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Domestic Infrastructures of Intimacy: Kitchens and Hygiene Spaces in Premodern Houses of Sucre - Bolivia ('50 '60 '70)

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Abstract

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This study asks how kitchens and hygiene spaces in premodern houses of Sucre ('50-'70) shaped everyday domestic practices and cultural notions of intimacy before the rationalization of modern housing. It investigates how these environments negotiated boundaries between private and communal life, gender, and ritual. The research applies architectural surveys and qualitative interviews with elderly residents, using typological and phenomenological analysis to interpret spatial configurations and meanings. Results reveal the coexistence of hybrid infrastructures—where cooking, washing, and everyday activities overlap—reflecting both material scarcity and symbolic richness. These findings highlight how domestic space functioned as a living archive of social order and memory. The study concludes that the premodern dwelling anticipated contemporary tensions between efficiency, affection, and cultural continuity, offering critical insights for architectural design and the understanding of dwelling practices in Latin America.

Keywords: domestic space; premodern housing; kitchen architecture; hygiene spaces; Latin American architecture

1. Introduction

The house constitutes the primary space of human experience. Beyond its physical condition, it operates as a cultural system where practices, meanings, and forms of everyday life are articulated. In this sense, Amos Rapoport argues that the form of the dwelling is not determined exclusively by technical or climatic factors, but also by cultural values, social organization, and symbolic systems. From this perspective, the house may be understood as a system of fixed, semi-fixed, and non-fixed elements, where material structure, objects, and human practices interact dynamically.

In relation to this, Witold Rybczynski understands domesticity not as a natural condition of housing, but as a historical construction associated with notions of comfort, privacy, intimacy, and everyday life. These dimensions become particularly visible in domestic infrastructures such as kitchens and bathrooms, where daily practices, technological transformations, and cultural habits intersect.

Beyond its physical attributes, the home can be understood as a cultural and relational construct where identity, belonging, memory, and everyday practices are negotiated (Mallett, 2004). This perspective reinforces the interpretation of domestic infrastructures as spaces through which intimacy and social relations are actively produced.

Likewise, Sigfried Giedion notes that the mechanization of the household reorganized domestic routines and spatial relations, particularly in spaces associated with food preparation and hygiene. This articulation between material conditions and lived experience may be interpreted, following Christian Norberg-Schulz, as the relationship between the concrete dimension of architecture and its existential or symbolic dimension.

In Bolivia, architectural studies have traditionally focused on material, typological, and distributive aspects, while everyday domestic practices and modes of dwelling remain less explored. In Sucre, research has concentrated primarily on upper-class heritage houses, leaving middle-class premodern housing relatively understudied despite its spatial complexity and adaptive character.

Premodern middle-class houses in Sucre retain organizational schemes derived from colonial housing, particularly the sequence of corridor-patio-rooms, while simultaneously incorporating progressive transformations associated with

modernization during the mid-twentieth century. Rather than representing fully modern dwellings, these houses reveal hybrid configurations where inherited spatial structures coexist with changing domestic practices, technological incorporation, and incremental adaptation.

Within this context, kitchens and hygiene spaces become particularly relevant because they concentrate tensions between tradition and modernization, collective and private life, ritual and functionality. The evidence suggests that, unlike modern housing models based on spatial specialization and individual privacy, premodern domesticity in Sucre organized intimacy through shared practices and flexible spatial arrangements.

The spatial transformations observed in domestic architecture between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries can also be interpreted in relation to broader socio-economic structures and gender relations. From this perspective, the organization of domestic space reflects a patriarchal order in which household functions were frequently associated with gendered roles. As Cevedio (2010) and Bourdieu (1998) suggest, domestic spaces may be understood as socially differentiated environments where activities traditionally assigned to women acquire visibility and recognition only within structures of subordination and social hierarchy.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the modes of dwelling (abstract dimension) and the spatial configuration (concrete dimension) of kitchens and bathrooms in premodern houses in Sucre during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, in order to understand how domestic practices, spatial ambiguity, and processes of incomplete modernization shaped everyday life in this transitional context.

2. Materials and Methods

The type of research required by the object of study of this work is framed within qualitative research under the interpretative and hermeneutic paradigm and cultural studies (Ynoub, 2011). A selection of seven case studies, documented through architectural plans and testimonies from their inhabitants, was considered for the analysis, crossing material conditions with lived experience.

An ethnographic approach was adopted in order to understand the particularities of the modes of dwelling. This approach was complemented by documentary review of architectural plans, semi-structured interviews, and photographic documentation.

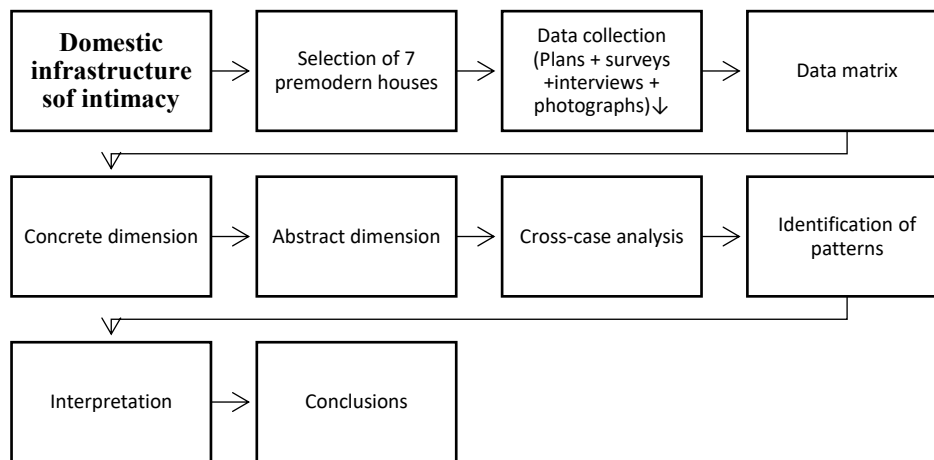


Figure 1. Research methodology framework. Source: Prepared by the author.

2.1 Temporal and spatial delimitation

Houses in Sucre present a typological continuity originating in the colonial house and gradually transforming throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, while maintaining elements such as patio-centered organization, symmetry, and the predominance of solid walls over openings. These characteristics persisted even into the early and mid-twentieth century, particularly in middle-class housing, where transformations did not imply a complete rupture but rather a process of gradual adaptation.

Between the 1950s and 1970s, a key transitional moment became evident: materials such as reinforced concrete and architectural languages associated with Rationalism and Art Deco were introduced, mainly modifying façades through cleaner lines, straight openings, and greater austerity. However, internal spatial structures continued to follow organizational logics inherited from the colonial tradition, revealing a coexistence between permanence and transformation.

This period is particularly relevant for the study because it concentrates this hybrid condition: it does not fully correspond to architectural modernity, yet it is no longer strictly traditional. By the 1970s, the incorporation of modern elements such as corrugated metal roofing, concrete structures, and new opening systems became more visible, consolidating a moment of typological transition that defines premodern middle-class housing in Sucre.

In order to ensure comparable study cases under similar conditions, the sample was delimited within an urban radius that guaranteed both temporal correspondence and the identification of houses belonging to the middle class.

2.2 Selection of study objects

For this study, a purposive sampling strategy was adopted in order to select analytically relevant cases, consisting of seven premodern houses built between the 1950s and 1970s. The selection of houses —the study objects— responded primarily to a temporal and spatial delimitation. However, to ensure their correspondence with the defined period, characteristic architectural features of the second half of the twentieth century were identified. In this regard, Schoop and Márquez (1974) describe material transformations associated with modernization, in contrast to vernacular elements such as the tiled roofs characteristic of colonial architecture.

Based on direct observation of middle-class houses located in the historic centre of Sucre, recurrent features were identified, including the use of rationalist lines, austere finishes, corrugated metal roofing, straight metallic balconies, and continuous construction aligned with the street and property boundaries.

These observations were contrasted with selected architectural plans, allowing an understanding of the spatial organization and configuration of the cases. Additionally, each house was analysed through architectural surveys and in-depth interviews conducted with elderly inhabitants who had continuously lived in the studied houses, articulating material conditions with modes of dwelling.

The sample size does not respond to statistical representativeness, but rather to theoretical saturation, reached when the cases began to repeat recurring patterns. Collectively, the seven cases provide a sufficient basis for identifying significant recurrences and variations between architectural spatiality and everyday domestic life.

2.3 Data matrix

The data matrix generated from the research objective and the units of analysis structures and defines the methodological framework employed in the study. It is presented as follows:

Table 1: Data matrix.

UNIT OF ANALYSIS	VARIABLE	INDICATOR	VALUE	METHODOLOGY
Kitchens and bathrooms in premodern houses	Concrete dimension (architectural spatiality)	Degree of typological structuration	Typological Hybrid Contingent	Architectural survey + plan analysis
		Degree of typological structuration	Density / Diaphaneity Episodicity / Continuity Schematic order / Clutter Cellularity / Spatial openness	Photographic documentation
		Materiality	Vernacular / Intermediate / Modern	Direct observation + photographic documentation
		Mechanization	Traditional / Modern	Interviews + photographic documentation
	Abstract dimension (modes of dwelling)	Domestic practices (food preparation, hygiene)	Traditional / Modern	Interviews + reconstruction of domestic roles
		Use	Individual / Collective / Shared	Interviews + reconstruction of domestic roles
		Symbolic dimension	Utilitarian / Symbolic / Hybrid	Interviews

Based on these methodological considerations, the results are presented through a differentiation between the concrete and abstract dimensions of kitchens and bathrooms, as developed in the following sections.

2.4 Analytical Procedure

The analysis of the information was developed through a systematic process of triangulation between qualitative sources (interviews) and architectural material (plans and architectural surveys), with the aim of articulating the abstract dimension (modes of dwelling) and the concrete dimension (spatial configuration).

In a first stage, the semi-structured interviews were transcribed and subjected to a thematic coding process oriented toward identifying recurrent categories related to: (i) domestic practices (food preparation and hygiene), (ii) forms of use (individual, collective, or shared), and (iii) symbolic dimension (utilitarian, symbolic, or hybrid). This coding process made it possible to identify regularities in the narratives, as well as variations between cases.

Simultaneously, an architectural reading of plans and surveys was conducted, focused on identifying the location of kitchens and bathrooms within the dwelling, their spatial relationships with other rooms, and their degree of integration or contingency. This reading allowed the configurations to be classified according to criteria of spatial organization, materiality, and level of mechanization.

In a second stage, the information obtained was systematized according to the established data matrix (Table 1), where the indicators corresponding to the defined variables were cross-referenced. This matrix operated as a tool for articulating qualitative and spatial data, enabling correspondences between practices, meanings, and architectural configurations to be established.

Subsequently, a cross-case comparison was carried out among the seven study cases in order to identify recurrences, divergences, and gradients of transformation across the analysed decades. This comparative analysis made it possible to distinguish patterns of organization in kitchens and bathrooms, as well as differences in hierarchy, spatial location, and symbolic significance.

Finally, analytical patterns were identified from this process, understood as recurrent configurations linking spatiality and modes of dwelling. These patterns constitute the basis for interpreting domestic infrastructures as hybrid systems characterized by the coexistence of traditional practices and incipient processes of modernization.

The methodological strategy followed a qualitative multiple-case study design combining architectural analysis and ethnographic inquiry. Through methodological triangulation between architectural plans, surveys, photographic records, and semi-structured interviews, the study sought to establish correspondences between spatial configurations and modes of dwelling. This approach enabled the integration of material, functional, and symbolic dimensions of domestic space, providing a comprehensive understanding of kitchens and hygiene spaces within processes of incomplete modernization.

3. Results

3.1 Premodern Typologies

Premodern houses are understood here as dwellings that preserve traditional spatial configurations derived from colonial architecture. Considering the house as a vernacular and heritage product undergoing continuous typological transformation allows for the examination of domestic spatiality from an archaeological perspective. Elements such as corridors, patios, and service yards reveal processes of permanence and adaptation through which inherited spatial structures are progressively reconfigured into local housing typologies. In this sense, domestic architecture can be understood as the result of successive layers of occupation, use, and transformation rather than as a fixed and immutable form (Gómez Martínez, Espino Hidalgo, & Pérez Cano, 2019).

These correspond to what Jorge Francisco Liernur defines as the strategy of the self-constructed house: a process based on private decisions, open-ended and incremental in character, developed outside formal real-estate production and state intervention (Liernur, 2014). This condition not only defines their constructive origin, but also produces a non-standardized spatial configuration in which rooms are progressively transformed according to changing needs, giving rise to ambiguous and flexible forms of organization.

During the studied decades, the premodern house combined traditional arrangements and spaces inherited from colonial housing —such as corridors and patios— with progressive and non-structured extensions of the dwelling. This generated hybrid configurations characterized by gradual transformations from the front to the rear of the house. Robert Venturi would describe this process as an “adapted contradiction”, in which spatial organization is continuously reconfigured according to family demands accumulated over decades.

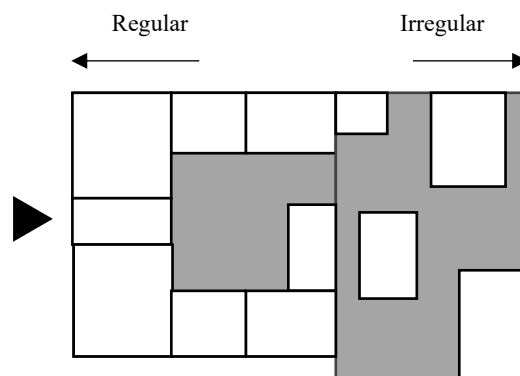


Figure 2. Adapted Contradiction in the Structure and Organization of the House (Developed by the Author).

Within this typological hybridization, kitchens may appear integrated into the regular spatial structure or improvised within adapted rooms located in the more irregular sectors of the dwelling.

Interview results reveal that the kitchen is configured as a central and structuring space within the premodern house, regardless of its specific form or location.

The different recorded configurations —ranging from kitchens organized around wood-burning stoves or the use of the *batán*, to those integrated into the interior or directly connected to the patio— demonstrate a remarkable spatial flexibility in which the boundaries between interior and exterior, as well as between functions, remain diffuse. This condition is accompanied by a predominantly collective or shared use, reinforcing the kitchen's role as the main nucleus of domestic interaction.

Its location responds to a non-standardized logic characterized by variability and progressive adaptation within the domestic ensemble. In most cases, kitchens do not occupy a fixed or predefined position, but rather are situated in contingent areas of the house, frequently associated with patios or intermediate spaces between interior and exterior. This tendency is confirmed by the comparative data, where “improvised” locations predominate in five of the seven cases, while integrated kitchens are less frequent. Their placement responds both to functional conditions —such as smoke ventilation or spatial availability— and to processes of subdivision and incremental growth of the lot. In the cases where the kitchen is integrated into the main structure, a greater spatial consolidation and proximity to everyday living spaces can be observed. However, these represent only specific situations within the analysed group.

In general terms, the kitchen is configured as a flexibly located space whose position is not determined by a predefined scheme, but rather by adaptive dynamics, reinforcing its contingent character within domestic organization.

In contrast to the kitchen —which becomes a central, recurrent, and socially articulating space— hygiene spaces present a more unstable and secondary condition within the premodern dwelling. While the kitchen maintains a constant presence and a strong integration with everyday life, the bathroom appears as a late-added space with weaker spatial definition and lower relevance within domestic organization. This difference reveals an unequal hierarchy between both infrastructures, where food preparation structures domestic life, while hygiene is resolved progressively and adaptively.

The location of hygiene spaces in the analysed dwellings presents a markedly peripheral and contingent pattern, with limited integration into the main structure of the house. Comparative data show that, in most cases, bathrooms occupy “improvised” positions, generally located in patios, rear sectors, or residual areas of the lot, confirming both their late incorporation and their limited consideration within the original organization of the dwelling. Unlike the kitchen, whose flexible location does not compromise its functional centrality, the placement of the bathroom reinforces its secondary condition, situating it within lower-hierarchy areas of the domestic ensemble. Only in isolated cases can a more direct integration into the interior of the house be observed, suggesting incipient processes of spatial consolidation associated with later transformations.

In general terms, the bathroom is configured as a marginally located infrastructure determined more by logics of adaptation and availability than by planning criteria, revealing its weak integration within the premodern spatial structure.

3.2 Interior Space

Once the organizational patterns corresponding to fixed elements (Rapoport, 2003) within the concrete dimension of architecture (Norberg-Schulz, 1980) have been identified, it becomes pertinent to address the abstract dimension, which Amos Rapoport associates with semi-fixed elements: furniture, curtains, domestic objects, and plants —that is, contingent components linked to everyday life.

In the premodern domestic environment, interior configuration is not exhausted by built materiality, but rather completed through the elements accompanying everyday practices. In this sense, spaces such as kitchens and bathrooms cannot be understood solely through their physical boundaries, but through the objects, practices, and arrangements that activate them as lived spaces.

In kitchens, semi-fixed elements —stoves, utensils, improvised or adapted furniture— produce a highly contingent spatiality. Their organization responds less to a predefined order than to the progressive accumulation of objects associated with food preparation, revealing a practical and everyday logic. This condition generates hybrid configurations in which cooking, gathering, and other domestic activities overlap within the same space. The accumulation of domestic objects should not be interpreted merely as material clutter. As Miller (2001) argues, everyday objects actively participate in the construction of domestic identity and social relationships.

At an aesthetic level, these kitchens tend to display conditions of heterogeneity and clutter resulting from the accumulation of elements without a unified compositional intention. Far from responding to principles of order or *conciñnitas*, their character approaches a vernacular aesthetic in which existing elements are continuously reused and reconfigured. This accumulation does not imply absolute disorder, but rather a form of organization grounded in experience and the repetition of everyday practices.

In contrast, bathrooms reveal a different logic, marked by their late incorporation or peripheral condition within the dwelling. Unlike the kitchen—which tends to operate as an active and central space—the bathroom appears as a segregated area, often exterior or precarious, with lower symbolic significance and lower object density.

Semi-fixed elements within bathrooms are scarce and respond strictly to hygiene-related functions. This produces more schematic and less saturated spatialities, where economy of resources predominates over accumulation. The absence of ornamentation or additional objects reinforces their utilitarian character, in contrast to the material and symbolic richness present in kitchens.

Nevertheless, in both kitchens and bathrooms, the arrangement of objects and surfaces reveals specific environmental conditions. In kitchens, the presence of smoke, heat, and residues produces dense and heterogeneous textures, whereas bathrooms tend to remain more austere, with less intervened surfaces. These differences reinforce the distinction between a space of prolonged permanence and another associated with punctual use.

Taken together, the reading of these spaces reveals that the premodern dwelling does not respond to a homogeneous logic, but rather to differentiated configurations in which the kitchen acquires functional and symbolic centrality, while the bathroom remains a marginal space defined primarily by its basic utilitarian function.

3.3 Modes of dwelling and late mechanization

From the perspective of architectural theory, domestic space has not transformed uniformly. Studies have shown that service areas such as kitchens and bathrooms have undergone the most significant processes of experimentation and adaptation, becoming key environments through which the relationship between everyday life and technical systems can be understood (Preciado, 2010). In contrast, socially representative spaces such as living and dining rooms, as well as intimate environments such as bedrooms, have generally remained more stable, often being analysed primarily through dimensional, functional, or ergonomic criteria (Monteys, 2014; Amoroso, 2017). This distinction is particularly relevant in the premodern houses analysed here, where kitchens and hygiene spaces reveal the material and cultural transformations associated with incomplete processes of modernization.

3.3.1 Domestic practices and technological transition in the kitchen

The interviews conducted reveal that kitchens in premodern houses in Sucre were not configured as specialized spaces, but rather as multifunctional environments where domestic, social, and symbolic practices converged. Everyday life within the kitchen implied a space of coexistence and integration, particularly among women, housewives, and domestic workers. Their organization revolved around traditional devices such as wood-burning stoves and braziers, involving prolonged food preparation processes and a strong dependence on manual labor.

Kitchen mechanization was initially characterized by the predominance of manual devices, including hand-cranked meat grinders, grain mills, and manual mixers, together with the *batán* as a pre-Hispanic grinding system. These conditions directly affected the temporality of dwelling, structuring extended and collective routines associated with everyday food preparation.



Figure 3. Batán dispositive, a prehispanic artefact. Source: Author's photograph.

The incorporation of household appliances was gradual and partial. Blenders began to replace certain manual practices, while refrigerators were introduced from the 1960s onward, initially through kerosene-powered models and later electric ones. However, this process did not imply the immediate replacement of traditional systems, but rather the coexistence of different levels of technification within the same domestic space.

Cooking systems likewise reveal a gradual technological transition. Initially, wood-burning stoves—such as the *k'oncha*—and charcoal stoves predominated, later being partially replaced by portable burners and kerosene- or gasoline-powered devices. Toward the late 1960s, liquefied gas stoves began to be incorporated, with their widespread diffusion consolidating during the 1970s. This technological overlap reveals a process of incomplete and adaptive modernization rather than a total rupture with traditional practices.

Likewise, the kitchen operated as a predominantly shared space. Food preparation, everyday consumption, and other activities such as childcare or social interaction occurred simultaneously, consolidating this environment as the nucleus of domestic life. The absence of functional specialization reinforced the overlapping of uses and the prolonged permanence within the space.

Within this domestic environment, tables occupied a central role that extended beyond their original utilitarian function. Rather than serving exclusively as surfaces for food preparation or consumption, they frequently became spaces for conversation, childcare, household tasks, and social interaction. As Köncke and Olea Fonti (2022) suggest, the domestic table often transcends the specific function for which it was conceived, acquiring meanings and uses that exceed the physical space that contains it. In the analysed houses, this multifunctional condition reinforced the collective character of the kitchen and its role as a primary setting for everyday domestic life.

Conditions of mechanization were also limited by domestic infrastructure. The absence of generalized potable water networks prevented the systematic installation of sinks, so utensils were washed in patios or through the manual transportation of water from public sources. These practices maintained a collective and everyday dimension even during processes of modernization.

In terms of materiality, countertops were constructed in concrete and progressively incorporated tile coverings toward the 1970s. Floors evolved from brick to mosaic tiles, the latter associated with improved maintenance conditions. Furniture remained limited, with no integrated cupboards or cabinetry, while worktables covered with cloths, shelves, and hanging storage predominated.

From a symbolic perspective, the kitchen presents a hybrid condition: beyond fulfilling utilitarian functions, it also operated as a space charged with affective and cultural meanings. This dimension was reinforced by the presence of ritual practices associated with food preparation and by the persistence of traditional devices linked to inherited knowledge, consolidating the kitchen as the principal nucleus of socialization and domestic intimacy.

Table 2: Interview Results.

Case Interview /	Kitchen (Food Preparation)	Bathroom (Hygiene)	Use	Symbolic Dimension
User 1	Kitchen with wood-burning stove	Initially exterior bathroom	Collective / Shared	Hybrid
User 2	Not clearly described	Not mentioned	Collective	Utilitarian
User 3	Integrated kitchen	Not detailed	Shared	Symbolic / Hybrid
User 4	Kitchen with batán	Precarious bathroom (without door)	Shared	Hybrid
User 5	Kitchen connected to patio	Bathroom present	Collective / Shared	Hybrid
User 6	Kitchen as central family space	Exterior bathroom	Collective	Hybrid
User 7	Patio kitchen / multiple use	Later incorporation of bathroom	Shared	Hybrid

The data obtained through architectural surveys and cross-case comparison make it possible to identify patterns in the location, dimension, and number of kitchens and bathrooms within the dwelling, revealing differences between improvised and integrated configurations.

3.3.2 Bathroom, hygiene, precariousness, and partial modernization

Like the kitchen, hygiene spaces in premodern houses in Sucre reveal a late and discontinuous incorporation of comfort and hygiene devices, characterized by their peripheral location and predominantly utilitarian condition.

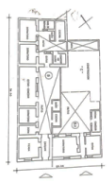
In many cases, the bathroom did not originally exist as a defined space during the early years of the studied period, and bodily hygiene practices were carried out using containers such as basins or pitchers, with water heated manually either under the sun or over the kitchen fire. Access to water depended on transporting it from public sources, limiting the implementation of mechanized systems and conditioning everyday hygiene practices.

Bodily waste disposal was initially resolved through corrals, cesspits, or open spaces, without integration into sanitary networks. In some cases, locally manufactured cement toilets were identified, whose operation required the manual pouring of water. These conditions reveal a weak consolidation of the bathroom as an architectural infrastructure integrated into the dwelling.

The incorporation of sanitary fixtures occurred progressively during the 1960s and 1970s. Pedestal sinks, chain-operated high-tank toilets, in situ constructed bathtubs, and electric showers were gradually introduced. Nevertheless, these devices operated under limited conditions due to the partial coverage of water and electricity networks, generating incomplete forms of domestic modernization.

Spatially, bathrooms presented reduced surfaces —approximately between 2 and 3 m²— and predominantly improvised positions within the lot. Their location responded more to adaptive logics than to planning criteria, frequently occupying patios, rear sectors, or residual areas of the dwelling.

Table 3: Comparative objective indicators of indoor and outdoor spatial conditions across housing in all cases.

Study case	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
							
Kitchen position inside the house	Improvised	Improvised	Improvised	Improvised	Improvised	Integrated	Integrated
Surface kitchen mean area (m2)	6	8	6	7	5	6	12
Number of kitchens	3	3	3	3	4	1	1
Number unities (house per family)	3	3	3	1	1	1	1
Bathroom position inside the house	Improvised	Improvised	Improvised	Improvised	Improvised	Integrated	Improvised
Bathroom mean area (m2)	3	2	2	2	2	3	2
Number bathrooms	2	4	3	2	2	1	1

Likewise, the variability in the number of bathrooms per house was associated with processes of subdivision and the coexistence of multiple family units. In these contexts, bathroom use tended to remain shared, revealing collective dynamics even in practices related to hygiene and bodily intimacy.

In terms of materiality, metallic basins, enamel containers, cement toilets, and in situ constructed bathtubs were identified. In later stages, ceramic coverings and elements associated with greater visual hygiene were incorporated, although sanitation infrastructure remained partial and dependent on non-formalized drainage systems.

From a symbolic perspective, the bathroom maintained a predominantly utilitarian condition, with less affective and ritual significance than the kitchen. However, its progressive incorporation into the dwelling reflects significant transformations in modes of dwelling, particularly regarding bodily intimacy, hygiene, and the modernization of everyday life.

4. Discussion

According to Blunt and Dowling (2006), home is not only a physical location but also an emotional and symbolic space continuously produced through everyday practices and social relationships. The analysed houses reveal processes of continuous adaptation and transformation.

This interpretation is consistent with Cravino's (2022) argument that domestic space cannot be reduced to its material or functional dimensions, but must be understood as a cultural construction shaped by everyday practices, meanings, and forms of inhabitation. From this perspective, kitchens and bathrooms are not merely technical infrastructures but environments through which domestic life is experienced and reproduced.

In this way the location of the kitchen within the premodern dwelling in Sucre does not respond to a fixed scheme, but rather to an adaptive logic conditioned by resources, the progressive growth of the lot, and family dynamics. It may be situated in the first or second patio, or displaced toward rear sectors under more precarious conditions. This variability does not constitute an anomaly, but rather a structural characteristic of these dwellings, where spatial organization is defined by incremental processes rather than prior planning. In this context, the progressive subdivision of the lot and the coexistence of multiple family units reinforce the non-standardized condition of dwelling. The incorporation of additional kitchens within the same property demonstrates that domestic autonomy was not resolved through formal spatial segregation, but through the repetition and adaptation of basic infrastructures.

Beyond its location, the kitchen systematically emerges as the principal nucleus of domestic activity. Its condition as a multifunctional space —where food preparation, social interaction, care, and ritual converge— positions it as a central device in the organization of dwelling. The simultaneity of uses and the copresence of users generate an intensity of interaction that transcends its definition as a merely functional space. At this way the kitchen emerges not only as an architectural space but also as a socially produced environment shaped by repeated practices and everyday interactions (Lefebvre, 1991).

In this sense, the observed practices —prolonged food preparation, the use of manual devices, preservation through traditional techniques such as *charque*, and the persistence of the *batán*— not only reflect material conditions, but also structure domestic temporalities and rituals. Following Michel de Certeau's understanding of everyday practices, these routines organize daily life through repeated actions, evidencing that dwelling is constructed through practice rather than through abstract spatial configurations alone. The kitchen, as a space of accumulation of objects, practices, and meanings, also acquires a symbolic dimension that exceeds utilitarian functions. Its association with everyday domestic care practices, its affective character, and its condition as a gathering space position it as an environment of cultural production where memory, tradition, and everyday life are articulated.

In contrast, hygiene spaces present a different logic. Their late incorporation, peripheral location, and predominantly utilitarian character reveal a weak institutionalization of hygiene as an architectural program within the original configuration of the dwelling. Unlike the kitchen, the bathroom does not structure domestic life, but rather adapts to it, being resolved in residual or exterior spaces.

The results allow kitchens and bathrooms to be interpreted as hybrid infrastructures in which traditional practices and incipient processes of modernization coexist. The progressive introduction of technologies —such as gas, refrigeration, or electric showers— did not imply the immediate replacement of previous systems, but rather the superposition of multiple systems. From the perspective of Amos Rapoport, these configurations may be understood as systems where fixed, semi-fixed, and non-fixed elements interact dynamically. The premodern dwelling is not organized as a closed object, but rather as an open system in constant transformation, where practices continuously redefine space.

The contingent location of kitchens and bathrooms, as well as their progressive development, reveal an adaptive continuity in relation to modern logics of integral planning. Rather than responding to predefined functional schemes, these dwellings are configured through adaptive processes. This condition may be understood as a form of spatial ambiguity, in which the boundaries between functions, rooms, and interior-exterior relations remain diffuse. This ambiguity allowed the same space to accommodate domestic, productive, and social activities simultaneously. The kitchen, for example, may extend toward the patio, integrate with circulation spaces, or coexist with productive activities, blurring the functional specialization characteristic of the modern model. Recent studies have shown that shared domestic practices remain fundamental in the production of intimacy and belonging within the home (Vandeventer, 2024), a condition clearly observed in the collective use of kitchens in the analysed cases.

In line with Witold Rybczynski, the observed domesticity does not respond to modern notions of privacy, comfort, or specialization, but rather to collective forms of coexistence. However, the findings make it possible to go beyond this premise.

Studies on twentieth-century domestic architecture have shown that processes of modernization were frequently associated with an increasing specialization of domestic space and a clearer separation between public and private spheres. The progressive incorporation of individualized bedrooms, multiple bathrooms, dressing rooms, and specialized social spaces reflected a growing emphasis on privacy and functional differentiation within the home (Ayala Alonso, 2016). In contrast, the premodern houses analysed in Sucre reveal a domestic organization based on multifunctional environments and shared practices, where intimacy was produced through coexistence rather than through strict spatial segregation.

The empirical evidence suggests that the premodern dwelling does not organize intimacy through spatial separation, but through shared practices. The kitchen, as a collective and multifunctional space, acts as the principal device for the production of intimacy, where social proximity, the repetition of practices, and copresence configure forms of domestic bonding. In contrast, intimacy linked to the body —associated with the bathroom— was not initially consolidated as an architectural condition, but rather as a contingent practice. This reveals that intimacy is not a given spatial attribute, but a situated cultural construction mediated by practices, resources, and historical transformations.

In this sense, intimacy should not be interpreted as a fixed architectural attribute but as a culturally constructed condition. As Cravino (2022) notes, the boundaries between public and private life have historically varied according to social and cultural contexts, producing different ways of experiencing domesticity and personal space.

As is well the findings suggest that intimacy in the premodern dwelling is not primarily produced through spatial segregation or the strict separation of functions. Rather, it emerges from shared practices, everyday interactions, and prolonged forms of coexistence developed within collective domestic environments. In this sense, the kitchen becomes a privileged setting for the production of intimacy, where social proximity, care, and routine activities converge. This interpretation is consistent with recent theoretical approaches that challenge the modern association between intimacy and privacy, arguing instead that domestic intimacy is relationally constructed through everyday life and social interaction (Orzechowska, 2021).

This condition challenges the universalizing assumptions of modern domesticity, particularly those based on functional segregation and individual privacy, proposing an alternative reading of dwelling in Latin American contexts characterized by incremental urban growth and hybrid domestic modernization.

4.1 Domestic space, memory, and cultural continuity

The findings make it possible to recognize that kitchens and hygiene spaces do not function solely as utilitarian infrastructures, but also as material supports of everyday memory. The persistence of traditional devices —such as the batán, wood-burning stoves, or manual food preparation practices— reveals the continuity of inherited knowledge and routines, even within contexts of progressive modernization. In this sense, the premodern dwelling operates as a domestic archive in which everyday practices preserve historical forms of social and cultural organization. The daily repetition of activities associated with food preparation, care, and coexistence produces mechanisms of intergenerational transmission embedded both in objects and in spaces.

As Bachelard (1994) suggests, domestic space acts as a repository of memory and lived experience, allowing everyday practices to acquire symbolic and emotional significance.

The persistence of traditional devices and shared domestic routines indicates that the premodern dwelling functions as a material support of cultural continuity. Rather than organizing everyday life through highly specialized rooms, domestic activities remained concentrated in multifunctional environments where memory, coexistence, and daily practices were continuously reproduced through use (Ábalos, 2009).

The kitchen thus acquires a ritual condition that exceeds the mere preparation of food. Its collective use, the prolonged temporality of domestic labour, and the coexistence of traditional and modern practices configure a space where memory, affectivity, and everyday life remain interconnected. The persistence of the batán or manual cooking systems responds not only to material limitations, but also to cultural forms of continuity and appropriation of dwelling.

From this perspective, the premodern dwelling in Sucre cannot be interpreted exclusively through universal categories of modern domesticity. Its spatial configurations reveal situated forms of dwelling shaped by processes of cultural mestizaje, vernacular continuities, and urban adaptations characteristic of the Latin American context. The coexistence between modern infrastructures and inherited practices reveals a process of incomplete modernization in which collective dynamics continue to structure domestic life. Consequently, the case of Sucre makes it possible to question Eurocentric models based on functional specialization, individual privacy, and the strict separation of domestic functions. In contrast, the Latin American premodern dwelling reveals forms of inhabitation in which space, ritual, and memory remain deeply interconnected.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of kitchens and bathrooms in premodern houses in Sucre allows us to conclude that the organization of dwelling does not respond to principles of functional specialization or integral planning schemes, but rather to adaptive processes and hybrid configurations.

The kitchen becomes the structuring nucleus of domestic life, characterized by its multifunctionality, collective use, and high symbolic significance. Within it converge everyday practices, rituals, and social relationships that configure forms of intimacy based on copresence and interaction.

In contrast, hygiene spaces reveal a late incorporation and a peripheral location, evidencing a lower hierarchy within domestic organization. Their predominantly utilitarian condition reinforces the distinction between both domestic infrastructures.

Recent studies have shown that shared domestic practices remain fundamental in the production of intimacy and belonging within the home (Vandeventer, 2024), a condition clearly observed in the collective use of kitchens in the analysed cases.

In this context, the principal contribution proposed by this study is that the premodern dwelling does not organize intimacy through spatial segregation, but rather through shared practices. This condition redefines the understanding of domesticity, shifting it from a spatial logic toward a relational and cultural one. These findings challenge Eurocentric models of modern housing based on individual privacy and functional specialization, proposing instead a situated interpretation of dwelling in Latin America.

The findings contribute to broader discussions on Latin American housing, where incremental growth and hybrid domestic configurations continue to play a significant role in shaping everyday life (Vázquez-Torres et al., 2025). In this sense, the premodern dwelling may be understood as a system in which space, practices, and meanings are dynamically articulated, offering insights for rethinking contemporary architectural design from culturally contextualized perspectives.

The study contributes to the literature on Latin American domesticity by demonstrating that intimacy in premodern housing is produced primarily through shared practices rather than through architectural segregation. This finding expands existing discussions on domestic space by proposing a relational understanding of intimacy rooted in everyday life, cultural continuity, and collective forms of dwelling. In doing so, the research offers an alternative perspective to dominant models of domestic modernity based on privacy, functional specialization, and spatial compartmentalization.

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Data Availability Statement

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Institutional Review Board Statement

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