothesis is: Vernacular architecture in Quisquinchir is being transformed by migration, adopting an eclectic typology that combines traditional elements with modern influences.

This article analyzes in the indigenous community “Quisquinchir” belonging to the Saraguro canton, located in southern Ecuador in the Andes Mountains, the substantial

transformations in rural housing and in the ways of living, initially a product of colonization and recently of the transnational effects arising from internal and international migratory processes, in which remittances received influence the patterns of daily consumption and investment in housing. The problem arises when new housing differs from the traditional context, and the architectural typology and materiality, forgetting the traditional purposes and uses, such as serving as a barrier to the cold or generating a community workspace, which transforms the landscape.

2. Materials and Methods

The visual anthropology method was used, which is based on observation and photographic analysis. Given that it is based on “observing, listening, comparing, and writing,” the visual anthropological method includes “looking” [36]. According to Hernández-Cordero and Hermansen [37,38], ethnography and photography present reality and, at the same time, allow access to it; in addition, images contribute to constructing reality as they guide daily practice and the understanding of the world.

The methodological process is summarized in Figure 1. A systematic visit was conducted to the community to document the morphological, constructional, and functional characteristics of approximately one hundred dwellings. During this process, information on various housing indicators was collected, georeferenced, and photographed using the Kobo Collect digital tool. The variables recorded included walls, roofs, doors, windows, and floor materials; architectural morphology; occupancy and use of space; major structural transformations; and the dwelling’s condition (see Appendix A).

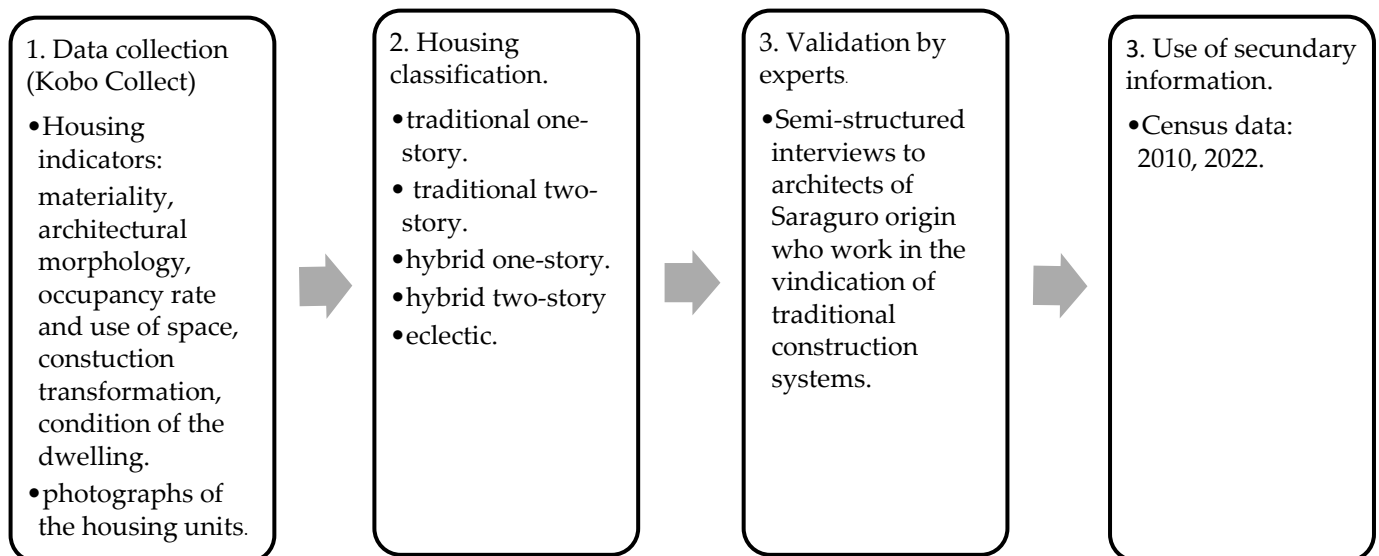


Figure 1. Methodological process (authors).

Based on this data (Table 1), dwellings were classified into five categories: traditional one-story, traditional two-story, hybrid one-story, hybrid two-story, and eclectic. The vernacular typologies are those that conserve the morphological and constructive characteristics of the original model of the Saraguro house; the hybrid typologies are those that conserve a large part of the morphological characteristics but have changed their materiality; and finally, the eclectic typologies are those that differ completely from the previous ones, including in their function and aesthetics, various architectural models that are far from their tradition. The eclectic housing typology additionally features a chimney, portico, porch with a rolling door, and enclosure while conserving the clothes hanging and external bathroom.

At the same time, three key dimensions of transformation were identified: functional, structural, and aesthetic. These findings were validated through interviews with experts, particularly architects of Saraguro origin who are working to revive traditional construction systems (see Appendix B). Finally, statistics on migration and remittances were obtained from the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC) in the Population and Housing Census, 2010 and 2022 [39], and the latest Saraguro Land Use Plan [40].

Table 1. Housing typology in Quisquinchir ¹.

Housing Types		Wall Type	Render Type	Wall Finish	Roof Type	Window Type	Door Type	Porch as Productive Space
1.	Traditional One-Story	Adobe Bahareque	Earthen plaster	Water-based pint	Clay tile	Wood and glass Aluminum and glass	Wood	Has
2.	Traditional Two-Story			None				
3.	Hybrid One-Story	Adobe Concrete block	Cement render	None	Clay tile	Iron and glass Aluminum and glass	Wood	Has
4.	Hybrid Two-Story							
5.	Eclectic	Concrete block	Cement render None	None	Corrugated Zinc	Aluminum and glass	Wood	Does not have

¹ Based on Survey on materials and use of the dwelling, 2025.

Case Study

The Saraguro canton is located 64 km north of the city of Loja, Ecuador, at an average altitude of 2550 m above sea level (Figure 2).

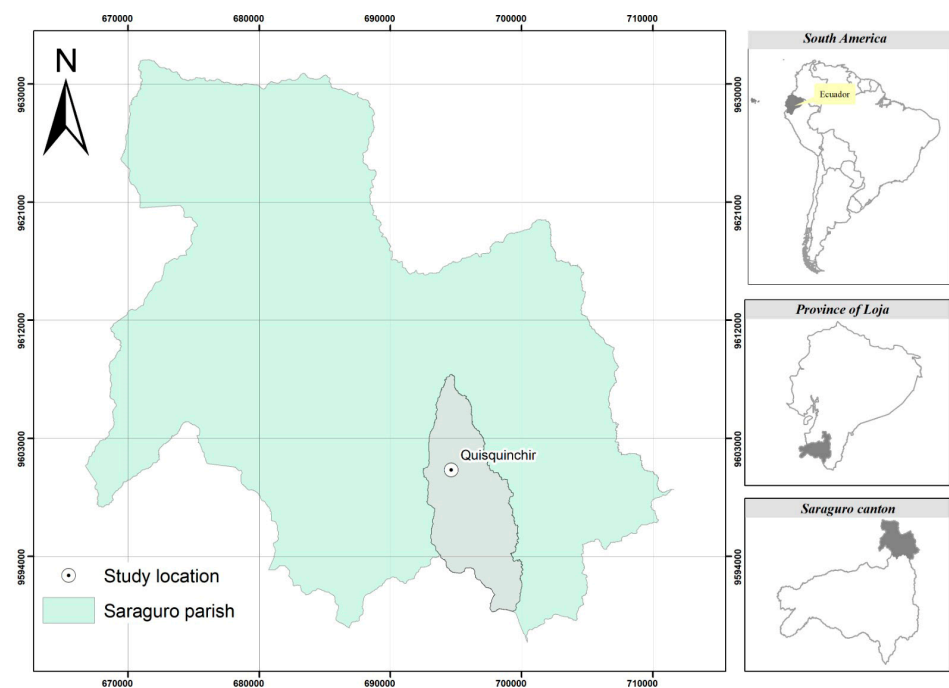


Figure 2. Location of the Quisquinchir community in the Saraguro canton, province of Loja, Ecuador (authors).

This canton was declared a Magical Town of Ecuador on 19 March 2021, by the National Institute of Cultural Heritage (INPC) for its preservation of cultural heritage, history, and tradition (Figure 3). Fundamentally, because it is a descendant population of the Incas, it settled in this region due to its strategic location, facilitated by the passage of the Royal Mine known as Kapak Ñañ, which allowed for connections with other regions of the empire [41].



Figure 3. Agricultural activities in Saraguro [42]. Saraguro indigenous people (authors).

The cantonal capital is surrounded by small scattered rural communities, among which the following stand out: Tualata, Vervenas, Pasabón, Puente Chico, Ñamarín, Tuncarta, Tambopbamba, Oñacpac, Gulacpamba, Gunudel, Lagunas, Ilincho, Yucucapac, and Quisquinchir (Figure 4), which have dispersed vernacular settlements characterized by their emplacement in predominantly natural landscapes with the presence of short-cycle crops and pastures for cattle raising.

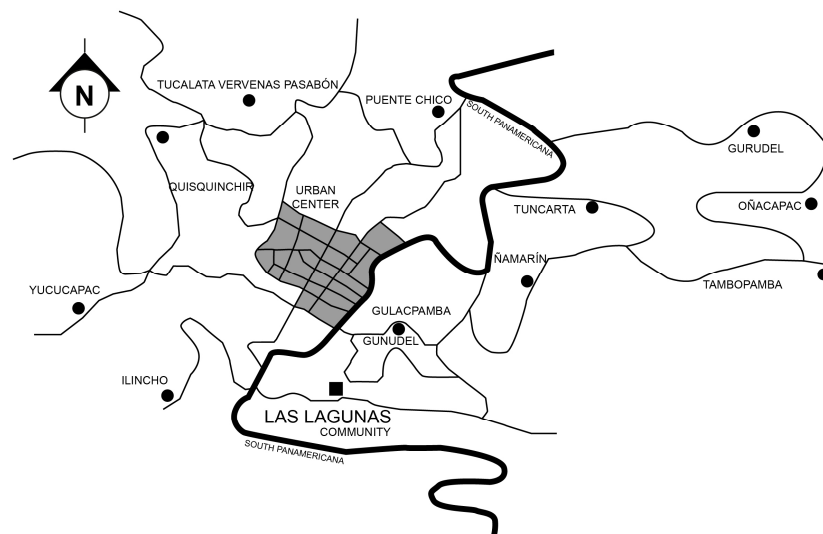


Figure 4. Communities near the cantonal capital of the Saraguro canton [43].

According to the latest Population and Housing Census [39], the Saraguro canton has 29,111 inhabitants distributed according to cultural self-identification as follows: 38% identify themselves as indigenous, representing a total of 11,063 people. Most of the population, 61.12% or 17,794 people, identify themselves as mestizo. The remainder corresponds to Afro-Ecuadorians, Montubios, and other cultural groups. These data reflect a predominantly mestizo and indigenous population, with a significant presence of Saraguro culture. Saraguro parish has 7414.11 ha at 2690 m above sea level with 20.30% by internal immigrants and 0.96% by international immigrants.

Quisquinchir-Ayllullakta is a community of approximately 1300 inhabitants belonging to the Saraguro parish, which bases its economy on agriculture, particularly corn, handicrafts, and community tourism. It has a basic education school, and its main social problems are alcoholism and migration. The inhabitants of Saraguro, since ancient times, have been characterized by being a people that migrates, the first migration to the Amazon region

of Ecuador, specifically to the province of “Zamora Chinchipe, reaching the basins of the Nankais river (Nangaritza)” [44], which was initially itinerant; they worked in the jungles in wintertime and returned to Saraguro in summer, until finally establishing themselves as a formal settlement of an entire Saraguro community in the Amazon.

A second wave of rural–urban migration occurred in the 1970s, driven by the implementation of the Agrarian Reform, which allocated land and property to peasants [45]. Subsequently, between 1998 and 2000, a third and massive migration took place at the national level, motivated by the economic crisis resulting from the national holiday and dollarization. This was the most significant in the history of Ecuador [46], with the main destinations being the United States and Spain.

The consequences of this migratory phenomenon are evident in different areas. Socially, there was a disintegration of the family and a transformation in traditional roles, with the mother assuming new responsibilities. In the economic sphere, the impact was notable: remittances increased from US\$794 million to US\$1317 million, reaching US\$1604 million in 2004, according to data from the Central Bank of Ecuador. These resources were mainly allocated to housing construction and education. From a cultural perspective, migration brought with it the incorporation of new ways of life and the loss of distinctive elements of cultural identity, such as traditional dress.

Migrations to the United States gave rise to the first migratory flows that, over time, would facilitate new flows and consolidate the United States as the main migratory destination for Ecuadorians. According to Jokisch & Pribilsky [47], migration to this destination began before the 1990s, with many migrants originating from the central-southern highland provinces of Cañar and Azuay. Conversely, the massive migration of Ecuadorians to Spain was made up of the following population groups: Lojanos and Otavaleños. The Otavaleños are an indigenous group known for their folk music and handmade textiles. In the case of the Lojano migration, it was composed of mestizo farmers, and it is also possible that, at that time, indigenous people from Saraguro also migrated. These groups started migratory networks to Spain in the early nineties, and, later in 1999, they contributed to facilitating the massive migration due to a strong financial crisis that led to the adoption of the dollar as the official currency.

3. Results

3.1. Transformation of Vernacular Housing

The Saraguro vernacular house (Figure 5) stands out for being developed in a single rectangular floor plan, with a porch that could be front or side built in bahareque, which is a construction system based on a support structure, usually made of round wood buried directly in the ground; this structure is filled with a mixture of natural materials such as mud, straw and manure, and sometimes stones or vegetable fibers are added [44,48]. This technique has been used for thousands of years and is known for its properties as a natural temperature regulator.

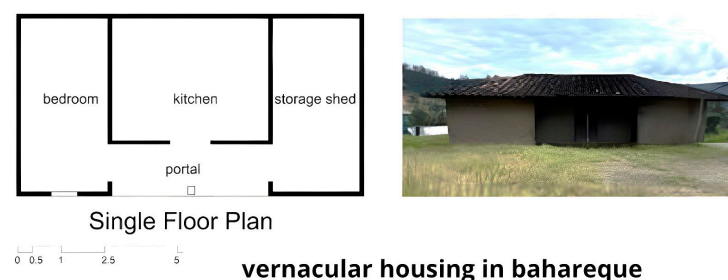


Figure 5. Typology 1: Saraguro vernacular housing (authors).

Due to the cold climate, these dwellings have few or no windows in order to ensure that heat is properly distributed. A constant element in these constructions is the porch, which plays an important role as it functions as a link between the private and the public. It also acts as a social and productive space, as well as a protective barrier against the wind. These dwellings are still being built and represent 28% of the total built. The first transformation in housing occurred with colonization during the 16th century, when elements such as tile roofs, adobe, and rammed earth began to be incorporated, which allowed the buildings, originally one-story, to change their configuration (Figure 6).

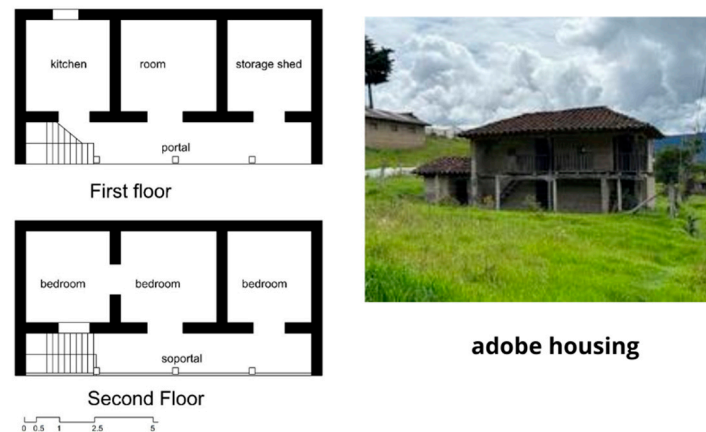


Figure 6. Typology 2: two-story Saraguro housing (authors).

This typology still prevails in the community; the construction practice knows that the upper level can combine materials to lighten the load, so this type of building is found only in adobe, only in tapial, or in combinations of adobe/bahareque, tapial/bahareque. Although new materials are introduced, the genesis remains the same: the use of the porch and upper porch. Within the community, we find 8% of these dwellings. An important change occurred in the 1950s due to the introduction of new construction techniques [44], which led to the loss of its original conception to adapt to this new reality started by the first migrations, with which variants appeared, but it is in the last 25 years that vernacular housing gave way to a cultural hybridization through the reconfiguration of housing from two dimensions that form the habitat: the symbolic-cultural and physical-spatial (Figure 7).

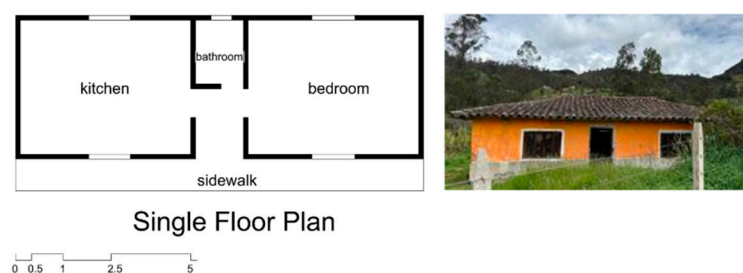


Figure 7. Typology 3: one-story hybrid dwelling (authors).

While the image (Figure 8) also changes its materiality to brick and cement, in terms of its morphology, it remains relatively the same on two floors, but the portal is eliminated, while the porch is replaced by a balcony; likewise, the staircase that was previously outside is given inside the house. This typology is reflected in 16% of homes.

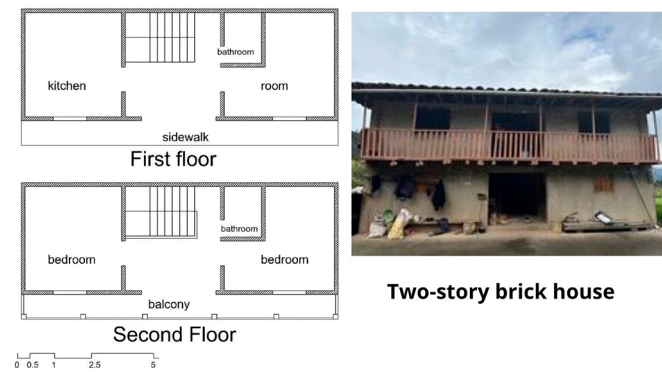


Figure 8. Typology 4: two-story hybrid dwelling (authors).

The activities that were previously carried out in the doorway of the house have been moved in an improvised manner to a space used for the storage of tools and products. This transformation responds, in part, to the effects of migration, which has resulted in the construction of new buildings decontextualized from the natural and rural environment of the area. These larger constructions differ notably in scale, functionality, and materiality (Figure 9).

These buildings have been catalogued as eclectic. In this sense, Bermeo [49] conceptualizes eclectic architecture as a stylistic mixture influenced by historicism, which combines elements from different periods. However, in a broader sense, contemporary eclecticism is understood as a proposal that integrates materials, ideas, styles, and references from different periods and cultures, which is the most appropriate for this case.



Figure 9. Typology 5: eclectic housing, introducing elements such as chimneys, attics, oculi, and steeply pitched roofs (authors).

These dwellings represent 27% of the total recorded. The changes are evident in their morphology, as they move away from the original typology that included the portal as a transition space between the public and the private. In its place, spaces such as the garage, living room, laundry, and bathroom are incorporated. At the formal level, roofs of greater

slope and size are used, and large single-pane windows are introduced, as well as elements such as chimneys, dormers, oculi, and balconies, which are significantly distanced from the traditional model, characterized by its scarce ornamentation and the predominance of walls over openings.

Regarding materiality, the tile roof has been replaced by materials such as zinc or PVC (polyvinyl chloride), a plastic type. In the walls, cement blocks or bricks are used. The main change observed in Quischnquir—and in Saraguro canton in general—is the substitution of traditional bahareque constructions by buildings that use new materials such as brick and concrete (Figures 7 and 8). This leads to a hybridization: traditional models built with contemporary materials. In addition, there is a loss of traditional construction techniques, including the use of modern materials.

According to the state of preservation of the dwellings, the data show that dwellings in good condition are the predominant ones, representing 75% and 65% in the traditional two-story, hybrid one-story, and eclectic typologies. Conversely, abandoned dwellings show a significant presence in the traditional one-story and eclectic typologies.

As for the material of the windows, there are traditional and new materials, such as wood, wood-glass, wood-iron, and iron. In traditional one-story houses, wood and glass windows predominate; in traditional two-story houses, there is a mixture of wood-glass and aluminum and glass. In one- and two-story hybrid houses, wood windows no longer predominate, while in eclectic houses, aluminum and glass windows predominate.

The doors of most of the houses, in all typologies, are predominantly wood. As for the type of roofing, tile predominates, a traditional material, particularly in the traditional typologies of one and two stories, as well as in the hybrid typologies, except in the eclectic type houses, where zinc predominates. As for the finish of the walls, among the options found we have water paint, latex, and no finish. Most of the houses do not have any material placed on the walls. However, in the eclectic typology, latex predominates.

The type of siding is traditionally earthen plaster, which is observed to predominate in traditional one-story houses. In traditional two-story houses, there is a mixture of earthen plaster and cement plaster. In the hybrid and eclectic typologies, cement plaster is predominant. The wall typology is traditionally made of bahareque, adobe, and, as a more modern material, block and brick, or a mixture of bahareque and adobe. In the traditional houses of typologies 1 and 2, adobe walls predominate, and the rest are blocked.

3.2. Impact of Remittances on New Construction

According to data from the Central Bank of Ecuador, in the Saraguro canton, from 2010 to 2024, remittances will increase 74 times, reaching a maximum of formal income received in 2021 (Figure 10).

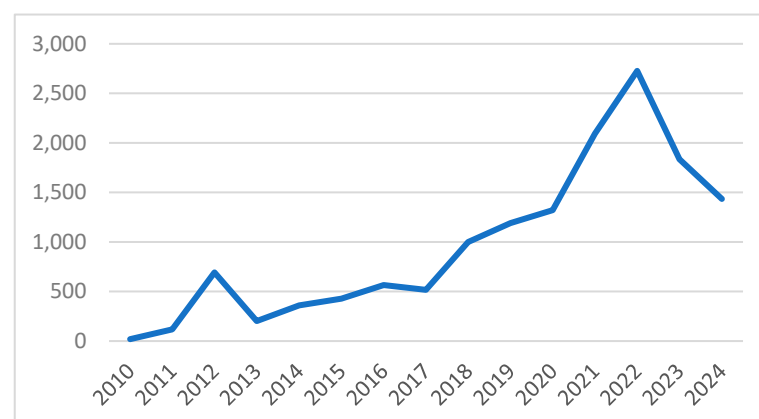


Figure 10. Evolution of remittances in the canton of Saraguro in dollars. Made from [50].

The characteristics of the dwellings identified through the surveys allow us to highlight the typology of the dwellings according to their level of adaptation from the traditional model. Table 2 shows five typologies observed, from traditional to a category identified as eclectic.

Table 2. (authors).

Housing Types	Percentage
Traditional One-Story	38.9
Traditional Two-Story	11.1
Hybrid One-Story	29.2
Hybrid Two-Story	22.2
Eclectic	37.5
	100

Remittance architecture primarily involves transforming construction materials and subdividing spaces [7]. There is a direct relationship between migration and the new constructions whose funds come from the remittances they send, as well as with the construction preferences, repeating and transforming, and even deforming the models seen in the cities where they reside or resided abroad. These changes respond to factors such as the cost of materials, ease of construction, status, or changes in people's tastes and preferences. Among the main adaptations observed are the existence of houses with two stories or more, roofs with large windows, and spaces that are not adapted to the reality of life in the countryside, as well as mansion-type houses with exuberant facades, which do not focus on interior comfort. In addition to the above, among the most notable patterns is the adoption and mixture of different architectural models, such as houses with designs that differ from the pure geometry of the traditional model—characterized by straight lines and little ornamentation—which is why their construction has become popular. This choice of material and model, according to the interviews conducted, responds to:

“New building trends reflect the desire to improve quality of life, maintain cultural identity, and adapt to new labor and commercial realities.” Personal communication, 4 June 2025.

“Status and fashion, wanting to have the house that the neighbor has, and bigger and more luxurious.” Personal communication, 2 June 2025.

“By not valuing roots and believing above all that traditional architecture is for the poor.” Personal communication, 5 June 2025.

The changes in the materials have an impact on the adoption of new customs and ancestral methods. They do not adapt to the culture, the environment, the needs, or the cold climate where the case study is situated. Therefore, according to the criteria of the interviewees, the choice is based on external details, but they have left aside the comfort and thermal benefits of the “earth,” the main effect of which is that it harms the health of its inhabitants. In addition, in terms of landscaping, the community has lost its authenticity and has become a fusion of styles from other cities and contexts. On the other hand, some criteria emphasize that, from a technical point of view, the new materials can bring safety to the construction.

“I think the new houses are not adapted to the culture, the environment, the needs, or the cold climate of our communities.” Personal communication, 2 June 2025.

In this same context, ONU-Habitat [51] highlights the need for adequate housing, concerning some characteristics among which “habitability” stands out; consequently, inadequate housing “does not guarantee physical safety or provide sufficient space, as well

as protection against cold, humidity, heat, rain, wind, or other health risks and structural hazards.” To which it adds “cultural adequacy,” housing must consider and respect the expression of cultural identity. Likewise, Article 30 of the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador establishes that [52], “people have the right to a safe and healthy habitat and to adequate and dignified housing, regardless of their social and economic situation”.

Quisquinchir is exposed to these changes in such a way that, currently, the existing percentage of vernacular dwellings built on earth in one and two stories reaches 36%, while the remaining 64% corresponds to hybrids and eclectic styles (Figure 11).

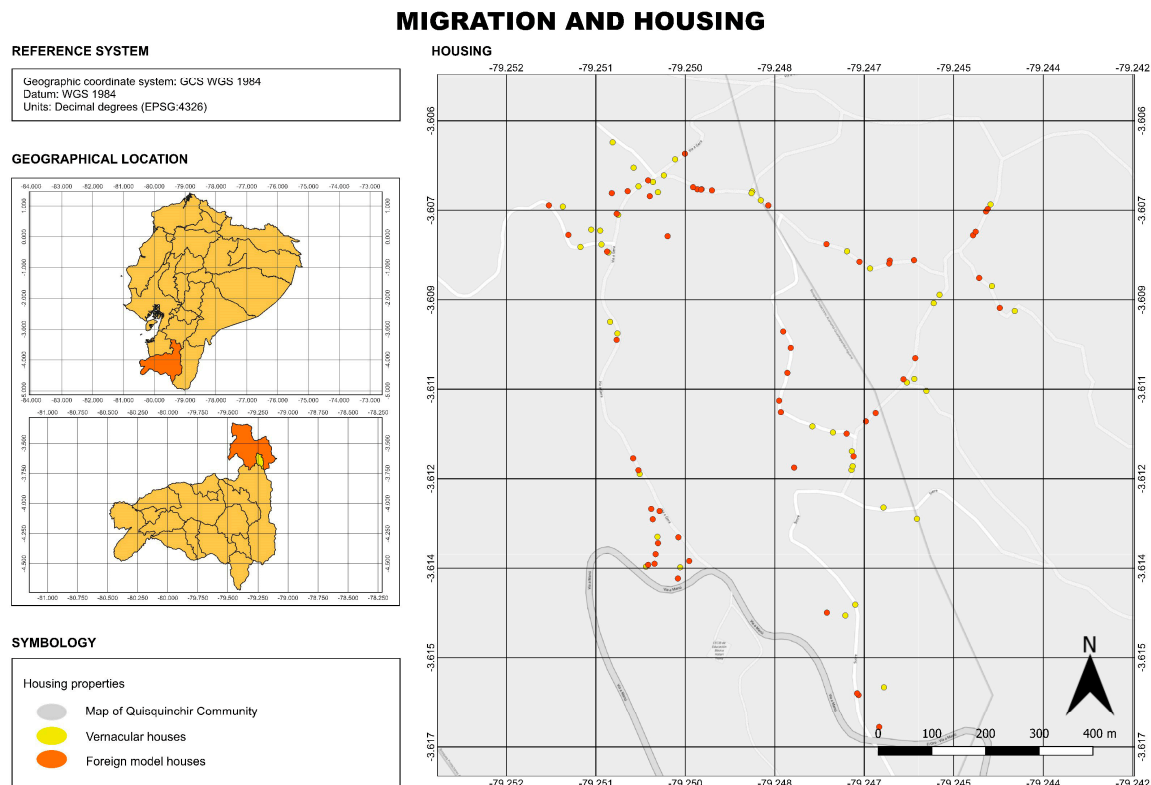


Figure 11. Vernacular dwellings (Typologies 1 and 2) and foreign dwellings (Typologies 3, 4, and 5).

3.3. Transformation of the Rural Landscape

The rural sector examined is defined by the direct relationship between housing and productive land. The primary economic laborers include the cultivation of cereal crops and livestock, such as sheep and cattle, forming an immense agricultural-pastoral landscape. In this context, vernacular dwellings serve as places to live but are also carefully sited to directly survey their territory. The idea of ownership is manifested more by using space than by boundaries. This harmony between construction and environment has begun to transform. The incorporation of enclosures typical of the city is beginning to be included in rural contexts (Figure 12) without the need for them, but rather in response to the effect of migration. Now, these new houses are separated by walls or fences, showing a clear line between the private and the foreign. This practice introduces a more rigid notion of private property, which differs from the communal logic and reciprocity historically characteristic of the indigenous communities in the area. In addition, these enclosures interrupt the visual and physical continuity of the landscape, fragmenting the territory and altering its reading, no longer a collective and productive space.



Figure 12. Incorporation of enclosure in new housing (authors).

On the other hand, the verticalization of the dwellings, materials alien to the environment, and the delimitation of space generate a rupture in the relationship between architecture and landscape. The territory is no longer a lived and worked space; it now becomes a scenic backdrop or a status symbol (Figure 13). This transformation not only involves aesthetics but also socially and culturally, modifying ways of living, of relating to the environment, and the community.



Figure 13. Marked in red are the lower vernacular dwellings in a landscape where new buildings that are out of context currently predominate (authors).

4. Discussion

4.1. Migration: Mutations and Transformations in Vernacular Architecture

International remittances have financed the construction of houses in the migrants' place of origin [53]. However, over time, rurality loses its traditional aesthetics and the characteristic functionality of its new dwellings. Vernacular architecture is affected by the importation of new models and new materials. Although indigenous communities are surrounded by natural wealth, they are affected by poverty and inequality that have driven internal and international migratory processes, becoming the main catalyst for architectural transformations in Saraguro, particularly in Quisquiquir. A similar trend is observed in nearby communities such as Oñacapac, where Vacacela [54] reported a rise in brick and block housing construction, with one-third of the financing for these constructions

coming from remittances. In Cuenca, in the province of Azuay, whose migrants make up the main Ecuadorian communities in the United States [55]. As Borrero [56] notes, migrant architecture has left a visible mark on the city, standing in contrast to the construction of high-rise buildings and the mosaic of migrant residents' houses.

Therefore, migrant architecture becomes a visible indicator of cultural uprooting and the tension between modernity and tradition, raising the urgent need to rethink the territory from an intercultural and sustainable perspective. Architectural transformations have a more significant visual and cultural effect on indigenous peoples, bearers of ancestral cultures and traditions. Vernacular architecture reflects in its morphology and materials a deep knowledge with a social and cultural purpose. Materials such as tile and earthen walls have a thermal function that insulates from heat or cold and integrates harmoniously into the rural landscape. Both materials are ecological and economical. The morphology of the houses has a social objective and allows the strengthening of collective life and shared activities.

This article compares the initial typology of traditional houses and the layout of their spaces to determine how the housing in the sector has been transformed functionally, aesthetically, and structurally to become the buildings we see today. Although elements of traditional housing persist, such as the single-story layout or the use of a porch in some cases, there has been a gradual shift in their morphology, materials, and function. Traditional elements, such as courtyards and porches, can evoke positive feelings among occupants, fostering a sense of community and emotional well-being [31].

The porch is the constant and identifying feature of traditional vernacular architecture, which historically has functioned as a multifunctional space, connecting the public and private spheres, where activities ranging from social (celebrations) to productive (drying and threshing grain, weaving, shearing sheep), ancestral rituals (healing), tool storage, and as a space or vestibule that prevents the direct action of the wind, are being forgotten (Figure 14). This semi-open space allows families and communities to gather. Its flexible nature allows it to be temporarily reconfigured as a store, warehouse, or additional room, strengthening the family economy without altering its original structure [57]. This space in new buildings tends to disappear, forcing people to improvise these activities typical of rural life by building cellars or simply using a room. This change indicates the social and productive transformations that are taking place.



Figure 14. The absence of the porch means that the little space available is used for product storage (authors).

Traditional housing is designed for community living, with porches that allow visual control of the territory. These porches are tending to disappear due to new, modern constructions influenced by external models that reflect a functional and individualistic logic that privatizes the act of living. This loss of shared areas, in Lefebvre's [58] terms,

represents a change in the social production of space where the built environment reflects new dynamics of power, aspirations, and consumption.

Heidrich [59] warns that inappropriate design decisions—such as excessively large dimensions—can contribute to thermal discomfort and increased energy consumption. In the case study, the closed doorways at the ends seek to protect from the wind and generate warmer spaces. In this vein, Bourdieu reminds us that housing is not a neutral object, but rather a space that embodies habitus and strategies of distinction: new ways of living express aspirations for social mobility and the search for recognition through architecture. In this sense, Forero [60] points out that the presence of these spaces favors natural ventilation, natural landscape, and a loss of its constructive tradition. Heidrich warns that inappropriate design decisions, such as overly large spaces, can make buildings uncomfortable to live in and increase energy consumption. In the case study, the closed portals at the ends seek to protect from the wind and create warmer spaces.

The porch space is being replaced by more individualistic alternatives, in what Lefebvre describes as a shift in the way society produces space, where territory is no longer planned according to collective needs. In this sense, space is no longer conceived as an area to be inhabited and enjoyed, but rather as a resource to be used that reflects new ways of exercising power, excluding certain groups, and generating social disconnection.

Similarly, all the new buildings analyzed in the case study incorporate roofing; however, this no longer uses traditional baked tiles but acts as a transitional element between the vernacular and modern models. In the traditional scheme, the roof responds to a bioclimatic logic, while in new buildings it takes on different meanings. In this context, the central question of the research arises: what is more complex to modify in the construction process, the materials used or the morphology of the dwelling? Both aspects involve transformations in vernacular architecture and in everyday living practices. However, the results show that the replacement of materials is more frequent due to their greater accessibility and because it is linked to the idea of “successful migration.” Hence, most of the dwellings studied correspond to hybrid typologies, a phenomenon that is also favored by the lack of control over construction in rural areas.

4.2. Cultural Hybridization and New Constructions and Their Impact on the Rural Landscape

Rapoport et al. [6] find that immigrants act as vectors of cultural diffusion, which mainly allows them to export the culture of the host country to their country of origin, based on a combination of economic, social, cultural, and technological factors. Regarding architecture, this results in what is known as hybridization, because buildings retain all or part of their original morphology and layout, but the materials are changed, creating a conflict between preserving their culture and uprooting them. It is a choice between maintaining the morphology and the materials.

The most obvious changes occur in the choice of construction systems, which arise mainly because people adopt a new lifestyle that assimilates to the country where they migrate and need to show their success to the community. In this context, they replace wattle and daub with concrete blocks and bricks, and tiles with PVC roofing. This leads to the loss of traditional earth construction practices and the loss of “minga” or community work as a form of community development.

Moreover, the presence of new buildings that are alien to their tradition responds to eclectic styles, neither modern nor contemporary. In Bourdieu’s terms [17], this would be a symbolic translation of habitus; that is, the constructions reveal the tension between community tradition and the desire for social recognition. Akiner [61] calls cultural eclecticism and conceptualizes it as architecture of conscious and meaningful integration of forms, symbols, materials, and values from different traditions, modern and vernacular.

According to Datta [62], migration, particularly in the middle and upper-middle classes of less developed countries, has led to a preference for housing styles that mimic Western suburban aesthetics. In addition, migration affects local real estate markets and can lead to the abandonment of traditional construction techniques in favor of modern styles [63]. This was observed in a study, where 19% of abandoned houses were found, as well as 22% of hybrid constructions [40]. This is the case in the Andean highlands of Colombia [64], where traditional rural housing has evolved into a hybrid typology due to the introduction of industrialized materials and changes in housing functions, preserving some old elements and integrating new ones.

In Quisquinchir, the eclectic houses reflect the use of new materials that replace the wattle and daub, adobe, earthen plaster, and tile typical of vernacular architecture. This transformation is due to the availability of new materials in the market and the lack of labor in the cost of labor in the countryside due to migration, and it also constitutes a form of social advancement and demonstrates a better standard of living.

Regarding morphology, two-story houses are built, excluding the porch and the upper porch, and they lack the productive space found in the traditional model, which is evidence that they have replaced their productive model based on agriculture and have become recipients/consumers of monetary income based on remittances. This may be interpreted as an adverse effect of migration. Another aspect, which can be analyzed in two ways, is the effect of remittances on food security, on the one hand, according to which remittances enhance food access [65]. Conversely, if people stop working in the fields to receive remittances, it could accelerate the process of food insecurity [66]. In addition, it is found that, unlike the traditional model, some houses include railings, while others insert oculus or circular windows, traditional in ships and bahareque style that can be observed in North American architecture. The eclectic houses reflect the loss of the social and productive space that is part of their ancestry.

5. Conclusions

The current situation of vernacular architecture in the community of Quisquinchir reveals that 19% of the homes are abandoned, regardless of their typology. Meanwhile, 22% maintain their original morphology and earthen construction system. The observed changes confirm the initial hypothesis about the existence of a significant transformation of the traditional architectural fabric due to migration and a historical discontinuity of the rural landscape, generating tensions between what has been inherited and what has been imposed by the new dynamics of occupation and construction.

The five identified typologies show the loss of traditional spaces like the porch, a morphological change that implies the fragmentation of the social, productive, and cultural practices that were carried out in this space to incorporate architectural elements foreign to their tradition. These transformations are reflected in the rural landscape, changing the perception, meaning, and sense of the territory, which affects collective identity and memory.

A significant change is the preference for new materials that are easy to access and use. On one hand, this reflects the loss of ancestral construction knowledge that was traditionally developed through collaborative work or *minga*. On the other hand, the use of these materials reveals the migrants' aspirations for social status, prioritizing exterior appearance over functional aspects such as habitability or thermal efficiency, essential in temperate-cold climates, as in the case studied.

A recurring pattern identified across all typologies is the use of pitched roofs as a closing element, both in one-story and two-story houses, whether traditional or eclectic. This construction feature is key when proposing conservation policies that prioritize a culturally

reflective and respectful development, where modernity does not abandon its roots but instead contributes to finding a balance between the vernacular and the contemporary.

Migration patterns influence changes in morphology and construction style, while challenging principles of identity not only in this community but also in nearby ones, such as Oñacapac, which is undergoing an architectural transformation process—including an increase in block or brick construction—yet still retains a high percentage of earthen dwellings. Unlike what happens in Quisquinchir, where the majority of homes are built with materials foreign to tradition, earth-based constructions are significantly fewer. This comparison highlights the need to implement comprehensive strategies that integrate economic, social, and cultural dimensions for indigenous populations.

The main difficulty for these communities lies in combining the preservation of their building tradition with the incorporation of cultural and technical innovations that improve living conditions in spaces such as the kitchen and bathroom, ensuring higher health standards than those offered by earthen construction. Hence, there is a need to promote programs such as the Traditional/Vernacular Architecture Line of the National Institute of Cultural Heritage, which is open to cultural managers, rural communities, and researchers; however, despite the allocated budget, it is not sufficient to achieve its objective.

In light of the foregoing, it is essential to promote housing initiatives that engage with collective memory, recover ancestral knowledge, and, at the same time, incorporate relevant innovations, thereby enabling a balanced and respectful connection between the vernacular and the contemporary.

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Appendix A

The following table shows the variables on which the survey on housing materials and use is based. It also shows the response options for each question.

Table A1. Survey on materials and use of the dwelling.

Variable	Variable Suggested Question	Response Options
Wall type	What material are the walls of the dwelling mainly made of?	Wattle and daub/Adobe/Block/Brick/Mixed (wattle and daub-adobe/wattle and daub-block)
Type of plaster or coating	What type of plaster or coating do the walls have?	None/Earth plaster/Cement plaster

Table A1. Cont.

Variable	Variable Suggested Question	Response Options
Wall finish	What type of finish do the walls have?	None/Water-based paint/Latex paint/Other
Type of roof	What type of roof does the house have?	Tile/PVC tile/Eternit/Zinc
Window	What material are the windows of the house made of?	Wood and glass/Iron and glass/Aluminum and glass/Wood only
Exterior door	What material is the exterior door of the house made of?	Wood/Iron/Other
Type of house (shape)	What is the type of house in terms of its shape?	One floor with a continuous entrance/One floor with a side entrance/One floor without an entrance/Two floors with an entrance and/or porch/Two floors without an entrance or porch/Two modern floors
State of repair	What is the state of repair of the property?	Good condition/Fair/Abandoned
Function of the dwelling	What is the current function of the dwelling?	Dwelling/Storage/Unoccupied
Productive space	Are there any productive spaces within the dwelling?	Yes, porch as a productive space/Yes, kitchen as a space for raising animals/No

Appendix B

The following table shows the format of the semi-structured interview conducted with experts.

Table A2. Semi-Structured Interview Guide.

<p>The purpose of this interview is to learn about the perceptions of architects and architecture students regarding changes in traditional construction due to international migration.</p> <p>What is your educational background?</p> <p>Are you a direct relative of migrants?</p> <p>What major changes have you observed in traditional construction practices in Saraguro?</p> <p>What are the main preferences regarding construction materials when planning or building new houses in Saraguro?</p> <p>What are the main preferences regarding the morphology and design of new houses?</p> <p>In your opinion, what factors motivate these changes?</p> <p>Why are traditional construction materials being replaced in new buildings?</p> <p>To what extent do new buildings or construction ideas draw on foreign models, particularly from countries where mi-grants reside?</p> <p>If applicable, what foreign design patterns have you observed, and how are they incorporated into new buildings?</p> <p>From both a technical and cultural perspective, how do you perceive these changes?</p> <p>To your knowledge, are new constructions being financed through remittances?</p> <p>What actions are being taken—or could be taken—to preserve traditional styles while integrating modern elements?</p>
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