

# Gender and Housing: Appropriation and Use of Space

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## ABSTRACT:

This study sought to analyze how women heads of household in both urban and rural settings use, transform, and give meaning to housing at the intersection of autonomy, caregiving, and income-generating activities. Seven women were interviewed using a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach that included in-depth interviews and domestic-space mapping. The findings indicate that kitchens, living rooms, and patios are transformed into spaces of production, care, and sociability, and that participants reorganize and expand their homes through self-construction to accommodate their entrepreneurial activities while facing constraints related to space, cost, and access to services. These findings substantiate the dual nature of housing as shelter, workplace, and means of livelihood, and demonstrate its capacity to serve as an anchor for identity and community. The study argues that housing policies should recognize women's self-management and incorporate gender perspectives that promote more flexible and equitable homes.

**Keywords:** Housing, Rural area, Urban area, Economy, Living conditions

## Introduction

Housing has historically been recognized as a feminized space, associated with social reproduction and care work, which has shaped the ways domestic spaces are built, inhabited, and endowed with meaning (Pacífico, 2024). Numerous Latin American studies have shown that women do not merely occupy housing; they

actively produce it in everyday life through practices of use, transformation, and spatial management that respond to family, community, and economic dynamics (López Rivera et al., 2022; López-Mares et al., 2023). This agency is evident in both urban and rural areas, where women transform the home into a place of care, independence, and survival, challenging established paradigms and expanding their

possibilities as social actors (Navarro Ochoa, 2010; Salas Velásquez, 2022).

In rural areas, popular peasant housing is often shaped by processes that confine women's work to the domestic sphere, and women play an active role in decision-making concerning materials, spatial layouts, and the use of space, all of which are grounded in the region's particular cultural and economic practices (Salas Velásquez, 2022). In precarious urban neighborhoods, women engage in "home-making" practices that combine work on their own dwellings, community-based systems, and resilient ways of life, thereby creating collective forms of spatial organization and territorial continuities (Ossul-Vermehren, 2021; Pacífico, 2019, 2022; Zenteno et al., 2023). Far from merely producing spaces in which to live, these practices also constitute forms of autonomy and resistance to highly restrictive and oppressive patriarchal and socioeconomic structures (López Rivera et al., 2022; Bertolotti, 2024).

Changes in power relations and responsibilities within the household and across the domestic and economic spheres have also been highlighted among women, particularly women heads of household, who adapt domestic space in response to emerging needs and livelihood strategies (Lázaro Castellanos et al., 2007; López et al., 2023). These practices include integrating productive activities, functionally repurposing living spaces, and creating areas for care or community practices, revealing the home as a multifunctional and dynamic setting (Pacífico, 2024; López-Mares et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, gaps remain in the evidence on how women heads of household assign new meaning to and transform their homes, particularly in comparative urban-rural contexts in Latin America. Examining these lived experiences makes it possible to challenge the androcentric biases embedded in architectural design and housing planning and to propose guidelines that incorporate care, autonomy, and the household economy as structuring criteria for contemporary housing (Pacífico, 2022; López Rivera et al., 2022).

Against this background, the question guiding this study is: What spatial uses, transformations, and practices involving the manipulation of interior space do women heads of household undertake in urban and rural dwellings, and to what extent do these practices of using and appropriating interior space reflect autonomy, family care, and household economic activities? To address this question, the general objective is to analyze the uses, transformations, and spatial practices undertaken by women heads of household in urban and rural contexts, identifying how they exercise autonomy, provide family care, and engage in economic activities within the home. Five specific objectives were also defined: (1) to describe everyday uses of domestic space; (2) to identify spatial transformations oriented toward family care, the household economy, and income-generating work; (3) to analyze spatial practices related to autonomy, care, and income generation; (4) to interpret the meanings women assign to these practices and transformations; and (5) to compare the use and adaptation of domestic space in urban and rural contexts.

This study contributes to a situated understanding of the ways women sustain and produce life through housing, providing qualitative evidence to advance housing models grounded in gender perspectives and spatial justice in Latin America.

## Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

### 1. Everyday Uses of Domestic Space and Home-Making Practices

Everyday uses of the home are dynamic processes that make it possible to understand how women create and sustain everyday life in the home. In Latin America, "home-making" is evident in situated care practices that include household organization and sociability, which in turn produce spatialities linked to the social reproduction of everyday life (Ossul-Vermehren, 2021). Far from passive, these practices articulate situated agency that closes or opens pathways among the domestic, community, and productive spheres (Pacífico, 2022).

In rural areas, peasant housing is conceived in relation to productive cycles and territorial relations of reciprocity, and women are responsible for maintaining the functional continuity of the household through flexible uses of patios, kitchens, and open spaces (Salas Velásquez, 2022). In impoverished urban areas, women carry out everyday territorialization practices collectively, enabling them to sustain strategies of collective care and self-sufficiency, from neighborhood gardens to other forms of mutual support, such as community workspaces (López et al., 2023). In this way, everyday uses of domestic space reveal a political and relational dimension of women's dwelling practices.

## **2. Spatial Transformations Associated with Family Care and the Household Economy**

The spatial reappropriations undertaken by women heads of household respond both to family care needs and to domestic strategies within the household economy. The literature indicates that women's housing is continually reconfigured through extensions, subdivisions, and adaptations according to childcare needs, care for dependent persons, and economic production, including home workshops, kitchens used for microenterprises, and other multifunctional spaces (López Rivera et al., 2022). This is therefore a dynamic process requiring the accommodation of both domestic work and income-generating work, extending beyond the traditional nuclear-family housing model (Pacífico, 2024).

In rural settings, these transformations may be related to subsistence and self-sufficiency practices and to the productive use of family land (Salas Velásquez, 2022), whereas in low-income urban neighborhoods they are associated with self-construction processes supported by networks of community solidarity and collective management (Zenteno et al., 2023). Women transform housing not only in order to inhabit it, but also to sustain the material and social reproduction of their households, revealing an everyday architecture grounded in women's lived experience.

## **3. Spatial Practices Linked to Autonomy, Care, and Income Generation**

Spatial practices that articulate autonomy, care, and the economy reflect profound changes in women's roles within domestic space. Female household headship represents a reconfiguration of domestic power that places women in a decision-making position regarding the spatial organization of the home, care practices, and the incorporation of economic ties (Lázaro Castellanos et al., 2007). In low-income urban contexts, these practices become forms of resistance to patriarchal and state structures of territorial control (López Rivera et al., 2022). The home is thus recast as a dynamic economic space that women modify and adapt for production (Pacífico, 2019). These processes give rise to new forms of family-community organization in which everyday autonomy is expressed through the appropriation of space, the generation of independent income, and collective networks of protection and care (Cortés-Rodas et al., 2021; Pacífico, 2024). In this sense, housing becomes a space of gradual emancipation, where spatial organization reflects trajectories of empowerment.

## **4. Social and Political Meanings Attributed to Women's Domestic Space**

The meanings women attribute to spatial practices and transformations transcend architectural functionality, embodying identity-based, affective, and political dimensions of dwelling. The home is understood as a space of shelter, care, and family cohesion, but also as a site of everyday struggle, identity reaffirmation, and conflict with other social classes (Pacífico, 2022; Bertolotti, 2024). These meanings are constructed through embodied experiences in which women's bodies intervene in, mark, and reinterpret space (Bertolotti, 2024). Likewise, changes to the home reflect aspirations for well-being and dignity, the forging of individual and collective paths, and action within structural inequalities (Pacífico, 2022; López-Mares et al., 2023). Interpreting these meanings requires recognizing housing as a political and relational

space where processes of resistance, autonomy, and care are materialized through a gender lens.

### 5. Urban-Rural Differences in Women's Production of Space

Comparing urban and rural contexts makes it possible to identify divergences and convergences in the ways women produce and adapt domestic space. In rural territories, dwelling practices are deeply connected to the natural environment, the agricultural economy, and community dynamics based on reciprocity and cooperation (Navarro Ochoa, 2010; Salas Velásquez, 2022).

Women also participate in producing habitable spaces through the management of agricultural activities, household care, and progressive self-construction. In impoverished cities, spatial production takes place under conditions of socio-territorial exclusion; within processes of informal settlement, land occupation, and self-management of basic infrastructure, women often take the lead (Zenteno et al., 2023; López-Mares et al., 2023). Although urban and rural settings differ greatly in resources and conditions, residents share ways of making and appropriating domestic space, driven by needs for care, subsistence, and women's autonomy.

### Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative interpretive approach aimed at understanding the experiences and meanings associated with women's dwelling practices in urban and rural contexts. A phenomenological-hermeneutic design was used because of its emphasis on interpreting situated experiences, practices, and meanings surrounding domestic space. This methodological choice made it possible to explore the everyday, material, and symbolic dimensions of dwelling, as well as the processes of agency and spatial transformation exercised by women heads of household.

### Participants and Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to select women heads of household living in urban and rural contexts. The inclusion criteria were: (a) being the

person primarily responsible for the household, (b) actively participating in family caregiving, and (c) engaging in economic activity in or near the home. The final analytical sample comprised seven participants, three from urban areas and four from rural areas; theoretical saturation was reached in relation to the participants' accounts of their practices.

### Data Collection Techniques

Situated observation and in-depth interviews were used to document everyday uses of the home, recording spatial organization and everyday dwelling practices. To capture transformations related to care and the household economy, participant-guided walkthroughs of the home were conducted, during which the women identified physical modifications, extensions, and multifunctional uses of space.

Short biographical accounts and narrative records were included in which participants described spatial decisions, household economic activities, and ways of organizing care in order to analyze practices related to autonomy, care, and income generation. To support interpretation of the meanings assigned to domestic space, participants were invited to take reflective photographs or narrate the significance of objects and places within the home; these were subsequently accompanied by personal narratives.

To compare uses and adaptations across urban and rural contexts, information was triangulated across cases by analyzing similarities and differences in strategies for organizing and transforming space. Each interaction was recorded with informed consent, and interviews were transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis.

### Data Analysis

The data were processed through thematic-interpretive analysis using open, axial, and selective coding. The analytical process was supported by Atlas.ti 25, which made it possible to organize textual excerpts and figures, generate analytical memos, and establish relationships

among codes and emerging categories. This procedure facilitated the development of comparative matrices for urban-rural contexts and word-frequency analyses by code group, which captured the meanings attributed to housing.

### **Ethical Considerations and Methodological Rigor**

The study adhered to ethical principles of informed consent, anonymity, and rigorous data management. Credibility and trustworthiness were supported through triangulation, peer review, and participant validation. The use of a phenomenological-hermeneutic perspective and multiple qualitative techniques made it possible to understand how women heads of household transform and assign meaning to housing in urban and rural settings.

### **Results**

The study population consisted of seven women heads of household living in urban and rural contexts. Household size ranged from three to five members. Urban participants had lived in their homes for two to seven years, shared domestic chores with their children, and earned income from baking or sewing. Participants with both urban and rural residential experience lived in households of four to five members and had lived in the countryside before moving to the city; they organized tasks jointly with a sister or father and supplemented household resources by raising poultry and selling weekend meals or artisanal jams. Rural participants had lived in their homes for six to twenty years and distributed household tasks according to their children's ages; they also contributed to the household economy by raising chickens and selling eggs, making artisanal cheeses, or producing totora-reed handicrafts. In every case, the woman occupied the central role in the household and combined family care with home-based production.

### **Everyday Uses of Domestic Space**

Domestic productive activities emerged as the most prominent use of household space. Multifunctional uses were also recurrent among

participants, and everyday spatial organization was frequently described. Care and social-reproduction activities were likewise identified. Affective uses of space and sociability appeared less often in the accounts.

The women begin the day by organizing the home and preparing breakfast. One participant stated, "I get up early to organize the house." The kitchen serves both production and food preparation, while the living room functions as a dining area and small shop. Another participant said, "I use the kitchen to cook and make the products I sell," while also serving customers there. Bedrooms and patios are adapted for rest, work, care, and family gatherings.

### **Spatial Transformations Associated with Family Care and the Household Economy**

Transformations within the homes consist primarily of extensions and the creation of work spaces. Internal rearrangements and adaptations for caregiving are also common in the accounts. Improvements in domestic efficiency and task distribution are less frequent. Interventions related to autonomy and control over space are mentioned only occasionally. Together, these categories highlight the diversity of transformations found in the households studied.

The women heads of household expanded their kitchens and patios to improve production and caregiving. One participant recalled, "I expanded the kitchen using inexpensive materials; now I have ventilation and comfort." Another said, "I built a small pen to protect the animals and expanded the kitchen." Large tables, shelving units, and shelves were added to organize supplies and streamline sales. One participant explained, "I added a large table and shelving for the business."

The women reorganized bedrooms and living rooms so they could work without neglecting their families. One mother explained, "I moved the furniture so I could keep an eye on my children." Another said, "I moved the bed closer to the bathroom" to assist her grandmother. They created corners for sewing, handicrafts, and

sales within their homes. One participant stated, "I set up a sales area in the living room."

### **Spatial Practices Linked to Autonomy, Care, and Income Generation**

The exercise of control over space is linked to autonomy, care, and the capacity to generate income. Spatial organization and decision-making are described very frequently in the accounts. Autonomy and control over space, as well as productive strategies, are also present. Constraints are significant, but the narratives also address meanings, values, and care.

The women decide where to carry out activities based on comfort and the need to supervise their children. One participant said, "I prioritize functionality and being able to watch my children. I place tables along circulation paths." Another commented, "I prioritize natural light and comfort. I place the machine next to the window." In response to caregiving needs, they locate the kitchen near the patio and maintain visible areas. They organize spaces to prevent tripping hazards and facilitate the care of family members.

For the women, space acquires a meaning associated with economic and emotional autonomy. One participant stated, "It represents economic independence and dignity. It allows me to support my household." Another said, "It supports the family. It reinforces my identity as a seamstress." A third commented, "It means economic freedom. It creates everyday stability." Autonomy is exercised through decisions about schedules, control over income, and the organization of production.

Despite these achievements, constraints and barriers limit the use of space. Many participants mention insufficient space to separate functions and store supplies. Noise and neighborhood rules make organization and caregiving more difficult. Climate, costly materials, and transportation affect production and storage. Even so, the women recast their homes as territories of resistance and care.

### **Social and Political Meanings Attributed to Women's Domestic Space**

The accounts reveal several categories of meanings associated with women's housing: identity, autonomy, habitability, and community. These categories are reflected in the overall distribution of testimonies, highlighting the centrality of the home as an affective and political space. Across the interviews, identity-based and emotional meanings coexist with economic meanings and meanings related to habitability and community interaction.

For many participants, the home is a refuge and a source of security. One woman stated, "It is refuge, workshop, and livelihood." Another added, "It gives me security and a sense of belonging." Patios and kitchens reflect identity, order, and effort: "The patio shows organization, effort, and community; I work and talk there." The home is also understood as a place of life, work, and family continuity. These meanings reinforce the idea of housing as memory, heritage, and an affective foundation.

Domestic space also represents autonomy and subsistence. Several participants describe their home as the center of the family economy. One explains that her kitchen is her work territory and a source of personal achievement. Another emphasizes, "It represents economic independence and dignity; it allows me to support my household." The home becomes a "productive space" where products are made and time and processes are controlled. This economic meaning is intertwined with the need to manage care and maintain habitability.

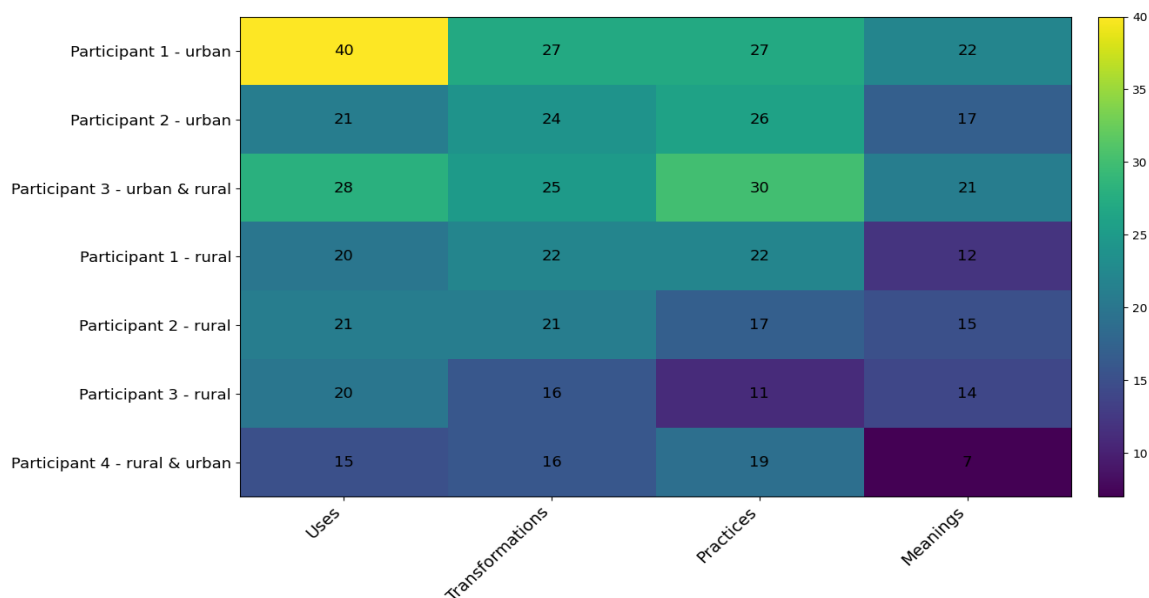
The women want their homes to be welcoming and respected spaces. They express an ideal of hospitality: "I want them to feel at peace and welcome." They want their rhythms of care and work to be valued. One testimony summarizes this aspiration: "I want them to participate without intruding." Others call for respect for the rural environment and manual work. The home is thus also a relational space that articulates community and dignity.

### **Urban-Rural Differences in Women's Production of Space**

Urban participants report more uses, transformations, and practices than their rural counterparts (Figure 1). They make intensive use of kitchens, living rooms, and bedrooms for work and caregiving, and describe constant reorganization to reconcile business and family life. Their homes are small, and they frequently adapt spaces. They describe the home as workshop, shop, and care center, reflecting greater autonomy.

Rural participants report fewer transformations and a close connection to the land and production. They adapt patios and kitchens for agriculture, animal care, and handicrafts. Their testimonies emphasize the integration of the home with the community and surrounding environment. Reorganization appears less urgent because more space is available. They value stability, tradition, and family legacy in their homes.

**Figure 1. Urban-Rural Comparison of Uses, Transformations, Practices, and Meanings of Domestic Space**



*Note. The heat map groups three urban participants and four rural participants, treating mixed contexts (urban & rural) according to the interview location. Each column represents an analytical dimension. Lighter colors indicate a higher relative frequency of mentions in the interviews, and the values are counts of coded quotations in each category. Author's own work, 2025.*

**Semantic Network of Women's Dwelling Practices** Figure 2 presents a semantic network centered on women's production of domestic space as the organizing node for several analytical categories. The main connections emerge among the categories of uses, transformations, and meanings, together with the dimensions of autonomy and territory (urban-rural). This core reflects the reciprocal relationship among the organization of space in the home, the physical adaptation of household spaces, and the meanings assigned to each place, showing how space is produced and modified through women's experiences.

From this network, subcategories emerge that explain particular ways of acting and conceptualizing. For example, uses include "everyday care," "work at home," and "kitchen," among others, while transformations include "I expanded/added," "I moved furniture," and "I set up a sales area." Meanings include values such as "identity/memory," "refuge/security," and "family significance." The autonomy category includes subcategories such as "I decide my own schedule" and "own income," highlighting the connection between women's autonomy and control over space. Finally, territoriality articulates urban and rural spaces ("urban

microspaces,” “rural agroproductive unit”), revealing contextual disparities in women’s dwelling practices and meanings.

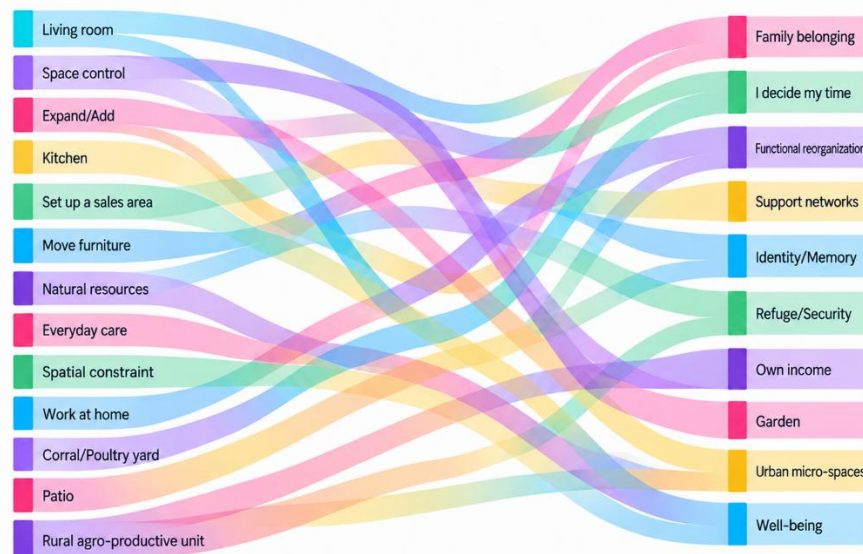


**Figure 2. Semantic Network of Women’s Inhabitation**

*Note.* The semantic network synthesizes women’s production of domestic space by linking the main categories of uses, transformations, practices, and meanings (urban-rural), highlighting their interrelationships. Author’s own work, 2025.

The word cloud derived from the qualitative testimonies is a visual device that synthesizes the diversity of dimensions analyzed in the study (Figure 3). The prevalence of terms such as kitchen, patio, work, space, table, family, and home within the semantic field of the “home” demonstrates the interweaving, in everyday life, of the use of domestic spaces, material transformations, productive and caregiving practices, and the associated emotional meanings attributed to the home. The centrality of the kitchen and patio shows that both indoor and outdoor spaces are key to cooking, producing, selling, storing, and socializing, underscoring the home as a multifunctional setting for economic activity and survival. Other related terms, such as production, sales, customers, animals, tools, and sewing, emphasize household-based income-

generating activities, particularly in regions where the formal labor market is limited.

The cloud also shows how transformations and reorganizations intersect with practices of autonomy and care. Verbs such as “I expanded/added,” “I moved,” “I placed,” and “I organize” refer to actions taken to adapt a space so that it becomes more functional or profitable. Terms such as “decide,” “organizes,” “maintains,” “controls,” and “time” reflect women’s agency in household management and in coordinating family and work responsibilities. Meanwhile, references to family, children, grandmother, grandchild, rest, and security reveal the affective and relational meanings associated with domestic space, understood as refuge, heritage, and a sphere of social reproduction. In this sense, the word cloud reveals the semantic complexity of the corpus and shows that housing is simultaneously a place of production, a setting for care, and a support for identities, where autonomy, dependence, and belonging are negotiated daily.

**Figure 3. Word Cloud of Uses, Transformations, Practices, and Meanings of Domestic Space**



animal pens and gardens in rural areas, and the modification of furniture, shelves, and counters to accommodate materials and supervise children or dependent persons. In our interviews, urban participants prioritized interior reorganization (moving furniture, installing shelves) so they could watch their children while working, reflecting the spatial constraints characteristic of self-built housing. Rural participants, by contrast, prioritized the construction or expansion of patios and animal pens because more land was available. Domestic space is therefore modified to accommodate both the demands of family care and those of income-generating work.

The study by Lázaro Castellanos et al. (2007) notes that assuming household headship entails transformations in productive and reproductive work and in power relations. Our findings confirm that women redesign their homes to negotiate both spheres. They move a bed closer to the bathroom to care for an older person while sewing, or move the worktable toward the doorway to supervise their children. Unlike settings where extensions reflect capital accumulation or subdivision for rental purposes, in our cases the priority is to provide care and livelihood. Autonomy in deciding on transformations is constrained by resources: urban participants cite limited space and budgets, while rural participants are constrained by climatic conditions and a lack of materials.

### **Spatial Practices Linked to Autonomy, Care, and Economy**

Spatial practices show how women exercise agency in organizing the home: they determine functional locations, regulate production and caregiving schedules, manage income, and coordinate family tasks. This pattern is consistent with Ossul-Vermehren's (2021) assertion that home-making practices are political by definition. In our interviews, some participants stated that their space gave them independence and dignity and shared strategies for combining care and business without having to leave home. However, significant constraints were evident: noise in urban neighborhoods, insufficient space to create separate areas, high material costs, and the

absence of rural infrastructure. These barriers recall situations of vulnerability identified in the literature, in which inadequate housing and services overburden women and expose them to gender-based violence.

Autonomy and control over space are linked to changes in household structures. According to Lázaro Castellanos et al. (2007), assuming household headship alters power relations and gender patterns; in our cases, women set schedules, determine product prices, and manage microenterprises, thereby reinforcing their role as providers. Nevertheless, shared family responsibility remains limited: children or relatives collaborate sporadically, but caregiving tasks continue to fall primarily on the women. This disparity may reflect the persistence of gender stereotypes and a lack of institutional support networks.

### **Social and Political Meanings of Women's Domestic Space**

For the women who participated, housing is a refuge and a source of identity, a sphere of economic autonomy, and a collective space. In the interviews, one woman described her home as "refuge, workshop, and livelihood," while another said that "her garden is a reflection of order, work, and community"; such statements reveal the emotional significance of the home in everyday life. The home, including the kitchen and garden, is also linked to autonomy and the economy: women who produce food or handicrafts there express the dignity of having a place of their own and the capacity to make decisions about their time. These findings align with the view that creating spaces for care and work is a pathway to women's empowerment (Pacífico, 2024).

Likewise, the home is associated with living together and hospitality. The women believe visitors and customers should feel at peace and respect their rhythms, which relates to Bertolotti's (2024) study of everyday territories and embodied experience, where domestic space is a setting for social and political interaction. The inclusion of community dimensions, such as the

school gardens discussed by López et al. (2023), indicates that the home can also function as a relational node and a space for collective formation. In our study, these ties appear more at the family than the collective level, perhaps because the women interviewed focus on household sustainability and have fewer connections with neighborhood organizations or housing movements.

The findings reaffirm women's production of domestic space as a key analytical category for understanding the articulation of economy, care, and autonomy. The home is not merely a space of social reproduction; it is an economic infrastructure that requires recognition of women's invisible labor, as noted in feminist geographies and studies of home-making. The transformations and practices observed broaden the notion of the care economy to include productive ventures, demonstrating that the boundaries between the domestic and public spheres are blurred and negotiated on a daily basis.

The comparison of urban and rural realities brings intersectional and territorial perspectives to the forefront, revealing how the availability of space, the presence of public policies, and community networks may constrain or foster autonomy and a sense of habitability. Theoretically, the study contributes to debates on spatial justice by indicating that housing design and planning must incorporate perspectives on gender, care, and the economy if they are to avoid reproducing inequalities.

### **Study Limitations**

The study has several limitations. First, it is based on a small, localized sample of seven women heads of household, which limits generalization to other sociocultural contexts. Second, the information was collected through interviews and household walkthroughs at a single point in time and therefore does not capture seasonal changes or changes across the life course. Third, the research centers on women's voices and does not include the perspectives of other household members or community actors; incorporating

these perspectives could enrich understanding of family and neighborhood negotiations. Fourth, the categorization of uses, transformations, practices, and meanings was guided by the research team; although theoretical saturation was sought, other dimensions might emerge through more prolonged analysis or participatory techniques. Finally, the study was conducted in a specific socioeconomic context and does not include variations by social class, ethnicity, or migration, which limits its comparative scope.

### **Conclusions**

The participants demonstrated that domestic spaces are highly multifunctional: kitchens and patios serve as workshops, dining areas, storage spaces, and points of sale, while the living room simultaneously functions as a place of rest, a space for receiving customers, and a family area. This dual capacity for "home-making" confirms that women sustain everyday life through practices that combine care, sociability, and economic production, reconfiguring the boundaries between the domestic and community spheres. This finding supports treating the kitchen, living area, and patio as infrastructures of survival rather than mere containers for prescribed uses, and calls for housing policies that recognize the flexibility and multifunctionality of the home.

The study showed that women enlarge and reorganize their homes to care for family members and carry out economic activities. The most common modifications include renovations and extensions to kitchens and patios, the construction of animal pens or gardens, and the modification of furniture and shelving to facilitate the care of children or dependent persons. These interventions reveal creative forms of making and an everyday architecture that exceed the nuclear-household model. This finding contributes to understanding self-management as a design practice and makes visible the lack of technical assistance and resources for safe adaptations that can support both work and caregiving in the home.

The study participants arranged their homes to achieve autonomy, increase flexibility in production schedules, and coordinate family caregiving time with their economic activities. They decided where each activity would take place, set prices and schedules, and managed their own income. They also had to overcome obstacles such as limited space, noise, and the cost of materials. These actions show that women are agents in the production of space and that the home is also a space from which women gradually move away as they transition to other spaces. Conceptually, this extends the idea of the care economy to include productive activities and brings shared responsibility within the family and community to the forefront of the debate.

For the women, their home is refuge, memory, and identity, but it is also a platform for economic autonomy and a space for engaging with the community. Phrases such as “refuge, workshop, and livelihood” or “a patio that reflects order, work, and community” convey an affective and political valuation of the home that extends

beyond its material function. Understanding these meanings offers a qualitative perspective that recognizes housing as a space of resistance and dignity. It also shows that any housing intervention must address not only the functional dimension, but also the symbolic and relational values that sustain the lives of women and their communities.

The comparison reveals that urban women tend to make interior modifications and make use of every available centimeter, whereas rural women have more space to add patios, animal pens, or gardens. In urban contexts, the lack of space and services leads to multiple functions overlapping within a single room, while in rural areas, natural and agricultural cycles shape transformations and uses of the home. These differences stem from disparities in physical resources, support networks, and access to public programs. The study's main contribution is to highlight the marked territorial differences in production and caregiving strategies, underscoring the need for differentiated policies for urban and rural areas.

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