


# The stories of the grandmothers' houses: memories and materialities in the *Villas* and Catalogue Houses in Pelotas, RS, Brazil


*Histórias das casas das avós: lembranças e materialidades nas Villas e Casas de Catálogo em Pelotas, RS, Brazil*

*Historias de las casas de las abuelas: recuerdos y materialidades en las Villas y Casas de Catálogo en Pelotas, RS, Brasil*

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## Abstract

The *Villas* and Catalogue Houses in Pelotas, RS, Brazil, are a type of residential architecture from the early 20th century. The architectural remnants still found in the city are, by the majority, recognized by the local community as important assets of local identity. Even with such recognition, most of these buildings still do not have legal heritage protection against potential destruction or de-characterization. Their peculiar features and their imminent fragility, due to real estate speculation and possible transformations that would de-characterize these buildings, motivated this study and the registration of these assets. Interviews with semi-structured scripts, based on contact with residents, both in person and remotely, made it possible to understand what it was and still is like to inhabit these spaces, highlighting an indissociable aspect between materiality and people's bonds with these properties. Among interviewees, the stories of a special group were especially notable: the grandmothers. They often talk about their homes in connection with their life stories and family journeys. Thus, these women make an irrefutable connection between their memories, their feelings and the materiality of these houses.

**Key-words:** Architectural heritage; Intangible heritage; *Villas* and Catalogue Houses; Grandmothers; Family; Pelotas-RS.

## Resumo

As *Villas* e Casas de Catálogo, em Pelotas, RS, Brasil, tratam-se de um tipo arquitetônico residencial do início do século XX. Os remanescentes arquitetônicos ainda presentes na cidade são, em grande parte, reconhecidos por sua comunidade envolvente como bens importantes para identidade local. Mesmo com esse reconhecimento, a maior parte dessas edificações ainda não conta com instrumentos legais de proteção patrimonial, contra possíveis demolições ou descaracterizações. Suas características peculiares e sua iminente fragilidade, frente à especulação imobiliária e possíveis transformações que descaracterizariam os imóveis, motivaram o estudo e registro desses bens. A realização de entrevistas através de roteiros semiestruturados, a partir do contato com moradoras e moradores, presencialmente e em formato remoto, possibilitou entender como era e como ainda é habitar esses espaços, demonstrando a indissociabilidade entre a materialidade e os vínculos das pessoas com essas residências. Dentre as entrevistadas, os relatos de um grupo especial tomaram destaque, as avós. As falas dessas interlocutoras sobre suas residências fazem frequentemente relações com suas histórias de vida e trajetórias familiares. Dessa forma, possibilitam uma conexão irrefutável entre suas lembranças, sentimentos e a materialidade dessas residências.

**Palavras-chave:** Patrimônio arquitetônico; Patrimônio imaterial; *Villas* e Casas de Catálogo; Avós; Família; Pelotas-RS.

## Resumen

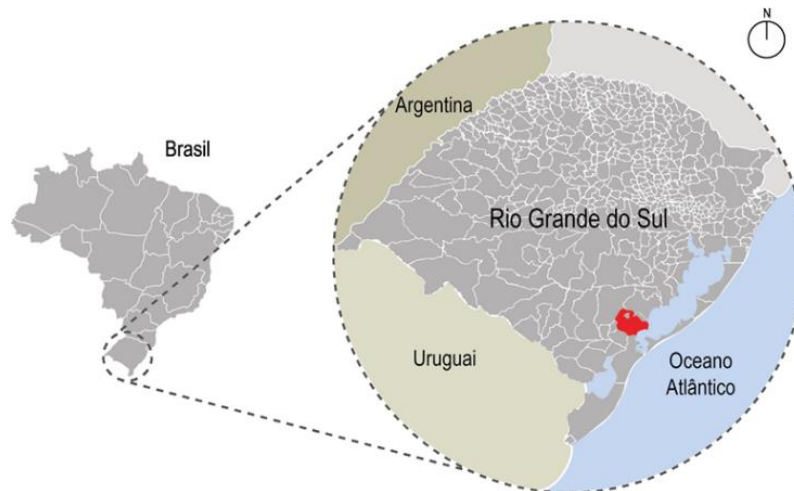
Las Villas y Casas de Catálogo, en Pelotas, RS, Brasil, se tratan de un tipo arquitectónico residencial de principios del siglo XX. Los restos arquitectónicos aún presentes en la ciudad son, en su mayoría, reconocidos por su comunidad circundante como bienes importantes para la identidad local. A pesar de este reconocimiento, la mayoría de esas edificaciones aún no cuentan con instrumentos legales de protección del patrimonio, contra posibles demoliciones o descaracterizaciones. Sus características propias y su inminente fragilidad, ante la especulación inmobiliaria y las posibles transformaciones que descaracterizarían los inmuebles, motivaron el estudio y registro de esos bienes. La realización de entrevistas a través de guiones semiestructurados, a partir del contacto con los residentes, en persona y en formato remoto, permitió comprender cómo era y cómo sigue siendo habitar esos espacios, demostrando la inseparabilidad entre la materialidad y los vínculos de las personas con esas viviendas. Entre las entrevistadas, los relatos de un grupo especial ganaron destaque, las abuelas. Las declaraciones de estas interlocutoras sobre sus casas con frecuencia se relacionan con sus historias de vida y sus trayectorias familiares. De esta manera, posibilitan una conexión irrefutable entre sus recuerdos, sentimientos y la materialidad de esas residencias.

**Palabras-clave:** Patrimonio arquitectónico; Patrimonio inmaterial; Villas y Casas de Catálogo; Abuelas; Familia; Pelotas-RS.

## 1 Introduction

Pelotas is a city located in the south of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, with approximately 343,000 inhabitants (IBGE, 2022). It is about 260 km from the state capital, Porto Alegre, and 144 km from the border with Uruguay (Figure 1). The city was established about 200 years ago, with its economy developed due to the production of *charque*, which is the name given to a kind of salted sun-dried meat that was the food consumed by the enslaved population until the late 19th century (Gutierrez, 1999).

**Figure 1:** Location map. In red, the city of Pelotas, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.



The accumulation of capital has boosted urban developed, especially throughout the second half of the 19th century, when buildings that are relevant to the history of the city were built (Gutierrez, 1999). Several of these buildings remnants of that period are now acknowledged by the Federal Government as Cultural Heritage and thus legally protected from possible demolition or mischaracterization.

The city nowadays counts with a vast and diverse architectural collection in its urban fabric, with legal recognition and protection local, state and federal levels. So, as one walks about the streets of Pelotas' historic center, it is possible to identify assets of several temporalities coexisting side by side and composing a urban palimpsesto<sup>1</sup> (Pereira Costa; Gimmler Netto, 2015).

In this diversity, we highlight the architectural type that is locally known as “Villas” and “Catalogue Houses”. Those are contemporary houses that date from the early 20th century and stand out in the landscape for they are implemented in the middle of gardens, using setbacks from the limits of the lots. Despite its relevance, this architectural type does not have any protection tool of its own and only a few specific buildings in the city are acknowledged and protected by governmental institutions.

This particularity indicates the importance of expanding studies on these assets, which have already been addressed by Schettino (2012) and Homem (1996) in other contexts, and by Schlee (1993) in a brief local study. The research on this architectural type in the city, searching not only to understand its physical features, but also its relevance and

<sup>1</sup> Palimpsest is the name given to papyrus or parchment whose initial text has been scraped away to allow another piece of text to be written. Despite this procedure, the material sometimes still contains traces of the previous writing.

relations with the inhabitants, has motivated the contact with these people, like in the study by Pereira (2021), which covered a multidisciplinary analysis of the material and immaterial aspects of these assets.. From the interviews carried out herein, a specific group stood out: the grandmothers. In addition to their memories about moments in the past of the city, the grandmothers describe the importance of these houses for their families, and the strong affective bonds to such assets.

In this perspective, the article herein proposes a brief characterization of the *Villas* and *Catalogue Houses* in Pelotas, RS, showing, through the narratives of the residents of these houses, their relationships of affection with these things – according to studies by Ingold (2012). Also, their constant effort to maintain these buildings, in what concerns both maintenance and resistance to proposal from the real estate market, that looks at these house units and sees opportunities to build multi-family buildings with many floors.

### 1.1 Protection Measures for Cultural Heritage Assets in Pelotas

Pelotas has had properties protected at federal, state and municipal level since the mid-1950s (Oliveira; Silveira 2014). In 2018, the city's most recent heritage listing was carried out, which included the protection of a group of assets in the urban area, along with four squares, a park and a *charqueada* (Iphan, 2018). The decision that indicated this recognition highlights there is very advanced municipal legislation for the protection of the local heritage.

In addition to listed heritage assets, the city has a significant collection of inventoried properties, whose georeferenced location in the urban area of the city can be seen on the city hall's website (Pelotas, [2022]). Motta and Rezende (2016) highlight that inventories are at the origin of the establishment of the field of cultural heritage preservation, and represent tools of registering, identifying, valuing, and protecting the assets. Since they are widely used, their concepts are dynamic, and they can adopt different strategies to assign value to the inventoried assets, depending on the site, historical period, and nature of what is being studied.

According to Pelotas City Hall (2008, 14):

The Historic and Cultural Heritage Inventory is a record keeping tool that contains information about cultural assets. It is an acknowledgment of the city's architecture and urban space and is meant to preserve the ensemble of the buildings in their urban context. [our translation]

In the city, such tool is ruled by Law 4568, enacted in the year 2000, to protect public façades and volume of the inventoried buildings against mischaracterizations or demolitions (Pelotas, 2000).

Despite the diversity of constructions in Pelotas, a certain preference is observed regarding buildings of the eclectic language. Eclecticism was at its most during the second half of the 19th century, when the city had great economic – and thus urban and architectural – development, due to the heyday of the economic cycle of *charque* (Gutierrez, 1999). Buildings from that period are mostly recognized by tools of heritage listing and inventory, and often publicized in the city's campaigns for tourism. This collection of eclectic architecture, composed of assets that are recognized at local, state and federal levels, translate to physical aspects the desires, in the past century, to bring Europeans habits and ambiances to Pelotas (Magalhães, 1993).

An example of cultural assets listed as heritage at national level in Pelotas is the set of houses located around Coronel Pedro Osorio Square, 2, 6 and 8. The architectural ensemble is composed of the former houses of *charque* traders and politicians, members of the city's traditional families. These houses represent the city's architectural production during the second half of the 19th century, with an advanced sophistication of materials and construction techniques. Figure 2 shows these buildings.

**Figure 2:** Architectural ensemble composed of houses 2, 6, and 8 around Coronel Pedro Osorio Square in Pelotas, RS, Brazil.



The city's urban morphology features in this period, as well as the construction techniques and the European influences, echoed in the architectural production. Lots were rectangular, with narrow fronts and great depth. The constructions occupied a great part of the front limits of the lots, so that the line between public (the street) and private (the house) was drawn by the *façades*.

In the late 19th century, Brazilian cities went through several events that caused great physical and social transformations. The abolition of slavery in 1888 and the proclamation of the Republic in 1889 brought relevant political, social, and economic changes. In addition to that, during the following decades, cities were plagued by epidemic diseases, like smallpox, bubonic plague, typhoid, and the tuberculosis endemic (Gill, 2005).

The sanitary crisis, along with scientific and technological advancements, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, brought many changes in infrastructure to Pelotas and several Brazilian cities. The arrival of waterpipes at the urban area in 1875, of the telephone in 1888, of cars in 1905, of sewage networks in 1914, of electric lighting in 1915, among others, were innovations with consequent reformulation of public and private areas of the city (Santos, 2014).

## 2 The *Villas* and Catalogue Houses in Pelotas

In the first decades of the 20th century a new housing proposal started to spread, mostly close to the limits of the urban area of the city (Schlee, 1993). These houses incorporated, from their conception new infrastructures, in comparison to the existing ones, for they were implemented amidst gardens, as can be seen in the example represented in Figure 3.

This characteristic showed, through materiality, that these constructions sought to represent what was modern and healthy at the time (Pereira, 2021).

**Figure 3:** Studied house.

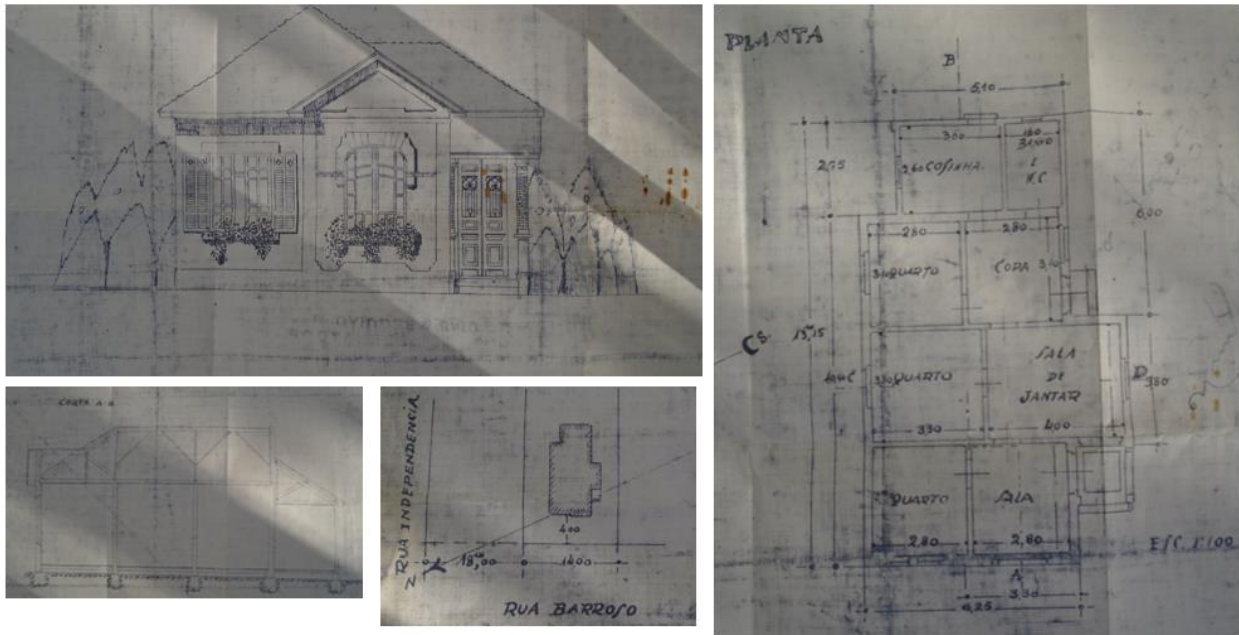


As remnants of the eclectic architecture, the *Villas*, were disseminated among wealthier classes in Pelotas' society. According to Schlee (1993), this type was one of the ones chosen by the city's industrialists in the early 20th century. Still during this period, it is possible to notice the diffusion and popularization of this type, resulting in the so-called "Catalogue Houses". For Pereira Costa & Gimmler Netto (2015), based on the analysis of the Italian School of Urban Morphological Thought, such simplification is considered as a diversification of the typology process.

Both the terms "*Villas*" and "Catalogue Houses" represent the same architectural type, also known in other regions of the country as "bungalows". From literature reviews, consultation of physical and digital collections, and search for remnants in the city, it was possible to understand several characteristics of this architectural type, which were specialized in Pereira (2021) work. Figure 4 presents one of the documents found at this stage of the study. The peculiarities of this type, such as its recurrence in the urban fabric, implementation in the lot, organizational features, among other specificities, were some of the topics addressed in previous stages of the research (Silva et al. 2020; Pereira, 2021).

Despite the lack of specific protection tools for most of this architectural type in Pelotas, these units are part of the urban fabric and recognized by surrounding communities as important assets. This feeling can be mostly observed in social media, with expressions of sadness when there are posts about such buildings being ruined or demolished.

**Figure 4:** A graphic illustration of the architectural design studied, in order to characterize the architectural type, so as to value.



Source: Pelotas City Hall, Department of City Management and Urban Mobility, 1927.

Even though the comprehension about physical features of the *Villas* and Catalogue Houses in Pelotas had relevant advancements, there is a need to deepen the views about this theme, to go beyond physical features, searching to understand not only materiality, but also the symbolic relationships with these objects of study. To meet this demand, interviews with residents were carried out, aiming to understand how it was (and still is) to live in these houses. In their narratives, one can note the strength of the bonds that connect these families to these objects.

This activity brought an interdisciplinary view to the research, for more than observing objects in their constituted materiality, we sought an approximation with the field of anthropology, through the contact with people. Such view is in line with contemporary perspectives of heritage, that theorize the field as a cultural process of meaning and memory (Smith, 2006).

People with diverse profiles were heard, different ages, genders, and multiple perspectives. Amongst a plurality of stories and narratives, those that came from a specific profile stood out. This work focuses on the grandmothers, their narratives, life experiences, and impressions about the houses where they live.

### 3 Methodological paths

Preliminary stages of the research counted with the study about the architectural type, including stages of bibliographic review, historiographic research, and record keeping of the remnants in the city. A more detailed view of the study can be found in Pereira (2021). The stage of interview the residents of these houses, which is the main methodology described here, was carried out between May 2020 and April 2021, when Brazil was still facing a spread of Covid-19. The contact with the interviewees happened from indications of people in the city.

The research consisted in contacting people who live in or have lived in these properties. Before meeting the interviewees, semi-structured scripts were drawn up with a few questions about the topics of interest to this research. The purpose was to spark the conversation, getting the interviewees comfortable enough to talk in depth about the subjects they felt most at ease with. After the interviews, the topics that emerged spontaneously in the stories were incorporated into the subsequent interviews. All the meetings were recorded, with the consent of the participants, and later fully or partially transcribed

Ten interviews were carried out, with twelve people (as two were given by two people at the same time). Amongst the interviewees, only two did not live in one of the houses studied at the moment of the interview but used to in the past. Nine were women, of which four were grandmothers.

Given the character of the research, that aimed to understand the bonds between the interviewees and their houses, at first, interviews would be done in person. For it was believed that due to the age of the interviewees, a personal contact would be more engaging and make them more comfortable. However, due to the indications of physical and social distancing brought by the pandemic, most meetings were remote.

Some of the interviewees showed little familiarity with technological means, some reported that it was the first time they were making this kind of calls. In these cases, they had support, from family members, to use applications for video calls; sometimes, the interviewees' children or grandchildren helped them use the technology.

The researchers were concerned that using technologies would intimidate them or that internet access would be less usual, due to the age of those who were interviewed. Despite that, virtual conversations went on well, with some of them during almost three hours. Thus, using technologies was not an obstacle for this stage of the research.

At first, the interest of the interviews was to understand how interviewees inhabited the space of the house. In this sense, the questions of the semi-structure script usually began with questions like: "When did you move here?", "How was life in this house", or "Which rooms were the most used by the family?" The interviewees promptly started to speak, and in a way that was obvious but unexpected for the researchers, they would answer questions through narratives and stories about their lives in those places.

After collecting data, a reflection about the material collected was done, based on authors like Lins de Barros (1987), Velho (1981) and Bosi (1979). That aided to understand the symbolic relationship with material objects, in this case, the narratives and affective bonds of families and their houses..

#### **4 Results: stories of the grandmothers' houses**

The materials collected have shown to have a distinct density in their contents. Each interview was unique, for as they spoke about their houses, interviewees would always comment on their lives in those places. Results would vary, especially according to how long they lived in those houses, the time of the interview, and the excitement of the interviewees with the situation. Ecléa Bosi (1979, p. 01) described that what is most valuable is not related to the veracity of the stories being told, nor the exact chronology,

since “our interest is in what was remembered, in they chose to perpetuate in the story of their lives.” [our translation]

To make an approximation with this story, a brief report on each of those interviewees. Among the grandmothers, we can identify two groups with their own characteristics: the interviewees M.Z. and L.M. are ladies with about 90 years of age, who live in their houses for more than sixty years. That provided narratives with a greater number of family stories, and older memories of domestic life.

At the moment of the interview, M.Z. told she was 95 years old. Widow since 1969 and she did not get remarried. She had eight children and two of them are already dead. Her family is big, with many grandchildren and great grandchildren who visit her often. She now lives by herself at the same house where she used to live with her husband and children in the 1960s.

L.M. is also a widow, at 87 years old. She lives in the same house since the age of 7, when she moved there with her parents and siblings. The house was modified along the decades. Nowadays she lives alone and says she “will only leave inside a coffin”.

The second group brings interviewees I. and L.E., who are younger, with ages around 70, with shorter experiences in these houses. This shorter relationship with the objects does not make them any less special for those interviewees, nor makes their narratives any less qualified or relevant.

Conversation with I. happened together with her husband, E. After a long time living in rented apartments, due to E.'s job, that made them frequently move to different cities, with retirement, they acquired their house in 1995. Both of them describe the purchase of the house as part of a dream, to come back to Pelotas and finally live in a “house”. Their stories about the house include longing for their grandchildren, who were distanced due to the moment of social isolation.

L.E., who was interviewed together with her daughter C.E., tells her house has been in the family for at least four generations and is very important for them. The first to live in the house were L.E.'s parents and nowadays C.E. lives there with her husband and children. The stories of this grandmother date back to her youth in this house.

We will also include some talks with A.M. and C.E., who recall memories of their grandparents in the conversations. Both still live in houses where their family has lived for three generations. Their stories are not only about themselves, but also about their ancestors.

The houses of the interviewees were mostly built about a century ago. In this way, certain, themes like maintenance and family life are recurrent. Conversations also bring up correlated topics, like old memories of places in the city, or old behaviors and habits. These stories tangle life, the house, the city, and their experiences. About that, Bosi (2003, p. 204) states:

As we listen to many testimonials, we notice that neighborhoods have not only physical features, but also a biography. [...] In life stories, we can follow the transformations of urban space; [...] Physical features mature edges round off, straight lines soften, and the neighborhood follows the breath and the life of its

residents. Their stories mix and we start to see, in the streets, what we would never see, but have been told. [our translation]

This perception of a version of the city which is no longer possible to experience comes up in the interview with L.M., as she spoke about the eighty years she has been living in the house, also telling about the transformations the city has been through:

Here in the end of this block, this was a dead-end street, because Santa Barbara [stream] passed, and there was a very narrow wooden bridge we would use to go to the other side. No cars were allowed, there was Santa Barbara to cross.

L. M. recalls in this passage, as she talked about her childhood memories, the presence of an element of the city of Pelotas that no longer exists, and which has left no trace in the urban area: the presence of the Santa Bárbara stream. This watercourse was rerouted away from the urban area at the end of the 1960s. Figure 5 shows the former bed of the stream.

**Figure 5:** Scheme of the former and sinuous bed of the Santa Barbara stream (in light blue), and the course of the same stream nowadays (in dark blue).



Source: Design traced by the authors (2024), from a Google Earth satellite image, with no defined scale.

The narrative of this grandmother shows a perception of the city that cannot be lived anymore, nor lives in the minds of younger inhabitants, which highlights the importance and unique value of stories like the ones by the interviewees.

It is important to emphasize that the interviewees did not only talk about the material circumstances of the city, but also about former behavioral patterns. Interviewee I's words about dating show that:

My mother was like, if you sit on the same chair he sat, you will get pregnant. There is a cousin of yours, they would tell me the name of the cousin, she died

herself on the towel her boyfriend dried himself with and got pregnant. They would scare me like that, I wouldn't even touch him, I was afraid of kissing. Well, it took seven months to hold hands.

Their memories refer to the expected behavior standards for middle-class and bourgeoisie women in the second half of the 20th century. At that time, the ideal woman would value innocence and chastity, before marriage, and praise the "wife-mother-housewife" triad, in the marriage (Maluf; Mott, 1998). The grandmothers interviewed herein recognize the cultural behavior changes, and it helps us reflect on social and gender transformations.

For Lins de Barros (1987), grandmothers have a special role in what concerns permanence and change. Their memories and references of past generations, as counterposed to their expectations and projects for future generations, locate them as intermediary characters in this family scenario.

For Bosi (2003, p. 199), the act of remembering, when done by the elderly, aids not only to constitute their individual history, but also to compose a global reality we cannot access. About that, the author states:

The memory of the elderly unfolds and enlarges the horizons of culture in a way that it makes the researcher and the society in which they are inserted grow together. [...] A life story is not made to be filed or kept in a drawer like a thing, it exists to transform the city where it flourished.

In addition to the aspects and special characteristics of the field of memory, we can highlight the peculiar and important role these people play in their families. For the author, grandmothers represent someone who mix characteristics of authority and affection, and also influence the organization of the family routines of their children, often representing a reference in the upbringing of their grandchildren.

Going through several moments of the development cycle of the domestic group, age, and experience, are concrete data that are useful, in the present, to elaborate speeches about their position the family, as well as about change and permanence of certain family values (Lins de Barros, 1987, p. 11) [our translation].

Beyond the themes such as the physical and social transformations of the city, the stories of the grandmothers are filled with descriptions of their family life and relationships. In this sense, the women interviewed here, even when they do not have a daily life with their descendants together, they refer to a house full of children and grandchildren, which usually happens in weekends, holidays, and celebrations.

The first to be interviewed was M.Z., in a sunny day, in the garden of her house. From the beginning of the conversation, she said "Call me Gramma M., this is how everyone calls me." M. Z. is the matriarch of a family with eight children and many grandchildren and great grandchildren. She lives in the same house where she raised her children, since the 1960s, and told many stories about her time there, like about lunches on the weekends:

Everyone comes here. Usually, on Saturday, I make lunch, so everyone comes, either barbecue or lunch, those who can, come, those who can't, don't come. Everyone is at ease. Or they call me saying "gramma, we're all going there". So I

rush to prepare something and everything is alright. This is how the house is.  
[sic]

The relationships of the grandmothers, their houses, and their respective family realities, observed in this research, are also commented by Lins de Barros (1987), who highlights that despite social transformations, for the grandmothers, the house remains as an expression of feminine.

L.M.'s profile is similar to Gramma M., both are widows and live by themselves. L.M. tells her stories in the house she has been for eight decades very proudly, however, she reacts differently when it comes to the topic of family visits.

Yeah, I don't even know if they were visiting me or making time to go somewhere else. I didn't know if it was grandchildren visiting grandma, or making time. [laughter] Because everyone lives far from the city center, you know, and here is close to the city center.

The role of grandmothers in the family varies according to the interviewee. This characteristic had already been identified by Lins de Barros (1987). In this respect, the author discusses the presence of greater or lesser interaction of grandmothers in the family structure. This particularity, characteristic of each family structure, can be understood by the speeches quoted. In general, grandmothers' position within the family guarantees them a certain role as a figure of reference. Later on, we will see how this perception associated with these figures is also embodied in the materiality of their homes.

Another recurrent theme in the interviews was their expectations about death and the concern about the continuity of their houses. Both L.M. and Gramma M. refer to those topics, talking about their worries with the houses, about when they will no longer be in the hands of their descendants. In this sense, L.M. tells us:

But I believe that the day someone buys this, they will buy for the lot and demolish the house. And will make a building. For sure [...] Who will want to buy this? I wouldn't. [...] I only intend to leave here inside a coffin.

This perception L.M. has about the possible future of her property is a true concern. Since they are large lots, mostly located in central areas of the city, many of them are targets of real estate speculation, aiming at multi-family buildings.

Still of maintenance and the concerns about the future of the residence, Gramma M. talks about the ongoing works of renovating external windows. She says: "They looked bad, breaking here and there. I mean, I can suddenly die, and then those who inherit it will say 'how sloppy grandma left this?', so I made it for everything to be fixed."

The need for constant maintenance is related by several interviewees. That is, for example, the case with electric and hydraulic installations. About this need, L.M. explains:

Pipes break and I say, well, great, a pipe broke. The plumber already knows it. Let's see how many meters of pipe I have to buy. The pipes are all lead, the waterpipes down here are all lead. So when they break, they must be changed. If we would take care of them all, we would have to break the entire floor. I say no, I'm too old for that. So when they break, one goes to that place, takes the pipe from there, installs a plastic one, and that's it, done.

Even though the *Villas* in Pelotas are acknowledged as cultural assets by the communities, it must be highlighted that some owners have difficulties to keep these houses by catering for the need of constant maintenance.

Pelotas' City Hall, through law n. 6178/2014, gives an exemption from Land and Urban Property Tax (IPTU) for buildings in the heritage list or inventory, as long as they are well conserved and/or renewed (Pelotas, 2014). Such measure stimulates preservation and conservation of the buildings that make up the historical center, but obviously does not meet the needs of each and every situation.

The interaction between the house and its residents is mentioned by all the interviewees, in different manners. For Ingold (2012), the house can be understood as a “thing”, that means, an entity that acts in the environment. The houses studied herein are home for and participate in the lives of their residents. They are likely to require maintenance and can be altered to receive new residents. For the author, the house is not only a shelter for human lives, but also for plants in the garden, for animals (pets or not) that come, and the fungi that permeate foundations, in a way that “the real house is a reunion of lives, and to inhabit them is to join this reunion” (Ingold, 2012, p.30) [our translation].

The theme of modification and alteration has been addressed by some of the interviewees, who have different views on the subject. L.E., for example, was emotional when telling us about the impressions of her family on the topic of modifying and modernizing the house:

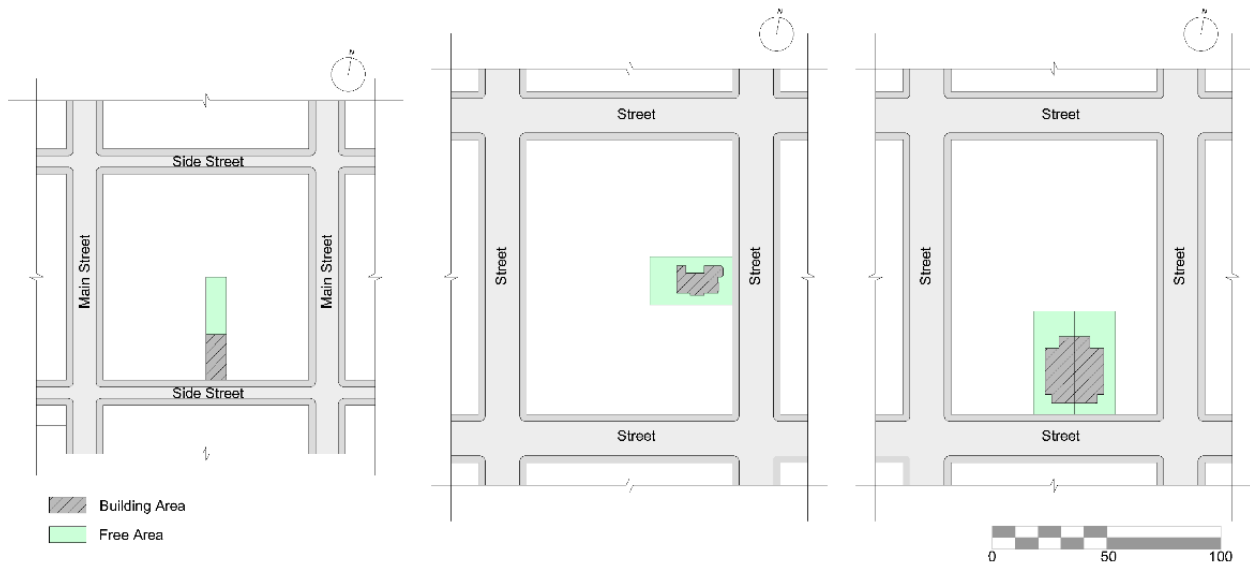
Just today, I was walking about with her and I said, C.E., the size of that house, and with the kind of architecture that is coming, there are so many renovations you can do in the house. She said mom, that house is an old lady and I don't want to mischaracterize it.

For another interviewee, some modernizations were necessary throughout time. That is the case of M.Z.'s house. During our interview, she showed the last thing she had done in her garden, the construction of a grill for barbecue, in order to host her relatives more comfortably in the family Sunday lunches.

This different views about the assets studied bring up the characteristics of heterogeneity when it comes to conceptions about heritage, amongst house owners. From this perspective, the characteristic becomes evident the relational and dynamic feature of the assets with the communities that surround them becomes evident (Smith, 2006).

The use of backyards and gardens in these houses is due to the organization of the architectural type, with them inserted in the middle of gardens (Pereira, 2021). Such characteristics differs the houses studied from other productions in architecture that existed before the *Villas* period. The architecture of the urban fabric has a different formation, usually is located in smaller lots that do not allow or reduce the use of lateral and front setbacks. In these cases, they usually have as open area only the backyard at the back of the lot. Figure 6 searches to demonstrate, through a graphic scheme, an example of implementation of a *Villa* and an example of a previous production in architecture in Pelotas.

**Figure 6:** Scheme of the organization of the lots and implementation of the buildings.



The importance of the space of backyards and gardens for the interviewees appears in the conversation with C.E., who tells about her concern with the construction of a building in the neighborhood:

They had to plaster a wall from my backyard, and I have a grapevine, until today, that was planted by my grandfather, and I agreed to make it smaller, but that grapevine was priceless, so they would have to do this plastering the most careful in the world regarding the grapevine, and so they did.

Interviewees I. tells us about the modifications in her house, to welcome children and grandchildren. She had the eating area made larger and installed a swimming pool for the grandchildren. Lins de Barros (1987) addresses how the grandmothers' houses can be altered in order to receive the visits of children and grandchildren. In such sense, some rooms can have their function changed, to install these people, or spaces can be enlarged, to accommodate everyone comfortably. Spaces can also go through modification, depending on the age of the grandchildren, when diapers, baby bottles and toys becoming part of the composition of the residences. "With the grandchildren, usually the grandmothers' houses turn into 'branches of the grandchildren's houses.'" (Lins de Barros 1987, p. 125)

Their stories also address daily life, and from that we can interpret how families use these spaces. However, their narratives were not only made of stories and descriptions, but also of the feelings these spaces caused them. To exemplify that, M.Z. tells the story of a Christmas Eve at her house: "[...] So each year there was a Santa Claus, but L.Z. was the most amazing Santa Claus [interference – noise] the belly fell! She was speaking and suddenly the belly fell! Bang! It fell. [laughter] It was all a joke."

The houses also have stories of pain and sadness, like in the narrative of A.M., who is not a grandmother, but lives in the residence where her grandparents and parents lived in the past. She tells us about her grandmother's farewell to the house, after her husband died:

So, grandma never wanted to come back to this house, because she said memories here were too heavy for her memory, for it was their house. Everything

she had to remember of their life together was here, the children, the pregnancies, everything was inside this house.

Whereas some women wanted to be far from the houses in moments of grief, other recall them as a place of refuge to go through this process. In such sense, M.Z. tells us:

My daughter died in a car accident, it was in September, so I was sitting in this little room with the girls who lived there, from the T. family, and I said "I have to hold Christmas parties at home, with the grandchildren and all that, but it is hurting me so much that I don't know what to do, if I could just hide" [...]

Situations like that, when a beloved person dies, or a new family member is born, are remarkable moments for the interviewees, in which there are intense changes in the family circle. For Velho (1981), changes in life stories come in moments when an individual faces great transformation, like the loss of a loved one, the arrival of a new one, the end of a marriage. The narratives of the interviewees are intersected by their life stories and family cycles.

In a general way, from the interviews carried out, we observe that the grandmothers play an important role in the family constitution, their experience and affection with the other family members places them in a position of respect amongst them (Barros, 1987). In this sense, their houses also represent important place for these family members. The different ways of inhabiting houses described in our meetings with the interviewees demonstrate the relationships people establish with such objects. Stories take place and memories materialize in these spaces, either of affection or sadness. This look at symbolic matters of inhabiting show us how much these material objects, the things, are permeated with affective bonds, and present the importance of such matters to think about the *villas* as cultural assets in Pelotas.

## 5 Conclusion

Results obtained from the application of the methodology of the interviews were significantly helpful for a more sensitive comprehension about life in the houses studied. This practice allowed to interpret how people inhabit the residential space and especially the motivation for changes in the architecture, which, in the case of the grandmothers, is mostly welcoming and accommodating their family members. So, this thing that houses are, just like their owners, opens its doors/arms and modifies, to receive and shelter everyone. In this respect, the main changes noted in the cases studied are enlargements, with no changes to the original structure of the buildings. These extensions generally cater for the needs of the growing family members.

Despite some heterogeneity of profiles amongst the interviewees, their narratives usually make relations between materiality of the houses and the stories of their lives and their families. For them, speaking about their house includes their memories and feelings, making it difficult to detach material and immaterial. That brings a strong emotional character to their narratives, which values them in an immeasurable way.

In such sense, residential environments present themselves as a palimpsest of memories for those interviewed. The same room that used to be the office of her deceased husband in the 1960s, and was the place where M.Z. cried her daughter's death years later, is now where she spends most of her time watching television nowadays. The same relationships

of different recollections and memories of each space, often allowed by the change in use, is identified in the other interviews. In this regard, the time and space correlation of the house is gradually altered as a result of the changes in family structure.

In the special case of the grandmothers, it is also possible to identify relevant themes in their narratives, like the loneliness in a house that used to be filled with family members in the past, and the concern with the house maintenance when they will no longer be alive.

When it comes to maintenance, these old ladies show the struggle throughout generations to preserve these assets. With little or no government support, keeping these houses is a choice made by part of the interviewees. These choices, in turn, are guided by the emotional connection that the interviewees have with these properties.

This way, the houses of the grandmothers, these material and built assets, carry meanings that go beyond inhabiting, they represent the family nest, the meeting point, the reunion of generations. So, the grandmothers' houses, just like their owners, have several feelings and memories dear to their existence.

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