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Future housing representations of children from rural areas

Representaciones de vivienda de niñas y niños provenientes de zonas rurales

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Abstract

Based on experiences, during childhood people develop cognitive, affective and motor abilities, to comprehend different circumstances, to generate beliefs and to glimpse the future. An outstanding situation is housing and its environment, whether rural or urban. The representation of this can be expressed through drawing which allows revealing the construction of oneself, its reality, its significance and motivations. The purpose was to investigate, through pictorial representation, the way in which children from rural areas depict the place where they want to live as adults, which elements integrate it and how they are organized. The method was mixed. 145 children, aged from 6 to 13 years old, from seven rural schools in Guanajuato, México, were asked to draw their future house. Content analysis and statistical analysis of the drawings were carried out. The results showed children's consciousness about space, the environmental conditions, and the desire to improve these conditions. This points out a construction generated among the participants about their development and their real and imagined context, which became apparent in differences and similarities of the illustrations, as well as in their vision of certainties, uncertainties and hope for future well-being.

Keywords: *Childhood, drawing, housing, visualization, rural areas*.

Resumen

Con base en las experiencias, durante la niñez se van desarrollando capacidades cognoscitivas, afectivas y motoras para comprender distintas circunstancias, generar creencias y vislumbrar el futuro. Una situación relevante es la vivienda y su entorno, ya sea rural o urbano. La representación de ello puede expresarse a través del dibujo lo que permite revelar la construcción de sí mismo, su realidad, sus significaciones y motivaciones. El propósito de este trabajo fue indagar a través de la representación pictórica la manera en que niñas(os) del medio rural caracterizan el lugar donde desean vivir cuando sean grandes, qué elementos la integran y cómo se organizan. El método fue mixto. A 145 niñas(os) de 6 a 13 años de siete escuelas rurales de Guanajuato, México, se les solicitó que dibujaran su futura casa. Se realizaron análisis de contenido y estadístico de los dibujos. Los resultados mostraron consciencia sobre el espacio, las condiciones del entorno y el deseo de mejorar dichas condiciones. Ello habla de una construcción generada entre los participantes sobre su desarrollo y el contexto real e imaginado que se manifiesta en diferencias y similitudes de las ilustraciones, así como en la visión de certezas, incertidumbres y esperanza de bienestar futuro.

Palabras clave: *Niñez, zona rural, dibujo, visualización, vivienda.*

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Introduction

Throughout personal development, individuals form perceptions, thoughts, and ideas—both present and future—about life, others, and themselves. During childhood, these processes shape the fundamental biopsychosocial foundations for growth. Hence arises the interest in identifying children's experiences and representations to understand how they envision their future within a specific context. This can help trace the paths through which they construct their sense of self and reality, and contribute to understanding the meanings and ways in which this population inhabits its environment.

The study emerged from the identification by the *National System for the Integral Development of the Family* (DIF) in Guanajuato, Mexico, of children working in high-risk environments, particularly during periods of tourist influx. The key questions are: What kind of future do they imagine? How do they see themselves? Specifically, where do they want to live "when they grow up"? And does this perspective vary depending on the area in which they envision themselves?

For these reasons, the projection children create toward the future (Rogers, 1982; Maslow, 1970) becomes relevant, as it suggests a possible life path within their personal imagination. The *imaginary* encompasses beliefs, values, visions, experiences, and emotions that guide both motivation and action (Guevara-Sanginés, 2004; Figueroa, 2018); within it, mental images, situations, and ideals are constructed, helping to form an individual framework of meaning aligned with one's goals (Delval, 2007).

This reflects their self-conception and vision of the future, as well as the internalized values and assimilated knowledge derived from their context (Seve, 1973), and from the evolving process of personal development over time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Delval, 2007; Ponterotto & Park-Taylor, 2019).

The future, as a social imaginary, encompasses and activates a set of beliefs, aspirations, fears, images, and both individual and collective values (Figueroa, 2019). These images allow access to subjective representations of hope or fear, and the ways individuals cope with them (Figueroa, 2018).

The study was conducted in areas of the municipality of Silao, Guanajuato, characterized by their rural nature and fragile socioeconomic conditions (National Population Council [CONAPO], 2020) (Table 1), as well as their proximity to a highly visited sanctuary: *El Cerro del Cubilete*, better known as *Mount Cristo Rey*, where children "work" accompanying pilgrims and receiving tips for doing so.

Table 1. Socioeconomic characteristics of the localities (in percentages).

Locality	Population	Illit.	Incomp. Basic Educ.	No Sew./Toilet	No Elect.	No Piped Water	Dirt Floor	No Fridge	Overcrowding	MI	MD
Aguas Buenas	1,298	8.57	40.23	2.08	0.23	3.47	0.54	7.63	34.98	23.04	Very Low
Baños de Aguas Buenas	551	10.88	36.60	4.54	0.73	0.00	0.36	13.07	41.20	22.68	Low
Ejido El Paraíso (El Coyote)	400	12.79	39.15	2.25	0.00	1.25	5.50	9.00	41.25	22.55	Low
El Cubilete (La Montaña)	212	7.25	28.99	5.06	0.00	0.00	0.00	28.65	40.45	22.66	Low
El Jitomatal	332	11.21	42.15	9.04	0.30	15.96	0.30	6.63	40.96	22.13	Low
El Paraíso	812	9.42	40.11	8.50	0.25	68.60	3.45	7.88	44.09	20.67	Medium
Pabileros	638	16.36	49.32	4.70	0.78	1.72	0.47	8.78	31.66	22.37	Low

Source: Author's elaboration based on CONAPO (2020). **Note:** Abbreviations – Illit. = Illiteracy; Incomp. Basic Educ. = Without complete basic education; No Sew. /Toilet = Dwellings without sewage system or toilet; No Elect. = Dwellings without electricity; No Piped Water = Dwellings without piped water; Dirt Floor = Dwellings with earthen floors; No Fridge = Dwellings without refrigerator; Overcrowding = Dwellings with some degree of overcrowding; MI = Marginalization Index; MD = Degree of marginalization.

The dwelling as a living space

People do not exist in a vacuum; they are situated within a space—transitory or permanent—and a specific time. It is a place that human beings occupy, and in this sense, the relationship between *being* and *being-in* is indissoluble. Although the house or dwelling is, par excellence, an intimate space, it is located within a broader, physically and socially constructed space, demarcated by a set of people, customs, beliefs, ideologies, norms, and infrastructure. Thus, each place acquires a variable configuration resulting from the interaction between physical elements and human activity (Vargas, 2012; Lugo-Villegas et al., 2020), as space—including the home—is transformed and built through this interaction.

Within this framework, inhabited or imagined spaces (home, neighborhood, community, city, country) are considered one's own when a person appropriates them, forming bonds and attachments. Consequently, the content of such spaces becomes an expression that materializes conceptions, perceptions, traits, and preferences built through a constant process between the self and others—in other words, between the *I* and the *we.*

This study starts from the premise that the home is a space one inhabits (physical aspect) or wishes to inhabit; it is a *place of life* (Barañano, 2021) that provides shelter, enjoyment, rest, and safety for its members. It functions as both a point of departure and return, and as a site of interaction, development, and transformation. Depending on the specific social dynamics, it can also come to represent the opposite pole, with varying degrees of hardship in each of these aspects.

Throughout life, people engage in multiple and diverse processes and exchanges that are key to their continuity and development. This is especially relevant in early childhood. Hence, the nurturing exchanges that occur in one's environment provide vital social support that fosters the first impressions and interactions with the world—the first experiences of exploration and experimentation with oneself, with others, and with the environment; the first babblings and words that gradually enable the child to experience, construct, value, and project a sense of self (Berger & Luckman, 2003; Delval, 1989), through which experiences, knowledge, autonomy, and confidence are gained.

At this stage, children acquire a wide range of forms, interests, feelings, thoughts, and knowledge. This becomes an inexhaustible source of inspiration, motivation, and opportunity to reaffirm and recreate the self across diverse times and spaces.

As personal development unfolds, expectations arise that are linked to enriching the self within a more appealing and prosperous context (Murray, 1938; Maslow, 1970). Individuals situate themselves within a possible horizon in which to shape their "home," and thus their life (Deci & Ryan, 1990), in terms of autonomy, control, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1970).

During childhood, one begins to become aware of oneself, of recognizing oneself and being recognized by others (Erikson, 1994; Quiroga, 2021). At this stage, children require solid supports (family, educational, social, and normative) to ensure their right to well-being and full development throughout life. However, the living conditions in Mexico reveal unequal access to these rights—particularly in rural areas, which are often characterized by the lack of basic services (water, electricity, paved roads, medical care, education, or employment), small population size, regional disparities (economic and productive lag), extensive land use, population dispersion, settlement size, remoteness from public services, and the presence of ecosystems, agricultural zones, and extractive activities (CONAPO, 2020; National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy [CONEVAL], 2020; National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics [INEGI], 2020).

Currently, demographic dynamics and population growth are constantly reshaping architecture and spatial interaction beyond geopolitical boundaries, as well as influencing people's lives and cultures—for instance, through population aging, lower birth rates, and migration. Regarding migration, Guanajuato is the Mexican state with the highest number of international emigrants (CONEVAL, 2020).

Perspectives on drawing

Drawing allows individuals to organize and give form to symbolic elements. Through it, experience and the possibility of interpreting one's worldview and sense of life are expressed (Monteira et al., 2020), along with representations, emotions, expectations, motivations, and desires (Baroutsis et al., 2019), as well as one's interaction with the world, others, and oneself (Krautz, 2017). It gathers a set of elements that enables the reproduction of figures or images as the person thinks, feels, and perceives them (Lowenfeld, 1961). In this sense, it is a language that conveys cognitive, affective, and cultural processes that children use to organize, shape, and make sense of their world.

Different perspectives on drawing highlight its importance, as they provide elements for understanding its depth, dimension, and expressive, narrative, and projective capacity. This richness allows for diverse approaches to sociocultural and affective processes for different purposes—psychological, clinical, or therapeutic (Rinaldi et al., 2019); artistic and creative (Lowenfeld, 1961; Cepeda et al., 2020; Zapata, 2019); educational (Rodríguez et al., 2014; Dosio, 2020); and research-oriented (Fabbrocino, 2020).

From evolutionary and historical-cultural perspectives, drawing is accessible and achievable for every human being, as people have drawn across generations and cultures. The development of drawing follows a typically ideal sequence in its early stages (Lowenfeld, 1961; Glas, 2015), which include essential phases for understanding this process in childhood: pre-schematic or scribbling, schematic, and realistic or abstract.

From a cognitive perspective, drawing is understood as a thought process that enables the creation of knowledge (Piaget & Inhelder, 1984). Thus, drawing becomes a form of thinking and acting that humans use in dialogue or confrontation with the internal and external world. An image originates from the human ability to use a material—such as a pencil, stick, or finger—to make a mark through coordinated movements of the hand and other body parts, developing and employing representational formulas (mental action plans executed through linear forms on a drawing surface). This requires *shared intentionality* (Tomasello, 2012): when children attempt to express themselves through scribbles and share them with others, they place their drawings in an intersubjective space of communication and interaction with the world.

From a sociocultural perspective, cultural codes and drawing conventions are evident. Drawing with others serves a cultural function of making the world visible through images—to oneself and to others. Children do not create drawings solely for themselves; rather, in each drawing act, they move between their multilayered environment (the world) and their social and cultural world (the *we*). An imagined interlocutor (*you*) and a normative *we* (in the form of cultural expectations) are always present. Thus, drawing reveals a relationship between *I, you/we*, and the world (Krautz, 2017)—that is, a relational perspective.

Considering that motivation involves the study of the direction, intensity, and persistence of behavior (Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981), an approach to studying children's and adolescents' visions of the future can be based on their expression of the desires they wish to achieve as adults. The ability to think about oneself in the future—that is, the relationship between self-awareness, personal development, and the environment one will inhabit—can be activated through questions about the short and long term, such as managing personal or material resources (e.g., daily expenses), appropriating living spaces (e.g., the kind of house they would like to live in), or personal growth (e.g., what they would like to be when they grow up). Since these elements may determine one's course of action, it is important to explore how such visions are represented and expressed, what components they include, and how they are organized. Therefore, in this study, the drawing—its content and references—serves as the fundamental medium through which children express the relationship between their inner and social worlds, and how they project their future home and life.

Methodology

This study is part of a broader research project on children who may be at risk of homelessness, focusing

on their current socioeconomic conditions, their envisioned future employment, and their understanding of household spending distribution. The objective was to explore the desired housing of children living in rural-suburban areas, using colored-pencil drawing as a communicative tool to gain a substantive interpretation through the inductive analysis of its content and organization. The study followed a cross-sectional, mixed-methods design: qualitative in data collection and content analysis, and quantitative in inferential statistical analysis.

Participants

A total of 145 students participated: 82 girls and 63 boys, aged between 6 and 13 years (mean age = 9.40, SD = 1.90). All were enrolled in primary schools located in areas surrounding *El Cubilete*, Silao, Guanajuato (Table 2). The study localities correspond to small rural communities with populations ranging from 212 to 1,298 inhabitants (see Table 1), whose main economic activities are agriculture and construction work (CONAPO, 2020; CONEVAL, 2020; INEGI, 2020).

Study Procedure

The seven primary schools in these communities were selected in agreement with the educational authorities of the *Secretaría de Educación de Guanajuato* (SEG), using the inclusion criterion of proximity to *Cerro del Cubilete*. Authorization was requested from the delegate of Region IV of the SEG, followed by consent from the school principals and the children's parents or guardians. The study followed the ethical guidelines of the *Código de Ética de los Psicólogos* (Mexican Psychological Society, 1984). Once permissions were obtained, fieldwork was scheduled at the corresponding schools.

Teachers were fully informed about the process and accompanied the researchers during data collection. In their regular classroom groups, the children were given a blank sheet of paper and colored pencils, with the following instructions: *"Please draw the house where you would like to live when you grow up."* They were also told, *"If you have any questions, raise your hand and a member of the research team will come to your desk to assist you."*

Table 2. Distribution of the participating population by locality.

Variable	Male	Female	Total
Sex	63	82	145
Locality			
Aguas Buenas	13	23	36
Baños de Aguas Buenas	8	9	17
Ejido El Paraíso (El Coyote)	6	7	13
El Cubilete	5	5	10
El Jitomatal	11	6	17
El Paraíso	9	16	25
Pabileros	11	16	27
Age			
Mean	9.51	9.32	9.40
S.D.	1.83	1.96	1.90
School Grade			
1st	6	15	21
2nd	11	12	23
3rd	13	14	27
4th	12	15	27
5th	10	9	19
6th	9	17	26
n/a	2	0	2

Data Processing

The pictorial representations were subjected to content analysis, and inductive categories were generated based on the elements present in the drawings. First, each drawing was individually reviewed to record the general elements it contained. Then, the drawings were assessed by three judges from different disciplines with experience in the educational field. Based on this evaluation, the arguments were analyzed to construct the analytical units. Using these initial categories, a preliminary analysis was conducted, and the categories were subsequently refined to achieve the highest possible taxonomic resolution (Table 3).

Statistical Analysis

Frequency and percentage analyses were performed for each category. A chi-square test (χ^2) was calculated to assess the influence of gender and the type of projected residential area.

Table 3. Categories defining children's drawings of their desired homes.

Category	Definition
Projected area	Information about the (desired) dwelling in relation to the space where it is located, based on its socioeconomic context: rural or urban.
Location	Geographic environment that is the same as, different from, or not specified in relation to the current dwelling.
Distance	Distance from the original location, classified as unknown, same, near, or far.
Internal setting	Internal characteristics of the dwelling. Arrangement and distribution of all necessary elements to achieve the desired decoration and atmosphere: a) Only façade, cozy, or practical. b) Basic services — essential amenities required for people's and communities' well-being, safety, and development, such as electricity, fireplace (wood), water, pavement, and transportation.
External setting	External characteristics framing the desired home. Arrangement and distribution of external elements necessary to achieve the intended atmosphere. a) Height — refers to the vertical dimension of the construction: one floor, two floors, or more than two. b) Detached house, practical exterior, cozy exterior, or both practical and cozy. c) Detached house, more nature, more human activity, or balance between nature and human activity.
Density	Number of dwellings per unit area. Degree of construction within a specific space (volume): isolated, dispersed, or dense.
Objects in the sky	Absence vs. presence of objects in the sky.
People	Absence vs. presence of people.
Affective impression	Emotional experience evoked when coming into contact with the drawing (as a flash or snapshot), which can be positive, negative, or neutral.

Results and Discussion

Projected Location and Distance

It was found that half of the participants envisioned living in a different place in the future, one out of six wished to remain in the same location, and one out of three did not specify it (Table 4). Regarding the distance between their place of origin and their future dwelling, 41% expressed a preference to remain in the same or a nearby area, 19% to move to a distant location, and 40% were uncertain.

A statistically significant difference was found when comparing projected future residence by area (χ^2 (4, N = 145) = 62.36, p < .001). In rural contexts, the distribution was 31% preferring to remain in the same or nearby space, 8% to move to a distant location, and 56% uncertain, compared to urban areas, where the respective figures were 48%, 36%, and 15%.

Table 4. Projected future residence by area.

Area	Same	Different (near)	Different (far)	Different (uncertain)	Uncertain	Total
Rural	21	10	7	3	46	87
Urban	3	25	21	6	3	58
Total	24	35	28	9	49	145

The most frequently mentioned nearby cities where participants imagined living in the future were Silao and León (Figure 1). In contrast, participants from rural contexts most often mentioned the countryside or the hill area (Figure 2).

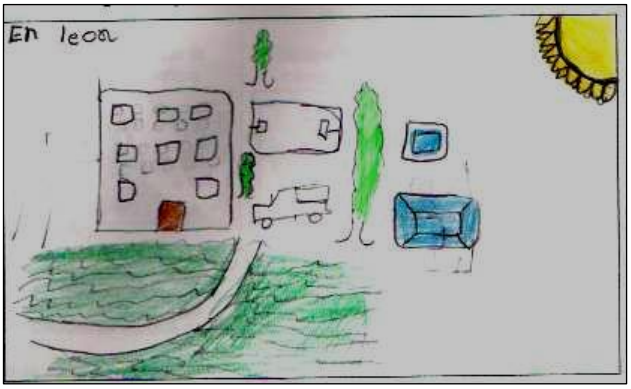

Figure 1. Nearby urban space around his home. 8-year-old boy, 3rd grade.

Figure 2. Nearby or same rural space. 12-year-old girl, 6th grade.

The preferred distant locations correspond to the United States of America (Figure 3) and to some states of the Mexican Republic (Figure 4), such as Mexico City, Monterrey, Nuevo León, Jalisco, and Guerrero.

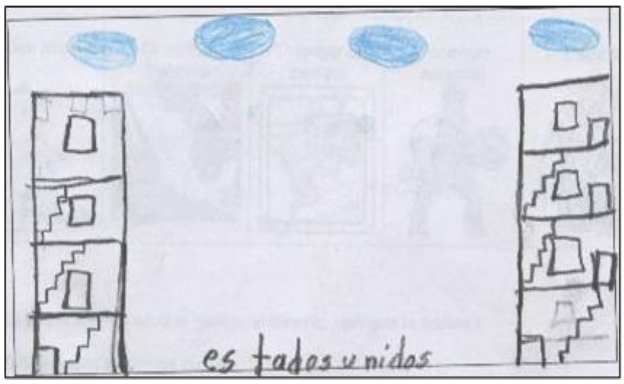

Figure 3. Distant place outside the country. 8-year-old boy, 2nd grade.

Figure 4. Distant place within the country. 12-year-old girl, 4th grade.

Projected home environment

The arrangement and distribution of all the elements necessary to achieve the desired atmosphere and decoration of the home reflect people's representations of how immediate space is organized (Murray, 1938; Edwards, 1959): both internal and external. The internal environment corresponds to the components arranged within the home, while the external one includes all the surrounding elements.

a) **Internal environment**

Most of the drawings (81%) depict only the façade of the house. However, in those that also show the interior, two main orientations can be observed: a practical one (12%) and a cozy one (7%). In the practical environment (Table 5), participants drew stairs, light bulbs, divisions of space, as well as basic services such as electricity (22%), water (17%), fireplace (16%), paths (12%), and means of transportation (11%). In contrast, in the cozy environment, children included vases, curtains, and furniture. These data indicate greater attention to the house as a visible unit rather than to its interior environment, both in rural and urban projections ($\chi^2(2, N = 145) = 0.927$, ns).

Table 5. Internal environment of the house depicted by area.

Category	Façade only	Practical	Cozy	Total
Rural	67	13	7	87
Urban	51	4	3	58
Overall Total	118	17	10	145

b) **External environment**

In the external environment, there are various elements that, when considered together, provide a broad picture of it: the height of the house, the density of dwellings, the proportion between the residence and the external environment, objects in the sky, and people.

In the pictorial representations, single-story houses (66%), two-story houses (23%), and houses with more than two stories (12%) were found (Table 6). Representations of single-story houses predominated in rural areas (76%) compared to urban areas (50%). Conversely, houses with more than two stories were more frequently observed in urban areas (24%) than in rural areas (3%). Differences in house height were statistically significant ($\chi^2(2, N = 145) = 16.668$, $p < .01$).

Table 6. Height of the projected future dwelling by area.

Category	One story	Two stories	More than two stories	Overall Total
Rural	66	18	3	87
Urban	29	15	14	58
Total	95	33	17	145

Regarding the density of dwellings, the drawings predominantly depicted detached houses (71%), followed by scattered houses (17%) and dense clusters (12%), which allows for identifying the building density in relation to the space available

(Table 7). The differences in density by area were statistically significant ($\chi^2(2, N = 145) = 39.707$, $p < .01$), as detached houses predominated in rural areas (89%), while dense clusters were absent, in contrast to urban areas (45% detached, 31% dense).

Table 7. Housing density by projected area.

Projected area	Detached	Simple	Dense	Overall Total
Rural	77	10	0	87
Urban	26	14	18	58
Total	103	24	18	145

Concerning the proportion between the residence and the external environment, a higher proportion of houses featured more natural elements, such as trees, animals, hills, and rivers (66%), followed by houses dominated by human activity, with buildings and pavement (15%), detached houses (10%), and houses with a balance between nature and human activity (9%) (Table 8). The proportion of houses with more natural elements was statistically significantly higher ($\chi^2(3, N = 145) = 20.94$, $p < .001$) in rural areas (79%) than in urban areas (47%), while houses with more human activity were more frequent in urban areas (29%) than in rural areas (6%) (Figures 5 and 6).

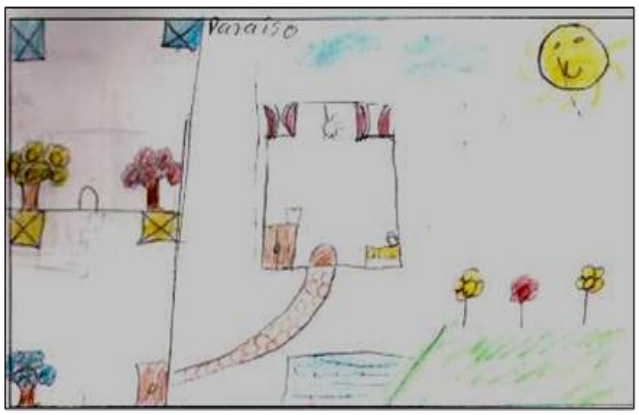

Figure 5. Representation of a dwelling in a rural area. Eight-year-old girl, 2nd grade.

Figure 6. Representation of a dwelling in an urban area. Eleven-year-old girl, 6th grade.

Table 8. Proportion between human activity and nature in the projected future dwelling by area.

Category	More nature	More human activity	Detached house	Balance between nature and human activity	Overall total
Rural	69	5	8	5	87
Urban	27	17	6	8	58
Total	96	22	14	13	145

In the external environment of the dwellings planned by the children, a similar percentage of images depicted objects in the sky (51%) and no objects in the sky (49%) (Table 9). In rural areas, these proportions were 54% and 46%, respectively, and in urban areas 45% versus 53%. These differences were not statistically significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 145) = 0.777$, n.s).

Table 9. Objects in the sky in the projected future dwelling by area.

Category	With objects in the sky	Without objects in the sky	Overall total
Rural	47	40	87
Urban	27	31	48
Total	74	71	145

Regarding representations of people in the context of the dwelling (Table 10), most drawings depicted houses without people (79%) compared to houses with people (21%). By area, houses without people were more frequent in urban areas (83%) than in rural areas (76%). These differences were not statistically significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 145) = 0.985$, n.s.).

Table 10. Presence of people in the projected future dwelling by area.

Category	House without people	House with people	Overall total
Rural	66	21	87
Urban	48	10	48
Total	114	31	145

Regarding the external environment as cozy or practical, differences were not statistically significant ($\chi^2(3, N = 145) = 5.41$, n.s.) (Table 11); however, the data are noteworthy, as the objects drawn around the desired residence indicate a nearly equal proportion of cozy (45%) and practical (40%) environments. A cozy environment was observed more in rural areas (51%) than in urban areas (36%), while a practical environment was more common in urban areas (50%) than in rural areas (33%).

Table 11. External environment of the projected future dwelling by area.

Projected area	Exterior: cozy	Exterior: practical	Detached house	Exterior: practical and cozy	Overall total
Rural	44	29	7	7	87
Urban	21	29	6	2	58
Total	65	58	13	9	145

Affective impression

Regarding emotionality (Table 12), a higher percentage of drawings expressed positive emotions (66%), followed by neutral emotions (30%) and, marginally, negative emotions (3%). Differences were not statistically significant ($\chi^2(2, N = 145) = 0.874$, n.s.), as the distribution was very similar across both areas.

Table 12. Emotionality of the projected future dwelling by area.

Category	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Overall total
Rural	58	27	2	87
Urban	38	17	3	48
Total	96	44	5	145

The results reveal both common and differentiated representations. In common representations, the distribution configuration is similar across both areas, whereas in differentiated representations, variations arise based on the projected area. This interplay provides insight into how children visualize dwellings, integrating their emotions, beliefs, and knowledge toward the future.

Two-thirds of participants demonstrated clarity about the location of their dwelling, which may guide personal behavior. One-third showed uncertainty, indicating that information organization and symbolic projection are stronger in the former group than in the latter (Piaget & Inhelder, 1984).

Children's drawings of their desired future dwellings express a predominant orientation toward urban environments, suggesting a sense of progress, improvement, and pursuit of well-being, influenced by family or neighborhood experiences as well as cultural media and regional migration patterns resulting from rural precarity.

Even within urban contexts, participants incorporated rural features such as trees, flowers, animals, and mountains, reflecting a strong attachment to the familiar, directly experienced world. This envisioned future preserves historical belonging to the place of origin while simultaneously projecting autonomy and life improvement.

Two complementary findings emerge regarding area-specific differences and similarities: distinctions are evident in the nature–human activity relationship, building height, and housing density, while shared characteristics include objects in the sky, presence of people and services, cozy versus practical environments both inside and outside the dwelling, and the affective impression produced.

Regarding the prevalence of natural elements in drawings, it is evident that children emphasize the relationship with nature, particularly in rural areas, though it is also reflected in urban dwellings where human activity dominates. In sum, the house–nature relationship is essential in shaping the projected future residence.

The predominance of single-story dwellings in rural areas versus multi-story constructions in urban areas reflects children's clear awareness of prevailing building types and space availability. Rural children

anticipate having sufficient space for expansion, whereas urban children perceive more spatial constraint.

In terms of housing density, rural dwellings were mostly depicted as individual, autonomous spaces extending beyond the building itself, while urban drawings reflected higher density, with nearly half sharing some of these features but one-third depicting densely packed constructions.

Many drawings included objects in the sky such as celestial bodies and living beings (e.g., clouds, sun, birds, butterflies), forming part of both present and future habitats regardless of area.

The fact that only one out of every five participants drew people within the residential context may be due to the drawings depicting a morning setting—a time when people are typically working, studying, or engaging in activities outside the immediate view.

Consistent with this, the drawings reveal houses with interiors not visible beyond the façade, where the building itself and its surroundings predominate rather than furniture or ornaments that might suggest comfort. The environment of the projected houses is instead adorned by the liveliness and strength of the surrounding natural landscape, reflecting part of the children's experiences and daily interactions with that environment.

In line with these observations, it was found that the external environment represented in the drawings shows certain appealing features that make it a welcoming and practical space for the children, although the interior appears to offer few comforts and, overall, the homes show a lack of basic services such as electricity, water, or furniture. In this sense, the external environment seems to offset this disparity, making the children's daily lives appear more pleasant and bearable.

Conclusion

Overall, the drawings revealed a predominance of positive emotionality. This allows us to infer that participants have a pleasant projection of their home and of themselves, as well as a sense of personal peace. At the same time, it reflects internalized values, aspirational motivation, an emerging life plan, and a pathway guiding possibilities and opportunities for growth.

Children not only show awareness of their immediate surroundings but also beyond their own territory, suggesting the potential to transcend it. The influence of socioeconomic and cultural contexts, as well as personal agency, is also evident in shaping their future vision.

The topic addressed here highlights the relevance of housing and the meanings children construct based on their references. The results underscore the need to engage with the projected aspirations of this population in order to provide and recreate supportive and welcoming spaces beyond the individual level, in both rural and urban areas. Consequently, it is essential to rethink and build the world that children inhabit and wish to inhabit from the perspective of social well-being and personal development.

Author contributions

Conceptualization: M.G. and M.R.; Project development: M.G.; Literature review (state of the art): M.G. and M.R.; Methodology: M.G.; Data collection: M.G.; Data analysis: M.G. and M.R.; Presentation of results: M.G. and M.R.; Discussion and conclusions: M.G. and M.R.; Writing – original draft: M.G. and M.R.; Final revisions: M.G. and M.R.; Approval for publication: M.G. and M.R.

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