

**An Inevitable Transition. The erosion of traditional vernacular building forms  
in the Alpujarras, Southern Spain**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines continuity and change within the domestic architecture of the village of Laroles in the Alpujarras region of southern Spain. The distinctive characteristics of this typological form are identified and the principal features of change at the level of the individual building are surveyed. It is argued that change in the architectonic details of houses within the village is inevitable but that such changes do not necessarily lead to the loss of a distinctive type of building and they may be considered to be a necessary consequence of the natural evolution of vernacular architecture. However, some recent developments give significant cause for concern as, although superficially similar to traditional typologies, in reality they amount to a different typological form and are frequently merely a pastiche of the original type. In addition to the issue of visual landscape change, traditional vernacular architecture is a source of continuity and meaning and the erosion of this form represents a threat to identity and the long-established basis of communal life.

**Key Words:** Alpujarras; built form; vernacular tradition; building components; modernisation; building transition

## Introduction

The study of landscape as a cultural artefact has passed through several distinct phases but has recently undergone something of a renaissance (Howard, et. al., 2013). This contribution is concerned with one important dimension of cultural landscapes, namely vernacular architecture. The study of vernacular architecture has itself progressed through several stages. Early studies were concerned with the recognition and distribution of distinctive house types usually identified by form and materials (Kniffen, 1936; Houston, 1953; Wagstaff, 1965; Aalen, 1966). Subsequently, the broader identification of the relationships between dwellings and their cultural and physical environments came to the fore (Rapoport, 1969; Hutton, 1984; Knapp, 1989; Oliver, 1978; 2006). More specifically, the role of dwellings in forming and maintaining individual and group identities has excited interest (Rakoff, 1977; Duncan, 1981; Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zúñiga, 1999; González-Ruibal, 2005; Haber, 2011; Buchli, 2013) along with the role of materiality in cultural change more generally (Baudrillard, 1968/1996; González Álvarez and González, 2014). The research field remains a rich one, albeit one whose subject matter is increasingly threatened by processes of modernization and globalization. Many of the essential core characteristics of traditional, vernacular built environments are clearly challenged by the latter. For example, a key feature of traditional buildings would be the local sourcing of construction materials, a past economic reality enforced through the cost of obtaining and transporting alternatives from further afield. In many parts of the globe, such constraints have been significantly reduced or removed entirely. In more general terms, there is increasing evidence of quantitative and qualitative declines in rural landscapes with high scenic value (Vos and Meekes, 1999; Sayadi, et. al., 2009) and mounting concern over such change (Holdaway and Smart, 2001).

Change in the predominant character of the built environment can come about in several ways. First, it may be the result of gradual evolution, of piecemeal additions to existing forms. The end result of such evolution may be forms that differ from their origins but which have, at least, been modified in empathy with that starting point. A second type of change is an abrupt one, where completely new additions are made whose stimulus and inspirations have little to do with the origins of what already exists. But there is a third possibility where new additions self-consciously look to traditional forms for inspiration. However, in this case concessions are often necessary as contemporary societal requirements impose constraints requiring adaptations to built forms that may seriously compromise any sense of authenticity. Against this background, this article will first explain why some contemporary changes in a traditional rural built environment are a matter of deep concern. It will then move on to an examination of the specific components of traditional architecture in the villages of the Alpujarras, a remote mountainous region of southern Spain, and the extent to which these are being lost within the contemporary village structure. The study will be carried out within the village of Laroles (Figure 1), one of four nucleated settlements within the *municipio* of Nevada, Granada province.

## The Significance of Vernacular Building Forms

Underpinning this research is a conviction that traditional vernacular forms possess an inherent value but, first, it is necessary to identify the key characteristics of vernacular architecture in a general sense. Vernacular architecture consists of buildings constructed by their users to meet the

everyday requirements of domestic and work related activities of 'ordinary' people. Thus, the functions that the building was intended to perform were paramount in its design, possibly to the exclusion of other considerations, such as aesthetics. Buildings were constructed from materials that were readily available within the neighbouring locality and the norms of construction and design were those that had evolved within those localities (Brunskill, 1992). Vernacular architecture is a built form that has been created and evolved from 'within' (in this case, the Alpujarras) in contrast to architecture and built forms that take their inspiration from wider influences, other cultural realms, professional design and the use of materials to make a statement of power, cultural, or aesthetic refinement, rather than using those immediately to hand.

But why should we value vernacular architecture? It has been argued that much vernacular architecture encompasses a valuable source of practical and theoretical knowledge (Turan, 1990). Vernacular buildings can teach much about the priorities and lifestyles of our ancestors but they also can inform contemporary debates (Marcucci, 2000). Practical issues include appropriate responses to environmental conditions. Many authors (e.g. Cañas and Martin, 2004; Ratti et. al., 2003) have celebrated the environmental wisdom encapsulated within traditional building paradigms, incorporating issues of adaptability to climate through to long term sustainability. In this sense, vernacular architecture may be an educational tool and be important in the context of conservation as a thorough knowledge of traditional building is surely a pre-requisite for the preservation or restoration of such buildings or their removal elsewhere for conservation purposes (Oliver, 2006). In the specific context of the Alpujarras it has been claimed that the 'importation' of more modern building materials and methods has introduced greater risks and more problems, for example in dealing with heavy snowfalls (Navarro Alcalá-Zamora, 1979). Some residents of Laroles are scathing about the negative micro-climatic effects of the linear alignment of recent housing developments (personal interview, 20/04/2015). At a practical, economic level it has also been argued that the vernacular house may provide an important cultural resource for tourism development, partly through its aesthetic appeal as a component of the landscape (Wright and Campbell, 2008; Sayadi et. al., 2009) but also through its role in encapsulating and communicating a local cultural identity to visitors (Wang, 1997). Some authors argue that professional architecture suffers from an increasing rupture between practitioners and society at large (Oliver, 2006) and the study of aspects of vernacular architecture may help to bridge that gap (Abu-Ghazze, 1997). Indeed, in the quest for more organic buildings, some modernist architects in the 1920s and 1930s looked to vernacular architecture for inspiration (Sabatino, 2010). In a similar context, it has also been suggested that 'ordinary or vernacular architecture' represents the principal basis of a 'living architecture' that is in touch with influences beyond limited and immediate professional confines (Collins, 1965). If we are to create better residential environments of all kinds in the future we need to better understand the built environment and what it is that society at large values about that.

In more theoretical terms, it could be argued that landscapes of traditional built forms are important components of collective identity and contain transferable values (Ashworth, 1998; Egoz, 2013). As such, they provide meaning and value to communal life and its sense of continuity and emotional stability. As Buchli (2013: 1) puts it, 'buildings make people'. There is substantial evidence that individuals and communities need to be connected to their 'past' as this promotes a psychological sense of belonging, rootedness, continuity and an overall sense of well-being (Lowenthal, 1975; Gulinck, et. al., 2001). Such phenomena may come about in a variety of ways - through extended family contacts, oral traditions and written texts - but, much more direct and tangible are the

physical representations of this rootedness and continuity (Caro Baroja, 1946; Lund, 2005) and it is the built environment which is the most direct manifestation of such phenomena. Traditional forms of architecture form an integral part of the character of many landscapes, make them recognisable and distinctive and differentiate them from others (Vallés, et al., 2013) and recent research has demonstrated that the greater the homogeneity of landscapes, the lower the perceived visual attractiveness (Arriaza, *et. al.*, 2004). Significant change to the character and coherence of a traditional built environment clearly leads to a loss of identity and the possible emergence of a new one (Antrop, 2005). Furthermore, in communities where 'change' has been relatively slow in the past, the value of the built environment as a repository of psychological security and a symbol of the relationship between people and place, is likely to be all the more significant.

This paper is concerned with the characteristics and threats to the traditional vernacular built form of the village of Laroles in the Alpujarras region of southern Spain and will attempt to assess the degree of change from traditional norms in the village's mainly domestic architecture. The extent to which 'modern' developments sever linkages to the past and mark a discordant benchmark in the evolution of the landscape is an important theme. In the context of domestic architecture this step-change is manifest in the contrast between older, multi-functional structures and recent single purpose dwellings. The latter appear likely to become a more significant feature of the landscape in the future but represent a threat, both in a visual sense and, more deeply, in terms of cultural capital and identity (Sánchez Hita, 2007; Bañuelos Arroyo, 2014) which depends on the intimate linkages between people, place and physical structures. The study is given particular resonance in the light of the recent proposal to classify the Alpujarras as a UNESCO approved World Heritage site. Central to this proposal is the recognition of the distinctive cultural heritage embodied within the landscape of which the built environment is seen as being an integral component, to the extent that this is now embodied within the primary and secondary school curricula within the region (Proyecto Culturmed, 2014; Delgado Anés, 2014a; 2014b). In addition to a growing literature on landscape evaluation generally in Spain (Pastor *et. al.*, 2007), there has been considerable recent interest in the problems raised by the pressures upon traditional architectural forms resulting from rapidly changing social and economic circumstances (Tarreggiani and Tassinari, 2012). Research has demonstrated the high value attached to the visual quality of landscapes made by traditional man-made elements (Arriaza, *et. al.* 2004). However, much of the literature is concerned with the creative re-use of redundant buildings and forms (Fuentes, 2010; Fuentes *et al.*, 2010; Verhoeve *et al.*, 2012) or with the appropriate adaptation of older and modern structures into existing landscapes (Tarreggiani and Tassinari, 2012). A further area of study has been in the role of traditional buildings for cultural and heritage interpretation (Porto *et al.*, 2011). However, none of these approaches tackle directly the issue of the threats posed to entire settlements with a traditional built form and a remaining significant population by the emergence of powerful processes of change emanating from 'outside'.

## **Laroles**

The village of Laroles (Figure 2) is located in the south east of Granada province in the upland region of the Alpujarras. It is one of the higher villages in this region (1015 metres, 3330 feet) and is the last (or first) village situated on one of the few main north-south routes across the Sierra Nevada, the Puerto de Ragua. The village population in 2013 was 656 (INE, 2014). This is the lowest

population count since records began – in 1787 (when the population was 924). The highest recorded population was 1,524 in 1860 but this declined gradually through the remainder of the nineteenth century, followed by a disastrous fall from 1890 to 1910 when the population was 819. This was largely due to a series of catastrophes such as the earthquake of 1884 which destroyed large numbers of dwellings (López Arroyo et. al., 1981), a cholera epidemic in the later 1880s and the phylloxera outbreak of 1888. The decline in the silk industry in the nearby town of Ugijar also played a part as Laroles residents had been active in this industry. Some recovery took place up to 1960, when the population reached 1,502. Thereafter, the village has experienced steep decline, a phenomenon with clear implications for the built environment. At the 2001 census Laroles pueblo had 608 houses recorded (INE, 2001), of these only 315 were inhabited 'family homes', 20 were 'empty' and 273 were 'second homes'.

In addition, the housing stock is ageing. Nearly three-quarters of the dwellings in Laroles were built before 1950 (INE, 2001) implying a considerable proportion of dwellings that, initially at least, would have lacked modern facilities and conveniences, including running water and electricity. The provision of services to such properties also has consequences in terms of likely change within the built environment.

Most villages in the Alpujarras were established by Muslim inhabitants between the tenth and sixteenth centuries (Cressier, 1983) and evolved a distinctive economic system and landscape. Fundamental to this system was irrigation and terracing, both of which were developed to a highly sophisticated degree but both of which required significant labour input (McNeil, 1992). A flourishing rural economy developed based on intensive subsistence farming of a range of crops, some limited animal husbandry and the commercial exploitation of silk (Carrascosa Salas, 1992). The final expulsion of the Moors in the sixteenth century had disastrous implications as it meant the loss of considerable knowledge and their replacement with peoples who brought with them a different rural economy based on wheat and barley production and sheep farming (Sánchez Ramos, 1997), both of which resulted in considerable deforestation. The result was severe soil erosion even though population levels were well below those of the peak of Moorish settlement. It was only when the 'new' American crops of maize and potatoes were introduced that recovery took place producing the population increases of the later eighteenth century (Tapia Garrido, 1965). In this period the production of wine also increased and, although the main centres of production were in the Sierra de Contraviesa, the Puerto de Ragua pass through the Sierra Nevada was an extremely important trading route to the north (García Manrique, 1973) and added to the strategic significance of Laroles.

### **The Alpujarran House**

Traditional Alpujarran dwellings were distinctive (Figures 2 and 3) and basically similar to those in the Rif mountains of Morocco (Orihuela, 1997) as people from the Rif were the original settlers in the Alpujarras (Carandell, 1934) and it was the Rif mountains to which the Moors were expelled in the sixteenth century. Numerous authors have described the basic features of the traditional Alpujarran dwelling (de Voigt, 1937; Brenan, 1957; Flores, 1973; Navarro Alcalá-Zamora, 1979; Allart and Delaigue, 1984; McNeill, 1992; Carrascosa Salas, 1992; Oloriz Aguilera, 1995 – but describing 1894), drawing attention to their 'cubic' nature, adaptation to the slopes and climatic conditions, predominantly flat roofs, open terraces, distinctive chimneys, and traditional building materials.

More recent writers have described this area as having “ a dustier look and the villages have a shabbiness and a lack of architectural sophistication reflective of the great poverty which this area has often known” (Jacobs, 1990:39).

The form of the village is usually described as haphazard or formless, with no obvious plan, suggesting that, within the constraint of a tight nucleation, buildings appear to be scattered at random. Brenan (1957) described the village of Yegen (10 kilometres to the west of Laroles) as it was in 1920 - “..the houses ran into one another..the effect from a distance was of a confused agglomeration of boxes..” (p.16). Yet most Alpujarran villages do have an identifiable structure, often consisting of more than one *barrio* or neighbourhood (Cressier, 1983) and several small plazas, one of which fronts the village church whereas others are where water fountains are located or where several streets converge. Streets may appear to be haphazard and change width and direction suddenly but this is a function of the difficult terrain and steep slopes. Access problems due to the latter were resolved by the construction of stairways instead of streets and *cul de sacs* leading to the doors of a group of houses. A further distinguishing feature was the use of *tinaos*, a structure linking buildings, usually at first floor level, and often with a public right of way beneath (Figure 4). Street blocks (*manzanas*) vary enormously in size and orientation, again due to the irregularity and uneven nature of the terrain. However, buildings are often adapted to the detail of surface features, sometimes even taking advantage of large protruding rocks that serve as foundations or part of the wall of houses. The orientation of buildings is mostly to the south in order to maximise the amount of sunlight and advantage is taken of slopes to increase access to open air. The structure of smaller houses was simple (Figure 3) with the ground floor, or sometimes semi-basement, being devoted to animal shelter and storage of agricultural equipment, the first floor being the living quarters with an open-fronted terrace (*azotea*) above, used for drying and storage of agricultural products especially ham, peppers and tomatoes (Figures 5 and 6). Larger houses have variations on this basic structure with possibly more specialisation in the use of ground floor or semi-basement rooms and with more domestic rooms at first floor level.

Construction materials were those most readily available in the immediate environment, taking advantage of the resources available and the difficulty of transporting other materials. External walls were constructed of stone or slate flagstones and mortared with mud. The roof structures, supported by the external load bearing walls, consisted of a wooden framework of chestnut, walnut or poplar. The roofing material was a layer of soil mixed with gravel (*malhecho*), with a further layer of *launa* above, a grey impermeable clay formed from crushing the locally available magnesium slate, both spread on top of a supporting cradle of canes or in some cases stone slabs (Flores, 1973; Carrascosa Salas, 1992; López Tavar, 1998). The roof edge or eaves of the dwellings consisted of large slate slabs called *beriles*, weighted down with rocks above (*castigaderas*). Floors were made of beaten earth or stone slabs. Most houses in Alpujarran villages were originally not whitewashed, this being a practice introduced only in the mid twentieth century (Carrascosa Salas, 1992) when exterior walls started to be covered in layers of plaster which is whitewashed annually. Overall, the mode of construction, use of local materials and traditional design of buildings provided a strong degree of homogeneity and visual uniformity to the Alpujarran village (Allart and Delaigue, 1984). The traditional Alpujarran house constituted a distinctive typological form.



These traditional features and mode of construction have inevitably been subject to change. It is our contention that, of the alternative modes of change in the built environment identified at the outset, and despite evidence of gradual evolution, many recent developments represent a significant break with the past. This is despite the existence of planning regulations that, ostensibly, require that existing character should be preserved. A specific objective of the Municipal Development Plan is “To maintain the characteristics of the existing urban fabric in the urban nuclei as well as the popular typology of existing buildings” (Ayuntamiento de Nevada, 2008:11). ‘New’ developments are expected to conform to existing building typologies and there are, for example, local by-laws limiting the number of storeys in residential buildings although subject to local variations in terrain. Despite such safeguards, there is some evidence that regulations are not always enforced (Figure 12) and even within a restrictive framework, ‘new’ development may produce incongruous results.

Modern houses are of course much more likely to be constructed from materials derived from outside the immediate locality. Floors are commonly made of imported tile or brick, cement is used in the construction process and walls constructed from brick or breeze-blocks. Roofs are frequently made from imported tiles and, rather than being flat, have a steep pitch. The installation of potable water and sewage disposal in many villages allows the construction of bathrooms and other services. Equally, the introduction of electricity has supported the growth of domestic appliances, television and lighting within the house. A significant feature of landscape change within the village therefore is the presence of phone wires, TV aerials, air conditioning equipment and satellite dishes. Such elements may amount to significant visual intrusion (Hopkinson, 1971) and produce incongruous contrasts between the introduced elements and their setting (Hernández et al., 2004). The ownership of motor vehicles has increased with a corresponding demand for garages. Over the latter part of the twentieth century, despite many social and economic problems, living standards did increase significantly and many people had more disposable income. So, even small, traditional houses have been subject to change in the form of renewal of doors and windows, and external decorative work such as *rejas* (window bars) and coloured tiles cladding lower walls.

These factors suggest a trend away from traditional, vernacular forms, towards a more uniform building style whose principal features emanate from outside the region. Indeed, some authors are profoundly pessimistic about the future of traditional architecture in the Alpujarras (Grey, 1992). This paper will now outline the methods used to assess the extent to which these forces for change have impacted upon Laroles, before presenting the research findings.

## **Method**

The conceptual framework for this paper was shaped by the literature reviewed above, as well as by themes recurring in a series of informal conversations which took place between 2012 and 2014 and twelve more formal interviews in April 2015. These were with local residents, business owners and *ayuntamiento* staff in Laroles, as well as interviews with mayors and other officials at the *ayuntamientos* of the nearby villages of Murtas, Torvizcon, Laujar de Andarax, and Ugijar. The interviews with officials served to provide a framework for understanding the local context in terms of building regulations. Conversations with local residents were a natural part of carrying out the survey, since residents were interested to know why we were surveying the buildings, and were eager to contribute their own reflections on building change. Interviews in April 2015 built upon this

foundation in a more structured way, exploring issues of family and housing histories, structural change to dwellings and questions of identity.

The assessment of building change in Laroles was carried out via a survey of a total of 148 buildings (approximately 23 per cent of the total number)<sup>1</sup> in three sub-areas of the village.<sup>2</sup> While a fully comprehensive account of change in the built environment would include issues such as change in the construction materials used, this paper is concerned with the identification and change in the key visual traditional external components of buildings, rather than with the detail of construction materials. Therefore, the data collection sheets for each building contained the following categories:

- Building condition
- Main use
- Number of storeys, front and back
- Walls (decoration, material, whitewash)
- Door(s) (material, size, shape)
- Animal space (presence and current use)
- Purpose-built garage (presence and door material)
- Windows (number, rejas presence and style)
- Balcony (number, style, function, position)
- Roof terrace (presence, position)
- Roof (shape, material)
- Chimney (style, shape)
- Modern external additions (nature)

The results of the survey into the extent to which the key traditional external components of the buildings are disappearing, and an examination of 'new' elements in the village-scape will now be presented.

### **he erosion of tradition in Laroles**

The survey results confirm that the general characteristics of housing in the village conform to 'traditional' descriptions. For example, the tightly packed, vertically uneven nature of the housing environment is supported by the fact that 24 per cent of buildings have a different number of storeys at the front compared to the back and 67 per cent of the buildings are part of a connected street terrace with a further 22 per cent being end terrace structures. Almost all buildings within the survey had a flat roof, producing an inter-connected roofscape, albeit at varying levels in accord with the topography. Indeed, it has been suggested that in the past these inter-connected roofs could form more convenient access routes than some of the streets below (Brenan, 1957). The relatively small size of many of the properties is indicated by the fact that 46 per cent of them have 3 windows or less. Despite this relatively small size, 66 per cent of the buildings possess a balcony, another

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise explained, all statistics relate to the buildings in this survey.

<sup>2</sup> Field work was principally carried out in April 2013.

traditional feature of the Alpujarran cottage (Figure 7). Nearly 40 per cent of the buildings possess more than one door entrance, an additional door providing access to a separate area for animals or storage. But this feature may itself indicate change in a period much earlier than the present as historically both humans and animals would have shared the same entrance to the ground floor with the latter being used primarily for animal stabling. Several *tinaos* exist within the village (Figure 4).

One of the more distinctive features of the vernacular tradition within Alpujarras villages is the existence of open fronted terraces (*azoteas*) at first or second floor level, used for drying crops such as peppers and tomatoes, the curing of hams and also an airy leisure space in very hot weather (Figures 5 and 1). Just over 40 per cent of the dwellings surveyed possessed this feature and several more had clearly been filled in recently (Figure 8). However, mainly because of the nature of the topography upon which the village is built, the terrace associated with one dwelling may overlap onto the space above a neighbouring house, producing a rather loosely structured layout in terms of the relationship between 'private' domestic space and space that is at least partially open to public (or neighbours') view.

It is clear from the descriptions given earlier, that many distinctive features of the Alpujarran village concern the roofscape. In terms of this aspect, 92 per cent of the buildings have a traditional flat roof (Figure 2) and 81 per cent of roofs are constructed from *launa* – the crushed shale material historically used as a roofing material – and a further 62 per cent possess the traditional slate eaves (*beriles*) (Figure 5). The nature of the chimney is also clearly an essential component of the roofscape and 55 per cent of these take the traditional form shown in Figure 7. However, it should be noted that for a further 40 per cent it was not possible to observe the actual character of the chimneys due to the building having to be surveyed from street level where chimneys were often not visible due to street gradients and the alignment of buildings.

The features discussed above represent the defining components of the traditional Alpujarran house as a typological form in that they may be held to be "A construct of conventions and norms that exist in a certain region ... and that evolved over time on the basis of experience" (Muratori, 1959). The built environment produced over the centuries was a direct consequence of a close link between production and consumption activities within the constrained space of the village and its immediate environment, producing a holistic structure and form. But production and consumption (in their widest senses) have become increasingly separate and subject to influences from further afield. The meaning of the built environment and of the individual dwelling is likely therefore to undergo significant change.

Therefore, despite these features that suggest a significant degree of continuity of tradition, the survey revealed a number of aspects of change that are suggestive of a slow and probably inevitable transition in the nature of some Alpujarran architectural details. In part, these are driven by demands for more convenient domestic arrangements. In interviewing local residents a specific group could be identified who, whilst recognising that traditional architecture has many attractions, emphasise the advantages of something more modern. One married couple interviewed have substantially modernised an old property at the western end of the village. The wife in particular was forceful about the disadvantages of the older dwellings and how her house was now *cómodo* (comfortable) and *conveniente* (convenient) with *menos trabajo* (less work) due to a more regular arrangement of rooms. The same message was reinforced by other interviewees, some of whom still

lived in older properties . Women, in particular welcomed the modern conveniences available in 'new' or modernised homes and favourable comparisons were made to earlier domestic arrangements. Modern houses are *más fácil de cuidar* (easier to look after).

In terms of visual appearance, it is clear that concrete is increasingly replacing *launa* as the basic material for the flat roof. Of the buildings surveyed, it is the roof material of only 14 per cent but these constitute the most recently repaired buildings. Only 19 per cent of the buildings possess a garage but this is most frequently a conversion from a former animal space whilst only 14 per cent of buildings had ground floor spaces that were self-evidently still used for animal stabling. However, it is in some of the decorative features of the buildings that 'change' is more readily apparent. Although only 9 per cent of the buildings had main front doors made from metal or metal and glass, with 84 per cent made from wood (the remainder being blocked up), many of the latter were modern, mass produced heavily varnished doors with polished handles and brass knockers, rather than traditional, locally manufactured doors. As with most villages in southern Spain, an important but relatively recent decorative feature of the village house is the addition of decorative tiles or stone cladding (Figure 9) to the ground floor walls up to at least a metre in height – 41 per cent of buildings in this survey possessed this feature. Possibly even more significant as a visual external feature of the Alpujarran house is the proliferation of *rejas*, or wrought iron coverings for the ground, and sometimes upper, floor windows. Originally used as a protective measure situated flat against the window, these have become increasingly decorative with the use of more intricate patterns and curvilinear designs (Figures 5, 9 and 10).

Balconies and terraces are also changing. The former were mainly a feature of larger properties and characteristic of first floor level where windows would open onto a supported projection from the front wall of the house. Although not strictly a 'balcony', an alternative for less wealthy households was to create an 'integral' balcony where a large double window extending to the surface of the first floor room could be opened and be protected by a railing flush with the exterior wall of the dwelling. Increasingly, former wooden balustrades are being replaced with metal. The traditional *azotea* or open fronted terrace used for drying peppers, maize cobs, aubergines, tomatoes and the curing of hams (Figure 5) still exists for this purpose in a number of homes but several have been converted into additional room space by filling in the former open area with modern windows (Figure 9) or sometimes brickwork.

Although not surveyed in detail, it is apparent that the basic components of the Alpujarran house are undergoing change in terms of building materials. Most recent constructions are of brick and/or breeze block (Figure 11) rather than traditional stone and mud mortar. Metal has in some cases replaced timber as a supporting material in beams and posts. Although, with one or two exceptions (Figure 12), the traditional flat roof remains the norm (and is a legal requirement) concrete is being preferred to *launa* as the main covering material (Figure 13), largely because of ease of manufacture and application. In a number of cottages, metal stove chimneys have replaced the older traditional forms (Figure 13). In addition, completely new components have been added to the exterior of dwellings in the form of telephone wires, TV aerials, satellite dishes and air conditioning devices (Figure 14). All of this adds up to a village-scape in the process of transition, the gradual erosion of distinctiveness and possible visual convergence towards uniformity where many features of the Alpujarran village are no different to those found in villages and towns elsewhere (Relph, 1987; Graves 1998; Munjeri, 2004).

Yet, one could argue that the Alpujarran village has been undergoing a process of change for many decades. However, the key point is that such changes and mutations took place within the framework of an existing typological form. Indeed, they could be argued to be part of the typological process, whereby buildings undergo 'progressive mutation' (Caniggia and Maffei, 2001) or the adaptation of existing forms to new, emergent requirements.

Furthermore, a number of apparently 'traditional' elements of contemporary buildings are, in fact, the product of historically recent evolution. Some of the first written descriptions, for example, make no mention of the use of whitewash (Aguilera, 1995) and early photographs show that most dwellings were left as rough surfaced 'freestone' constructions. Writing of the early 1920s, Brenan noted that houses in the village of Yegen were "built of uncut stones and earth and sometimes – especially in the case of the better houses – given a rough surfacing of mortar. The interior walls were plastered and whitewashed but, as in all Alpujarran pueblos that kept to the old tradition, no whitewash was employed outside." (Brenan, 1957, p.16). But, since then, the use of whitewash and the conglomeration of several years of application have produced a rather different visual appearance from that of the nineteenth or early twentieth century, smoothing out what would have been an irregular freestone appearance of the external walls. Yet, for many contemporary observers the 'whitewashed Alpujarran village' is the epitome of 'tradition', as for example in Jacobs' (1990: 39) description of "the quaint cube-like houses, with whitewashed stone walls". In reality though, it is a very recent 'tradition' or 'neo-traditionalist' tendency (Baudrillard, 1968). Similarly, original *rejas* would have been functional, plain strips of metal rather than the product of more elaborate wrought iron design work, even though the latter frequently appears to be a 'traditional' component of the village streetscape. There are architectural echoes here of Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) discussion of 'the invention of tradition', a theme tackled more directly in Krit's (2013) study of 'new traditional' building types.

In summary, Table 1 categorises the key external components of the traditional Alpujarran house and the main types of change identified in the survey.

As noted earlier, a key issue is the extent to which such changes are bringing about a totally different appearance to the village-scape. Vernacular purists may assert that the continuation of true integrity can only be assured through a total adherence to 'traditional' modes of construction, design and use of building materials (Rapaport, 1969; Lawrence, 1983). In the contemporary, globalizing world this is almost certainly an extreme and untenable position. The population of Alpujarran villages require hot and cold running water, access to electricity and the benefits that brings in terms of domestic appliances and entertainment devices. More importantly, they require modes of construction that are hardy and sustainable (21 per cent of houses in Laroles were in ruins, a bad state or defective in 2001, INE 2001), that keep out the elements and are easier to keep warm and cool at different times of the year. These features inevitably imply degrees of modification to existing built forms but this does not necessarily demand the eradication of vernacular components. There is an important difference between (a) adapting a building to modern needs, possibly including change in the type of building materials used in the name of convenience, cost and habitability whilst keeping the elements and/or components that provide the essential integrity in the visual appearance of the building, and (b) processes external to a settlement that significantly change the visual appearance in order to cater for perceived needs within the design. The former accords with an interpretation of architecture that argues that, within any one 'typology', natural

evolution is an essential characteristic (Cannigia and Maffei, 2001). In contrast, architect-designed modern developments, even if paying 'lip-service' to some traditional features (Figure 15) are likely to produce a fundamental change in the typological form and therefore a dislocation with the past and between people and place.

The survey revealed that much piecemeal change within the village is of the former variety where an attempt has been made to respect the basic integrity and character of the traditional built form, albeit responding to the needs of modern living (a conclusion supported by Lund, 2005). In these cases a transition is taking place and it is probably inevitable, but it is one that is gradual and respectful of the basic typological form of traditional building.

Unfortunately, there is also a significant recent presence of developments that are considerably less respectful of this integrity. The essential character of the physical structure of the Alpujarran village related to the intimate link between form and function. Traditional building reflected the need for multi-functional buildings, providing residential space for both humans and animals, storage of all kinds, space for food preparation, shelter from weather extremes and suitable access in areas where the ground terrain is treacherous. But, over time, this multi-functional rationale has weakened and buildings have become less plural in their purposes and much more 'specialised', even mono-functional. This is most apparent in new housing developments in Laroles which emanate from construction companies employing professional architects. This has created a 'manufactured' village-scape, and produced a fundamental change in the typological form of parts of the village, disturbing the meaning, communal life and sense of continuity afforded by traditional vernacular architecture. Whilst it is the case that many original multi-functional buildings have been adapted and become mono-functional (residential), their form still respects the original plurality of purpose. This is never the case with the purpose-built 'holiday cottage' and it is this feature that renders the latter incongruous and out of character.

Arriaza *et. al.* (2004) have argued that, as man-made elements are significant components of the visual landscape, "...planning the modernisation of rural areas should include the impact of such features on the landscape." (p.123). Arguably, this is what has failed to happen with most of the architect-designed new additions within Alpujarran villages including Laroles. Such developments are usually built in 'estates' or 'subdivisions' (reflecting the process of site acquisition by external developers) and themselves constitute discordant spatial units in the village landscape. They consist of mono-functional dwellings which immediately differentiate them from the multifunctional but harmonious traditional design of existing buildings. Such discordance therefore represents a threat to the entire village-scape. Landscape researchers have shown the high value attached to integrity within the visual environment, referring to concepts such as coherence, continuity, harmony and undisturbed functional objects (Gulinck, *et. al.*, 2001; Hernández, *et. al.*, 2004). Discussions with local residents revealed several ways in which such dramatic change was interpreted as a threat. For example, within the village there is a strong group who are opposed to modern development if it's not 'in keeping' (*a propósito* - 'fitting') or *apropiado* (appropriate) and actively dislike many of the new developments. These are regarded as *demasiado regulares* (too regular), *sin armonioso* (out of harmony), and attempts to make them 'look' authentic are ridiculed - *copia crudo* (crude copies) or even *tergiversación* (misrepresentation). They are *todos iguales* (all the same) - in other words, variety is valued. *Auténtico* and *histórico* are recurrent terms used in describing the basic character of the village. It must be recognised however that the main interests of this group are concerned

with tourism and they see the traditional authenticity of the village as an asset in terms of publicity and marketing.

A second group share many of the views of the former but consist largely of elderly people, in their late 70s or 80s. They talk much more about the nature of the built environment in the context of their memories (Lowenthal, 1975). One such interviewee still lived in *la casa de mi abuelo* (the house of my grandfather) and claimed (possibly with some exaggeration) that it was much the same. But the language used by these respondents is significant in that they talked about *ascendencia* (ancestry) and *antepasados* (ancestors). It became clear that an unconscious link was being made between the house they lived in and their own identity and heritage (Birdwell-Pheasant et. al., 1999; Sánchez Hita, 2007). This group talked disparagingly about the 'new' developments as being *desde afuera* (from outside).

The superficially 'authentic' houses that characterize most recent group developments are anything but that (Figure 15). Set out in neat rows, and built with small front gardens and/or external patios (both of which are absent from dwellings in the historic core of the village), their sheer uniformity of design, the regular, uniform placement of doors, windows and chimneys, and their relationship to the street, all work against the traditional grain of a village such as Laroles. As such, they are an architectural expression of a 'staged' authenticity (McCannell, 1973), with some token gestures in the direction of the historical physical form of Alpujarran dwellings but, in reality, the product of an entirely different paradigm of development (Krit, 2013; González Álvarez and González, 2014). They represent a new typological form that is anything but a locally generated tradition of building, as specifically recognised in the recent proposal to establish the Alpujarras as a World Heritage landscape (Proyecto Culturmed, 2014, Anexo 1, p22). As recognised by long-standing residents they represent a 'manufactured' village-scape that is specifically designed for external, 'sanitized' consumption. The identity of a landscape is determined by the coherence between its small component parts and the broader spatial context (Antrop, 2005) and it is precisely this coherence that enhances a reading of the history of the place by its inhabitants and visitors. Change in any of these component parts therefore represents a threat to readability and identity. If the legibility of a landscape for its residents is lost, there is a clear danger of anomie, of a loss of guidance and rootedness.

## Conclusion

This paper has argued a case for the broader value of the built environment of the traditional Alpujarran village. It has identified the specific components of traditional vernacular architecture in the village (buildings that have been constructed by their users to meet the everyday requirements of domestic and work related activities of 'ordinary' people), and used the results of a survey to identify the key external features of buildings, differentiating their traditional and 'changed' form. We have identified an important distinction between 'naturally' evolving buildings which retain a degree of vernacular integrity and larger scale modern development originating from external investment.

At the level of individual buildings, the key features of change identified in the village related to roofs, balconies and terraces, ornamental features including *rejas* and decorative tiles, the use of

new mass produced building materials and the addition of completely new functional components serving to provide modern amenities, including telephone connections, TV aerials, satellite dishes and air conditioning devices. Many of these features are a consequence of a gradually improving standard of living in rural Spain. We conclude that, although significant, this 'natural evolution' substantially maintains the essential integrity in the visual appearance of the village architecture. However, the survey also revealed issues of more fundamental concern in terms of the future of the built environment.

Several new developments, whilst ostensibly demonstrating some 'traditional' features of Alpujarran domestic architecture, are clearly incongruous. Furthermore, they mark an important step-change in the visual and emotional character of the architecture of the Alpujarran village. The component features of traditional architecture were all necessary for the functions the building was intended to perform. Whilst predominantly mono-functional, the design and layout of more recent developments bear witness to a wider set of influences, mostly emanating from external sources, and thereby demonstrate a loss of local integrity. Pre-ordained design briefs with emphasis on unity, order and replicability are fundamentally at odds with historic local norms. In this sense, 'tradition' is indeed being eroded and the fear must be that a village such as Laroles is engaged in an accelerated transition towards some kind of parody of its original self.

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