Otherness and closeness: residential tourism and rural gentrification processes
Antonio di Campli
Politecnico di Torino, Turin, Italy

Abstract
Purpose – This essay looks at how various forms of residential tourism or lifestyle migration, produced by people arriving from the cities and territories of the so-called Global North, have triggered complex processes of social-spatial modification in the landscapes and rural environments of Vilcabamba, Ecuador, a small Andean village of approximately 5,000 inhabitants in the southern part of the canton of Loja. The paper aims to discuss this issue.
Design/methodology/approach – Residential tourism in rural areas is a phenomenon that can be investigated by combining socio-economic studies with spatial analyses to define the specific characteristics of territories and environments affected by this phenomenon. In the case of Vilcabamba, the relationships and conflicts between imaginations, spaces, ecologies and desires have taken the form of a complex “implicit project”, a “palimpsest-project” intended as a set of territorial descriptions, interpretations and transformation actions triggered by a plot featuring migrant tourists, activists, eco-institutions, schools, artisans, intellectuals and artists. Though weakly connected to one another, these subjects nonetheless produce substantially coherent actions.
Findings – Two main hypotheses are given as: the first is that in particular rural contexts, such as the Andean area around Vilcabamba, dwelling practices and economies related to residential tourism have triggered processes through which these areas have progressively become peripheries to distant metropolitan territories and are reconfigured as sets of specialised places. The second hypothesis is that Vilcabamba and its rural surroundings can be viewed as a particular “contact zone” in which different types of residential tourists and local dwellers interact, together with different economies of tourism. In this case the reference is, on the one hand, to the logics and discourses of the so-called extractive tourism, a concept that describes the processes of “extracting” and converting local cultural characteristics, and “indigenousness”. To support these hypotheses, the result is the construction of a spatial representation of the ways in which specific practices of residential tourism are territorialised, and how they modify the meaning and functioning of rural spaces.
Originality/value – What is new in the paper is the attempt to define a spatial representation of transnational spaces trying to highlight relationships between extractive tourism and remittance urbanism.
Keywords Cohabitation, Extractive tourism, Remittance urbanism, Rural studies, Transnational space
Paper type Research paper

1. Contact zones: lifestyle migrations
This essay looks at how various forms of residential tourism or lifestyle migration, produced by people arriving from the cities and territories of the so-called Global North, have triggered complex processes of social-spatial modification in the landscapes and rural environments of Vilcabamba, Ecuador, a small Andean village of approximately 5,000 inhabitants in the southern part of the canton of Loja[1].

The concept of “residential tourism” has been used since the late 1970s (Jurdao 1979) to analyse, more than anything else, the spatial characteristics of processes of urbanisation linked to the construction of holidays homes, especially in seaside settings. In recent years, however, this concept has been used to refer to a complex set of processes, voluntary migratory movements and reterritorialisation produced by a variety of subjects: expats, global nomads, counter-culture dropouts, qualified professionals, weekend tourists and retired people, as well as the kind of experiences imagined and sought: bohemian lifestyles, rural idyllic, exclusive or more simply those looking for a quiet “place in the sun”. The search for different transnational spaces and lifestyles adopting multiple tactics and forms of dwelling, pursued according to strategies that can be individualistic (Janoschka and
Haas, 2013), communitarian (di Campli, 2013) or a hybrid between the two, is what holds these different subjects together. In this process, two forms of mobility traditionally considered distinct – one linked to tourism and the other to migratory movements – are intertwined and the migrant is superimposed on the tourist.

In the Ecuadorian Andean territories, the phenomenon of residential tourism was first presented in the early 2000s, triggered in large part by the retirement of the so-called Baby Boom generation in the USA. In particular, the economic crisis that began in 2007 made it difficult for many North American retirees to maintain their previous standards of living and the need to define new strategies to maximise retirement incomes began to emerge (Bucks and Bricker, 2013). Economic insecurity has always been one of the main triggers of emigration towards destinations where better standards of life are pursued. In this sense, migration from North America to the Andes overlaps desires linked to exotic imaginations and the pursuit of greater purchasing power (Hayes, 2013).

The speed and strength with which these phenomena have manifest themselves in recent years in Ecuador does not correspond with an adequate number of studies that, in any case, have focussed primarily on the analysis of changes in land ownership or so-called processes of *descampesinización* or *desagrarización*. These two terms describe a decline in the reproduction of traditional rural spatial conditions and societies due to global economic processes, including residential tourism, taking place in these contexts.

Residential tourism in rural areas is a phenomenon that can be investigated by combining socio-economic studies with spatial analyses to define the specific characteristics of territories and environments affected by this phenomenon.

In the case of Vilcabamba, the relationships and conflicts between imaginations, spaces, ecologies and desires have taken the form of a complex “implicit project”, a “palimpsest-project” intended as a set of territorial descriptions, interpretations and transformation actions triggered by a plot featuring migrant tourists, activists, eco-institutions, schools, artisans, intellectuals and artists. Though weakly connected to one another, these subjects nonetheless produce substantially coherent actions.

These considerations are used to support two main hypotheses:

**H1.** The first is that in particular rural contexts, such as the Andean area around Vilcabamba, dwelling practices and economies related to residential tourism have triggered processes through which these areas have progressively become peripheries to distant metropolitan territories and are reconfigured as sets of specialised places.

These “nested spaces” are situations that, from time to time, manifest themselves as introverted spaces or protected interiors within “colloidal landscapes”, in which other urban elements and socio-environmental ecologies coexist. This condition seems to be result of the territorial application of strategies of “interior urbanism”. The relationships between these systems of interiors are regulated by specific spatial devices that, operating as thresholds between multiple environments, subjects and economies, allow them to function and coexist.

**H2.** The second hypothesis is that Vilcabamba and its rural surroundings can be viewed as a particular “contact zone” in which different types of residential tourists and local dwellers interact, together with different economies of tourism.

In this case the reference is, on the one hand, to the logics and discourses of so-called extractive tourism, a concept that describes the processes of “extracting” and converting local cultural characteristics, and “indigenousness” in particular, into an exchange value. On the other hand, it refers to forms of so-called remittance urbanism, a locution used to describe particular processes of spatial transformation triggered by “orbital” subjects and economies linking a country of origin with one of arrival, characterised by precise images and languages.
To support these hypotheses, the concepts of the “extractive zone” and of “remittance urbanism”, as defined, respectively, by Macarena Gómez-Barris and Sarah Lynn Lopez, are made operational in spatial forms of investigation[2]. The result is the construction of a spatial representation of the ways in which specific practices of residential tourism are territorialised, and how they modify the meaning and functioning of rural spaces.

2. Place
Vilcabamba is a small Andean village located between 1,400 and 1,760 m above sea level, of approximately 158.1 km², in the south-eastern part of the Loja Canton, in southern of Ecuador. This urban settlement consists of a system of closed blocks with a central square defined by the classic colonial grid. The historic centre resembles a 19-block chessboard. The entire town consists of 50 blocks measuring roughly 60 m per side, with a total area of 33.10 hectares.

The rural landscape, at the highest elevations, is characterised by typical Andean mountain features marked by a mix of eucalyptus woods, shrubs woods and natural and cultivated pastures. In the foothills, cultivated areas appear rather dense, with overlapping tree crops (fruit and banana orchards) and vegetable gardens in the same fields. Valley areas are dominated largely by sugar cane or banana orchards.

As argued by Pietri-Levy, the altitude of Vilcabamba and the geography of this portion of the Andes is characterised by a drier and warmer microclimate than other areas of the sierra (Pietri-Levy, 1993).

The village was described for the first time in a 1973 article in National Geographic magazine (Leaf, 1973) that attracted the first tourists in the early 1980s. They were largely hippies or exponents of so-called counter-culture, attracted by the energies of the towering “Mandango”, a geological formation characterised by an unusual shape that connotes the landscape of the area. Others were attracted by the supposedly healthy lifestyle that permitted inhabitants to live a very long life. More recently, the village has become a destination for wealthy Ecuadorian retirees from Quito or Guayaquil who build their second homes here, transforming the rural landscapes and village of Vilcabamba into an important tourist and leisure hotspot.

In 2010, Vilcabamba was home to 4,700 people. By 2017, this number had reached 5,200. However, this growth has been accompanied over the last seven years by a loss of about 500 inhabitants who emigrated mainly to the USA or Europe. Of the approximately 1,200 foreigners, 50 per cent hail from the USA, and the rest from Europe (Plate 1).

3. The subjects
About 60 per cent of foreigners residing in Vilcabamba are US or Canadian retirees. Of these, the majority is composed of inactive subjects, almost exclusively dedicated to restful or recreational activities. There is a smaller portion of retired people who dedicate themselves to such activities as organic farming or gardening. Finally, there also involved in the production of banana bread, jams, organic vegetables and fresh bread.

Retirees promote local economies related primarily to the construction sector or personal services, such as home maintenance, health care and restaurant activities.

The remaining 40 per cent are hippies, between the ages of 20 and 35. They are predominantly Chilean, Argentinian or Colombian and choose to settle in Vilcabamba for periods of time ranging from 3 months to 3/4 years, in some cases, forever. Many are artisans, manufacturers of necklaces, bracelets or other types of jewellery made with materials such as stones, seeds and animal bones.

Hippies tend to spend time in the centre of the village, organising a weekend crafts market that occupies part of the arcades near the central square and occasionally occupying part of the square in front of the main church.
In general terms, retirees and hippies are extroverted subjects, who can come into conflict with local inhabitants, characterised by a more introverted nature. In interviews with local administrators and economic operators, there are contrasting voices regarding the presence of retired foreigners. According to some, their presence is considered positive and relations with the locals are declared as almost always good. Some local inhabitants, on the contrary, highlight a few malo costumbres or “bad habits” that characterize these tourists. Some, fighting addictions to alcohol and drugs, are considered too extroverted, their public speaking too loud and deemed to be defying public decency with manners that disturb local inhabitants and especially children.

3.1 Expressive expatriates

The various types of residential tourists settled in Vilcabamba share some common features. All reject the lifestyles and productive styles of their countries of origin and try to circumvent, in particular, regimes of morality by participating in a cosmopolitan culture marked by an expressive individualism pursued mainly through neo-rural or meditative practices. Young migrants or long-term tourists often engage in small activities related to agriculture, permaculture, crafts or yoga. Many become farmers, others reinvent themselves as artisans, food producers or gardeners, New Age entrepreneurs, traders, musicians, masseurs, healers or drug users. Some, finally, are dedicated to the construction of Mongolian-style yurts, adobe or guadua cane buildings (a local variant of bamboo), or domes inspired by the geodesic architecture of Buckminster Fuller.

In Vilcabamba, the prevalence of activities related to agriculture or to spirituality represents an innovation if compared to traditional counter-cultural experiences where craft activities prevail. Through this set of activities, migrants try to offer an image of themselves that is far from that of the traditional tourist.
The integration of work, free time and spirituality is defined within an approach that realises visions, lifestyles and practices of non-western cultures, in particular that of the local Andean Indians or an idealised version of those from distant Asian contexts, for example India[3].

This search for counter-cultural lifestyles is dominated by intense work on oneself. In this sense, these subjects can be referred to as “expressive expatriates”, as subjects marked by precise desires of self-modelling and the search for an ethics of the self in opposition to dominant regimes of bio-power.

In the context of flexible capitalism, these expressive expatriates have learned to explore and colonise interstitial, residual or peripheral spaces by redefining themselves as self-employed, seasonal or part-time workers, hybridising new sources of income with those from their own countries such as pensions, unemployment benefits or inheritances. In Vilcabamba, the typical sites of these economies include weekend hippie craft and rural markets, bio-dynamic agriculture laboratories, meditative and New Age centres, a few restaurants, the sales of traditional fabrics or handicrafts and educational institutions such as the “La Calandria” primary school, attended by the children of both foreigners and Ecuadorians.

3.2 As idéias fora do lugar

The expressive expatriate is a subject seeking to evade dominant political and economic regimes through the adoption of strategies of spatial mobility and manifestations of social commitment and self-construction, placing him/herself in a condition of being permanently “on the road”. Most of the expressive expatriates who live in Vilcabamba and its rural surroundings, travel more or less intermittently, dwelling in one or two places at the same time. They define geographical triangulations through Vilcabamba and their countries of origin, both of which are considered a reference or “mooring point” where they can dock and disengage. In their search for new landscapes, environments and lifestyles, the world acquires a fragmented vision and mobility becomes not only a means for reproducing their lifestyle, but a true practice of counter-hegemony[4].

This research into the self that assembles geographic research, environmental explorations and mental introspection is the result of the intersection between two apparently opposite but simultaneous phenomena that had already manifest themselves in the western in the eighteenth century: the first is the definition of a structure of knowledge of the material world, of the “exterior”, through the concept of landscape, a concept in which space is read through its socio-cultural and environmental dimensions. The second phenomena correspond with a focus on the exploration and “definition” of the internal territories of the psyche. It is through this interweaving that “expressive expatriates” define their subjectivity.

Production and neo-rural dwelling practices, meditative activities, ecological and environmental protection. These are the main ideas imported from the “metropolis” that, once they spread to the “periphery” became what the literary critic Roberto Schwarz defined as idéias fora do lugar, “ideas out of place” (Schwarz, 1992). It is a cultural situation marked by implicitly neo-colonial characteristics that sees immigrants seeking to affirm the respect and importance of norms generated elsewhere that, at least in principle, local inhabitants cannot refuse. In this exchange, locals become second-class members of a club in which membership is not an option.

Stories and interviews with the different types of tourists residing in Vilcabamba reveal a definition of the expatriate as a subject who has almost completely abandoned the idea or desire for fixity, replacing it with an identity made of transitions, successive movements and changes, all more or less planned. This utopian image is particularly seductive for sedentary societies, as indicated by media, advertising and leisure spaces. As a result, two paradoxical consequences of these processes of movement-colonisation emerge.

In the migration towards Vilcabamba, subjects who chose to leave and impose a self-marginalisation from their countries of origin end up assuming a central role in the life of the
pueblo, giving a new image to a rural territory that is indirectly redefined as a destination for intense flows of “ordinary tourism”. The gradual commercialisation of alternative, counter-cultural spaces, practices and images questions their original sense and meaning. Despite fleeing the “mainstream”, expressive expatriates are in fact soon followed by ordinary tourists and local élites, triggering more traditional forms of tourism. In this way, the dialectic between liberation and opposition is permanently put back into action, periodically renewing itself through the search for different spaces, places and times, in a paradoxical consonance with the capitalist logic of consumption and reproduction. From a certain point of view, the more counter-cultures capture the feeling of alienation and anomie of modernity, the more indirectly they place themselves at the service of capital.

4. Processes

In recent years, the emergence of tourism economies has introduced a general fragmentation of rural properties and a decline in activities related to agriculture. Examples include the closure of panela factories linked to the production of sugar cane, or the abandonment of traditional crops such as coffee or vegetables, now relocated far from Vilcabamba, for example, in Quinara. In general terms, the arrival of tourists has changed labour conditions. Construction-related jobs have become one of the main sources of income for the majority of workers in the area. These are often precarious jobs related to the time required to construct individual buildings. At the same time, the emergence of new jobs supported by the tourism industry is generally related to the provision of low-cost services.

The growth of the construction sector is accompanied by the growth in value of rural land and the decline of traditional agricultural activities. Local farmers often maintain rural lots in a state of abandonment as the mere possession of land is considered more profitable than its use for productive purposes. Lots once considered marginal, for their position on hillsides and therefore difficult to work, have acquired a higher value than those located in flat and fertile areas. A panoramic view has become one of the leading qualities of a rural lot. In general terms, the exchange value of land now prevails over its use value[5].

The growth of rural land prices is not as uniform. Elements such as proximity to or distance from the urban centre, the presence of services like energy or water and accessibility play an important role in defining economic value. The nature of the rural land market has changed and owners prefer to sell their lots to foreigners rather than to locals, as the former tend to pay more money.

Farmers tend to invest the proceeds from the sale of rural plots in different ways. The first is in the purchase of apartments and building units in the centre of Loja to be rented as residences or commercial spaces.

The second is in the construction of second homes in Vilcabamba to be rented to foreigners. A third way involves to use funds obtained from the sale of rural soils to financially support family members who have emigrated to Europe or the USA in search of work. An interesting element in this sense is that money earned abroad is often reinvested in Vilcabamba in the construction of buildings to be rented to tourists or to host restaurants or commercial activities. It is this system of exchanges and relations between short-term speculation, emigration and rural decline that establishes links between residential tourism and the phenomenon of emigration.

4.1 Nested spaces

In Vilcabamba, the expat community, consisting of inactive retirees, hippies and active retirees, manifests very specific settlement choices, which are almost always linked to the definition of introverted and isolated dwelling spaces. This tends to trigger processes through which rural portions of Vilcabamba, as well as urban areas, are redefined as a
composition of particular landscapes of tourism and devices to foster interaction between residential tourists and local inhabitants.

These landscapes correspond to systems or archipelagos of “nested spaces”, hidden, introverted interiors, corresponding to landscapes that, respectively, can be referred to as “landscapes of remittances” and “counter-cultural landscapes”. These situations, expressions of an implicit project of “interior urbanism”, are immersed in viscous, “colloidal” landscapes in which a host of subjects, narrations, and ecologies coexist.

4.1.1 Landscapes of remittances. A remittance is an economic transaction that connects two people (sender and recipient) and two places (origin and destination of money). In the case of North American retirees, the sender is a public or private North American pension institution, in the case of Ecuadorian emigrants, the senders are sons and daughters, husbands, wives who have chosen to move abroad. The recipients are often elderly mothers and fathers, children or wives who have remained at home. In these exchanges, “home” becomes at the same time the main reference point for migrants and the priority destination for their investments.

In Vilcabamba, relationships and exchanges between inactive retirees and local society produce landscapes of remittances that manifest themselves according to two different logics and spatialities, which are functionally related to one another. The first corresponds to the places of elite tourism, to closed and protected residential settlements, located in rural areas, created to accommodate mostly inactive North American retirees and bought with the remittances of their pensions. They are low-density settlements, such as the Hacienda San Joaquin, a 270-acre foreign-owned gated community of 94 lots, ranging from 0.7 to 2 hectares, with gardens and private riding trails[6]. The houses, arranged for the most part along scenic rural routes, are characterised by a neo-rural or faux bucolic architectural language, accompanied by large natural areas, stables, swimming pools, orchards, gardens and cafes. Similarly, the Club Hacienda El Atillo is now a large gated community.

Inactive retirees tend to establish close relationships within their community and almost exclusively functional relationships with the outside world. The necessity to enclose oneself in such “coarse” housing arrangements, clearly identifiable and composed of more consistent architectural “objects” when compared to surrounding rural buildings, arises from the need expressed by retired foreigners to dwell among those with a similar cultural and linguistic background.

This real estate phenomenon is intertwined with the construction of enclosed developments for local tourists arriving mainly from the nearby city of Loja. These developments consist of sequences of smaller lots than those available to foreigners. Most of the time, local elites choose to invest outside Vilcabamba, especially around the nearby village of Malacatos, creating urban filaments that unite the two centres.

Malacatos can be seen as the double of Vilcabamba, a place subject to the same processes observed in Vilcabamba, though practically free of any foreigners. It is a transformation that does not produce images. Malacatos is basically a weekend residential neighbourhood located in tierra caliente. In this doubling, it is possible to grasp the persistence of modes of spatial production rooted in the colonial tradition. There is a tendency to conceive of dual urban spaces, places for settlers and places for natives, which has always characterised urban processes in Latin America (di Campli, 2016) (Figure 1 and Plate 2).

The second landscape of remittances is the result of building and spatial transformations triggered by economic flows maintained by villagers who emigrated abroad. These transformations, which take the form of the construction of second homes and restaurants, are evident both in the suburbs of Vilcabamba and in some of the urban filaments along the
main roads to the village. This second landscape of remittances is characterised by buildings, sometimes incomplete, which are simultaneously introverted and showy. The use of bright colours, decorative elements and architectural solutions in deliberate contrast with traditional languages, produces a fragmentation of spaces and images.

Around Vilcabamba, and more generally in southern Ecuador, the most common building material was raw or adobe earth, a mixture of earth, grass and sometimes horse manure. The vulnerability of adobe construction to the elements, in particular to water, wind and parasites, required constant maintenance that involved the entire community. In urban areas, the most popular building typology is the terraced house, built using adobe techniques, incremental processes and almost always provided with an external wooden porch. Until the 1990s, the limited disposable income of local inhabitants defined the scope and quality of constructions. Starting from the 2000s, small capital flows triggered initial small-scale housing refurbishments, such as the simple replacement of old window frames. Subsequently, more ambitious initiatives were started, such as the demolition of old houses and the construction of new buildings on land possessions. In both cases, migrants preferred to build rather than invest in existing building stock. Old materials – earth, brick and wood – were abandoned in
favour of more solid industrial materials. New and unusual decorative motifs were applied to creating eye-catching homes. The focus shifted from devices mediating between interior–exterior and from the configuration of traditional shared internal spaces to the definition of more individual spaces inside the home, reflecting the dissolution of the traditional cohabitation between several generations of the same family. New rules and social customs accompanied the construction of these buildings. By adopting new languages and spatial characteristics, migrants’ families tend to isolate themselves behind courtyards and fences, indirectly creating animosity in the community.

The main actors in “landscape of remittances” are foreign tourists and investors with high purchasing power and local migrants. Dominant processes include the ruptures, aestheticisation and rural gentrification produced by the creation of luxury second homes, upscale hotels and the dwellings of local migrants.

In Vilcabamba, retired immigrants or farmers who have emigrated abroad and finance real estate developments in their native territories represent their migration experiences using powerful symbols, undertaking precise projects and defining a field of bi-national cultural relations and cultural infrastructures that reformulate the social and spatial borders of places.

Images play a fundamental role in defining the space of remittances: they are the reasons why people leave and are what allows people to sustain a life marked by a psychological and geographical distance. In the case of rural migrants, aspirations are oriented towards their hometown, the place where economic and social progress can be made manifest. In the pueblo, migrants find a public, the community they support, and it is here that they are recognised as full members of society, regardless of their acquisition of a new citizenship in Europe or in the USA[7]. The result of these processes triggers a doubling of the self into parallel identities in two places and in two languages. A form of “thinking through mobility”
emerges and calls into question a permanent condition of dwelling that never needed to be named. The emigrant, “el viajero”, generates a double, “el quedado”, the one who remains. In the case of farmers who have emigrated abroad from Vilcabamba, remittance houses are emblematic of a new economic and social status. However, the high symbolic value associated with houses often corresponds to a low use value, since migrants living outside the country are unable to occupy them. Likewise, architectural languages adopted in their buildings allude to lifestyles that remain unattainable for many inhabitants of the pueblo. In this sense, the remittance house can be investigated both from an architectural and an allegorical point of view: it is simultaneously an architectural prototype and a crystallisation of the paradoxes and inequalities marking local societies since improvements to a house can be accompanied by its abandonment and investments in the community can generate new social and spatial divisions within it (Plate 3).

Remitting is at once an action and a postponement. It is a particular practice of economic exchange and spatial transformation necessarily associated with maintaining a distance. Depending on the situation of individual migrants, postponement may also involve the assumption of different attitudes towards the project they are carrying out in their native cities.

Plate 3. Migrants’ houses

Source: Antonio di Campli, 2018
For some migrants, distance and deferment lead to the idealisation of the family home, which becomes a symbol into which to pour an irrational quantity of investments compared to real needs. For others, a desire for “enviable distinction” prevails, through which to describe the condition of one’s own existence (Veblen, 1918). Projects created by an individual or a group through remittance tell a story about the relationship between two distinct though mutually constitutive worlds: one of accumulation and one of aspiration.

4.1.2 Extractive landscapes. The second type of nested spaces, can be defined as “counter-cultural landscapes” or “extractive landscapes”. These are two distant concepts that, in this case, can be superimposed to investigate the characteristics of a space marked by processes of spatial production, agricultural, artisanal or meditative practices that, in an extractive manner, trace local spirituality and ancestral cultures. At the same time, they are landscapes populated prevalently by subjects that express visions and values antagonistic to the dominant mainstream (Figure 2).

These places can be identified in rural contexts such as Mollepamba, Yamburara Alto, Yamburara Bajo and Rumihuilco, situated only a few kilometres from the centre of

Source: Maria de los Angeles Cuenca Rosillo, 2018

Figure 2. Extractive landscapes

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Vilcabamba. In these places, marked by the presence of tropical crops, pastures and woods and houses of local farmers, we can observe a process of fine-grained sprawling settlement, produced in large part by active retirees who choose to devote themselves to agricultural or meditative practices. These subjects choose to build new isolated homes in contexts that are at once idyllic and introverted, wooded, referring to the languages and characters of local rural architecture and adopting the constructive technologies of adobe or bahareque[8]. The homes of active retirees, preferably located in panoramic positions, are surrounded by small plots of land, ranging from 0.5 to 1 hectare, where they can practice farming, gardening or meditation. In some cases, large rural lots, preferably located in panoramic positions and crossed by canals or creeks for irrigation, are purchased, sometimes up to 10 hectares for a single family. These homes may be constructed in earth and wood, and in some cases they are even built as Mongolian yurts or domes. In some cases, productive agricultural areas are preserved and cultivated by previous owners.

This strategy of territorial sprawl is also adopted by hippies, albeit in a more precarious way, who rent wooden cabañas, huts on stilts, immersed in the woods, in accommodation facilities located a short distance from the centre or by planting tents along the banks of the Yambala river. The configuration of these small introverted enclaves, or opaque “possessed” landscapes[9], is an expression of a “search for the truth”, the realisation of the “real life”[10], through the implementation of meditative practices, craft or through organic agricultural activities (Plate 4).

Within these counter-cultural situations and landscapes, the eco-village of Chambalabamba represents a particular spatial device that condenses the three dwelling situations described above. Chambalabamba is an isolated eco-village located along the banks of the Yambala River, founded in 2012 by Mowfoofoo, an American citizen who first bought the land and then

Plate 4.
Extractive landscapes, isolated houses

Source: Antonio di Campli, 2018
invited other subjects, Ecuadorians and foreigners, to settle there. Starting in 2014, six families and three singles from Argentina, Germany, Colombia and Peru, progressively settled here[11]. Chambalabamba can be considered a particular contact zone between retirees, hippies and local inhabitants (Plates 5 and 6).

The main actors in these counter-cultural landscapes are active retirees, hippies or migrants with low purchasing power. The dominant process is that of rural gentrification produced through the celebration of the characteristics of traditional rural architecture and culture, the definition of public spaces and shared facilities or through the construction of shared residences configured as technological objects or nomadic architecture typical of Asian or North American territories. At the same time it is possible to witness the triggering of economies that evoke spirituality and local ancestral cultural characteristics through agricultural, craft or meditative practices.

In Vilcabamba, the ambiguous process of accumulation that occurs in the landscapes of remittances is accompanied by one of subtraction or extraction.

Counter-cultural building practices aimed at recreating traditional indigenous building languages and technologies, such as bahareque or adobe, tourism economies they recall, through the production of typical fabrics or objects reminiscent of local traditions, the sale of meditative experiences of shamanistic inspiration that evoke spirituality and local ancestral practices, such as that of San Pedrillo, correspond to different strategies for converting indigenousness into exchange value[12].

The use of local intellectual, material and spiritual resources aimed at producing new forms of colonial currency recalls the paradigms of the so-called notion of “playing Indian”, of an “indio game” in which the uses of Indian-ness are connected to processes of conquest and cultural appropriation[13]. The “indio game” is a symptom of an “extractivism”,

Source: Antonio di Campli, 2018

Plate 5.
Chambalabamba, Tepee

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as extractive capitalism is known in Latin America, intended as a model of territorial appropriation and an economic system marked by processes of appropriating material and immaterial resources. Such a process reorganises styles and forms of inhabiting the territories affected by these phenomena, and perpetuates dramatic social and economic inequalities limiting local sovereignty[14].

The material and emotional production of extractive capitalism observes the vernacular life by redefining it through levelling technologies. It is a form of “extractive tourism” associated with “extractive urban phenomena” that manifests itself through a series of rhetorical, economic and spatial contortions that originate with and indirectly alienate indigenous peoples from their territories or trigger conflicts between local populations and residential tourists.

4.2 Threshold space

As part of the migration process, the sense of belonging, integration with local society and the redefinition of one’s own identity become elements to be negotiated in the context of arrival. In this sense, mobility marks a transition from a more or less structured existence towards a more unstable lifestyle in which one seeks protection amidst familiar subjects. In this sense, the residential tourist is essentially an inhabitant of interiors. In this passage, migrants place themselves in a liminal condition, in a “threshold” between discontinuous worlds. “Threshold-subjects” tend to make themselves publicly visible in specific “threshold-spaces”, liminal places that simultaneously represent a condition of freedom, the manifestation of self-expression and order, in the sense that apparent freedom is just a different organisation of space-time.

4.2.1 Parque central. The main threshold-space in Vilcabamba is the central square or parque central. It is the staging area for the identities of migrant tourists, for the hippies and
their markets, for local tourists and for the natives. The square is a spatial device that permits interactions and negotiations between socio-spatial practices, the images and forms of dwelling adopted by residential and ordinary tourists and local society.

The central square is a quadrangular space of measuring roughly 70 m per side. The ground is sloping and the south side, the highest, is occupied by the main church. The other three sides are surrounded by arcades about 2.5 m in depth. In section, the floor of the arcades is not level, but presents important differences in height that are used by tourists or natives as seats. The centre of the square is occupied, according to colonial tradition, by a square garden of about 45 m per side, characterised by rather dense vegetation and centripetal paths. Bars and restaurants are located along the two sides of the square perpendicular to the church. They are frequented almost exclusively by American retirees and other foreigners. There is also a series of craft shops run by hippies settled more or less permanently in Vilcabamba. The north side of the square presents a few small craft stores and basic shops frequented largely by locals. The streets converging towards the square are lined by other shops and restaurants patronised by tourists and foreigners. The arcades along the continuation of the east side of the square host the weekend hippie market.

In terms of social exchanges, this space can be described, in plan, as a sequence of layers: foreigners tend to occupy almost exclusively the space of the arcades, the streets located between the arcades and the square are crossed by local commuter tourists, while locals prefer to use the central park.

This situation triggers a “game of looks”. Locals at the centre of the square observe the foreigners standing at its edges. They, in turn, observe the natives as subjects that are part of the landscape. Local tourists mainly cross the spaces of mediation between the arcades and the park.

This theatrical space of interaction is functionally connected to the system of nested landscapes of residential tourism, balancing their introversion and selectivity (Figure 3 and Plates 7 and 8).

4.2.2 Camino del Gringo. In Latin America, and especially in Peru, Camino del Gringo or Ruta del Gringo are locutions used to indicate tourist itineraries frequented mainly by independent travellers, almost always foreigners. This expression can be used to indicate a second threshold space, identifiable this time at the territorial scale, and corresponding to the approximately 39 km-long route connecting the city of Loja, the administrative capital of the canton, with Vilcabamba. This route, which takes roughly 45 min by car, crosses very different environments and drops down from a height of about 2,200–1,500 m above sea level. Along the way, it is possible to encounter consolidated urbanised filaments, pastures, tropical gardens, sugar cane cultivations, unstable soils, isolated villas, bananas and the huts of fruit vendors. In addition to these activities there are also filaments of informal restaurants specialised in typical food or drink, consisting of canopies with kitchens or private houses whose ground floor has been dedicated to restaurant activities. Constantly growing in number, these activities are almost always run by locals.

This route operates as a device that fosters economic and social interaction mainly between local tourists and local people, passing through and functionally connecting all the landscapes of residential tourism, just like the parque central.

As a place of both immigration and emigration, Vilcabamba presents itself as a territory defined by tortuous internal partitions that, only in a few limited cases become spongy and porous. It is a situation marked by the coexistence of tolerance and indifference.

In the traditions of urban planning, the discussion of “threshold-spaces” or “membranes” is connected to the design of the so-called “open city”, the dwelling space of an “open society”, in which various social groups develop flexible mechanisms to resolve issues related to their interaction using specific spatial devices. This set of issues was already addressed by authors such as Jane Jacobs, Albert Pope and, above all, by Richard Sennett.
In an important essay entitled “The Open City”, Sennett insisted on the importance of configuring membranes for spatial interaction in the borders between territories inhabited by different social classes or ethnic groups (Sennett, 2006). Within such discourses, Vilcabamba demonstrates how such thresholds or membranes of interaction do not necessarily have to coincide with the borders between territories inhabited by different social groups, but can also be located in distant third places.

### 5. Contact zone. Anti-conquest practices

“Landscapes of remittances”, “counter-cultural” or “extractive” landscapes and “threshold-spaces” are all outputs of the interaction between two urban and territorial phenomena, often analysed separately as remittance urbanism and extractive urbanism. The two terms at the centre of these forms of investigation and territorial planning, extraction and remittance, belong to a rather archaic productive language of colonial origin. A language that looks at the territory as a field to be exploited or, in opposing terms, as a space of symbolic accumulation.

Between extraction and accumulation, the processes of interaction and friction between the various landscapes of residential tourism define the characteristics of a particular
“contact zone” between subjects, economies, desires and images. The reference is to the studies of Mary Louise Pratt who uses this location to refer to the place where different cultures confront one another through relationships of coexistence and interaction, practices often placed within asymmetric power relations that recall forms of colonial power[15]. The term “contact” highlights the interactive dimensions of the encounter, the ways in which the life trajectories of subjects previously separated by geography and history intersect.
In this “contact area”, the meanings and symbols of local culture are appropriated through what Pratt defines “anti-conquest” practices, i.e. representation strategies employed by newcomers in an attempt to ensure their innocence at the very moment they affirm a cultural hegemony by spreading new discourses and lifestyles aimed at an alleged “search for the truth”. In Vilcabamba, the ideas and culture of new inhabitants pretend to have a greater specific weight. The newcomers, as intellectuals of the modern age, feel they have a mission, that of transforming local inhabitants into subjects able to care for the environment, ecology and their own local ancestral cultures.

This vision of “anti-conquest” is the same that characterised the natural scientists who visited the Americas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While not explicitly adhering to conquering designs, they manifested a western conscience with the planetary vocation whose European moralism attempted to conceal the intention to affirm its hegemony over the rest of the world. This predominance was to be achieved through a better knowledge of space and environments obtained through classification systems based on the direct observation of reality, applied indifferently to men, plants and animals. This is the case, for example, of the descriptions of Latin America and Ecuador, in particular by such geographers as Alexander von Humboldt, for example.

The protagonist of the anti-conquest is a figure that Pratt defines as the “seeing-man”, whose eyes observe, possess and plan all at once.

In a territory that has now become the object of desire for different subjects, foreigners, locals and nomads, the question that local inhabitants try to answer is: “how to make a place that became a destination for others a home for oneself?” In this sense, the contact area is configured as a productive space, not only a reflective one, where at the same time new possibilities of social exchanges, misunderstandings and equivocation are generated assuming an heterogeneity of meanings.

The lives of residential tourists are conducted in one or more diasporas. Their ways of life move in various directions, they come into contact, separate from, approach and distance themselves from the lives of inhabitants in territories of arrival, generating conflicts or initiating a mutual exchange of experiences and services. What place do you belong to when you live in a place like this? How are we to reflect on the relationship between public and private when for many of these subjects, private life is nothing but a public life in miniature?

Between “living at a distance” and “living with”, how are we to live with difference? This is the main problem to be addressed in any project for territories in which weakly connected actors realise projects and visions focussed on dwelling, on living intended as a definition of lifestyle. Proximity between strangers is not a transitory condition, but requires the acquisition and development of adequate design skills capable of reflecting on the coexistence between different lifestyles and different ways of inhabiting a specific place.

Notes

1. The paper is divided into four parts. The first presents Vilcabamba as a tourist destination by positioning it within disciplinary literature; the second describes the characteristics of new inhabitants; the third part describes their settlement strategies and analyses the processes of spatial modification produced by interactions between local society and residential tourists; the fourth and final part presents a critical analysis of these processes. Data are provided by spatial analysis, field research conducted from the end of 2014 to November 2017 and a series of qualitative interviews addressed to local administrators, local economic operators, tourists and local inhabitants. In addition to the work of the author, this research also benefits from the collaboration of Maria de los Angeles Cuenca, Patricio Cuadrado, researchers and professors at the Universidad Tecnica Particular de Loja, Facultad de Arquitectura y Artes and of Nubia Rámirez and Pablo Cuenca, employees of the Municipality of Loja.
2. Main references are: Gómez-Barris (2017) and Lynn Lopez (2015). Other references are: Correa (2017) and Barajas and García (2016).

3. Some of these migrants and their bohemian lifestyle recall similar phenomena that appeared in the past along the shores of the Mediterranean (di Campli, 2013; D’Andrea, 2007).

4. Such a scheme confirms the reflections of John Urry on mobility as a lifestyle and the importance of the “moorings” that permit such movements. (Urry, 2003, p. 126).

5. Over the course of 15 years, the average cost of one hectare of land in Vilcabamba rose from $1,000 per hectare to $6,700/ha. In some cases, up to $80,000 have been paid for one hectare and there are cases in which $35,000 are required for little over 700 m². Such amounts of money are unattainable for local farmers perceiving an average monthly salary of $467 (Reyes-Bueno and Tubio-Sánchez, 2018).

6. These settlements often occupy the land of previous large farms inherited from families who no longer live in the area.

7. David Harvey calls these places “spaces of hope” for the communities and families of emigrants (Harvey, 2000).

8. The term Bahareque, bajareque, bareque or fajina indicates a construction system based on the weaving of reeds and mud. This technique was already widespread in the area in pre-Columbian times.

9. The reference is to the expression of André Gide “All the things I want to possess, become opaque to me”, repurposed by Walter Benjamin in a text entitled “Experience and Poverty” (Benjamin, 2012).

10. Expressions by Roshni and Zia Parker.

11. Source: Sorange Aranda, Colombian woman, inhabitant of Chambalabamba.

12. The San Pedrillo is a hallucinogenic liquid produced by boiling the San Pedro, a columnar cactus transformed by local shamans who prepare and serve drugs to tourists and hippies. It is a pre-Columbian tradition that today is offered as a properly Indian experience and a meditative practice.


14. Extractivism works within what Anibal Quijano first coined as the colonial matrix of power (Quijano, 2007).

15. Using the locution “contact zone”, the reference is to the asymmetric interaction spaces that dominated colonial territories from the fifteenth century onward. Mary Louise Pratt (1992), in Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation, recalls the imperial periods of European and American expansionism in South America through scientific, military and tourist expeditions.

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Further reading

Corresponding author
Antonio di Campli can be contacted at: antoniodicampli@gmail.com

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