

DESTINATION HOME

A Study of Immigration and Housing in Buenos Aires

Vanesa Giuliana Santillan Messina

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Introduction	7
Chapter One: The Figure of the Immigrant	9
Chapter Two: A Brief History of Immigration in Argentina	13
Chapter Three: <i>Conventillo</i> : Immigration as an Opportunity for Speculation	x
Chapter Four: <i>Casa Chorizo</i> : Building a Place to Call ‘Home’	x
Chapter Five: <i>Edificio Entre Medianeras</i> : Privatisation to Counter Self-Construction	x
Chapter Six: <i>Casa Cajón</i> : A Professional Worker’s Wish for Privacy	x
Chapter Seven: <i>Chalet Nuñez</i> and <i>Duplex</i> : Normative Freedom	x
Chapter Eight: Buenos Aires: the Accumulation and Superimposition of Types	x
Bibliography	x
Annex: Buenos Aires on Timelines	x

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INTRODUCTION

Every immigration story follows some common steps: leaving, moving, and arriving. At this last moment, housing is one of the primary issues together with work and the creation of a transcultural identity. The immigrant as an individual defines their home through memories and habits from their home country and under the work conditions and necessities of the “new” one. With the rising numbers of immigrants, immigration as a mass phenomenon has often required actions from the State, starting with giving a legal definition to the immigrants themselves.

During the twentieth century, millions of immigrants from European countries arrived to Argentina. For this reason, Argentina is often referred to as a land of immigrants in popular knowledge. Within the context of Argentina from the dawn of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century, this thesis investigates the role of housing as both a tool of preservation and definition of a transcultural identity and as a reflection of the evolving position of the State towards European immigrants. Ultimately, the aim is to put forward an interpretation of the housing landscape of Buenos Aires, Argentina’s capital city, through the lens of immigration.

Supported by historiography and sociology studies, in the first chapter, the figure of the immigrant is delineated as a political, economic and transcultural identity that determines the emergence of a precise societal response towards them. This tension is then reflected in a typology and, therefore not understood as a mere abstraction. A brief history of the reasons and effects of European immigration in Argentina is given in the second chapter, while the development of parallel topics on timelines, summarized in the Annex, provides a wide framework for identifying and tracing key moments.

Delineated the context, the thesis deploys a typological study as the methodological tool to understand the role of the European immigrant in Argentinian society and vice versa. The *conventillo* reflects the absence of control, dictated only by privates’ ambitions, while the self-constructed *casa chorizo* is the manifestation of a willingness to control. The acts and the model of *Edificio Entre Medianeras* are an explicit demonstration of this wanted control through privatisation. The *casa cajon* is the superposition of national and individual ambitions, which are disconnected and inhibited in the *chalet nuñez* and *duplex*. Architectural typologies are analyzed with a focus on the identity and the role of the immigrant, their family composition and the ownership structure around them. Each of them is displayed through drawings that have been reconstructed by the author based on plans, stories and sketches.

The last chapter will conclude with a reflection on how the waves of European immigration have impacted the social map and the urban landscape of Buenos Aires, leading to its current fragmented aspect.

The Figure of the Immigrant



A family at the harbor in Buenos Aires eating pizza and faina in 1914. From Archivo General de la Nacion Argentina, photographic document 166662.
Arrival of immigrants at the harbor in 1912. From Archivo General de la Nacion Argentina, photographic document 146213.

1 Samuel L. Baily, “Cross-Cultural Comparison and the Writing of Migration History: Some Thoughts on How to Study Italians in the New World,” in *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics*, ed. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 221–53.

2 Andrea Rea and Maryse Tripier, *Sociologie de l’immigration*, Nouv. ed., Repères 364. Sociologie (Paris: La Découverte, 2008), 3–6.

3 Ibid., 30.

4 Hybridization combines different practices in new structures, in Susanna Regazzoni, “Memoria y relato,” in *Mobilidad humana e circularidad de ideas*, ed. Luis Fernando Beneduzi and Maria Cristina Dadalto (Universit  Ca’ Foscari Venezia, Italia, 2017), 55–57.

5 William Thomas was an American sociologist who theorized the “cycle organization-d sorganisation-r organisation” in Ibid., 8–10.

6 Fernando Devoto, “Le Migrazioni Italiane in Argentina: Il Problema Dell’identit , Delle Generazioni e Del Contesto,” in *Itinera: Paradigmi Delle Migrazioni Italiane* (Torino: Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 2005), 311–14.

7 Rea and Tripier, *Sociologie de l’immigration*, 2–5.

8 Ibid., 8.

9 Maria Kreuzer, Hans M hlbacher, and Sylvia Von Wallpach, “Home in the Re-Making: Immigrants’ Transcultural Experiencing of Home,” *Journal of Business Research* 91 (October 2018): 340.

Immigration experiences are strictly contextualized, situated within a precise time and space of action and they cannot be reproduced twice. Despite the repetitiveness of the sequence of steps in an immigration process, the specificity of each single case reveals the difficulty of its scientific study and understanding. Although historians and sociologists may differ in how to approach the study of immigration, scholars agree on the importance of the arrival and installation phase.¹ If the modalities of displacement can take different forms, the concerns and interrogations of the country of arrival can have relative stability and continuity. Whether permanent or temporary, all immigrants have to adjust to their receiver environment to some degree: the primary issues are finding some means of economic support, a place to live, and people to associate with. To study immigration is to study the moment of installation.²

The decision to migrate is essentially rational and the three main variables are: employment, salary and future. After calculating the costs and benefits, resulting in a positive financial value in favor of migration, the individual decides to migrate.³

According to the model theorized by William Thomas, the moment of installation - named “reorganization” - is crucial in the definition of the immigrant identity, their perception of themselves as well as their perception by others.⁴ The immigrant’s identity is the outcome of a process of *metisage* and hybridization, resulting from the coexistence and tension between different cultural modalities, local norms, and persistent values.⁵ Immigrants arrive at their destination with *oggetti sociali*, literally “social objects” - material and immaterial things such as stories, oral narrations, habits, etc. - which constitute their social memory.⁶

However, at the moment of arrival, this memory has to negotiate with other social memories. It has to deal with a new contest, hierarchy, state and logic. Not only do the immigrants have to face a new situation, but also the State a new phenomenon. At the receiving moment and considering the multiplication of singular cases of immigrants, there is a process of assimilation from both the immigrant, the State and the locals.⁷ The figure of the immigrant as a transcultural identity and as a worker allows the conceptual transition from a micro to a macro perspective.

Immigrants decide to move based on rational financial reasons and work opportunities. The summa of concurrent individual projects of migration results in mass migration and migration fluxes. Consequently, the State must manage an increase in numbers, leading to the definition of the figure of the immigrant and the distinction between an immigrant and a local. By observing the social insertion of the immigrants in the labor market, the State realizes the importance of acting on the employment market to control the migration fluxes: it becomes clear what position the government has taken towards them and to what extent immigrants have gained or have not a capitalist function.⁸

Undeniably, the immigrant is also a consumer. At the micro level, their consumption habits change according to the offer of the new conditions and, simultaneously, at the macro level, the consumption of the host society transforms influenced by the new needs of its newly composed society.⁹



Adults and children in a patio of a conventillo in 1907. From Archivo General de la Nacion Argentina, photographic document 102318.

Children in a room of a conventillo. From Archivo General de la Nacion Argentina, photographic document 18209.

10 Ibid., 334–35.

11 Devoto, “Le Migrazioni Italiane in Argentina: Il Problema Dell’identità, Delle Generazioni e Del Contesto,” 327–28.

12 Ibid., 328.

13 Kreuzer, Mühlbacher, and Von Wallpach, “Home in the Re-Making,” 336–38.

14 Anahí Ballent and Jorge Francisco Liernur, *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, 1st ed. (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2014), 21.

15 Ibid., 21–26.

16 Carlos Martí Arís, *Las variaciones de la identidad: ensayo sobre el tipo en arquitectura*, 1. ed, Arquitectura - teoría 1 (Barcelona: Serbal, 1993), 87.

17 Riccarda Cappeller, “Values of Immateriality,” *The Matter of Future Heritage* 1, no. 20 (2020): 175.

18 Ballent and Liernur, *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, 21–26.

19 Jorge Francisco Liernur, “El Discreto Encanto de Nuestra Arquitectura 1930 / 1960,” 1986, 63–65.

The conditions concerning the identity and the economic, professional, and social adaptation of the immigrant in the receiver society, are reflected in what can be considered among the primary issues and worries when moving abroad: the home. The home acquires an important role in the definition of their identity and their insertion into society.¹⁰ This is the place where the immigrants merge practices, and their new social and consumption conditions are reflected in tension with the transcription of the positions of the ruling authorities towards immigration.

When considering a large wave of immigration, a reflection on generation is required. There are many theories about its definition. Sociologist Karl Mannheim affirmed that generation is not based on biological factors but is a social phenomenon created when a group of people in their early adult life have experienced several particular common events.¹¹ Regarding immigration studies, Marcus Lee Hansen posited that the criterion to distinguish a generation from another is their attitude towards the preservation of their ethnical identity. Rather than considering a series of events as determinants of a generation, only the moment of migration is relevant to the historian.¹² The degree of transcultural feeling is inversely proportional to the number of generations. The extent to which a foreign consumer culture is identified with differs between generations. First-generation immigrants are still longing for the past by maintaining their original experience of home. For example, migrated mothers may stick to their former consumption practices as a resistance to the new local context, meanwhile, their daughters may adopt practices from the dominant consumer culture.¹³ Logically the stronger is the sentiment of longing for the past, the less is the desire for complete integration and adaptation. This process of transitioning from a transcultural to a national identity with the original one progressively fading, is evident in the evolution of architectural typologies studied in the following chapters.

The house is a condensation of social, economic, technological, ideological and political variables.¹⁴ If on one hand, it is embedded within technical rules (such as the position of the kitchen, etc.), on the other hand, it is a construction of social imaginaries. In the Spanish language, these two aspects are distinguished by two synonyms terms, that refer to different aspects of housing. “*Casa*” refers to the anthropological sense of the home, considering it as a set of human relationships that take place on a daily basis in a protected space.¹⁵ Hence, “*casa*” is a cultural device, the material ritualization of activities performed within it¹⁶ and an expression of collective memory, reflecting the conflict between tradition and new uses in the case of the immigrant.¹⁷ “*Vivienda*” instead refers to the technical and political sense of the house where the domestic spaces are intended as economic objects, with a certain value on the market and inserted in a political program.¹⁸

As sustained by the Argentinian architect Jorge Francisco Liernur, the genealogy of the house is then conflictual: anthropological as an original product of immigrants with their habits, and political as a tool used by the State to control and discipline them, considered as part of the national workforce.¹⁹

To accurately study architectural types, it is necessary to frame the context in multiple disciplines and scales, beginning with the historical frame.

A Brief History of Immigration in Argentina

Immigration can be analyzed through numerical data and fluctuations to achieve consistency. However, the mere study of statistics may oversimplify the complexity of the phenomenon. According to demographer Everett Lee’s model of pull and push, migration is the result of two opposing forces: pessimistic factors to repel people and optimistic factors to attract them.²⁰ These circumstances, including occupational, economic, social, and familial characteristics, contribute to the distinction between different waves of migration. These factors are not important just between nations but also regions. Therefore, the notions of nationality and regionality become crucial when studying immigrants in Argentina.²¹

There were two main waves of European immigration to Argentina. The first one occurred from the end of the nineteenth century to the start of the First World War. After reaching a substantial number, the influx remained constant. The rural immigrants arrived without specific expectations and Argentina was inexperienced in receiving them. This immigration was massive and widespread. Between the two world wars, the basis for the integration of immigrants into Argentinian society occurred. The number of entries decreased significantly until 1947, when the second wave of immigration began, as dense as the first but temporally shorter. Argentina’s populist government recognized European immigrants as a key workforce and formally included them in a political and economic plan to develop the country. The State supported a selective immigration policy, which, in opposition to the first wave, was implemented with consciousness towards the reception and integration of immigrants. In the fifties, the number of entries progressively decreased until it reached zero in the early sixties. The relationship between the Argentinian State and the European immigrants influenced the evolution of housing typologies. Therefore, a detailed analysis of this historical tension is required.

During the eighteenth century, individuals from Spain, Portugal, France, and Italy made the rational decision to embark on a new life in Argentina through migration, despite its illegality.²² In 1804, only 96 among Buenos Aires’ forty thousand inhabitants were registered as Italians. They arrived and settled independently of each other. Lacking professional uniformity or a common national sentiment, their focus was on integration. By copying habits, learning the language, accepting any available job and by even *castellanizar* their names, they blended smoothly into society.²³

From 1820, due to the European demographical growth and high agricultural indebtedness, families were forced to move out, constituting the wave of *migraciones tempranas*. Migration patterns were influenced by geographical proximity, leading people from the same regions to relocate to common destinations. The immigrants arriving in Argentina had easy access to a departure harbor as a common factor. Among the sailors from Spain and Marseille, the Ligurians rapidly established regular maritime connections between Genova, Buenos Aires and Montevideo. In 5 years (1825-1830), 80 percent of the Italians who disembarked in Argentina were Ligurians.²⁴

During Juan Manuel de Rosas’ government (1835-1873), Genoese immigrants affirmed their maritime control over Spanish companies²⁵ and

20 Everett S Lee, “A Theory of Migration,” 2024, 50.

21 Roberto Benencia and Fernando Devoto, *Historia de La Inmigración En La Argentina*, Colección Historia Argentina (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2003), 93–103.

22 Hiner, “El Derecho a Migrar Como Un Derecho Humano: La Actual Ley Inmigratoria Argentina,” *Cornell International Law Journal*, Autumn 2010, 312; Benencia and Devoto, *Historia de La Inmigración En La Argentina*, 50–65.

23 *Castellano* is the Spanish spoken in Argentina. *Castellanizar* is the action of changing names to make them sound more local. For example, Peri was changed to Perez. In Fernando Devoto, *Historia de los italianos en la Argentina*, La Argentina plural (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2006), 20–25.

24 Ibid., 31.

25 Spain was occupied with wars and small foreign companies advantaged their routes. in Ibid., 40–41.



Immigrants arriving at the harbor in Buenos Aires at the end of the nineteenth century. From Archivo General de la Nación Argentina, photographic document 215763.

experienced professional and urban expansion. Every immigrant from Genova had secured a job linked to the sea, from boat builders to sailors. The professional concentration influenced their territorial settlement in La Boca.²⁶ The area’s vulnerability to flooding and poor hygiene, due to industrial use of the rivers, made it accessible at low prices. Houses were built with cheap and light materials (wood and metal sheets), easy to move in case of flooding and fast to assemble.²⁷ The professional sharing and the urban closeness, create a common feeling of membership and regional belonging.²⁸ In 1873, 175.126 Italians were registered in Argentina. This number represents only legal workers; exiles - intellectuals with a strong sense of nationalism like the *Garibaldini* and the *Mazziniani* - were not included.²⁹ Ligurian pioneers influenced later immigration waves, generating the image of immigrants as workers, while exiles helped the creation of Italianity.

Due to their significant number and cultural importance in Argentina, observations concerning Italians can be considered valid for other nationalities.

After the unification of Italy, the fragmentary development of capitalism caused general discontent in rural areas: the shutdown of agricultural prices and the introduction of new production machinery worsened the families’ situation.³⁰ With reduced travel costs,³¹ emigrating to Argentina became a viable option. Argentina was a land of opportunity: low population, abundant land, higher salaries, high workforce demand and possibility of social and professional escalation. The expression *migraciones golondrinas* accurately represents its exploitability: temporary and yearly repetitive migrations, like swallows. Immigrants were recruited by masters of the same nationality (who prefer to work with people of the same origins rather than natives) to work only during the harvest.³²

The number of immigrants increased continuously from the 1880s, with a crisis in the 1890s, until 1914. This marked the first mass immigration wave to Argentina. At the first moment, high numbers of entries were registered from the North of Italy, specifically Piedmont and Veneto. They were farmers who, called by relatives or employers from their hometown, moved with their families and settled in urban areas where the work demand was higher. They would find a temporary housing solution, and once they had earned enough money to rent a larger space, they would be joined by their family.³³ Then, a constant influx of young people from Southern Italy, accessing the port of Genoa, were sent by their families and settled in the desert around Buenos Aires, called *Pampa*, fulfilling the expansionist State’s ambition.³⁴

The decision to migrate was natural as primarily based on poverty, misery, and a desire for a better future. However, the role of immigrants in the economic growth of the country led to artificial control and a pro-migration policy, enacted through acts and laws. In 1852, Juan Bautista Alberdi said “*Gobernar es poblar*” hence “to govern is to populate” and since, immigration has been directed to develop uninhabited areas and strengthen production.³⁵ In the Constitution of 1854, the right for freedom, wellness and justice is assured “*a todos los hombres del mundo que quieran habitar en el suelo Argentino*” hence “to all the men of the world that want to live on the Argentinian soil”. Article 25 concerns the “*nacidos en el extranjero*”, or the “born abroad” and it declares: “*El Gobierno*

26 A district in the southeast of the city at the confluence of the Riachuelo and Rio de la Plata rivers, James R. Scobie, *Buenos Aires: Del Centro a Los Barrios, 1870-1910*, [1 ed., la reimpr.] (Buenos Aires, 1986), 91-108.

27 Ibid., 107.

28 Devoto, *Historia de los italianos en la Argentina*, 43–46.

29 Ibid., 48–50.

30 Benencia and Devoto, *Historia de La Inmigración En La Argentina*, 64–66.

31 By changing the system to steam, the time of travel was reduced. Considering the distance as the time employed to do a trajectory, the price of the ticket was reduced too. In Ibid., 88–92.

32 Ibid., 65–76.

33 Devoto, *Historia de los italianos en la Argentina*, 106.

34 Ibid., 250–78.

35 Hiner, “El Derecho a Migrar Como Un Derecho Humano: La Actual Ley Inmigratoria Argentina,” 311.

36 Ibid., 315.

37 Ballent and Liernur, *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, 94.

38 Traslation by author. Original text: “*sanos, física y psíquicamente, con determinada instrucción, con un ramo propio de trabajo y con determinados recursos que garantices de que no estaran un día a cargo de la beneficencia pública,*” Hiner, “El Derecho a Migrar Como Un Derecho Humano: La Actual Ley Inmigratoria Argentina,” 315.

39 Diego Armus, *Manual Del Emigrante Italiano*, 2nd ed. (Buenso Aires, 1913), 1–5.

40 Baily, “Cross-Cultural Comparison and the Writing of Migration History,” 225.

41 Benencia and Devoto, *Historia de La Inmigración En La Argentina*, 60–62.

42 Ibid., 83.

43 Armus, *Manual Del Emigrante Italiano*.

44 María Mónica Bjerg, *Historias de La Inmigración En La Argentina*, 1. ed, Temas de La Argentina (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2009), 80.

45 Fernando Devoto and Gianfausto Rosoli, eds., *La Inmigración Italiana En La Argentina*, 1a ed, Colección Historia 3 (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 1985), 55.

46 Hiner, “El Derecho a Migrar Como Un Derecho Humano: La Actual Ley Inmigratoria Argentina,” 316.

47 Diego Armus, “Mirando a Los Italianos” in *La Inmigración Italiana En La Argentina*, ed. Fernando Devoto and Gianfausto Rosoli, 1a ed, Colección Historia 3 (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 1985), 95–115.

48 Ibid., 95.

49 Tulio Halperin Dolghi, “La Integración de Los Inmigrantes Italianos En La Argentina,” in *La Inmigración Italiana En La Argentina*, ed. Fernando Devoto and Gianfausto Rosoli, 1a ed, Colección Historia 3 (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 1985), 87–90.

federal fomentará la inmigración europea,” which translates to “The federal government promotes the European immigration”, expressing a preference about the immigrants’ origins.³⁶ The *Ley de la Inmigración y Colonización* (1876), known as *Ley Avellaneda*, defined the immigrant, and his rights, and it offered conditions to facilitate their settlement in the society: subsided boat tickets, free accommodation in the *Hotel de Inmigrantes*³⁷ for 5 days, and a paid ticket to the final destination. In the *Hotel* there was also the *Oficina de Colocación* to help immigrants find a job. All these benefits were assured to the admitted foreigners, who should be “physically and mentally healthy, with a certain level of education, with their branch of work and with certain resources that guarantee that they will not one day be in the care of the public welfare”.³⁸ The immigrant was clearly defined as a worker, which justifies the pro-migration political stance of Argentina.³⁹

In the early twentieth century, New York and Buenos Aires were magnets for European families⁴⁰ and, along with political strategies, the “agents of immigration” contributed to the decision of the destination.⁴¹ These agents included representatives of shipping companies, managers looking for “*mano de obra*” and government officials. Their role was not to encourage, but to help immigrants with concrete issues related to the journey and the integration into the new society.⁴² In addition, the people who had already migrated could be counted as well. They published emigration manuals, such as the “*Manual del Emigrante Italiano*” (1913),⁴³ and their letters were usually read aloud in the church *piazas* right after the Sunday celebration.⁴⁴ In summary, immigration was natural, based on financial rationality, and artificial, resulting in the expanded accessibility to formal and informal information, the credibility of the masses and the simplification of the process by the State.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the majority of the active population in Argentina were foreigners, who gained recognition for their contribution to economic growth without losing their nationality. Patriotic journals like *La Patria degli italiani* (1910) and mutual aid societies, such as *Association Française* (1854), *Sociedad Española de Socorros Mutuos* (1857), and *Unione e Benevolenza* (1858) were founded.⁴⁵ Schools, sports clubs, cultural societies and banks were part of a broad support plan, serving as cultural “reminders” to immigrants of their national origins. Their dispersion led to formal and informal attention. According to public opinion, immigrants from Southern Italy were stereotyped as fraudsters, troublemakers, noisy, illiterate, unskilled, and inaccurate at work.⁴⁶ While those from Northern Italy were seen as hardworking, modest, rigorous, and religious individuals and were referred to as the “*germanos latinos del norte Italiano*” in contrast to the “*latinos*” of the South.⁴⁷

In 1914, more than six million immigrants from Italy had already settled.⁴⁸ Immigrants exhibited spatial, professional, and social heterogeneity with successive waves introducing a social hierarchy among people of the same nationality.⁴⁹ Concerned about the societal cosmopolitan nature, the State began promoting a movement of “*nacionalizar y civilizar*” hence “to nationalize and civilize”. It was carried out through a series of acts addressed to the immigrants’ children. In 1910, the *Ley del Servicio Militar Obligatorio* created a sense of patriotism and the educational reforms of 1916 at schools aimed to foster Argentinian nationalism among

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Advertising announcements of an Italian cultural center, a school for Italians, an Italian hospital and an Italian pharmacy. From M.s.S., *Guida degli Italiani in Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Desa, 1951), 30-172.

50 Devoto, *Historia de los italianos en la Argentina*, 307–9.

51 Ibid., 381.

52 Ibid., 393–400.

53 Juan Domingo Peron was the President of Argentina from 1946 to 1955. Ibid., 393–403.

54 Ibid., 386–445.

55 Ibid., 434–35.

56 Benencia and Devoto, *Historia de La Inmigración En La Argentina*, 413–23.

57 Hiner, "El Derecho a Migrar Como Un Derecho Humano: La Actual Ley Inmigratoria Argentina," 317–19.

the younger members of society.⁵⁰

During the interwar period, immigration ceased and Argentina experienced settlement and generational change: by 1947, only five percent of the population was Italian.⁵¹ At the end of the Second World War, Argentina had strong contractual relations with Europe, particularly with Italy. The State recognized that its economic and industrial growth was due in part to Italian companies, such as Olivetti, Fiat, and Pirelli.⁵² Juan Domingo Peron⁵³ required the Italian workforce as essential to the industrial development of the country. He sought catholic, anti-communist technicians, in good health conditions, and those from the North of Italy were particularly valued. Peron created CREI, an association to aid the settlement in Argentina, and DAIE, a society to select immigrants with favorable traits. Simultaneously, in Italy, emigration was necessary due to overpopulation and post-war devastation.⁵⁴ This policy brought two main classes of immigrants, constituting the wave of the *Ingegneri*: workers formally recruited by industries, mostly in food supply and metallurgy and small entrepreneurs. Families arrived with their employment, social status, a source of income, possibly property, and political status. Immigrants were deemed politically significant and to encourage their participation, in 1954, Peron created specifically a party: the *Partido Peronista de los Extranjeros*.⁵⁵

The *Ingegneri*'s wave peaked between 1947 and 1951, benefiting from a more efficient society capable to their absorption. Argentina was perceived as a country of immigrants without negative connotations. European immigration to Argentina ceased in 1960 with the worsening of the country's political and economic situation.⁵⁶

The *Ley de la Inmigracion y Colonizacion* (law 817) of 1876 remained in force until 1981 when it was replaced by law 22.439, known as *Ley Videla*. This law was based on xenophobic principles that regulated immigration movements during the dictatorship. Since the Constitution of 1954 was considered only operational, it was impossible to reclaim the unconstitutionality of the law. In 2004, law 25.871 replaced this and repositioned the Constitution and human rights at the center of immigration. The definition of immigrants lost its emphasis on European workers: it has broadened to include any foreigner who wishes to enter, transit, reside or settle permanently or temporarily in the country.⁵⁷

Throughout the history of immigration in Argentina, the role of the immigrant is revealed to be fundamental in the economic and political development of the country. However, the consideration of this phenomenon as a population factor and its exploitation under a capitalistic perspective is not unique to this case. Major world cities have experienced it and it is still an actuality of relevance nowadays. The intensity showed by European immigration in Argentina is what sets it apart. In front of such an imposing immigration, the willingness of the state to capitalize from it became explicit through laws, definitions and the rapid invention of domestic types to accommodate and implicitly exploit such flux. Argentina serves as a paradigmatic case to show how housing typologies emerge under the pressure of immigration into cities and the actions of the state and the market. More precisely, the city of Buenos Aires, being the only arrival harbor was the magnet for immigrants and the scene for this tensioned emergence of typologies.

58 Ballent and Liernur, *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, 17.



Conventillo in San Telmo in Buenos Aires in 1943. From Archivo General de la Nación Argentina, photographic document 320025.

Delineated the general outlines of the history of immigration in Argentina and supported by the timelines illustrated in the Annex, the following chapters focus on the typological study of houses. This study does not aim to be a mere analysis of drawings, but an immersive comprehension of the structures inserted in the life of immigrants in Buenos Aires, to understand the complexity behind the “*vivienda*”. The changes in the models are representations of changes in the society, in the levels of consumption, in the cultural production, in the organization of housework, and in the phases of the history of European immigration within Argentina.⁵⁸ Each case will delineate the immigrant role, the family composition, the issue of property and its insertion and diffusion within the urban pattern through a detailed reconstruction based on books, stories, memories and oral narrations.

Every typology is represented by a plan, a façade elevation and a volumetric diagram. Despite the rigor and precision used to draw the plan, certain features have been abstracted to reflect the moment of condensation of different determinations. The façade, but mostly the diagram, allows the typology to achieve a more general connotation, enlarging the scale from the room to the block in its urban context. The axonometry of the blocks is employed to graphically represent the different urban policies and in parallel the evolving situation of the city.

Conventillo: Immigration as an Opportunity for Speculation

In the second half of the nineteenth century, due to the demographical increase of the population, the lack of available lands, the fiscal pressure and the consequent agricultural indebtedness, families from Europe began to consider the possibility to move and, in particular, the Argentinian experience as a real future possibility. To make a decision, each family calculated their feasibility based on the number of adults who were able to contribute to their economy: if the number of “arms” was higher than the number of “mouths”, so if the number of working adults exceeded the number of dependents, then emigration would occur.⁵⁹ In 1880, 649.000 immigrants arrived to Argentina, a number that would be duplicated in the successive decade.⁶⁰

Among the *inmigrantes golondrinas*,⁶¹ the immigrants from the South of Italy were sent to colonize the Pampa, the desert around the city of Buenos Aires, and all the other immigrants were concentrated in the city. Arriving with the idea of earning the maximum amount of money in the minimum time, the immigrants were looking for accommodation in the center, where the work demand was higher and varied. In the census of 1887, 53 percent of immigrants stayed in the city of Buenos Aires.⁶² The chosen immigrant man arrived at the harbor and upon arrival, they spent a few days in the *Hotel del Inmigrante* seeking work and housing, relying on the resources provided by the State.⁶³ They found a job as laborers in a small industry, where, with high chances, the manager was also from the same region. They moved with their few possessions into a shared room within a *conventillo*, not far from the center and the port.

The surging immigrant population, exceeding 100.000 entries in five

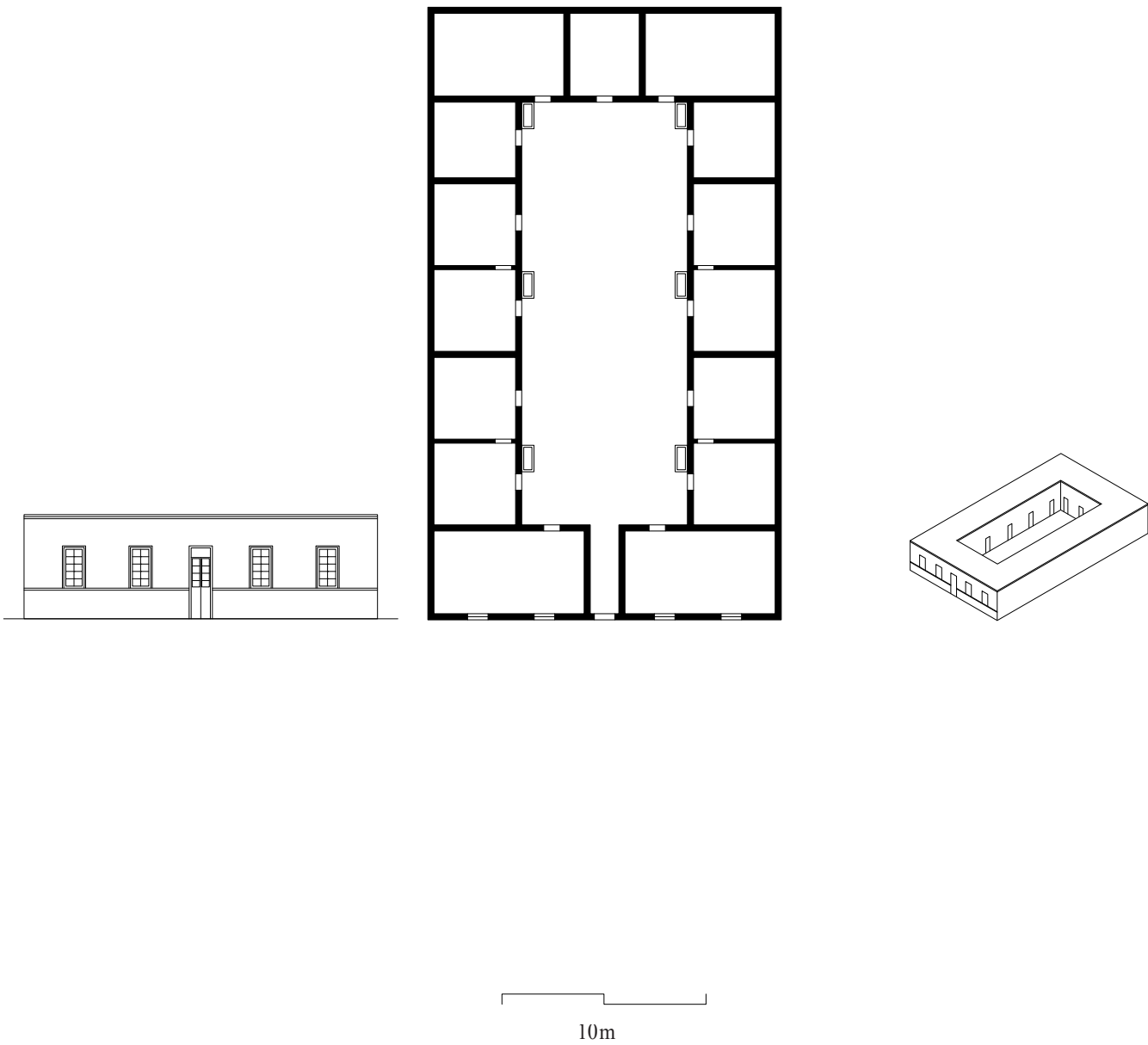
59 Devoto, *Historia de los italianos en la Argentina*, 20–31.

60 Jorge Ramos, “La habitación popular urbana en Buenos Aires. 1880-1945 : La mirada tipológica,” vol. 91 (Seminario de Crítica, Instituto de Arte Americano e Investigaciones Estéticas, 1998), 12.

61 Benencia and Devoto, *Historia de La Inmigración En La Argentina*, 65–76.

62 Ramos, “La habitación popular urbana en Buenos Aires. 1880-1945 : La mirada tipológica,” 13.

63 Bjerg, *Historias de La Inmigración En La Argentina*, 30–35.



Typical plan, facade and volumetric diagram of a *conventillo*. Drawn by author, based on interviews and adapted from Fernando E. Diez, *Buenos Aires y Algunas Constantes En Las Transformaciones Urbanas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial de Belgrano, 1997), 45-46.

64 Ballent and Liernur, *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, 95.

65 Ibid., 83.

66 Ibid., 60.

67 Translation by author. Original text: “a todas aquellas construcciones rapidas y economicas que permitieran reunir en un plazo corto el numero de casa-habitaciones requerido,” Ibid., 93.

68 Ramos, “La habitación popular urbana en Buenos Aires. 1880-1945 : La mirada tipológica,” 13.

69 Fernando E. Diez, *Buenos Aires y Algunas Constantes En Las Transformaciones Urbanas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial de Belgrano, 1997), 45–46.

70 Benencia and Devoto, *Historia de La Inmigración En La Argentina*, 100.

71 Liernur and Aliata, *Diccionario de arquitectura en la Argentina*, 2004, 2:169.

72 Ballent and Liernur, *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, 77–82.

73 Diez, *Buenos Aires y Algunas Constantes En Las Transformaciones Urbanas*, 45–46.

74 Liernur and Aliata, *Diccionario de arquitectura en la Argentina*, 2004, 2: 171.

75 Ballent and Liernur, *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivien-da, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, 97; Ramos, “La habitación popular urbana en Buenos Aires. 1880-1945 : La mirada tipológica,” 13.

76 The *vara* was a unit of length imported by the Spanish and used in Buenos Aires. 10 *varas* corresponds to 8,66 meter approximately. Alain Garnier, *Le Carré Rompu* (Lausanne: Archigraphie, 1989), 56.

years, sought temporary accommodation with low-comfort ambitions and encouraged the need for building densification.⁶⁴ The structures were not meant to last for a long time but rather to reflect the current moment made of temporary stays and limited resources.⁶⁵ As the number of immigrants multiplied, the infrastructure (such as water, roads, etc.) proved to be inadequate for the growing population. As described by European travelers, the city became unhealthy, prone to flooding and constant epidemics.⁶⁶ The hygienic living and urban conditions worsened and to address these problems, the municipality promoted the *conventillo* as a solution, initiating project competitions and publishing the *reglamento*. Despite the higher cost of durable brick construction, wood was extensively used because of its rapidity. The municipality favoured “all those quick and economical constructions that would allow gathering in a short time the required number of houses-rooms” in contradiction with the intentions of control promoted by the norms.⁶⁷

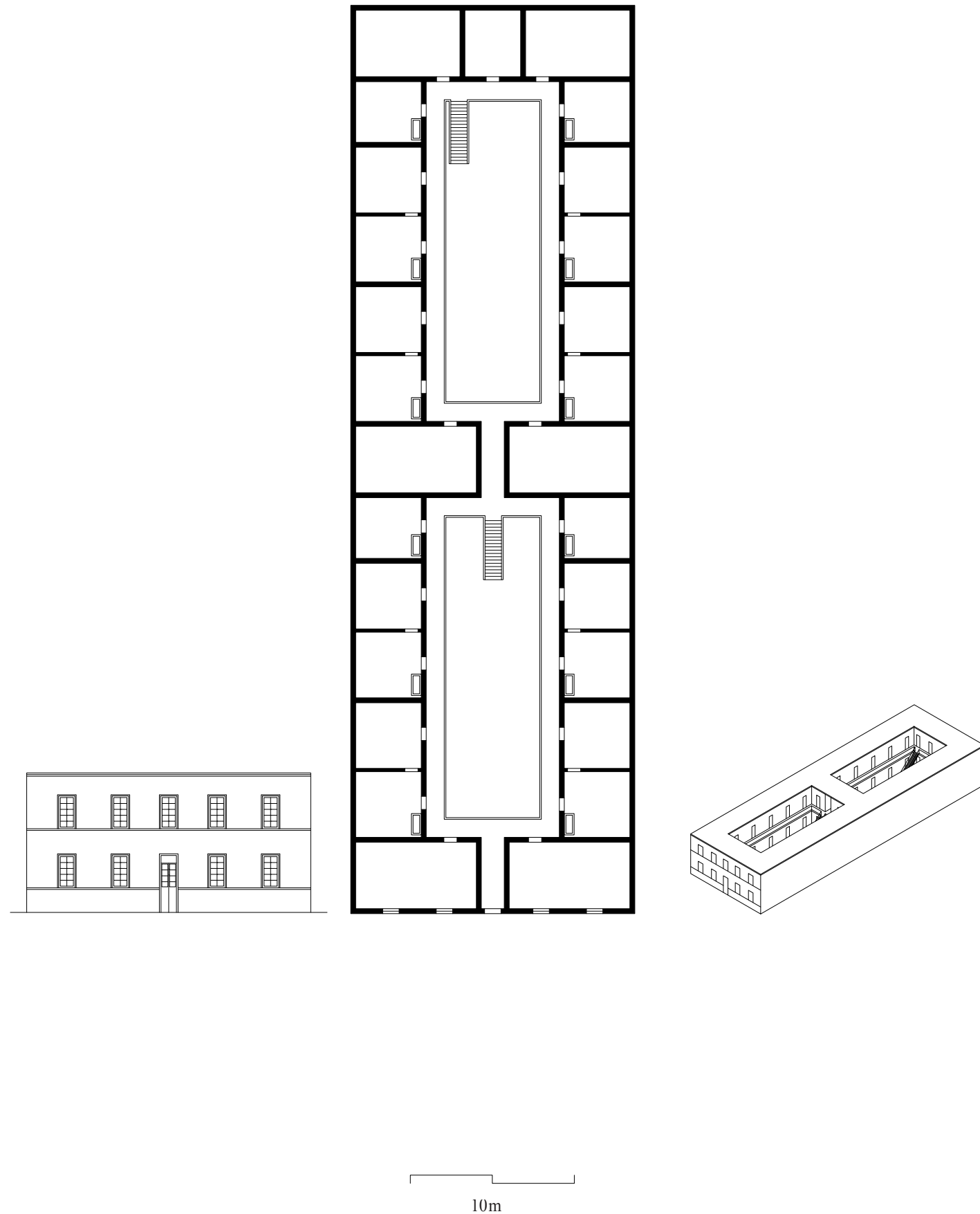
The *conventillos* were equally distributed in the city and their ownership was divided between the municipality and private owners. They were mostly immigrant merchants (mostly Italians)⁶⁸ who, considering the growing number of worker immigrants, saw an opportunity for speculation in the existing typology of the *casa de patio* imported by the Spanish centuries before.⁶⁹

In 1873, 65 percent of the European immigrants in Argentina were Italians, the rest Spanish, Portuguese and French.⁷⁰ All of these personalities had the same objectives and conditions and desire for exchange and support, necessary in a delicate moment such as the insertion into a new society.⁷¹

The *conventillos* were houses composed of a series of squared rooms arranged around a large courtyard. The number of rooms could be variable, from 14 to 28.⁷² The dimensions were fixed to four by four meters or five by five meters and their disposition did not allow for good ventilation or enlightenment. Their height was very generous, with three and a half meters minimum. Each room was assigned to an entire family or to two to four men together.⁷³ As the priority was the work for money and the residence was planned to be temporary for most of the cases, the house was seen as a necessity, not a luxury. The comfort conditions were sacrificed face to a convenient position in the city, the working center, and the lowest rental price offered. For a shared room in a good central location, a low-class worker the rent corresponds to 40 percent of his income.⁷⁴

The structural walls of the *conventillos* could be in brick or in wood, the interior walls were plastered, and the floors were tiled or bricked. There was a prohibition of using zinc and iron in the rooms and the obligation to *blanqueamiento* of facades (whitening of the front), that were then covered in *albañileria* (masonry). Norms about the construction, materials, interior cladding, ventilation and latrine provision were published in the “*Reglamento para las casas de inquilinato, conventillos y bodegones*”, on June 16, 1971, after a devastating epidemic of *fiebre amarilla* (yellow fever).⁷⁵

All the rooms had access to the patio, an outside space of at least 8 *varas*,⁷⁶ considered the true melting pot, an open and communitarian space. It was an integrative cultural space allowing for a high degree of sociability, facilitating conversations and exchanges between the in-



Typical plan, facade and volumetric diagram of a *conventillo* with two floors.
 Drawn by author, adapted from Jorge Francisco Liernur and Fernando Aliata, eds.
Diccionario de arquitectura en la Argentina: estilos obras biografías instituciones ciudades. Vol. 2: C - D (Buenos Aires: Clarín / Arquitectura, 2004), 168.

77 Ramos, “La habitación popular urbana en Buenos Aires. 1880-1945 : La mirada tipológica,” 11.

78 Armus, “Mirando a Los Italianos: Algunas Imágenes Esbozadas Por La Elite En Tiempos de La Inmigracion Masiva,” 100.

79 Díez, *Buenos Aires y Algunas Constantes En Las Transformaciones Urbanas*, 45–46.

80 Ballent and Liernur, *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, 100.

81 Fernando E Díez, “Normas y Formas: Regularicion y Tipología En Buenos Aires,” in *Habitar Buenos Aires: Las Manzanas, Los Lotes y Las Casas*, ed. Juan Manuel Borthagaray (Ciudad de Buenos Aires: Sociedad Central de Arquitectos : Consejo Profesional de Arquitectura y Urbanismo, 2010), 3–6.

82 Ballent and Liernur, *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, 97.

83 Ana Cravino, “Historia de la vivienda social. Primera parte: del conventillo a las casas baratas,” *Vivienda & Ciudad* 3 (December 2016): 13–15.

84 Ramos, “La habitación popular urbana en Buenos Aires. 1880-1945 : La mirada tipológica,” 11–13.

85 Díez, *Buenos Aires y Algunas Constantes En Las Transformaciones Urbanas*, 159–62.

86 Ramos, “La habitación popular urbana en Buenos Aires. 1880-1945 : La mirada tipológica,” 3–6.

87 Díez, *Buenos Aires y Algunas Constantes En Las Transformaciones Urbanas*, 180–82.

88 Ibid. 186.

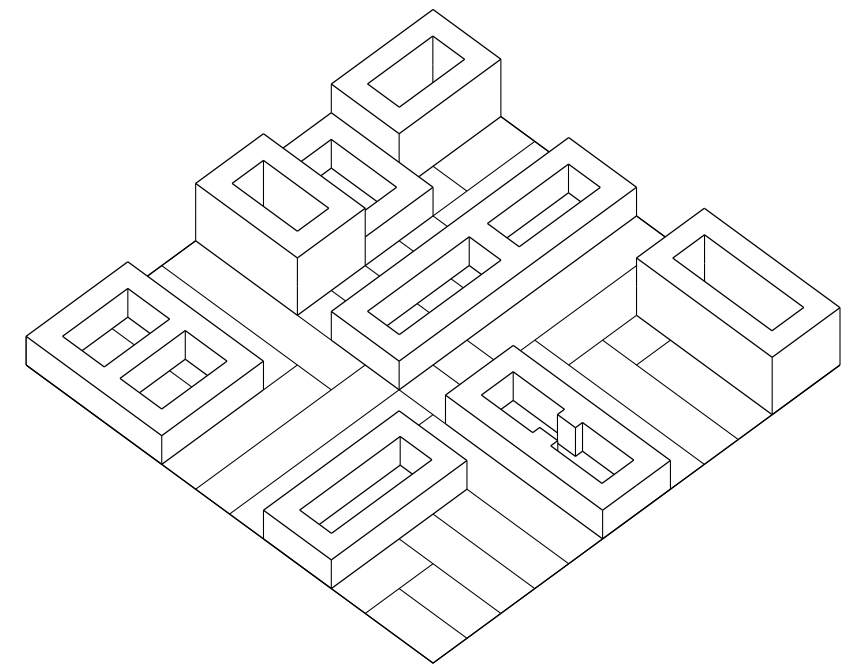
habitants of the *conventillo*. Immigrants from different backgrounds, Italians, Spanish, Polish and others were sharing celebrations, and meals and generating new aesthetic, linguistic expressions and music genres, such as tango.⁷⁷ The central passage at the front separated the patio from the road, conferring to it a high level of confidentiality. The space of the patio, hidden from the public eye, became a device generating forms of solidarity and protest. In 1907 a movement called the “*huelga de alquileres*” arose against the rising rents for a room in the *conventillos* and its organisation was held inside its patio. The impossibility to control over these social relations became the reason for the ruling class to spread a negative image of these structures among public opinion.⁷⁸

The *conventillos* diffused rapidly in the city developing several variations according to their owners. Considering the continuously increase in the number of entries of people seeking for short-term accommodation, the willingness to offer more rooms and to speculate on these extensible typology emerged.⁷⁹ This densification process expressed continuity with the existing typological pattern with the repetition of the patios and the surrounding rooms on the horizontal plan. Due to the recover of materials from demolished or burnt houses, acting on the existing structures was a simple, rapid and low-cost operation.⁸⁰ The existing floors were then multiplied and *apilados*, literally piled, one on top of the other for three or four times. The building was quickly achieving a considerable height of 25-30 meters.⁸¹ Even though the regulation of 1871 had been written to prevent unhealthy living conditions, the sanitary inspectors were incapable of controlling this speculation process and the spreading construction of these precarious buildings, as reported in 1887.⁸² Moreover, influenced by the negative opinion of the ruling class, the *conventillo* was believed to lead to the moral contamination of its inhabitants.⁸³ Considering that 27 percent of the population was living in *conventillos* and that 72 percent of them were immigrants, the decaying condition of the facilities reflects the absence of social protection towards this working class and the liberal position of the State in terms of housing, that it was considered a problem of the individuals far from the governmental worries.⁸⁴

The process of densification did not only act only on the typology itself. The city extended its limits with the multiplication of the number of *manzanas*, square blocks of 120 for 120 *varas* imported and imposed previously by the Spanish urbanists. The term *amanzanamiento* indicates the generated urban pattern.⁸⁵ Each block had an immense surface of at least 14.400 meters square and its squared shape was not ideal for the optimisation of spaces. These occupation difficulties and the rise of the land value of 40 percent, led to the subdivision of the existing *manzana* into *lotes* with a minimal front size imposed of 10 *varas* each.⁸⁶ The length of each parcel was defined by its position in the manzana: passing from the longest one, until 60 meters long, situated at the centre to the shortest at the corners.⁸⁷ The sizes of the plots in a single block were very variated. The *trazado* had then been consolidated by the construction of houses, such as la *casa chorizo* or la *vivienda en hilera*, typologies particular persistent, studied in the next chapter. The *amanzanamiento* and the *trazado* will reveal themselves to be resistant and persistent to the attempts of renovation and modernization that will happen in the second half of the twentieth century.⁸⁸



Patio of a conventillo in 1902. Jorge Ramos, “La habitación popular urbana en Buenos Aires. 1880-1945 : La mirada tipológica,” *Seminario Crítica*, Vol. 91 (Instituto de Arte Americano e Investigaciones Estéticas, 1998), 29.
Immigrants playing tango in a patio in 1932. From Archivo General de la Nación Argentina, photographic document 3462143.



Typical manzana in the city center at the beginning of the twentieth century. Drawn by author, reconstructed on a model inspired by of Fernando E. Diez, *Buenos Aires y Algunas Constantes En Las Transformaciones Urbanas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial de Belgrano, 1997), 264.

Casa Chorizo: Building a Place to Call “Home”

At the beginning of the twentieth century, waves of immigrants of rural origin arrived in Argentina. If they initially came from northern Italy, they were quickly joined by people from the south. Both were seen as hard workers, which led to a pro-immigration policy on the part of the Argentine state. Coming without any specific professional capacity, immigrants from Southern Italy contributed to the evolution of agricultural production and the expansion towards the pampa, while immigrants from the North actively participated in the industrialization process and settled in an urban context. The first person to immigrate was always a single man, who quickly settled down. The immigrant from the North arrived with no working knowledge but with a spirit of sacrifice and principles of hard work, frugality and humility derived from the abandoned hard life of rural Europe. By working regularly, they were able to accumulate enough money in a short time to afford a plot of land and to be joined by their family, followed by friends and acquaintances.⁸⁹

The typology built is called “*casa chorizo*,” named for its linear layout.⁹⁰ The imposition of 10 *varas* at the parcel’s front reduced the patio width and room size. One house had two simple rooms with multiple functions, smaller wet rooms and a corridor giving access to all the spaces. The main rooms had all the same dimensions of four by four meters, coupled with thick walls.⁹¹ The largest place was the living room, serving as a transition between interior and exterior. It functioned as a welcoming area for visitors, described as “the place for beautiful objects”, where “neither eating, sleeping nor working” were allowed.⁹² It was the only room aesthetically curated and it was designed to elevate the family’s position. Also the expressive façade contributed to this image: it was “*italianizante*”, adorned with elements reminiscent of classical architecture marking the missing centrality of the entrance.⁹³

The *casa chorizo* was a flexible structure, easily adapted to the family’s needs and preferences, with shared spaces being the norm.⁹⁴ Retaining their peasant origins, immigrants maintained communal habits within the walls, often spending most of their time together in a single room to minimize energy consumption.⁹⁵ At the end of the patio, there were *polleras* (chicken coops) or vegetable gardens, personalized according to the immigrants’ wishes, which gave them a sense of home and allowed them to cook their recipes.

Immigrants arrived through a network of personal connections, based on human relations. The *casas* were built in a similar way through a process of auto-construction, with neighbors sharing machines and technical knowledge. The neighborhood consisted of interconnected units that naturally blended interior, exterior, private, and public spaces.⁹⁶

Each individual, despite lacking prior experience, specialized in a specific construction job.⁹⁷ Mirroring the sharing of knowledge happening in the patio of the *conventillo*, the immigrants’ origins were associated with specific construction specialization: “The Russians were doing the glass, the Italians were doing the bricks and the Spanish were geniuses with the kitchen facilities” (from an interview with children of Italians immigrant arrived in 1903). To give an idea of the simplicity of the process of auto-construction, one man arrived in Buenos Aires, he lived the first

89 Devoto, *Historia de los italianos en la Argentina*, 278–309.

90 Liernur and Aliata, *Diccionario de arquitectura en la Argentina*, 2004, 2:29–32.

91 Díez, “Normas y Formas: Regularización y Tipología En Buenos Aires,” 2.

92 Translation by author. Original text: “*el lugar para los objetos bonitos [...] ni se come, ni se duerme, ni se trabaja*,” Jorge Francisco Liernur, “Casas y Jardines. La Construcción Del Habitar Moderno,” in *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, ed. Anahí Ballent and Jorge Francisco Liernur, 1st ed. (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2014), 556.

93 The adjective *italianizante* describes architectural features of Italian Renaissance. Díez, *Buenos Aires y Algunas Constantes En Las Transformaciones Urbanas*, 46–49.

95 Jorge Francisco Liernur, “Radicar y Controlar. La Estrategia de La Casa Auto-construida,” in *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, by Anahí Ballent and Jorge Francisco Liernur, 1st ed. (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2014), 178.

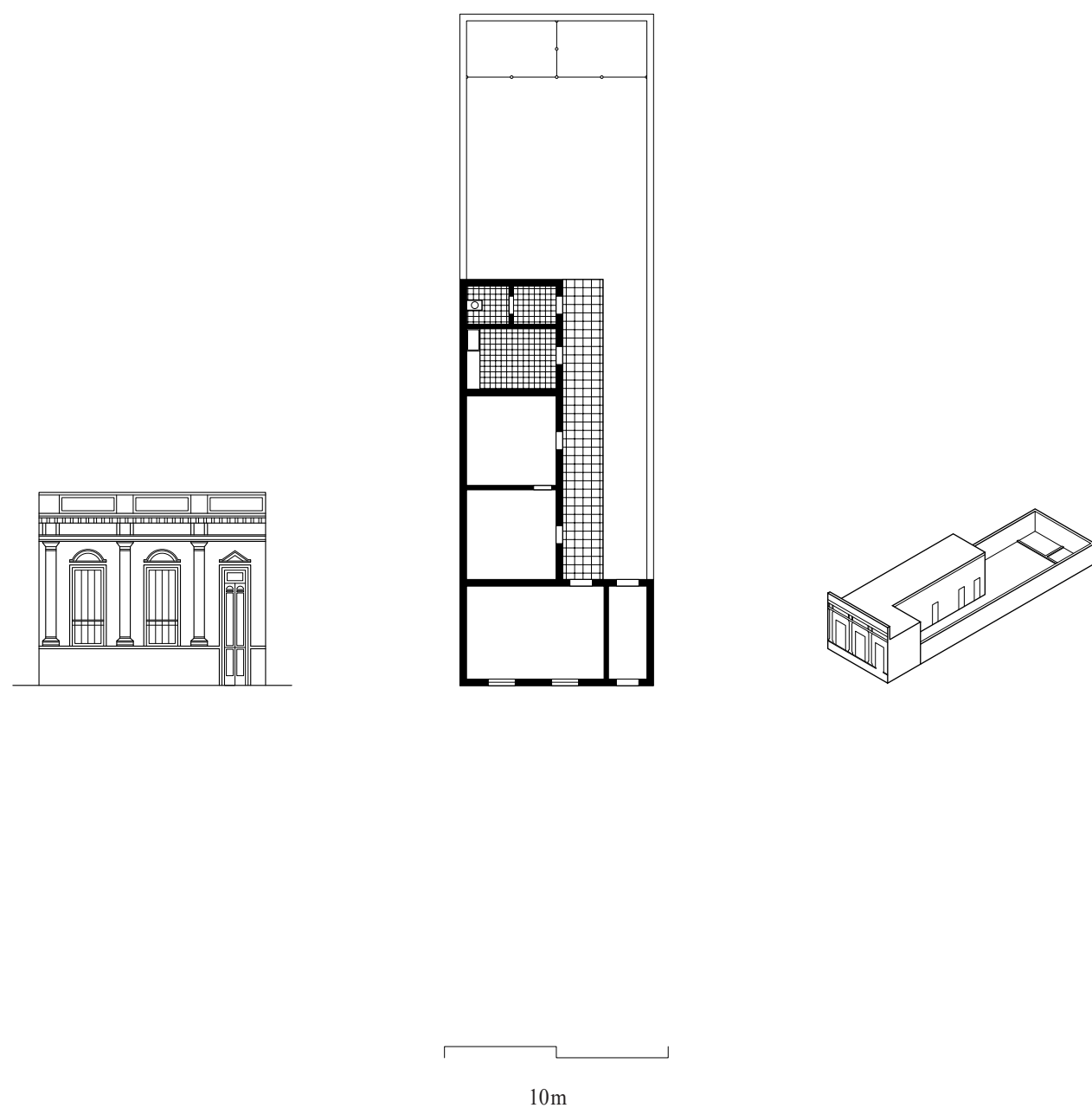
94 Cappeller, “Values of Immateriality,” 180–84.

96 Jorge Francisco Liernur, “Casas y jardines. La construcción del dispositivo doméstico moderno (1870-1930),” in *Historia de la vida privada en la Argentina*, by Fernando Jorge Devoto and Marta Madero (Buenos Aires: Taurus, 1999), 104.

97 Liernur, “El Discreto Encanto de Nuestra Arquitectura 1930 / 1960,” 8.



Illustration showing a typical front of a manzana and the process of auto-construction. From Carlos Moreno, *Reflexiones sobre memoria y patrimonio de nuestra tierra, nuestra gente y su cultura* (Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: ICOMOS Argentina, 2019), 40.



Plan, facade and volumetric diagram of a *casa chorizo*. Drawn by author, based on interviews and adapted from Jorge Francisco Liernur and Fernando Aliata, eds. *Diccionario de arquitectura en la Argentina: estilos obras biografías instituciones ciudades. Vol. 2: C - D* (Buenos Aires: Clarín / Arquitectura, 2004), 31.

98 Horacio A. Torres, “El mapa social de Buenos Aires en 1943, 1947 y 1960. Buenos Aires y los modelos urbanos,” *Desarrollo Económico* 18, no. 70 (July 1978): 18–19.

99 Ibid., 20.

100 At least 20 percent of the work in the production field was home-based. In textile and leather production it was almost 90 percent, Liernur, “Radical y Controlar. La Estrategia de La Casa Autoconstruida,” 175.

101 Torres, “El mapa social de Buenos Aires en 1943, 1947 y 1960. Buenos Aires y los modelos urbanos,” 17.

102 Halperin Donghi, Tulio in “La integración de los inmigrantes italianos en la Argentina” in Devoto and Rosoli, *La Inmigración Italiana En La Argentina*, 88.

103 Diez, “Normas y Formas: Regularización y Tipología En Buenos Aires,” 2.

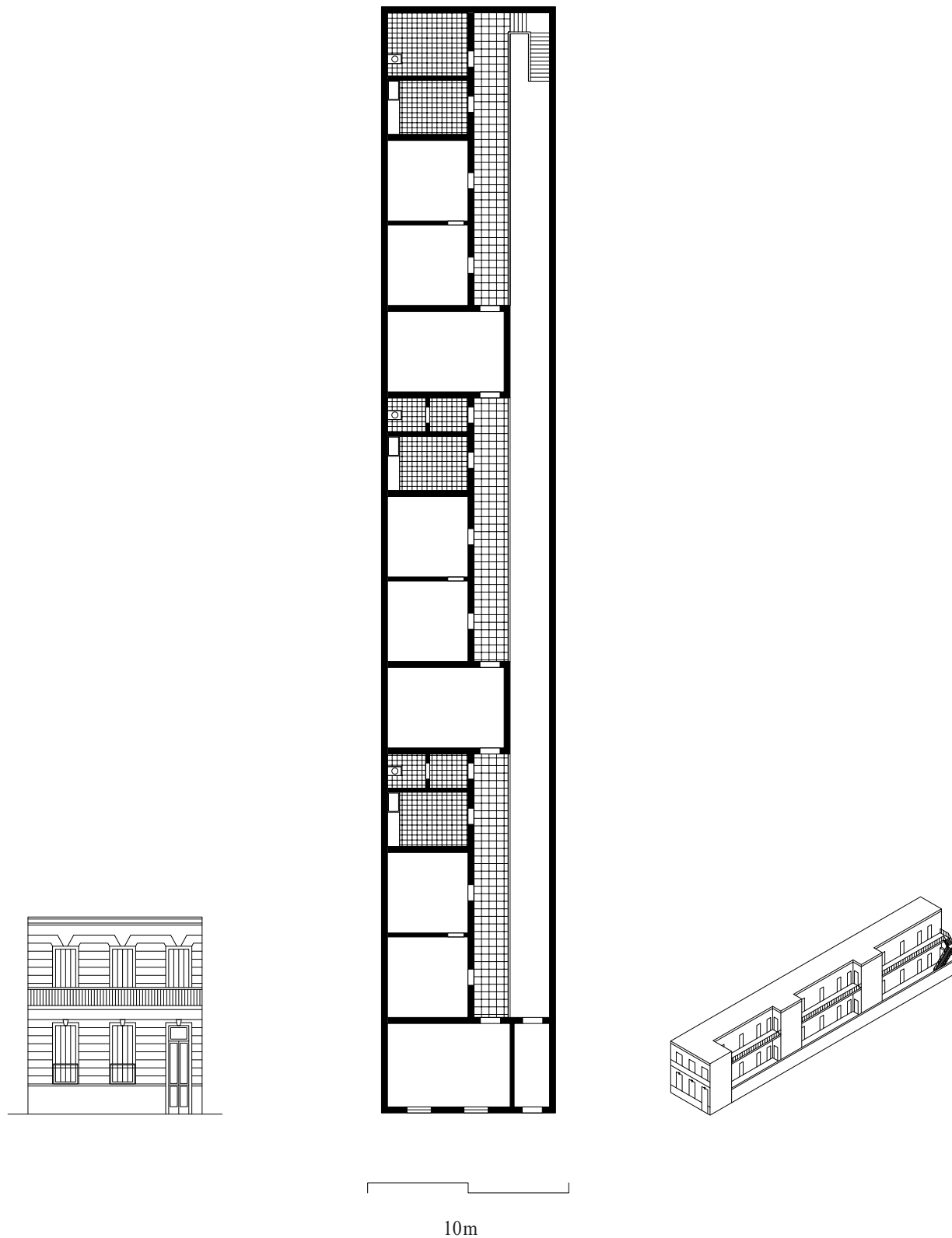
104 *Colectivos* are the buses. With their passage between the *manzanas* they defined roads. Scobie, *Buenos Aires*, 228.

weeks in a rented place, worked in industry, gained enough money to call his family, buy a land parcel and build his house. After a while, he sent a letter to his brother to join him. They learnt how to fabricate bricks, and they rented a place in the center with a brick oven. Then they build the house for the brother and his family following the same procedure as the previous one. The *casas chorizo* were built according to the financial capacities of the family step by step: the first savings were used to buy the parcel, then for the necessary materials and to construct it. The available techniques, materials and models were adapted to the parcel, allowing for a naturalization of the process of construction by the same immigrants.⁹⁸

At the base of this process of auto-construction, there was a wish for a place to call home. This aspiration to ownership had natural and artificial reasons. The immigrant’s ability to afford one parcel increased thanks to subsidized loan facilities offered by banks. Moreover, the salaries and the purchasing power of the workers increased while the number of working hours per day was reduced, leaving enough time and energy for workers to auto-construct their houses.⁹⁹ An important proportion of the industrial work was home-based in the multifunctional rooms of the *casa chorizo*, because of a lack of space of industries.¹⁰⁰ By implicitly helping the working middle class to aspire and afford a small property, the State and industries were promoting a plan of suburbanization and nationalization of immigrants.¹⁰¹

The access to property by immigrants leads to a process of spatial dispersion and urban expansion of the limits of the city. In the census of 1914, 32 percent of the urban properties in Buenos Aires were possessed by Italians. 14 percent were in the center, 13 percent in the areas just around and 41% in the furthers one.¹⁰² This number referred to the areas lowest towards the North of Buenos Aires, in the zones of Palermo, Tigre, Flores and Belgrano, where the land prices were the lowest.¹⁰³ The nationalization of the public transport system, the new net of tramways and the diffusion of *colectivos* with cheap tickets increased the affordability of these areas.¹⁰⁴ This attraction led to the creation of neighborhoods, the center of support and integration between immigrants in substitution of the patio.

Through bank reports of the first years of the twentieth century, the State remarked immense amounts of money sent to the exterior of the country from small saving accounts of immigrants. This practice was a reflection of the strength that the image of the original country was still keeping in their minds. Considering primordial for the ruling Argentinian class to hold the immigrants, with their workforce and capital, their nationalization was promoted. The plan was extensive: from mandatory military service in 1910 to the reforms of schools in 1916. The “*anclaje a la tierra*” hence “anchor to the land” represented the model of the “*casa propia*” or “own’s house”. The house was officially part of a state tactic to fix immigrants in Argentinian society. The promotion of the property was created through the diffusion of media and institutions, such as the *Comision Nacional de Casas Baratas* CNCB, founded in 1915. Its aim was not to build houses (the CNCB built some houses but its number was not effective, as very low compared to the demand), but to “direct popular education towards the cult of the home, to convince the worker that his home is the extension of the spirit, to teach the worker that such a



Plan, facade and volumetric diagram of a *vivienda en hilera*. Drawn by author, based on interviews and adapted from Fernando E. Diez, *Buenos Aires y Algunas Constantes En Las Transformaciones Urbanas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial de Belgrano, 1997), 52.

105 Translation by author. Original text: “*encaminar la educacion popular hacia el culto del hogar, convencer al trabajador que su casa es la prolongacion del espiritu, enseñar al obrero que de tal hombre, tal morada*,” from the journal *La Habitacion Popular*, num. 2, (Buenos Aires, 1934), reported by Liernur, “Radicar y Controlar. La Estrategia de La Casa Autoconstruida,” 182.

106 Ibid., 183–87.

107 Liernur, “Radicar y Controlar. La Estrategia de La Casa Autoconstruida,” 173.

108 Devoto, *Historia de los italianos en la Argentina*, 281–306.

109 Torres, “El mapa social de Buenos Aires en 1943, 1947 y 1960. Buenos Aires y los modelos urbanos,” 14.

110 Ibid., 5–8.

111 Diez, *Buenos Aires y Algunas Constantes En Las Transformaciones Urbanas*, 120.

112 Ibid., 51–52.

113 Diez, “Normas y Formas: Regularizacion y Tipologia En Buenos Aires,” 6.

114 Ibid., 2.

115 Diez, *Buenos Aires y Algunas Constantes En Las Transformaciones Urbanas*, 2–4.

man, such a home”¹⁰⁵ and to give the necessary tools for small individual actions of appropriation of ownership.¹⁰⁶ The immigrants, while benefiting from the satisfactory practice of the progressive acquisition of the property, were then “anchored” to their adoptive country.¹⁰⁶

A report from the bank *El Hogar Argentina* of 1910 reported the almost-disappearance of money transfers to the exterior.¹⁰⁷ The plan of nationalization though the aspiration to ownership was effective and it was boosted by the spatial and professional dispersion of immigrants in society. They were everywhere, occupying every working position from manager to the workman.¹⁰⁸

Once the house achieved the label of a safe place, one of the first ambitions for the immigrant, it could aspire to be an inversion.¹⁰⁹ Considering the fixed frontal dimension of each parcel to ten *varas*, its variable length (from 20 to 60 meters) was valuable and seen as an opportunity to speculate by its owner. The extended market of rent was ruling over this process of private densification.¹¹⁰ The room sizes were reduced to the minimum to be multiplied for the maximum times in the parcel. As happened with the *conventillo*, the typology is not questioned, but simply multiplied. This process of subdivision and multiplication was effectuated following the same principles of auto-construction. A unit was built and during the construction of the second one, the family had already moved in.¹¹¹

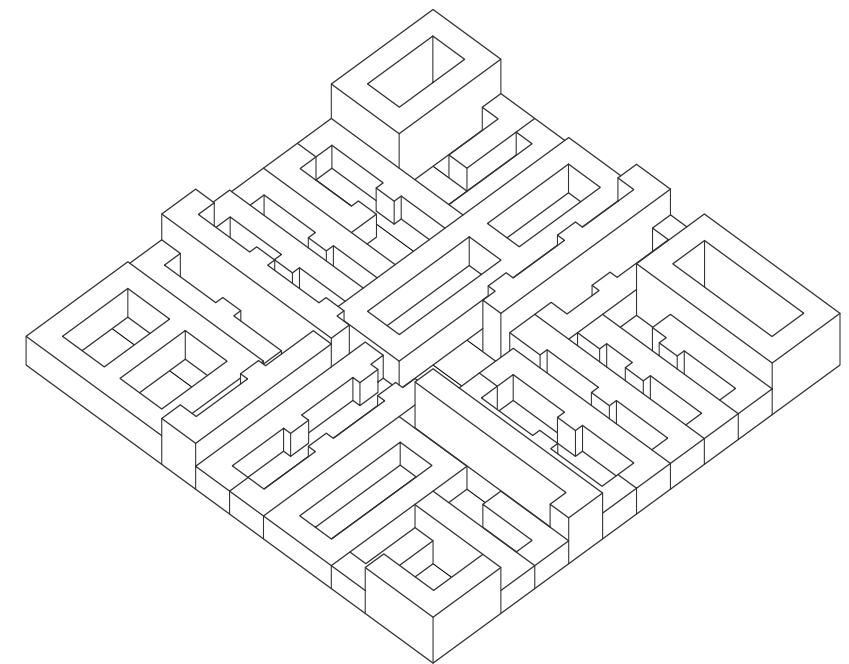
The minimal unit composed of two rooms, one bathroom, a kitchen and one service room, was horizontally repeated to cover the dimensions of the parcel and vertically “*apilada*” or “piled” five times, the maximum number of floors admitted by the norms.¹¹² The hierarchy of corridors was assuring distribution and privacy to each unit. The different units were occupied by renters or by relatives of the owners. In the rent advertisements, the units were sold as “*departamentos tipos casas*”, literally “department-type houses”, which is an oxymoron that exposes the contradiction between the habitable surface and its spatial organization.¹¹³

The typological transformations, derived from a necessity of densification, were only linked to quantity, rather than quality. The dimensions of the rooms didn’t change, they were just repeated. The quality of space and its general organization were subordinated by circumstantial choices, driven by speculation.¹¹⁴ The densification of a single lot resulted in a series of private actions, dictated by necessity and opportunity: the need to accommodate more people combined with the opportunity to have plenty of ‘superfluous’ space in one’s plot and to be able to exploit it as a source of income. This series of single densification operations based on circumstances, will give the city of Buenos Aires the epithet of “*gran aldea*”, literally “great village”.¹¹⁵

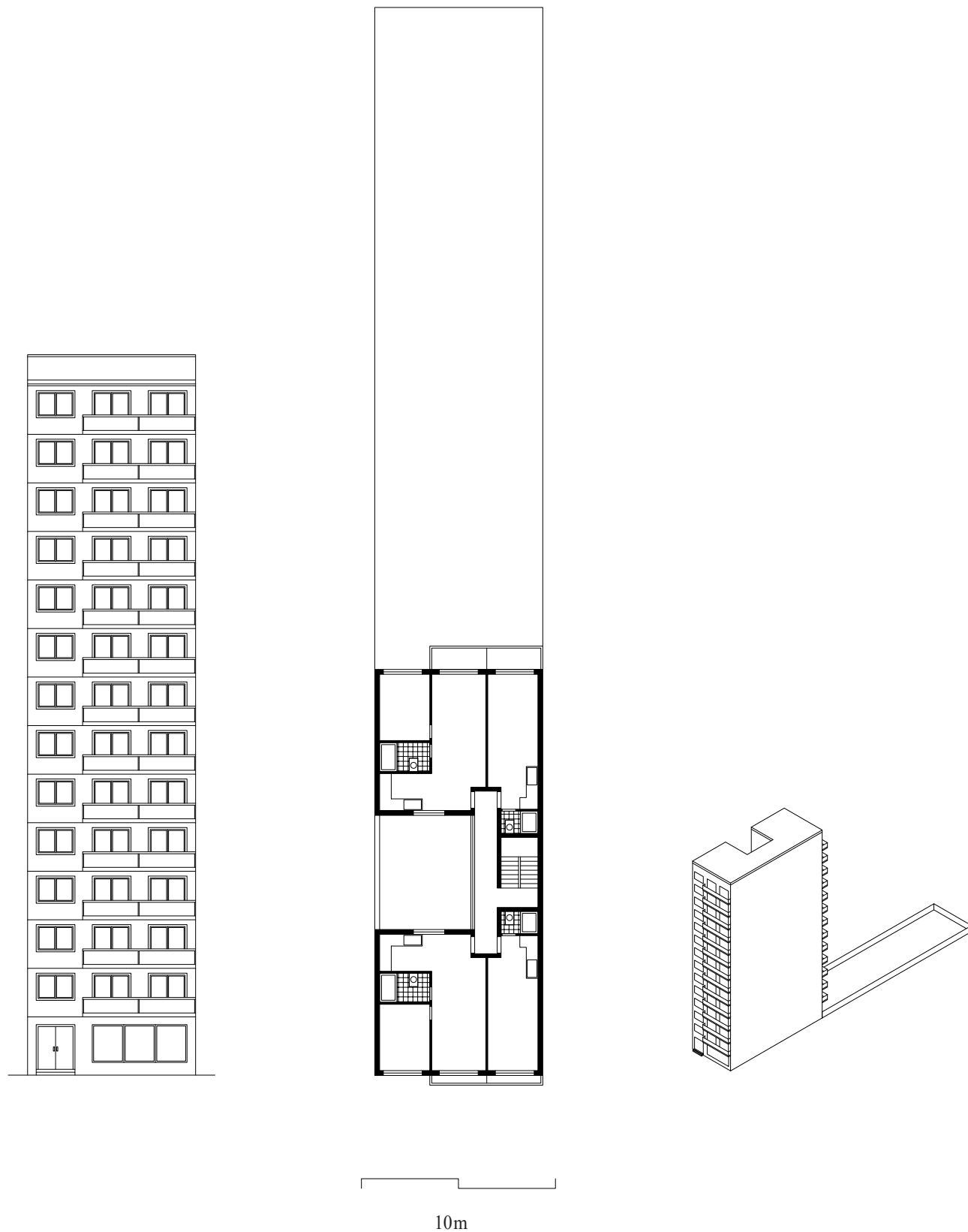
The process of the auto-construction when encountering speculative ambitions of the immigrants, now owners, will lead to a consensual culturally accepted typology and the creation of a fragmented and unhealthy city. The strategy of the State of using it in combination with the aspiration to property as a tool to anchor immigrants (and their capital) to Argentina revealed its limits. Influenced by European ideas and given the worsening sanitary conditions of Buenos Aires, the State aimed to homogenization and integration through new controlling laws increasing the accessibility to property, but taking out the self-made.



Aerial picture of the center of Buenos Aires in 1930. From Subsecretaria de Registros, Interpretacion y Catastro, Ministerio de Desarrollo Urbano y Transporte, GCBA, accessed on December 2023, http://ssplan.buenosaires.gob.ar/webfiles/mapa_aereas2.



Typical manzana in the city center in 1940. Drawn by author, reconstructed on a model inspired by of Fernando E. Diez, *Buenos Aires y Algunas Constantes En Las Transformaciones Urbanas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial de Belgrano, 1997), 264.



Plan, facade and volumetric diagram of a *edificio entre medianeras*. Drawn by author, based on interviews and adapted from construction folders of a building in Palermo - Ciudad Autonoma de Buenos Aires.

Edificio Entre Medianeras: Privatisation to Counter Self-Construction

The process of auto-constructed densification worsened the living conditions of the first-built units. Considering an entire *manzana*, the units on the ground floor were missing air and light, the free spaces were reduced to the minimum and the common areas were suffocated. The simple process of multiplication of existing typologies revealed its limits and led to an intense period of architectural experimentation to develop alternatives to the high-rise buildings on deep lots.¹¹⁶ The design process was relatively free, subject to the *Reglamento de Construcciones* of 1928. It reassembled regulations that were mainly about the distribution of buildable space in a plot. These norms were acting on existing buildings, answering specific problems when they approached an extreme limit. These restrictive postulations were specific, abstract, and did not communicate with each other.¹¹⁷

European vision of the city as an unified design gave rise to a new regulatory concept. Instead of solving one problem with one norm, one single model would ensure the respect of all conditions. The process of densification was controlled by building and *manzana's* models through postulative regulations, urban and housing plans.¹¹⁸ In 1944 the Code of Edification was modified and the model *Edificio entre Medianeras* (EEM44) was released. The buildings height increased to eight floors with possible extension proportional to the width of the front road. The fixed minimal dimensions of the “*patio de aire y de luz*” or “patio of light and air” ensured good ventilation and lightning to all units.¹¹⁹ With these geometrical restrictions, the buildable area was reduced by expropriating parts of property proportionally to their position in the block in favor of the “*corazon de manzana*”, a common and social place for its inhabitants. The EEM44 was a recommendation and its realisation depended on the interest of the private.¹²⁰

The building code of 1944 was part of a new political line of the State of intervention in the *problema de la vivienda*, abandoning its historical liberal strategy.¹²¹ Several laws concerning the rent market and property were enacted. The *Ley de los Alquileres* of 1943 created legal obstacles to freeze the value of rent “to protect the great mass of the population whose living standard [...] [was] incompatible with the minimum requirements for a human, healthy and dignified existence.”¹²² Its effects were contradictory: on the one hand, it prevented rents from rising; on the other, when inflation set in and workers’ incomes fell, families could no longer afford it.¹²³ Until 1948, the ownership of a plot was considered as a unit. Along with the modification of the article 2617 of the Civil Code, the *Ley de la Propiedad Horizontal* allowed for the coexistence of multiple properties in a single building with common areas. From one building with one owner and tenants to one building with several owners.¹²⁴ The democratization of property access and the existing subdivision of buildings in minimal dwellings, encouraged the private sector to sell over rent, acting through advertising operations.¹²⁵ The apartment in *Propiedad Horizontal* became a merch, an anonymous product. Elements were compacted, the kitchen and the bathroom were industrialized items. Apartment advertising evolved with the needs of users. At first, they were technical, focused on materials, all rooms were called *piezas* and it targeted

116 Jorge Francisco Liernur, “Primeros Debates Modernistas Sobre La Vivienda En Altura En Buenos Aires,” in *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, by Anahí Ballent and Jorge Francisco Liernur, 1st ed. (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2014), 409–32.

117 Diez, *Buenos Aires y Algunas Constantes En Las Transformaciones Urbanas*, 112–17.

118 Diez, “Normas y Formas: Regularicion y Tipologia En Buenos Aires,” 6–10.

119 Torres, “El mapa social de Buenos Aires en 1943, 1947 y 1960. Buenos Aires y los modelos urbanos,” 18–22.

120 Diez, *Buenos Aires y Algunas Constantes En Las Transformaciones Urbanas*, 118–29.

121 Ballent and Liernur, *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, 26–32.

122 Translation by author. Original text: “*proteger la gran masa de la poblacion cuyo nivel de vida [...] [era] incompatible con las exigencias minimas para asegurar la existencia humana, sana y digna,*” in Anahí Ballent, “Casa Colectiva, Monobloque, Propriedad Horizontal,” in *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, by Anahí Ballent and Jorge Francisco Liernur, 1st ed. (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2014), 468.

123 Torres, “El mapa social de Buenos Aires en 1943, 1947 y 1960. Buenos Aires y los modelos urbanos,” 21–22.

124 Ibid., 16–17.

125 Anahí Ballent, “De La Propiedad Horizontal a Las Torres Con Servicios,” in *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, by Anahí Ballent and Jorge Francisco Liernur, 1st ed. (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2014), 489–500.

LANUSSE y Cia.

Administración de propiedades

SAN MARTIN 232, PISO 3°

T. E. 30-0061 Y 34-3779

Propiedad Horizontal

LEY 13512

A

J. E. URIBURU 1639 (a 1/2 c. de Av. Las Heras)

Piso de gran categoría: hall, living-comedor, hall íntimo, 3 dormitorios, 2 baños completos, 7 placards, office, cocina, 2 dormitorios de servicio y otras comodidades. Servicios centrales. Garage en el mismo edificio. Posesión inmediata. Desde \$ 97.500 al contado y facilidades hasta 28 años.

B

GUERES esq. ACEVEDO (a 1 c. de Santa Fe)

Sobre el Jardín Botánico y Subte "C". Departamentos de: living-comedor, 1 y 2 dormitorios, cocina a gas. Calefacción. Incinerador. Depósito. Agua caliente y heladeras centrales. Desde \$ 18.400 al contado y facilidades hasta 12 años.

C

MONROE 2613 (a 2 cuadras de Av. Cabildo)

Departamentos de: living-comedor, 1 y 2 dormitorios. Servicios centrales: calefacción, heladeras, ascensor e incinerador. Cocina y calefón a gas. Depósito y Lavadero Local en Planta Baja. Desde \$ 17.400 al contado y facilidades hasta 12 años.

SEÑOR PROPIETARIO

Nuestra firma le ofrece su organización especializada en Propiedad Horizontal para edificios de renta ocupados y desocupados.

Ventas y Administraciones con profesionales al frente de cada sección, Legal, Contable y Técnica

Advertisement of apartment in propiedad horizontal. From Anahí Ballent and Jorge Francisco Liernur, *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, 1st ed. (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2014), 662.

36

CHAPTER FIVE

126 Jorge Francisco Liernur, “‘AAAdueño. 2amb. Va.Urq. Chiche. 4522-4789.’ Consideraciones Sobre La Constitución de La Casa Como Mercancía,” in *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, by Anahí Ballent and Jorge Francisco Liernur, 1st ed. (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2014), 581–90.

127 Ballent, “Casa Colectiva, Monobloque, Propriedad Horizontal. Desplazamiento y Cruces de Modelos En La Habitación Colectiva.,” 476.

128 Ballent and Liernur, *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, 39–43.

129 Torres, “El mapa social de Buenos Aires en 1943, 1947 y 1960. Buenos Aires y los modelos urbanos,” 18–21.

130 Díez, *Buenos Aires y Algunas Constantes En Las Transformaciones Urbanas*, 119.

131 During the World Wars, Italy recalled its citizens back to join its army. Less than half of the Italians answered positively to the call, Devoto, *Historia de los italianos en la Argentina*, 320.

132 CNCB was founded by the State. Liernur and Aliata, *Diccionario de arquitectura en la Argentina*, 2004, 2:135–38.

133 Baily, “Cross-Cultural Comparison and the Writing of Migration History: Some Thoughts on How to Stude Italians in the New World,” 249–50.

134 Torres, “El mapa social de Buenos Aires en 1943, 1947 y 1960. Buenos Aires y los modelos urbanos,” 5–8.

135 Liernur, “Primeros Debates Modernistas Sobre La Vivienda En Altura En Buenos Aires,” 411–15.

the middle class who were used to building their own houses. Later, the advertisement emphasized its location, the distance from the center and the rooms were distinguished: “*comedor*”, “*sala*”, “*vestibulo*”, etc.¹²⁶

The laws, with the EEM4 and the advertising campaigns, advocated for individual property ownership. This resulted in an increase in the number of property owners and a decrease of new constructions.¹²⁷ In contrast to the previous promotion of “*la casa propia*” through auto-construction, the state provided tools to access the property in a precise legal drawing. The promotion of property was part of a larger plan of the first populism led by Juan Domingo Peron, freshly installed as President of Argentina after the *Golpe de Estado* in 1943. All of his actions were based on the centralized control of what was natural before: the construction process, the culturally accepted typology and the sense of community.¹²⁸

These laws and norms were issued to control a growing population and to “solve” the problems created by auto-construction. The construction of new buildings was driven by small companies that dealt with all aspects of a housing project: from fundraising to execution, including the design project and promotion.¹²⁹ They replaced what had been covered by a shared knowledge network. Auto-construction shifted from being part of a nationalization strategy deployed by the state to being seen as an obstacle to its homogenization ambitions. As this self-made process was linked to immigration and its variety, an imposition of uniformity on them can be delineated. Variation were abandoned, the design process became a mechanism.¹³⁰

During the two World Wars, Argentina experienced a pause in immigration in Argentina and a period of integration for the former immigrants. In the following lines, the term “immigrant” refers to the Europeans who arrived in the first wave, the actors in the process of auto-construction of their own houses. Through their institutions, hospitals, associations, and clubs, they consolidated their social and professional dispersion and did not wish to leave.¹³¹ Simultaneously, the accepted process of auto-construction solidified certain housing typologies. Prior to the issuance of the aforementioned norms, the *problema de la vivienda* was limitedly tackled by the *Comision de Casa Baratas*¹³² and largely by the same inhabitants, the immigrants.

The EEM44 promoted the *corazon de manzana* for integration and exchange and it can recall the patio of the *conventillo*, but on the scale of the *manzana*. Immigrants already had this kind of community, based on their common nationality, nourished not by the physical creation of neighborhoods,¹³³ but by institutions that maintained celebrations and events, and by the persistence of traditions and habits within the walls of their houses. Moreover, the norms and codes were mostly applied to the center, the face of the city. At this stage of the immigrants’ integration process, only their working life was concentrated there, their private life was settled at varying distances from it.¹³⁴ With the same income, it was possible to choose to buy a small apartment in the city center or to buy a unit in the periphery. The middle working class chose the latter. This exodus was supported by the increase in mortgage credit, the constant cheapness of public transport, and by the freezing of rents.¹³⁵ The State’s efforts to solve the housing problem created a rejection of the center by immigrants and this centrifugal movement was still part of a plan of nationalization.

37

Casa Cajon:
A Professional Worker’s Wish for Privacy

The structuralization of the urban center was accompanied by a process of suburbanization. The current distinction between the Ciudad Autonoma de Bueos Aires CABA, the political, economic and administrative center, and the Gran Buenos Aires, its periphery, was entrenched. The urban growth was promoted by the second-generation immigrants, the children of the first immigrants, who were already socially and professionally integrated and could aspire to property outside the chaotic city, on the one hand and, on the other, by the new wave of immigrants who, forced by the European devastated condition, arrived to Argentina after the Second World War.¹³⁶

This immigration movement was intense in a very short time (1947-1951) compared to the massive and long one at the beginning of the century.¹³⁷ Argentina recognised in the immigrants a workforce for its improvement and, at the same time, some European countries, particularly Italy, recognised the movement of emigration as a forced solution to the demographical and employment crisis of the post-war. The role of formal and informal agents of immigration was fundamental and their operation facilitated the moves. New immigrants were called by relatives to join them, they arrived with a letter of recommendation and upon arrival, immediately started to work. There was no intermediate by the State, no stay in the *Hotel de Inmigrante*, and no need for the *Oficio de Colocacion* or other services, largely used by the previous wave. Although the chain of knowledge was present before as well, it was not as dominant as it was during this period: in fact, the call to move to Argentina was not coming only from families and acquaintances who had already settled and that could help other to do the same, but from industrial managers too. The preceding moment of decreased immigration corresponded to a moment of social and professional ascent: first-wave immigrants were now covering positions of relevance.¹³⁸

Aspiring to industrial and economic development, Argentina took advantage of a positive moment of emigration from a destroyed Europe to be selective in the profile of accepted immigrants.¹³⁹ The workers, professionals, small entrepreneurs and technicians were the favourites and among them, the ones from Northern Italy, that made themselves recognisable by their hardworking and modest way of living during the previous decades, were particularly appreciated. This was the phase dominated by the figure of the *Ingegneri*: small independent artisans called by their relatives and workers called by industrial managers.¹⁴⁰

Entire families were moving and this immigration was highly urban: 90 percent of the European immigrants in Argentina were settled in Buenos Aires.¹⁴¹ Family men arrived, they quickly installed themselves professionally as middle-class workers, bought a parcel with cash money, asked for a loan to the *Banco Hipotecario Nacional* for the construction of their own’s house and called their family to join.¹⁴²

The house was a compact volume, the interior circulation was reduced to one small space of distribution that gave access to all the rooms. The rooms were specialized according to a specific function: living, kitchen, bathroom, adult bedroom and children’s bedroom and each house was hosting one nuclear family.¹⁴³ The transformation of the internal organiza-

136 Torres, “El mapa social de Buenos Aires en 1943, 1947 y 1960. Buenos Aires y los modelos urbanos,” 5–8.

137 Benencia and Devoto, *Historia de La Inmigración En La Argentina*, 408.

138 Ibid., 410–23.

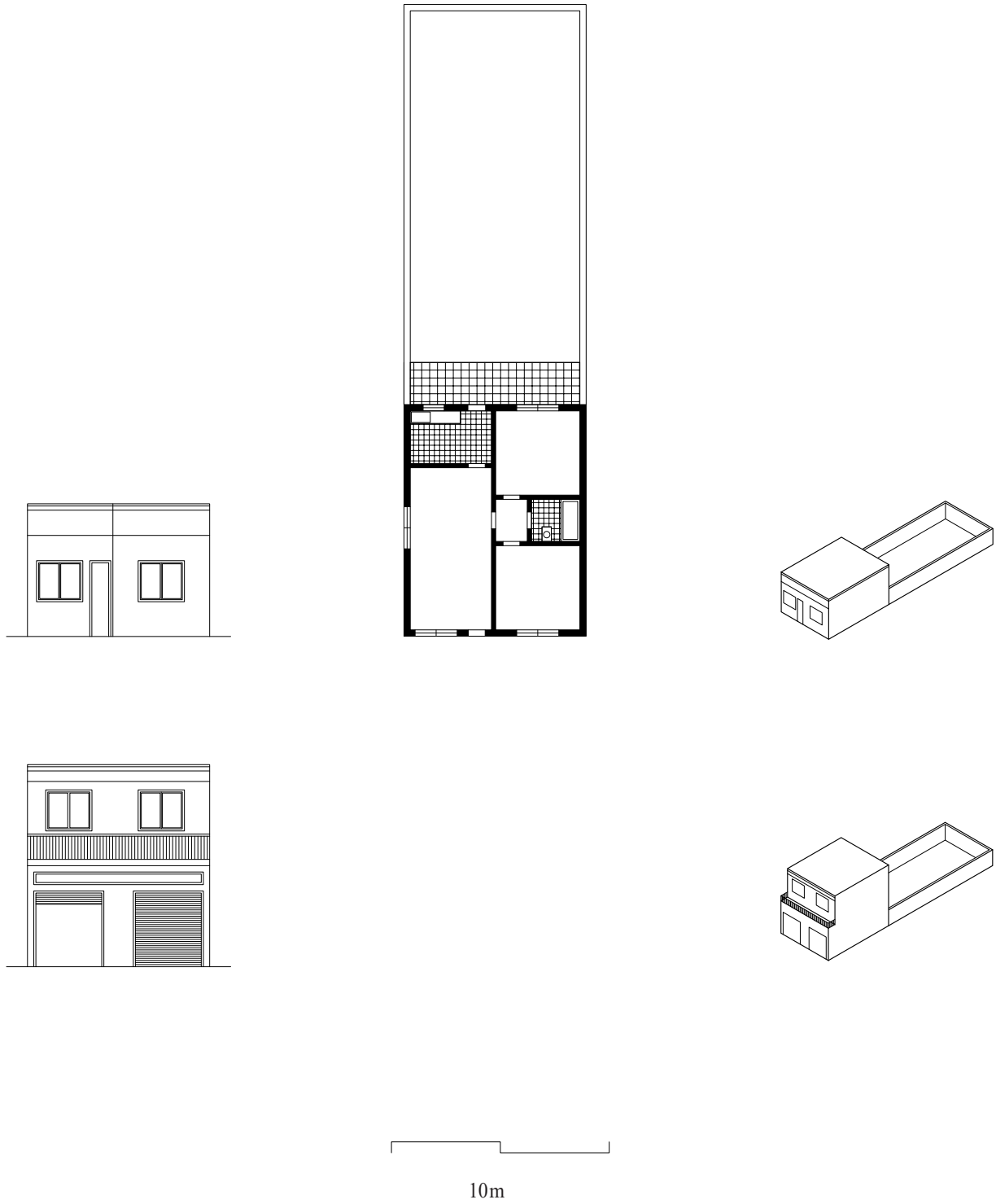
139 Ibid., 79–80.

140 Devoto, *Historia de los italianos en la Argentina*, 386–87.

141 Benencia and Devoto, *Historia de La Inmigración En La Argentina*, 421.

142 Interview with first-generation immigrants from Piedmont in 1948, October 2023.

143 Díez, *Buenos Aires y Algunas Constantes En Las Transformaciones Urbanas*, 74–75.



Plan, facades and volumetric diagram of *casa cajon* with one floor (top) and two floors (below). Drawn by author, based on interviews and adapted from Jorge Ramos, “La habitación popular urbana en Buenos Aires. 1880-1945 : La mirada tipológica,” *Seminario de Critica*, Vol. 91 (Instituto de Arte Americano e Investigaciones Esteticas, 1998): 24.



Stamp of the *Primer Congreso Panamericano de la Vivienda Popular* of 1939. From Anahí Ballent and Jorge Francisco Liernur, *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, 1st ed. (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2014), 290.

144 Diez, “Normas y Formas: Regulariccion y Tipologia En Buenos Aires,” 6–11.

145 Liernur and Aliata, *Diccionario de arquitectura en la Argentina*, 2004, 2:24–29.

146 The legal figure of the children was emphasized through educational plans and public social places dedicated to them, Liernur, “Casas y jardines. La construccion del dispositivo domestico moderno (1870-1930),” 3–10.

147 Fernando Devoto and Marta Madero, eds., *Historia de la vida privada en la Argentina*, 1. ed (Madrid, España ; Buenos Aires: Taurus, 1999), 3–10.

148 Interview with first-generation immigrants from Piedmont in 1948.

149 Ibid.

150 Ramos, “La habitación popular urbana en Buenos Aires. 1880-1945 : La mirada tipológica,” 12.

151 Ana María Cravino, “Historia de la vivienda Social en Buenos Aires. Segunda Parte.,” 2020, 251–52.

152 Jorge Francisco Liernur, “El Rol Inicial Del Estado. La Comisión Nacional de Casas Baratas,” in *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, by Anahí Ballent and Jorge Francisco Liernur, 1st ed. (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2014), 195–210.

tion from an aggregation of cubic rooms to an intricate compact volume, the disappearance of a common corridor to a central space of control and the distinction between spaces were the manifestation of the decline of the extended family and the emergence of new conditions of privacy.¹⁴⁴

The reduced surface and perimeter of the house allowed also for a reduction in its maintenance costs, which was further shortened by the clean and modest habits of European families.¹⁴⁵ The wish for intimacy led to an enclosure of spaces and the specialization of the uses and the form of each room led to a clear separation between the private and the public spaces. Among the private ones, the bedrooms were distinct according to the age of their users as a reflection of the emergence of children as legal figures in the second half of the twentieth century.¹⁴⁶ The social and community functions, that for the previous immigrants were centralized in the patio of the *conventillo* or of the *vivienda en hilera*, were now externalized, identified and specialized outside of the walls of the domestic space (hospitals, kindergartens, etc).¹⁴⁷

The simple and standard organisation of the *casa cajon* was reflected in a white and minimal façade. The process of family migration was fast and the immigrants that just arrived from Europe had still a strong attachment to their home country. This nostalgic feeling for the past was present within the domestic walls, even if the model of the house was very neutral: remembering the cold European winters and in a perspective of energy economy, all the doors needed to be closed unless the room was in use.¹⁴⁸ The fluid work environment in Argentina allowed the small entrepreneurs to arrive in Argentina with already a profession, all the necessary tools in their luggage and the ambition to start their activity in their own space. At the moment of building their house, the ground floor was dedicated to the atelier and the shop, while the family apartment was on the first floor.¹⁴⁹

Typologically the plan of the *casa cajon* affirmed itself rapidly compared to the slow consolidation of the *casa chorizo*: its organisation had already been tested for decades and it was already circulating.¹⁵⁰

Focusing on the economic growth of Argentina based on industrialization, institutions cared about workers’ life conditions. The heterogeneity in the origin of the class of immigrants and the lack of any previous technical knowledge were identified as the causes for the inefficacy of the industrial workers. The house was then seen as a way to improve the worker’s conditions and consequently his attitude to work and finally the Argentinian economy. Before the establishment of the Peronism, the first congress about this housing issue was held in 1939 and housing initiatives were not in the hands of the State but of public institutions.¹⁵¹

The *Comision Nacional de Casas Baratas* (CNCB) was created to battle the shortage of housing for the working middle class. In the beginning, its aims were mainly pedagogical, through the diffusion of images and publications about the *casa propia*. Explicit criticism of the *casa chorizo* emerged: its form of auto-construction was not appreciated because it was letting the persistence of non-Argentinian living modalities, that had been imported and were reminders of another culture. Moreover, the linear character, the absence of a core, the non-differentiation of the rooms, their position without a hierarchy of functions and the poor sanitary system were criticised.¹⁵²



Poster of “El Hogar Obrero” of 1925. Anahí Ballent and Jorge Francisco Liernur, *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, 1st ed. (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2014), 347.

153 Cravino, “Historia de la vivienda Social en Buenos Aires. Segunda Parte,” 256–59.

154 Anahí Ballent, “Socialismo, Vivienda y Ciudad. La Cooperativa El Hogar Obrero,” in *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, by Anahí Ballent and Jorge Francisco Liernur, 1st ed. (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2014), 238–40.

155 Ibid., 250.

156 Anahí Ballent, “Instituciones y Planes, Del Banco Hipotecario Nacional al Fondo Nacional de La Vivienda,” in *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, by Anahí Ballent and Jorge Francisco Liernur, 1st ed. (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2014), 285–90.

157 Jorge Francisco Liernur and Fernando Aliata, eds., *Diccionario de arquitectura en la Argentina estilos obras biografías instituciones ciudades*. Vol. 6: S - Z, vol. 6 (Buenos Aires: Clarín / Arquitectura, 2004), 182–85.

158 Ballent, “Instituciones y Planes, Del Banco Hipotecario Nacional al Fondo Nacional de La Vivienda,” 300–304.

159 Liernur, “El Discreto Encanto de Nuestra Arquitectura 1930 / 1960,” 10.

160 Cravino, “Historia de la vivienda Social en Buenos Aires. Segunda Parte,” 269.

161 Devoto, *Historia de los italianos en la Argentina*, 434–35.

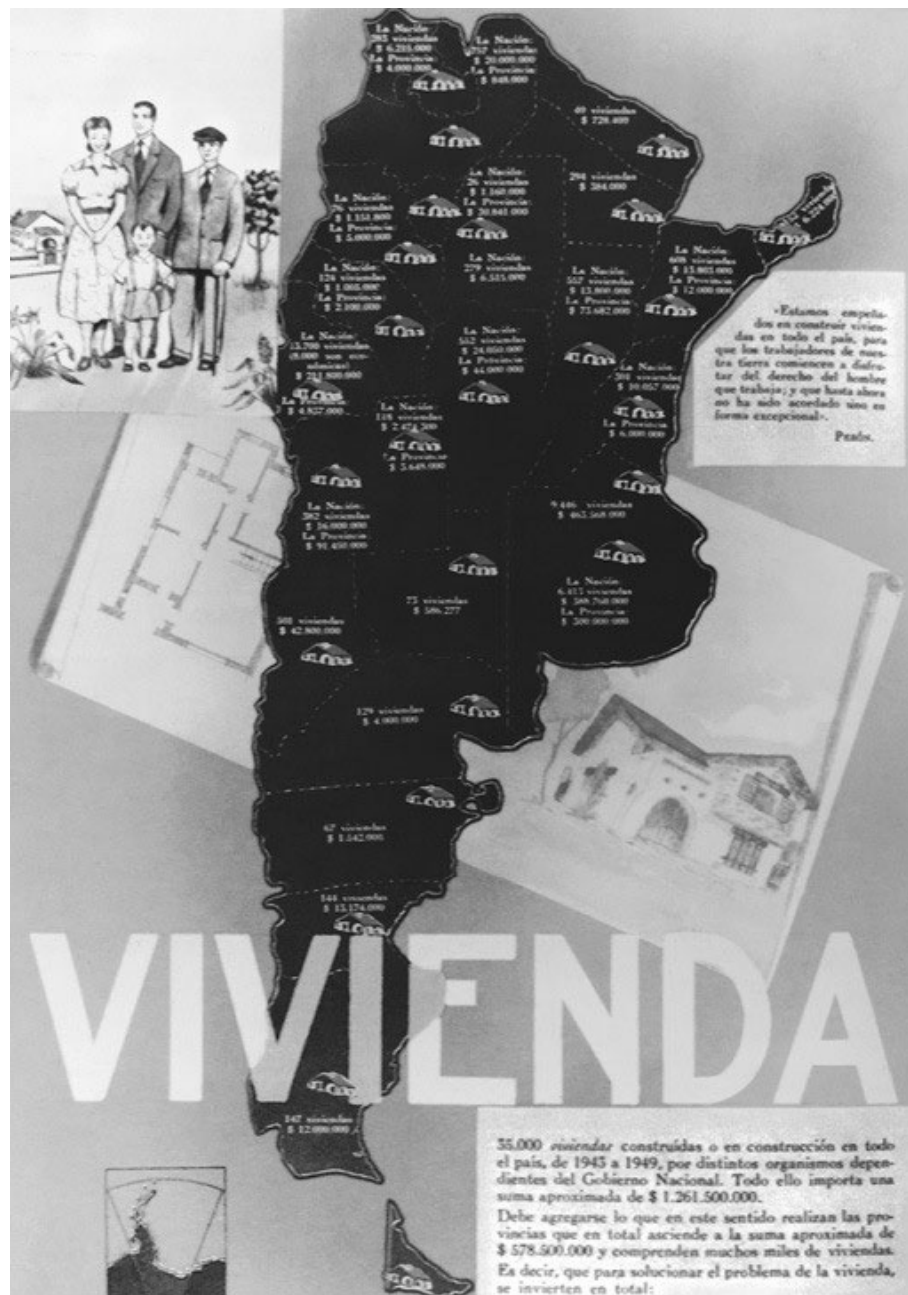
In parallel to the work of the CNCB, which was founded by the State, there were other institutions driven by strong ideologies that contributed to the consolidation of the *casa cajon*. Two entities had a particularly important role: the *Union Popular Catolica* and *El Hogar Obrero*. The *Union Popular Catolica* was a catholic institution aiming to promote social houses through fundraising and design competitions.¹⁵³ *El Hogar Obrero* was a socialist cooperative that, understood the complexity behind the housing design and in the protection of its workers, promoted the vision of the individual house for a family in the periphery.¹⁵⁴ In the decade of the twenties, it stopped granting the construction of *casas chorizo* to promote its own plans. The living room was the most important space: it was the family gathering space, where men could spend time after dinner, bringing the social aspect indoors, and shifting away from outdoor bars.¹⁵⁵

The actions of the *Comision Nacional de Casas Baratas*, the *Union Popular Catolica* and *El Hogar Obrero* moved criticism against the expanded typology of the *casa chorizo* and promoted the model of the *casa cajon* as its definitive substitute, creating the base of expansion for the housing plans of the Peronism. The operations of Juan Domingo Peron and his wife Evita to face the *problema de la vivienda* were massively supported by the actions of the *Banco Hipotecario Nacional*. Its history creates a clear picture of the change of the perception of the workers of their “own’s house”. Founded in 1886, it passed from its initial function of banking and investment, nourishing the rent market with credit for edification and loans to private house construction, to elaborating a national social housing plan in 1940-1950. Through the advantageous conditions for loans and the publication of project catalogues, housing became accessible to the low-middle classes.¹⁵⁶

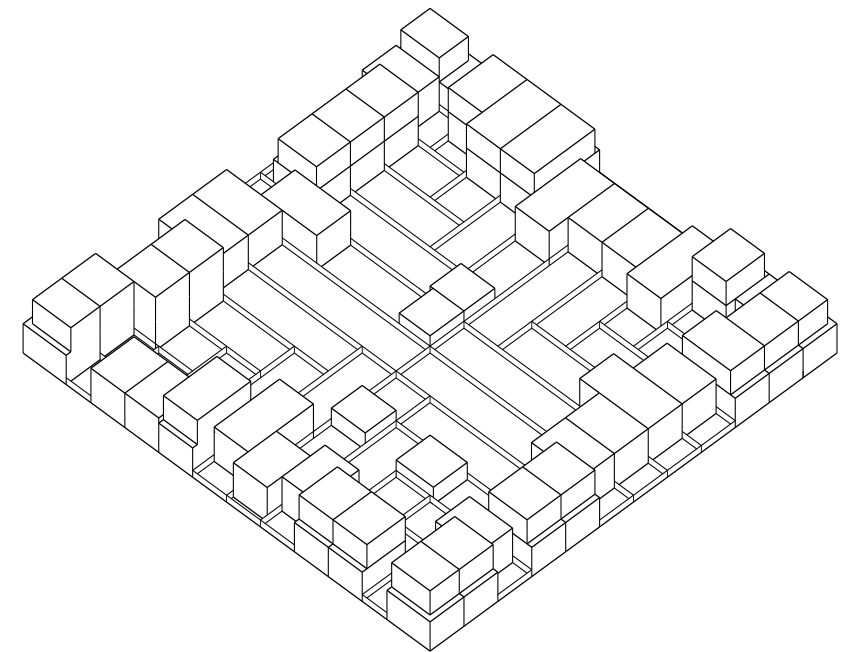
The *Plan Eva Peron* was the main operation which allowed the typology of the *casa cajon* to be largely diffused and accepted.¹⁵⁷ This success is due to the dominant role of the state in issuing funds and open access to a technical construction folder through regular publications.¹⁵⁸ School education also played an important role: innocent readings about the necessity of an own house with higher life standards than the ones offered by the *casa chorizo* were present in scholarly books.¹⁵⁹

What was imposed during the auto-construction of *casa chorizo* was the idea of the “own property” to nationalize and “anchor” the immigrants’ workforce to the Argentinian soil. What was imposed with the ready-made model of the *casa cajon* was the idea of the “own’s house” or “*la casa propia*” to homogenize the population and to improve the workers’ living conditions and their professional performance.¹⁶⁰

When the *Ingegneri* arrived with their families, their professional and social position in society was already secured and their stay in the country was quickly defined. Housing was a necessity, but having more resources than their predecessors, they aspired to something more than a *casa chorizo* and this ambition was easily satisfied thanks to state schemes and loans. Because of these feelings and the historical changes that occurred in Europe between the different waves of immigration, this wave did not recognize itself in the historical institutions present in Buenos Aires. New ones were founded but immigrants were more focused on their families than on community life with other compatriots.¹⁶¹



Advertising brochure of apartments in 1950. Pegoraro, Víctor. “Mar Del Plata: El Primer Boom de La Propiedad Horizontal, 1948-1960,” *Estudios Del Hábitat* 18 (30 June 2020): 9.



Typical *manzana* in the periphery in 1930. Drawn by author, reconstructed on a model inspired by of Fernando E. Diez, *Buenos Aires y Algunas Constantes En Las Transformaciones Urbanas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial de Belgrano, 1997), 264.

Chalet Nuñez and Duplex:
Normative Freedom

The year 1960 is considered the last moment of European immigration to Argentina. Europe’s economic growth could no longer compete with Argentina’s worrying political situation after the end of the Peron government.¹⁶² At the end of Peron’s government, a series of military distatorships took the control of Argentina until the 1983. On the immigration timeline, this is the time of the second-generation immigrants, the children of those who have actually moved. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the State understood the important role of the education of the children to the nationalization of the immigrant class and the mandatory military service of 1910 as much as school reform of 1916 were symboles of this.¹⁶³

The second-generation immigrants grew up in multicultural houses, feeling Argentinian in the spaces of the city but with habits and traditions from their original place kept in their houses.¹⁶⁴ Their attachment to the original country was lighter than the one their parents had. Moreover, the house was an ambition but never a primary necessity as it was for the first-generation immigrants when they first arrived. They were already naturally inserted into society and if their parents were part of the middle class, they were as well without having to affirm their position. In 1960, 73.3 percent of the Italians in Buenos Aires were working in the secondary sector, in urban industrial activities and 70 percent of Italians were owners of the house they were living in. A regular worker with an average salary could afford a house, a car and access to complete education for a family of four members.¹⁶⁵ To emphasize the economic independence of the second-generation of immigrants towards the State, they were financially stable and they no longer needed loans from the *Banco Hipotecario Nacional* - whose functions were suspended in 1959¹⁶⁶ - to buy a property.

In low-density areas, the wish to build one’s own home was not exhausted by regulations and the space for experimentation and variation was still alive. In this normative freedom, the *chalet* typology emerged as the result of space optimisation and social preferences, rather than as a design of shapes and silhouettes or a rapid operation seeking for speculation.¹⁶⁷

The *chalet* was a composite volume that resembled the plan of the *casa cajon*, with the introduction of a parking space. The public ground floor included a kitchen, a living room and a dining room, the bedrooms and a bathroom were on the private first floor. In some cases, there was a playroom in the attic.¹⁶⁸ The *chalet* was an extended and simplified version of the *casa cajon*, Peronism’s symbol of domestic happiness, a political allegory of social wellness.¹⁶⁹ The addition of a minimal garden in the front of the house provided privacy and increased the distance between the house and the public space. The entrance became a place of control, emphasized by the elevation of a half-floor, which allowed the garage to be partially hidden. All the existing housing components were recombined based on the uses, worries and habits of the users.

The external image of the chalet was remembered as that of a countryside house with “white walls, low-pitched roofs with Spanish tiles, the use of local materials (stone, brick, wood) and the recovery of certain elements of Spanish colonial architecture. To these should be added

162 Ibid., 450.

163 Benencia and Devoto, *Historia de La Inmigración En La Argentina*, 350–55.

164 Devoto, *Historia de los italianos en la Argentina*, 372–78.

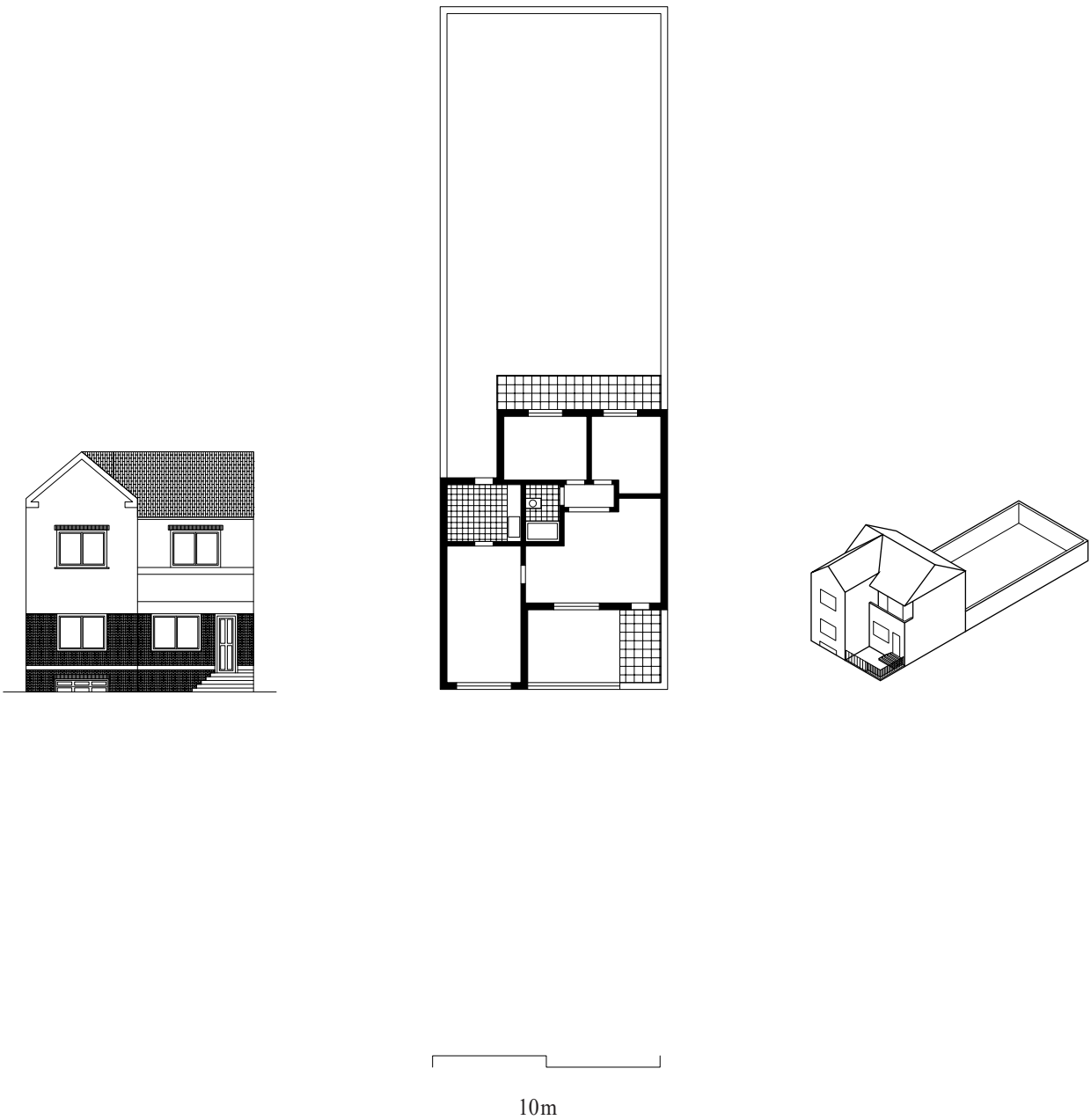
165 Ibid., 435–45.

166 Jorge Francisco Liernur and Fernando Aliata, eds., *Diccionario de arquitectura en la Argentina: estilos obras biografías instituciones ciudades. Vol. 1: A - B*, vol. 1 (Buenos Aires: Clarín / Arquitectura, 2004), 125–32.

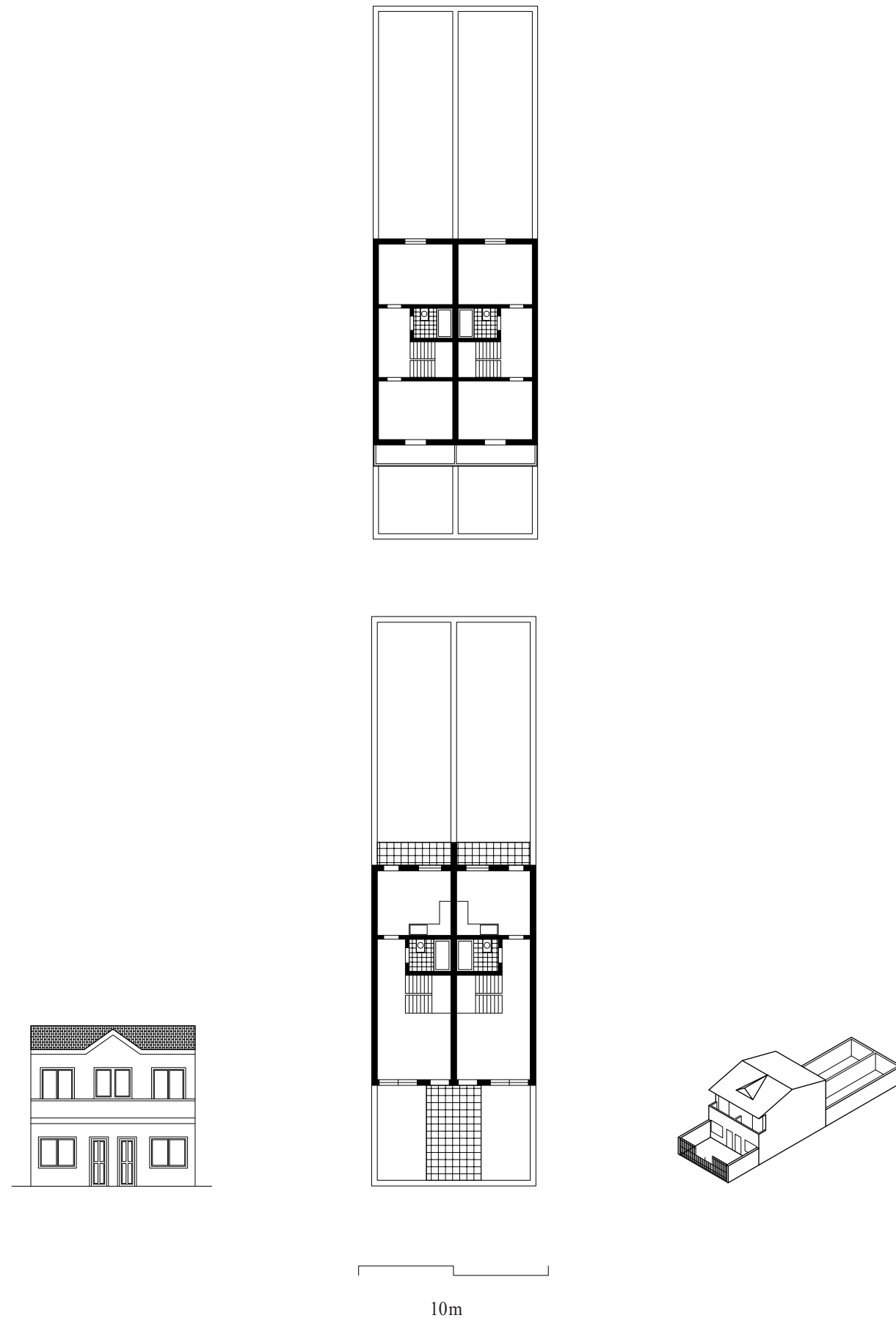
167 Diez, “Normas y Formas: Regularicion y Tipologia En Buenos Aires,” 10–11.

168 Diez, *Buenos Aires y Algunas Constantes En Las Transformaciones Urbanas*, 78.

169 Ballent, “Instituciones y Planes, Del Banco Hipotecario Nacional al Fondo Nacional de La Vivienda,” 384.



Plan, facade and volumetric diagram of a *chalet nuñez*. Drawn by the author, adapted from construction folders of two houses in Olivos - Partido of Vicente Lopez, Provincia de Buenos Aires.



Plan of the ground and first floor, facade and volumetric diagram of a duplex. Drawn by author, based on interviews and adapted from construction folders of two houses in Martínez - Partido of San Isidro, Provincia de Buenos Aires.

170 Translation by author. Original text: “muros blancos, techos de escasa pendiente en teja española, exhibición de materiales locales (piedra, ladrillo, madera) y recuperación de ciertos elementos de la arquitectura colonial española. A ellos deben agregarse los fuertes contrastes de columnes, que buscan siempre efectos pintorescos; una fuerte asociación con la arquitectura doméstica [...] y cierto carácter evocativo de medios suburbanos o rurales, si bien en sus usos habitado barrios de grandes ciudades argentinas,” Ballent in “Country life. Los nuevos paraísos, su historia y sus profetas” in Ballent and Liernur, *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, 628.

171 Translation by author. Original text: “Mucha gente mirando una casita inglesa o colonial española concreta sus reflexiones en un: ‘Como me gustaría tener una casa así!’”. Y en cambio exclama, ante las líneas sencillas, rectas, de una casa moderna: ‘Esta no me gusta,’ from the magazine *Casas y Jardines*, num. 1, January 1933 cited in Anahí Ballent, “Entre El Mercado y La Obra Estatal. Itinerarios Del Chalet Californiano,” in Ballent and Liernur, *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, 451.

172 Ibid., 627–50.

173 Diez, *Buenos Aires y Algunas Constantes En Las Transformaciones Urbanas*, 70.

174 Diez, “Normas y Formas: Regularización y Tipología En Buenos Aires,” 9–10.

175 Liernur, “Casas y jardines. La construcción del dispositivo doméstico moderno (1870–1930),” 99.

176 Ballent and Liernur, *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, 625–55.

177 Scobie, *Buenos Aires*, 180.

the strong contrasts of colours, which always seek picturesque effects; a strong association with domestic architecture [...] and a certain evocative character of suburban or rural environments, although in its uses it has populated neighbourhoods of large Argentinian cities.”¹⁷⁰ This rigorous formal definition was influenced by the Californian style and it was opposite to the modern and clean façade of the *casa cajón*. The tendency to abandon the linear aspect for one more connected to traditions and materiality was described in an article published in 1933: “Many people look at a small English or Spanish colonial house and think: ‘How I would love to have a house like this!’ And on the other hand, when faced with the simple, straight lines of a modern house, they exclaim: ‘I don’t like this one’.”¹⁷¹ The expressive façade of the *chalet Nuñez* and its meticulous research of materials was the mirror of a reappreciation for styles, a phenomenon that can also be observed in the facade *italianizante* of the *casa chorizo*.

In the seventies, due to a process of suburbanisation, the typology faced densification, as other typologies had in the past. The diffusion of urban theories, improvements in sanitary regulations, enhancements in infrastructures and stimulation for open-air activities fortified and valorised the presence of a garden on the parcel.¹⁷² Its untouchability resulted in the maximum compactification of the existing typology, ultimately leading to its division into two separate houses: the *duplex*.

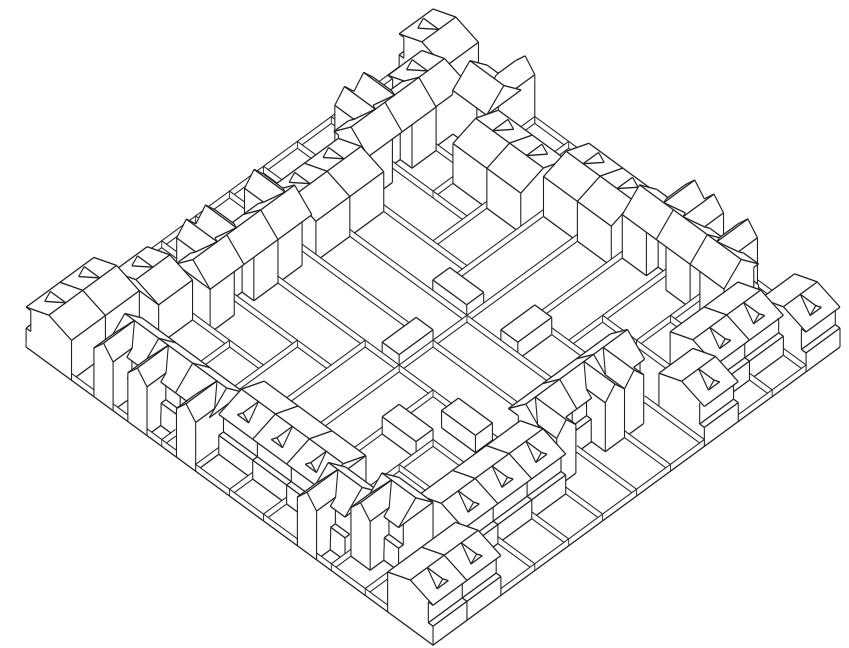
The ground floors replicated the plan of the *chalet*, with all the common and service spaces: a living room, and a kitchen. The garage was external with a small garden at the front. On the second floor, there were rooms on the front and the back. The entrances were separate and the two units were completely independent. This typology can be considered as the literal application of the co-ownership of a same building, which was possible after the issue of the *Ley de la Propiedad Horizontal*. This type was rapidly diffused and it achieved high stability even with complex versions. In terms of its expressive composition there were two versions: the first that was reflecting in the exterior the internal organisation of two separate houses and the second one, the most diffuse, that was keeping the appearance of one single mayor house.¹⁷³

These two types were a manifestation of the cultural process present in housing production. They continue to be alive even with the mayor’s high-density housing building that was promoted in the city centre.¹⁷⁴ The design addressed the middle classes and lower and these types became consensual forms. Important in its diffusion was the publication of “*Casas y Jardines*”, a magazine of architecture and decoration addressed to a non-specialised public, whose examples were mainly individual housing with a garden.¹⁷⁵ This imaginery contributed to the tendency of escaping the working life in the city towards the periphery and the picturesque.¹⁷⁶

Analysing the process of suburbanization at the beginning of the twentieth century, James Scobie connected the movement towards the periphery with a process of social ascent, connected to a change of generation of the large sector of urban workers. As the workers’ class was nourished by immigrants, both at the beginning and in the second half of the century, the suburbanisation process was part of the generational change of immigrants, it was a process of the children of immigrants.¹⁷⁷



Aerial pictures of a *manzana* in Buenos Aires today. From Google Earth, consulted in October 2023



Typical *manzana* in the periphery in 1960. Drawn by author, reconstructed on a model inspired by of Fernando E. Diez, *Buenos Aires y Algunas Constantes En Las Transformaciones Urbanas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial de Belgrano, 1997), 264.



Aerial pictures of a *manzana* in Buenos Aires today. From Google Earth, consulted in October 2023

Buenos Aires:
the Accumulation and Superimposition of Types

During the construction and development of models such as the *duplex* and *chalet nuñez* were underway, and new codes of edification were continuously issued. These codes were each one more utopian than the previous one. The *Edificio Torre* of 1957 and the *Codigo de Planeamiento Urbano de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires* of 1977 introduced new building types emphasizing the *Factor Ocupacional Total* and *Ocupacion del Suelo*, and added legal complexities for social housing construction. The first norm proposed excessively high buildings with a fluid space between the ground floors and the roads. The second code promoted two different buildings: the EEM77, an improved version of the EEM44 and the EPL77 or *Edificio de Perimetro Libre*, an accentuated version of the *Edificio Torre*. The *Ley de Uso de Suelo* of the same year aimed to delineate the urban pattern into zones with varying dimensions, occupation coefficients, and norms, reflecting a shift in regulatory approaches.¹⁷⁸

From the second half of the twentieth century, it is possible to notice an increase in the average of built surfaces per building (from 430 squared meters in 1950 to 1478 in 1978), an increase in the average of habitations per building (from 9 in 1950 to 39 in 1978) and an increased number of building permits, mostly for individual housing. The *propriedad horizontal* had its major moment of diffusion between 1960 and the 1975.¹⁷⁹

Starting in the nineties, policies of correction emerged to address urban difficulties resulting from previous regulations. This involved a shift from the rigid norms prescribed in 1977, abandoning the notion of monofunctional areas and focusing on improving the existing situation through tissue completion and the reevaluation of preexisting buildings.¹⁸⁰ Economic adjustment policies were implemented, especially after the end of the last military dictatorship in 1983. The establishment of the AMBA (Area Metropolitana de Buenos Aires) aimed to coordinate metropolitan planning, fostering collaborative solutions between the national government, the Municipality of Buenos Aires, and the government of the Buenos Aires province.¹⁸¹

Lefevre affirmed that buildings are a materialization of time.¹⁸² A screenshot of Buenos Aires today by Google Maps is the literal materialization of this affirmation. The city is the picture of a process of accumulation of independent actions and superposition of several models of control and non-control of housing in Buenos Aires.¹⁸³ The relationship between the edification of housing and the development of the city has suffered from many reformulations from the technical urbanistic point of view and the social experience of everyday life spaces, public and private.¹⁸⁴ And all the traces are still visible today.

The regulation codes started a process of irregular densification that contributed to the fragmented aspect of the city.¹⁸⁵ There was a notable lack of understanding of the context, with a complete dissociation between state ambitions and the real conditions on the ground. The norms appeared incompatible with the preexisting structure of the city, pointing towards a future system with more emphasis on how the city should be rather than reflecting the current reality.¹⁸⁶ The postulate regulations did not show comprehension of the cultural nature of the preexisting buildings, which showed resistance face to the norm of substitution. Moreover,

178 Torres, “El mapa social de Buenos Aires en 1943, 1947 y 1960. Buenos Aires y los modelos urbanos,” 24–29.

179 Ballent and Liernur, *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, 489–503.

180 Diez, “Normas y Formas: Regularicacion y Tipologia En Buenos Aires,” 15.

181 Torres, “El mapa social de Buenos Aires en 1943, 1947 y 1960. Buenos Aires y los modelos urbanos,” 34–40.

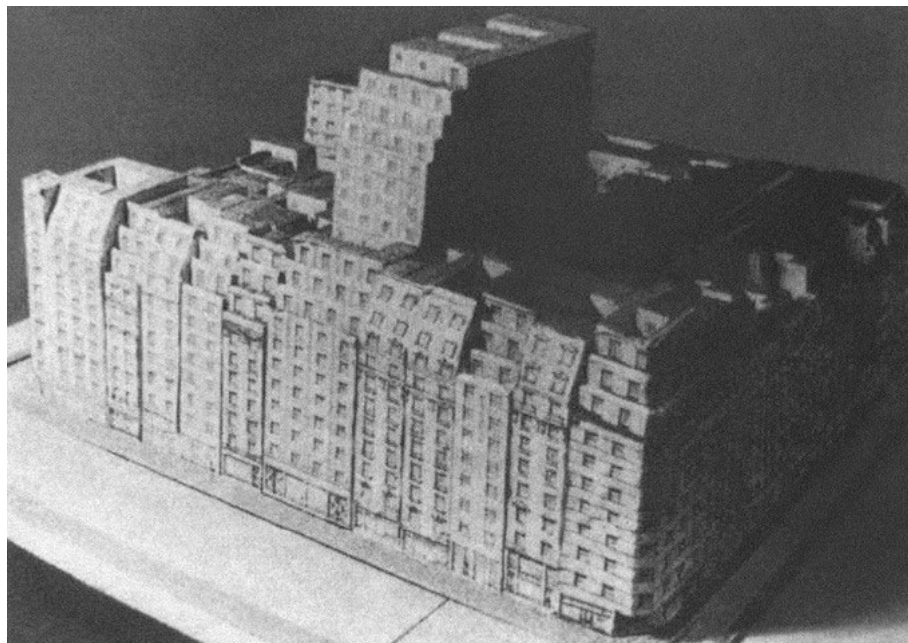
182 Cappeller, “Values of Immateriality,” 334.

183 Liernur, “El Discreto Encanto de Nuestra Arquitectura 1930 / 1960,” 1–3.

184 Ballent and Liernur, *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, 14.

185 Torres, “El mapa social de Buenos Aires en 1943, 1947 y 1960. Buenos Aires y los modelos urbanos,” 20.

186 Diez, *Buenos Aires y Algunas Constantes En Las Transformaciones Urbanas*, 167–80.



Model of an hypothetical manzana according to the maximum possibility of construction in 1931. From Anahí Ballent and Jorge Francisco Liernur, *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, 1st ed. (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2014), 564.
 Photo from the patio of a conventillo in Buenos Aires in 1940. From Archivo General de la Nación Argentina, photographic document: 320508.

188 Ibid., 15.

187 Diez, “Normas y Formas: Regularización y Tipología En Buenos Aires,” 10.

189 Ballent and Liernur, *La Casa y La Multitud: Vivienda, Política y Cultura En La Argentina Moderna*, 240.

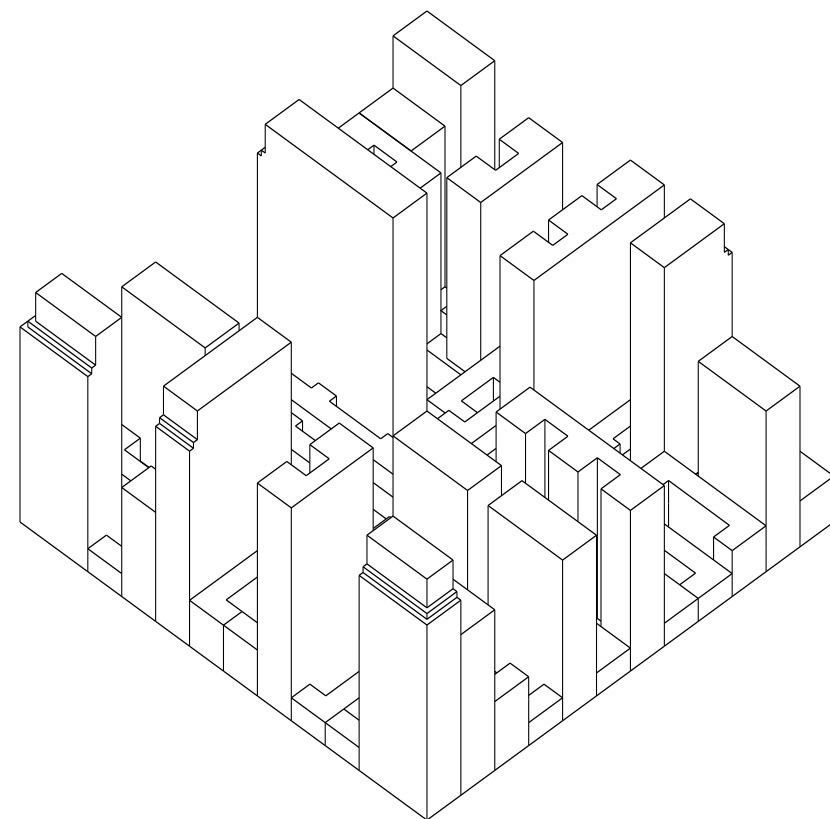
190 Ibid., 16.

the regulation did not have time to mature and act that there was a new one just emitted. This short time offset between norms, allowed the real estate owners to accelerate certain construction processes to exploit to the maximum the most advantageous norm.¹⁸⁷

The typologies were showing resistance because they were consensual forms, deeply linked to the family and their habits. The inhabitant's participation in its conception process gave to certain typology a cultural legibility.¹⁸⁸ The *casa chorizo* was working well because it was coming from the immigrants themselves. The *casa cajon* was working well because there was a reciprocal understanding between the family condition, the ambitions of the immigrants and the ambitions of the government. In its simple form, it coincided with the general interest of the ruling sector and the immediate necessities of the popular one, configuring this typology as a base of consensus and resolution.¹⁸⁹ The State understood their important role in society and gave actual relevance to them.

The juxtaposition of problems and objectives created the fragmented picture of Buenos Aires today, where the distinctive temporalities co-exist.¹⁹⁰ The public policy on housing had objectives that were deeply invested in the actuality of the historical context that created them. One common point can be found in all the typologies after the *conventillo* and it is regarding the position of the State towards immigration. At the moment of the migraciones tempranas, the house was conceived as a temporary accommodation that would last as their stay for money in Argentina. The State was not ruling and the rules in terms of housing were dictated by sanitary conditions, private speculation and the rent market. Starting at the end of the nineteenth century, immigrants were revealed to be a precious tool for the economic growth of the country and the State aimed to nationalize, breaking the link with their home country and settling them definitely in Argentina. For any immigrant, the issue of housing was primordial so it was for the State. From this moment, the house became a major national worry, due to its power to control the mass of immigrants.

During the first mass immigration, the plan for nationalization declined into the diffusion of the ambition for property and the promotion of the process of auto-construction, which will constitute the typology of the *casa chorizo*, largely culturally accepted. The extended family, the chain of knowledge and non-separation between the work and the domestic sphere were reflected in the linear typology. The irregular process of densification of this type led to major sanitary problems and consequent change of attitude toward urban regulations. Passing from restrictive to postulative, the norms were abstract, utopistic and dissociated from reality. In parallel to them, laws concerning property were emitted and they were part of a larger plan of social homogenization of the Peronism. Accessibility to property was facilitated. With the wave of immigration of the *Ingenieri*, the declared workforce of the Argentinian economy, the strategy of auto-construction as a tool was reintroduced through the diffusion of projects and statal design instruments without its vernacular character. The physical and moral health of the worker and the emergence of the nuclear family were reflected in the typology. The form of the *casa cajon* was consensual and accepted, serving as a universal identification of the working class for the ruling one. This neutrality was



Redrawing of a *manzana* in Buenos Aires today. Drawn by author, adapted from Jens Wolter, “Frozen By Law: How Building Law Shaped Twentieth-Century Buenos Aires - Case Study,” *Legislating Architecture - Law Creates*, ARCH+, (May 2016): 69.

then replaced by the reaffirmation of traditions and the willingness to show traces of diversity, expressed in the typology of the *chalet nuñez* and its densified version, the *duplex*.

An observation can be done about the way the existing typologies were densified. The process of subdivision and multiplication was present at different levels: the multiplication of the patios and the floors of a conventillo; the subdivision of the rooms to their minimal size, the creation of a minimal living unit for a family, like the *casa chorizo* and its multiplication horizontally and vertically, generating the *vivienda en hilera*. This procedure was based on the principle of taking what was already existing and multiplying it, removing any opportunity for modification of these types. In this way, these architectural types were blindly consolidated and became resistant to the norms.

As the problems are historically built, to act on the present, an analysis and comprehension of their reasons is necessary. As explained by Argentinian architects Jorge Francisco Liernur and Anahí Ballent in their collection of essays around the topic of housing in Argentina, these historical reasons are still very influential today: all the contemporary political decisions are more conditioned to the contemporary inhabitants than their former ones.¹⁹¹

By learning from history and gaining a thorough understanding of current demographic trends, including the increasing emigration to Europe and growing immigration from neighboring countries, as well as recognizing enduring architectural typologies, strategies can be developed, starting with the legal recognition of immigrants. The Constitution of Argentina promotes equality to rights and benefits to Argentinians and *extranjeros*: right to practice the profession, right to expression and religion and naturalization after two years of residency in the country.¹⁹² It guarantees equal treatment, no discrimination and access to medical, educational and social services. “The right to migration is an essential and inalienable right of the individual and the Argentine Republic guarantees it on the basis of the principles of equality and universality.” (Ley 25.871 Article 4)¹⁹³ Migration is a human right, even if not explicitly mentioned in any international convention.¹⁹⁴ “The new legislation on migration has taken a turn towards greater protection of the rights of migrants, with a view to their integration into society [...] by concretely regulating the principles, declarations and constitutional rights that apply to them in our country.”¹⁹⁵ The rights of immigrants are constitutional in Argentina, while in many other countries are only promoted by public opinion.

191 Ibid., 13.

192 Hiner, “El Derecho a Migrar Como Un Derecho Humano: La Actual Ley Inmigratoria Argentina,” 313.

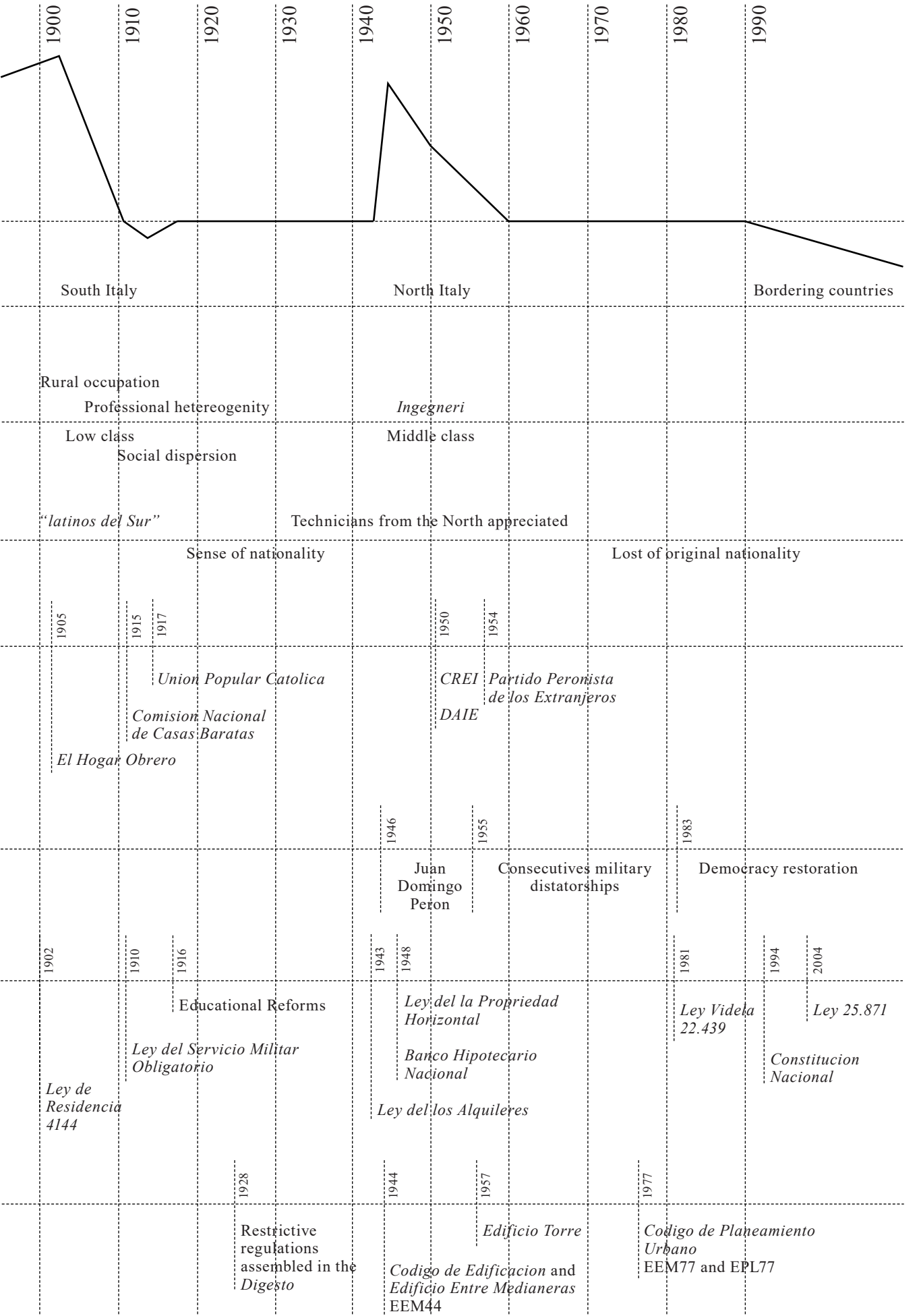
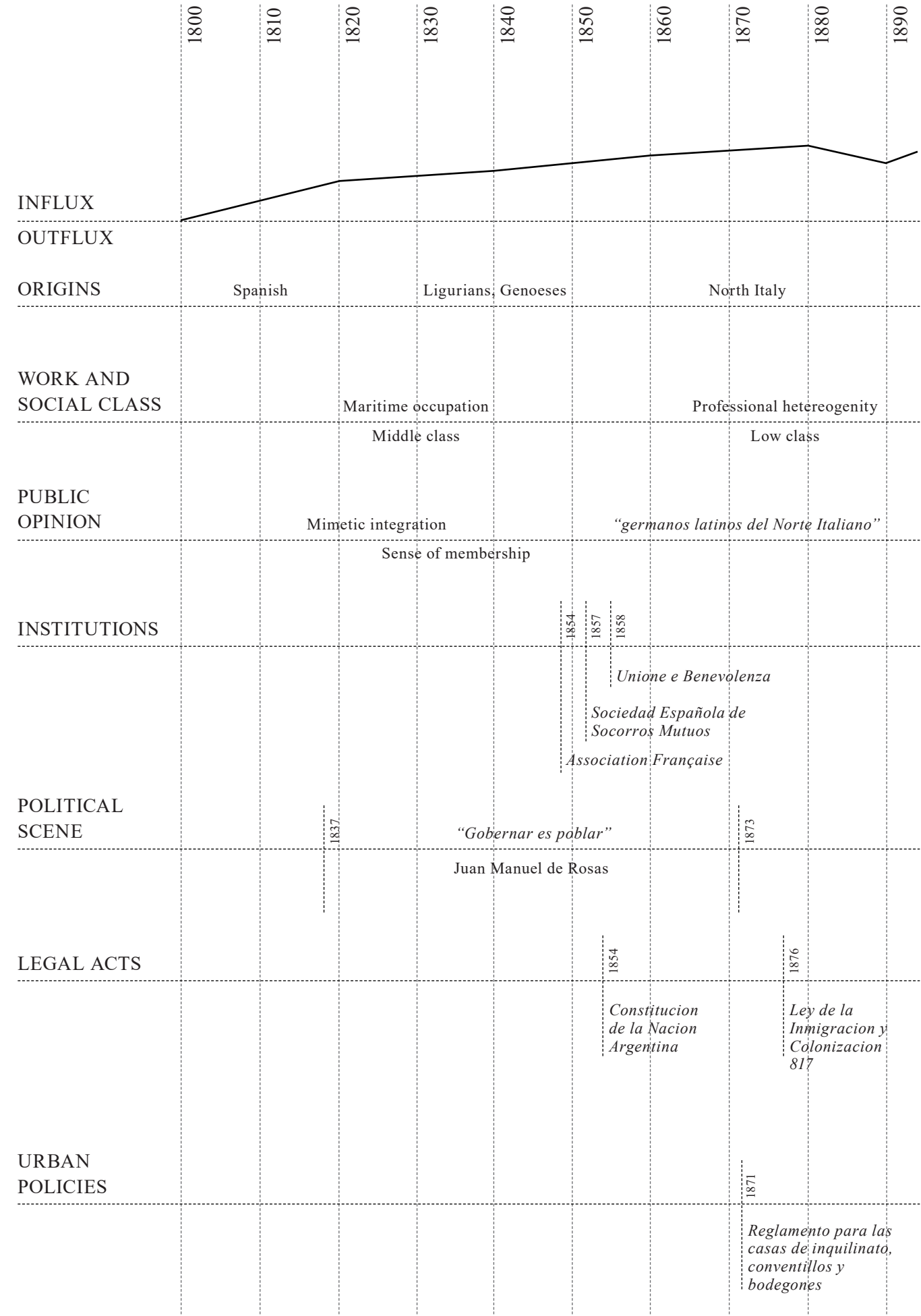
193 Translation by author. Original text: “*El derecho a la migración es esencial e inalienable de la persona y la República Argentina lo garantiza sobre la base de los principios de igualdad y universalidad*,” Hiner, 323.

194 Hiner, 310.

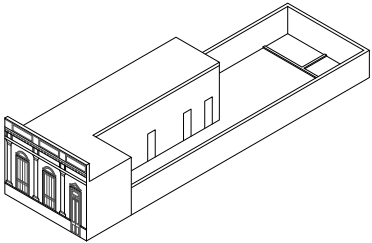
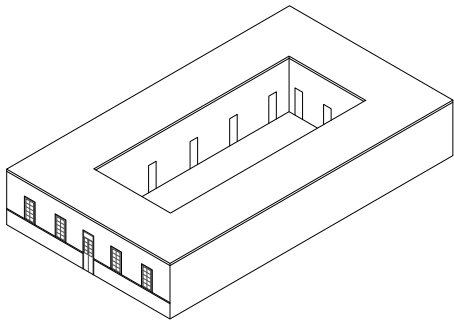
195 Translation by author. Original text: “*La nueva legislación referida al orden migratorio ha tomado un giro tendiente a lograr una mayor protección de los derechos de las personas migrantes, propendiendo a su integración a la sociedad (...) reglamentando de modo concreto los principios, declaraciones y derechos constitucional que a su respeto rigen en nuestro país*,” in Hiner, 315.

ANNEXE

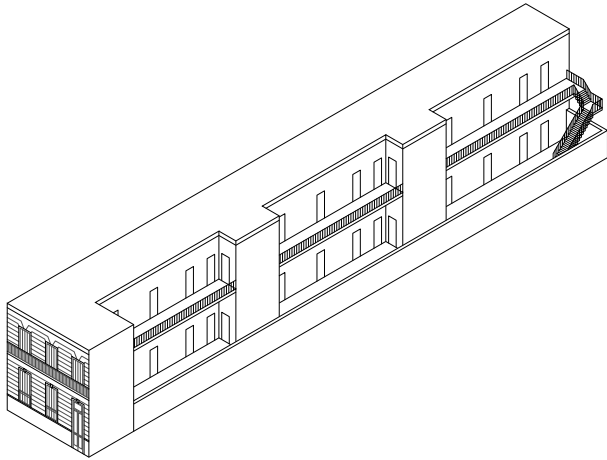
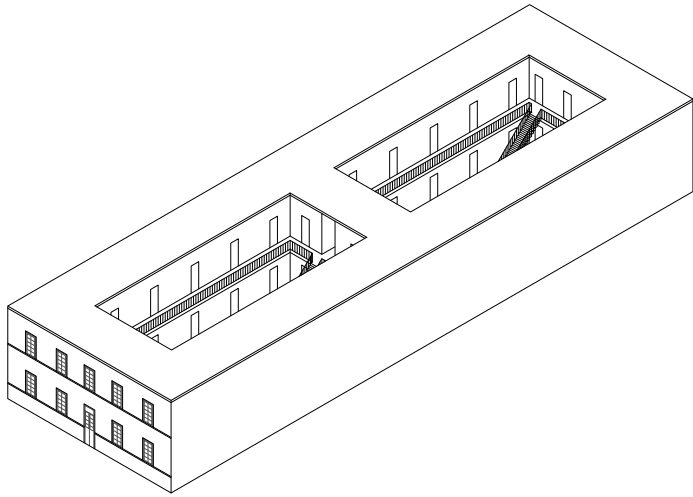
Buenso Aires on Timelines



	1800	1810	1820	1830	1840	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890
TYPES										

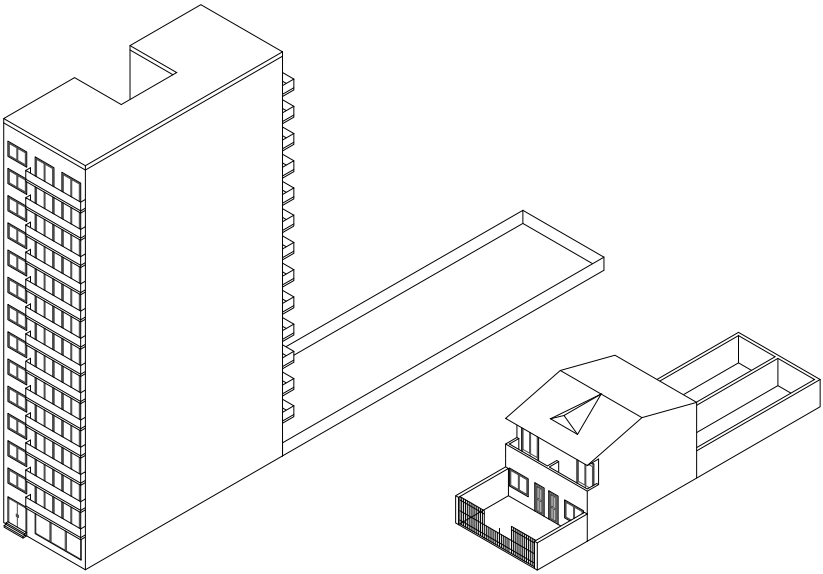
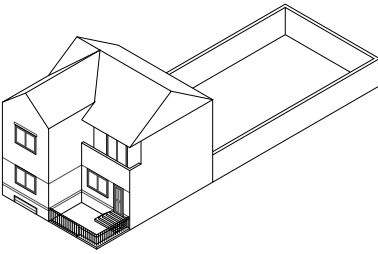
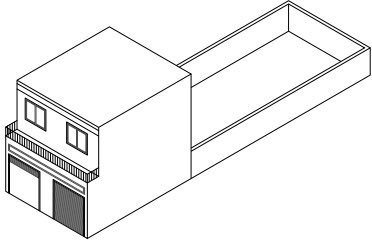


Simple



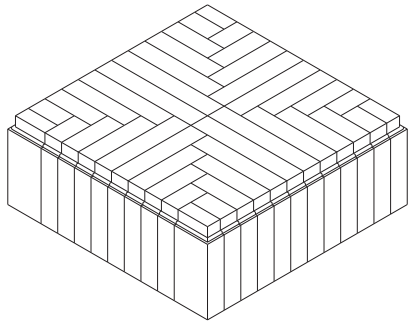
Densified

	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990
TYPES										



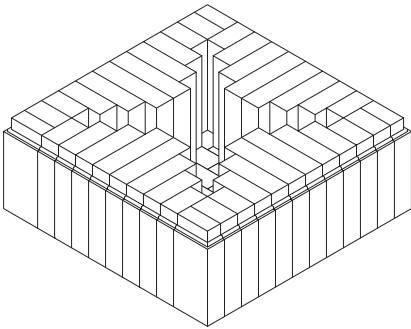
1928

Digesto



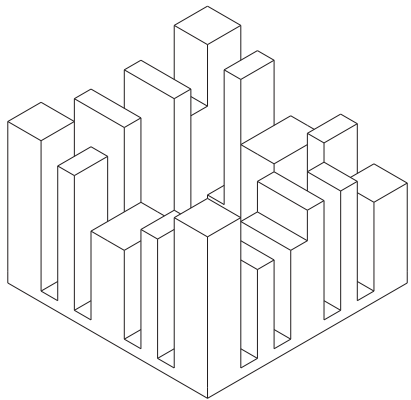
1944

Edificio
Entre
Medianeras
EEM



1957

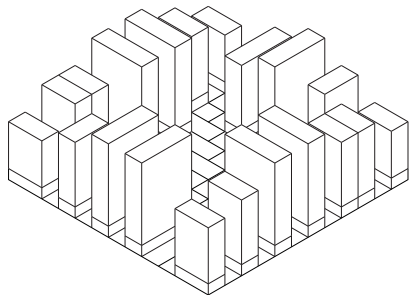
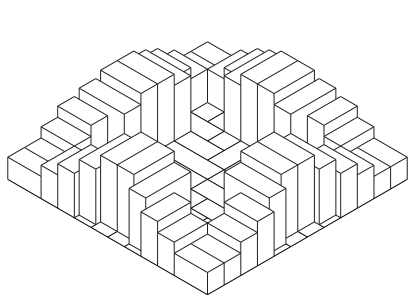
Edificio
Torre



1977

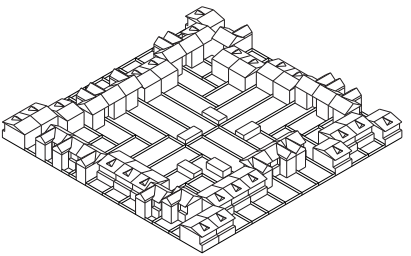
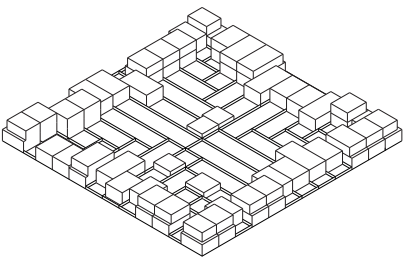
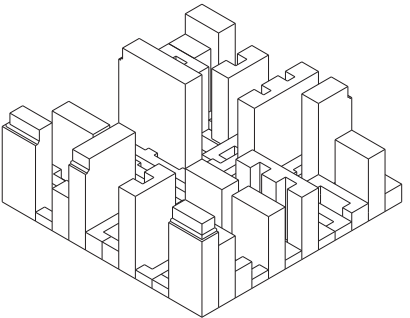
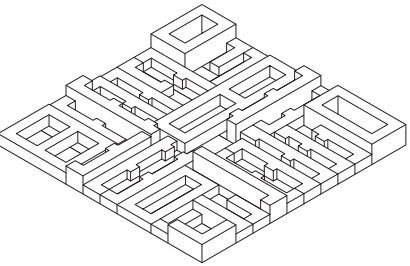
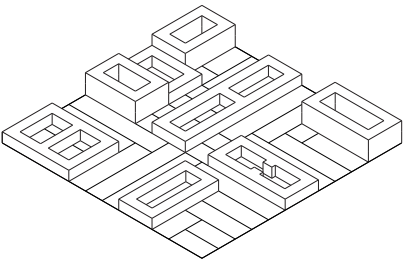
Edificio
entre
Medianeras
EEM

Edificio
EPL



Utopistic situation of a *manzana*
according to regulations

Conventillo



*Casa Chorizo,
Vivienda en
Hilera*

*Edificio Entre
Medianeras,
Casa Cajon*

*Chalet Nuñez,
Duplex*

Evolution of a *manzana* in the
center of Buenos Aires

Evolution of a *manzana* in the
periphery of Buenos Aires

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Beyond the Closet, Klea Ott

Destination Home, Vanesa Santillan Messina

Factory of Lives, Serena Mazzetti

First Struggle Then Housing, Antoine Ricard-Gauthier

From Hard to Soft, Julie-Anna Barès

Housewifization, Meryl Louise Barthe

Persistent Community, Melchior Dechancé

Pretending to Take the Country's Side, Karl-August Valfells

Room for Women, Camyl Vigneault

Round Table, Jian Lin Wong

Staging Movement, Ada Massarente

