

# Climate, Climate Change and the Global Diversity of Human Houses

## Short title: Global diversity of human houses

Robert R. Dunn<sup>1\*†</sup>, Kathryn R. Kirby<sup>2†</sup>, Claire Bower<sup>3</sup>, Carol R. Ember<sup>4</sup>, Russell D. Gray<sup>5,6</sup>, Joe McCarter<sup>7</sup>, Patrick H. Kavanagh<sup>8</sup>, Michelle Trautwein<sup>9</sup>, Lauren M. Nichols<sup>1</sup>, Michael C. Gavin<sup>5,8</sup>, Carlos Botero<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Applied Ecology, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC 27695, USA

<sup>2</sup>Department of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology, University of Toronto, Ontario, M5S 3B2, Canada and Department of Linguistic and Cultural Evolution, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Human History, Jena, Germany

<sup>3</sup>Department of Linguistics, Yale University, New Haven, CT 06520-8366, USA

<sup>4</sup>Human Relations Area Files at Yale University, New Haven, CT 06511, USA

<sup>5</sup>School of Psychology, University of Auckland, Auckland 1010, New Zealand;

<sup>6</sup>Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig, Germany

<sup>7</sup>Center for Biodiversity and Conservation, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY 10024, USA

<sup>8</sup>Department of Human Dimensions of Natural Resources, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523-1480, USA.

<sup>9</sup>California Academy of Sciences, 55 Music Concourse Drive, San Francisco, CA 94118, USA

<sup>10</sup>Department of Integrative Biology, University of Texas, Austin, TX 78712 USA

†Joint first authors

\* Correspondence to: Robert R. Dunn ([rrdunn@ncsu.edu](mailto:rrdunn@ncsu.edu))

**Word Count (all text not including figures and references):** 6,977

**Keywords:** architecture, adaptation, cultural diversity, cultural evolution, vernacular, human

This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is unaltered and is properly cited. The written permission of Cambridge University Press must be obtained for commercial re-use or in order to create a derivative work.

ecology, vertical transmission, horizontal transmission

**Author Contributions:**

RRD, KRK, CB, CRE, RDG, JM., MCG, and CB conceived and designed the study.

RRD, KRK and CB coordinated the collaboration, writing and analysis.

All authors conducted data gathering.

CB, PHK, MT, LMN and KRK performed statistical analysis.

RRD, KRK, CB, LMN, CRE, MG and MT wrote the article.

**Abstract**

Globally, human house types are diverse, varying in shape, size, roof type, building materials, arrangement, decoration, and many other features. Here we offer the first rigorous, global evaluation of the factors that influence the construction of traditional (vernacular) houses. We apply macroecological approaches to analyze data describing house features from 1900 to 1950 across 1000 societies. Geographic, social and linguistic descriptors for each society were used to test the extent to which key architectural features may be explained by the biophysical environment, social traits, house features of neighbouring societies, or cultural history. We find strong evidence that some aspects of the climate shape house architecture, including floor height, wall material, and roof shape. Other features, particularly ground plan, appear to also be influenced by social attributes of societies, such as whether a society is nomadic, polygynous, or politically complex. Additional variation in all house features was predicted both by the practices of neighboring societies and by a society's language family. Collectively, the findings from our analyses suggest those conditions under which traditional houses offer solutions to architects seeking to reimagine houses in light of warmer, wetter or more variable climates.

**Introduction**

## Global diversity of the human house

Houses create a set of conditions, the indoors, that is distinct from the “outdoors.” In doing so, they have the potential to shelter humans from many aspects of the outdoor world, but especially climatic extremes. This value of houses has become noteworthy in the context of global climatic changes in the temperatures, temperature extremes, rainfall and climatic variability. Such extremes threaten human well-being (National Academy of Sciences, 2016; see Trenberth et al., 2015; Ummenhofer and Meehl, 2017). The threat is especially acute where climatic extremes are novel relative to the climates for which houses were designed. For example, buildings in Europe are not equipped for the recent heat waves they have experienced (Lhotka et al., 2018), and electrical grid failures pose acute risks in places where indoor conditions are reliant on air conditioning systems or electrical heating systems (Koenig and Liedtke, 2021), as was the case during an unusual period of cold weather in Texas in the United States. In the context of rapidly changing climates, it becomes especially important to understand the extent to which particular aspects of house construction around the world represent adaptations to climate (and hence a model of how to deal with such climates) or instead the results of social or historical influences. We take a step toward such an understanding by considering the extent to which the features of vernacular houses around the world are best explained by climatic, social or historical factors.

The origin of human houses is relatively recent. Our closest living relatives - chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans - all build beds (Aschemeier, 1922; Casteren et al., 2012; Iwata and Ando, 2007), but these beds are ephemeral and offer little in the way of shelter. It seems likely our ancestors too once built ephemeral beds, before making the transition to shelters with roofs and walls (Casteren et al., 2012). The construction of shelters allowed our ancestors to alter local microclimatic conditions and escape predators, pests and even pathogens (Aschemeier, 1922; Iwata and Ando, 2007). By 20,000 years ago, unambiguous evidence of

houses appears, in the form of posts (and post holes), each supported by a rock and angled upward to what is inferred to have been a smoke stack, in a small community in Dolní Věstonice (now in the Czech Republic; Klíma, 1954). By 12,000 years ago, houses and other shelters were a characteristic feature of human culture.

Yet, for as much as houses are now built by every human culture, the materials, style and means of their construction was and is not universal (Oliver, 1997). This is especially true of vernacular houses. Vernacular houses are built without an architectural plan and, until very recently, accounted for most houses in most countries. Even the very earliest vernacular houses ranged from long, oval-shaped dwellings supported by wooden posts, such as those at Dolní Věstonice (Klíma, 1954), to small, round, domed houses built entirely of mammoth bones (Pidoplichko and Allsworth-Jones, 1998) or, alternatively, plant material (e.g. García-Diez and Vaquero, 2015). In light of this diversity we explore what climate, social, and historical factors are most closely associated with different features of vernacular houses.

Climate and other environmental conditions can influence how dwellings are built, both by humans and non-humans. The dwellings of birds (e.g. Bartholomew et al., 1976), rodents (e.g. Weber and Hoekstra, 2009), termites, and ants have all been shown to have evolved in response to selection pressures posed by environmental conditions (Weber et al., 2013). Where snakes are more common, *Peromyscus* mice species have evolved the ability to build burrows with an extra escape entrance (Weber and Hoekstra, 2009). Termites produce nests that cool more rapidly in hot environments (Korb and Linsenmair, 1998). In the 1800s, scholars began to suggest similar pressures might influence human houses via the effects of selection on cultural evolution such that the construction of a house might be predicted as a function of the demands of the environment in which people were living (e.g., Fitch and Branch, 1960).

Human houses might be expected to suit climatic and other environmental conditions even more so than the dwellings of non-humans. The attributes of knowledge and culture associated with house-building can evolve more quickly than genes such that similar climates have the potential to repeatedly and predictably favor similar sorts of houses (e.g., Fitch and Branch, 1960). In this respect, human houses could exemplify cultural adaptation, a cultural analogue to the beaks of Darwin's finches. To the extent that they do, we can study the houses of a particular extreme climate to learn how to build future houses adapted to that climate. However, this would only be the case if those unique features represent adaptations to the climate.

A large literature predicts not only that vernacular architecture will respond to climate, but also in which ways (Feather, 1996; Flannery, 2002; Olgyay, 2015; Rudofsky, 1987; Vitruvius, 1914; Whiting and Ayres, 1968; Zhai and Previtali, 2010). Thick walls and roofs, for example, can both absorb heat during the day and reradiate that heat at night (Zhai and Previtali, 2010) and hence are hypothesized to be both adaptive and more common in colder environments. Examples of cultures in cold climates with thick-walled dwellings are then taken as evidence for the adaptation of architecture to climate. But such considerations have rarely been quantitative. We take the key step of considering, quantitatively, which traits of houses are most consistently associated with adaptation to particular climates. Rather than testing each of the many hypotheses for climate-architecture links, we quantitatively explore the relative explanatory value of different climatic variables on a range of architectural features of houses.

The construction of dwellings can also reflect social environments, including the degree of settlement and political complexity of a society. As early as 1957, Clark (1957) noted that "the character of dwellings... depends more than anything on whether people are living a settled or

nomadic life”. Robbins (1966) specified that “the most suitable and predominant dwelling of mobile or semi-mobile peoples is a form of dwelling with a circular ground plan” and, conversely, that rectilinear houses are more likely to evolve where settlements are more permanent (Binford, 1990; see also Whiting and Ayres, 1968). Researchers have argued that rectangular ground plans make it easier to add units so as to yield larger, multi-roomed dwellings (as rectangular ground plans are easier to subdivide and to build additions on), and house larger families (e.g., Robbins, 1966). Building multicellular apartment-style houses in densely populated settlements may therefore allow population size and social complexity to increase while minimizing the geographical size of those settlements and hence the area in need of defense. We quantitatively test these hypotheses linking, on the one hand, nomadism and circular ground plans and, on the other hand, sedentary lifestyles and, with them, social complexity, and rectangular ground plans, on the other. In addition, we test the related hypothesis, suggested by studies showing that political complexity can buffer the direct effects of climate on societies, that the effects of climate on ground plan and other house attributes might be mediated by social complexity (Gavin et al., 2018).

Vernacular architectural styles can also be influenced by family structure. Because rectangular ground plans are easier to enlarge and compartmentalize than are round ones, they have been predicted to be more common in societies where nuclear families share a single dwelling and also manage their own food acquisition and storage (Feather, 1996; Flannery, 2002). Polygynous societies, meanwhile, have been suggested to be more likely to build houses with rounded ground plans (Whiting & Ayres, 1968), particularly those polygynous societies in which co-wives are unlikely to be sisters or otherwise related, so-called non-sororal polygynous societies (Murdock, 1949). In these non-sororal societies, separate quarters are often erected for

new co-wives, perhaps, some have suggested, as a strategy for minimizing conflict (White et al., 1988). Each wife's separate quarters need only house her, her children, and her husband on occasion. Given that her dwelling is unlikely to need to be subdivided or expanded as new wives join the family, a round ground plan might be most suitable. In polygynous societies in which all co-wives live under a single roof, as is often the case with sororal polygyny in which co-wives are related and typically sisters (Murdock, 1949), the ability to easily subdivide or build an addition on a house as the family grows suggests that round ground plans should be less common. We quantitatively test the hypothesis that houses in polygynous societies are more likely to have round ground plans as well as the sub-hypothesis that this trend is likely to be most pronounced where co-wives are not sisters/relatives.

Finally, many features of houses may also be shaped by the mechanisms through which culture is shared across space and time. The complex processes involved in building a house tend to be learned. Humans can learn about the design principles from previous generations, in a process referred to as vertical cultural transmission, or from members of the same generation, in a process referred to as horizontal cultural transmission (Pagel and Mace, 2004). Over time vertical transmission will lead to similar house design among communities with shared ancestry. When horizontal transmission is more prevalent, we would expect groups residing within close spatial proximity, and hence in more frequent contact, to share more design principles. A final consideration is that what appear to be non-adaptive features may be features that are complexly adaptive given cultural, environmental and other contexts. In this way, houses whose features do not seem to be predicted by climate or social systems represent potentially interesting case studies, whether with regard to the idiosyncrasies of culture or the complex nature of adaptations.

## Global diversity of the human house

As an example of the latter, one might consider the black tents used by some Bedouin pastoralists. The tents are thin and easily moveable (as might be predicted given the nomadic, desert-dependent lifestyles of Bedouin pastoralists); that is to say, they are adaptive relative to the climate. The black material of the tents, however, superficially appears to be maladaptive in the desert environment where black materials absorb heat (and white materials are common). Yet, a more detailed study of Bedouin homes concludes that the black color of tents is actually adaptive in as much as it more fully blocks sunlight and eliminates glare and, in doing so, makes indoor living more pleasant (Al-Shaali, 2006; Willits, 2001). We test the relative contribution of both cultural continuity and borrowing to house features and then also consider the features of houses that are not well accounted for by the climatic, social or historic factors included in our analysis.

The question as to the relative influences the climate, social environment, and cultural continuity and borrowing have on different aspects of house architecture is an empirical one.. Here, for the first time, we link a global cross-cultural dataset that describes aspects of the vernacular architecture of over 1000 societies (Barry III, 1980; Bondarenko et al., 2005; Korotayev et al., 2004; Murdock, 1962) with environmental, geographic and linguistic data for the same societies. Using this database, we test the relative influence of climatic environment, social environment, borrowing, and history on four aspects of houses we expect to be influenced by these forces: the materials out of which walls are built, their ground plan, the shape of their roof, and the placement of their floors (i.e., whether below ground, on ground level, or raised above the ground). In doing so, we offer the first rigorous, global evaluation of the factors that may influence the construction of traditional houses.

## Methods



*Data and data sources.* All data used in our analyses are available in the Database of Places, Language, Culture and Environment ([www.d-place.org](http://www.d-place.org); Kirby et al., 2016). Our analysis is based on the 1140 societies for which data on the prevailing type of human dwelling are available in the Ethnographic Atlas (Barry III, 1980; Bondarenko et al., 2005; Gray, 1999; Korotayev et al., 2004; Murdock, 1962). The unit of analysis in this data set is a human “society”, or group of people whose cultural practices were documented at a particular time and place, and who generally shared a language that differed from that of neighboring groups at the time of study (Kirby et al., 2016).

We chose that subset of dwelling features that a) has been mentioned in light of climatic, social or historical predictions and b) was well represented and described in the D-PLACE database. That resulted in the following descriptors, where codes (e.g., EA079) represent codes in the Ethnographic Atlas in D-PLACE (Kirby et al., 2016), and quoted texts reflect our category labels. For the ground plan, we considered two categories, rounded ground plans (EA079: 1-3), or angular edged ground plans (EA079: 4-6). For floor level we considered three categories, subterranean (EA080: 1) level with ground surface (EA080: 2) and elevated (EA080: 3-4 = “elevated”). We divided wall materials into four categories, stone, stucco or brick (all materials yielding thick walls; EA081: 1-2,9), wood or bamboo (EA081: 5-7), hanged fabrics, skins or mats (EA081: 10), and thatch (EA081: 8). Ice and snow walls were excluded from analyses due to their rarity. Roof shape was divided into three categories, rounded or domes (EA082: 1-5), sloped (EA082: 6,8-9) or flat (EA082:7).

The potential cultural predictors of dwelling traits in our models included polygyny (EA09: 1, 7 = “no polygyny”; 2 = “occasional polygyny”; 3-6 = “frequent polygyny”), nomadism (EA030: 3-8 = “sedentary”; 1-2 = “nomadic”), and political complexity measured as

## Global diversity of the human house

“levels of jurisdictional hierarchy beyond the local community” (EA033: 1=No political authority beyond community, for example “autonomous bands and villages”; 2=petty chiefdoms; 3=large chiefdoms; 4=small states; 5=large states).

For each society we measured the annual mean, variability, and predictability of climate variables in the corresponding map cell containing its sampling locality as listed in the Ethnographic Atlas. Precipitation and temperature data for each locality were extracted from the Baseline Historical (1900-1949) CCSM ecoClimate model (Lima-Ribeiro et al., 2015; Mitchell and Jones, 2005). We used estimates of elevation and slope for each society from the Global Multi-resolution Terrain Elevation Data of the U.S. Geological Survey (Danielson and Gesch, 2010). Climate observations were restricted from 1900 to 1949 in order to match the period during which the majority of the societies in our data set were sampled (Kirby et al., 2016). The predictability of climate patterns was measured via Colwell’s predictability index,  $P$ , which ranges from 0 (completely unpredictable) to 1 (fully predictable; Colwell, 1974). Because the climatic variables included in this study tend to be highly correlated at a global scale (Botero et al., 2014), we began our analyses by reducing them via Principal Components Analysis, PCA (Revelle, 2022), to three composite predictors labeled temperature harshness, mountain dwelling, and xeric harshness (Table 1). Every environmental predictor was normalized (Box and Cox, 1964), centered, and scaled prior to PCA. The first component, or “temperature harshness,” captured a gradient in which the occupancy of colder regions with more variable and unpredictable temperatures is depicted with higher scores. The second component, or “mountain dwelling,” captured the occupancy of higher elevations with more pronouncedly sloped terrains with higher scores. The third component, labeled “xeric harshness,” captured the occupancy of regions with fewer and less predictable precipitation with higher scores.

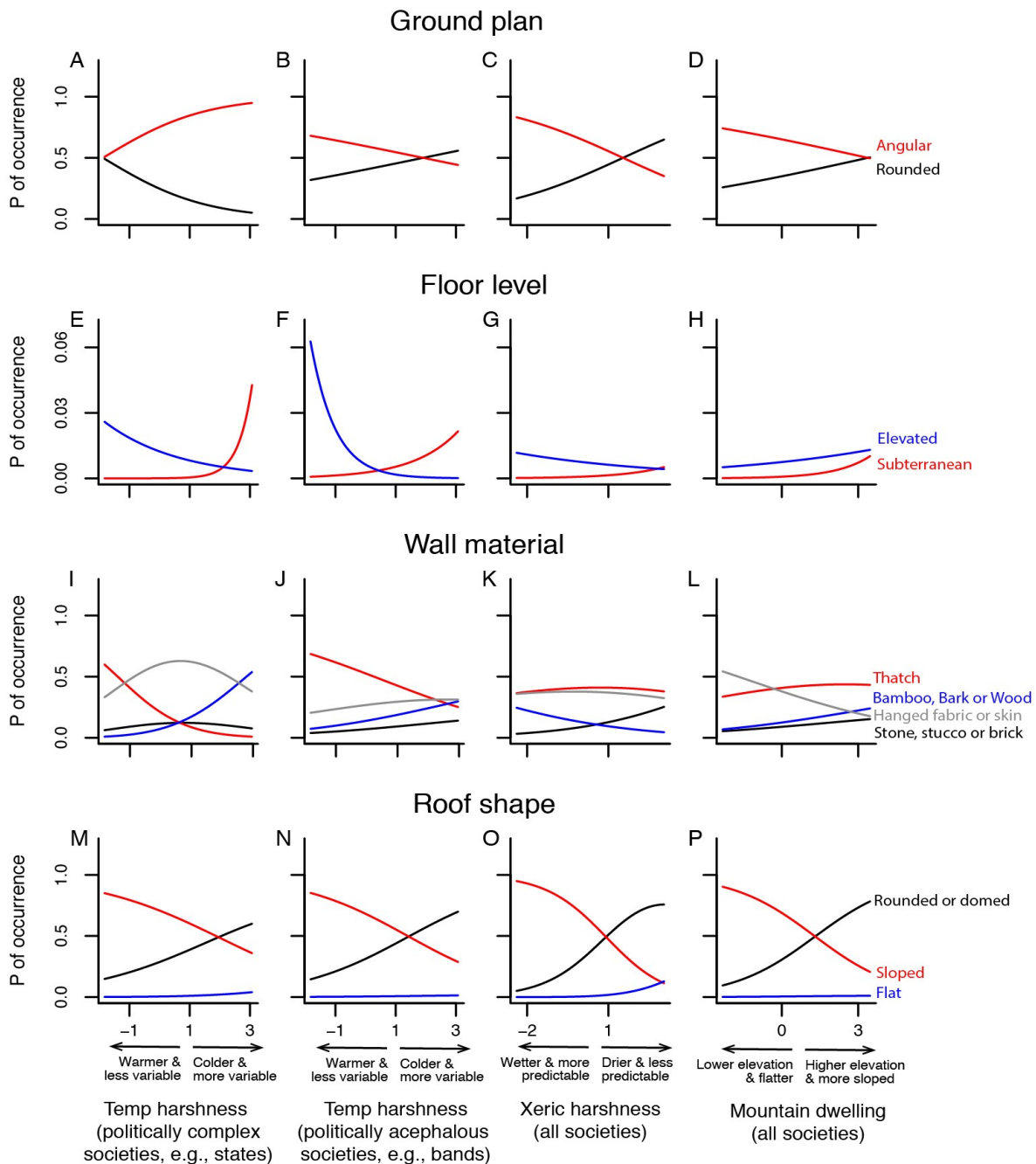
*Statistics.* Our analyses follow the multimodel inference procedures for cultural data outlined in Botero et al. (2014). Briefly, when exploring the effects of social and ecological parameters on the evolution of human culture, it is important to consider that some similarities between social groups may result from shared cultural ancestry and/or horizontal transmission (i.e., inter-group borrowing). To test for potential dependencies due to shared ancestry, we included language family as a random effect, using classifications from Glottolog ([www.glottolog.org](http://www.glottolog.org); Hammarström et al., 2015). To test for possible dependencies resulting from horizontal transmission, we estimated the potential for borrowing a particular dwelling characteristic from a neighboring group by computing the fraction of societies within the ten nearest neighbors that exhibit the same type of dwelling as the focal society. We chose to focus on a specific number of neighbors rather than a common distance, because distance to neighboring society varies greatly among regions and with climate. In choosing ten neighbors we sought to capture the first layer of neighbors (which is often two or three) as well as some of the closest of the neighbors' neighbors. We began our analysis by jointly investigating the potential effects of the different putative predictors in our list (i.e., ancestry, potential for borrowing, climate, and social variables) on each vernacular house feature (Supplementary Tables S1-S4) using mixed binary or mixed multinomial logistic regression models in R (Elff, 2021). We then evaluated whether each fully parameterized model had successfully accounted for potential spatial autocorrelation in house features, plotting the Moran's I spatial autocorrelogram of the residuals, as computed with 12 equal sampling distance classes in 'letsR' (Vilela and Villalobos, 2015). Moran's I values were close to zero for all distance classes in every house feature (Supplementary figures S1-S4), indicating that our list of predictors successfully accounted for potential spatial dependencies in

the available data. We followed up each fully-parameterized model by estimating all of their nested models (i.e., models with all possible combinations of predictors) and assessing their Akaike Information Criterion corrected for finite samples, AICc. AICc-weighted average models, which provide unbiased parameter estimates and unconditional standard errors (Burnham and Anderson, 1998) were subsequently estimated after excluding all nested model runs that did not converge due to insufficient house feature variation among the levels of one or more of their categorical predictors (Supplementary Tables S5-S8). AICc weights were also used as in (Burnham and Anderson, 1998) to estimate the relative importance of each predictor, which conveys the extent to which a given predictor contributes to the predictive accuracy of the average model on a scale from zero (no contribution) to one (the parameter is necessary to achieve the stated predictive accuracy).

## **Results and Discussion**

Table 2 summarizes our analysis of the relative importance of different environmental and social variables for the prediction of vernacular house features. Similarly, we summarize the findings of each fully parameterized model in Supplementary Tables S1-S4, and the AICc-weighted model averages in Supplementary Tables S5-S8. Graphical depictions of all environmental effects are provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1.



**Fig. 1.** Environmental effects on vernacular house features across a global sample of 1140 human societies. Panels depict how the probabilities of occurrence for different house features change as a function of temperature harshness, xeric harshness, and mountain dwelling (see methods for details on the interpretation of these principal components). The effect of temperature harshness is plotted in two columns to depict its interaction with political complexity. The first column highlights effects in large-state societies whereas the second one highlights effects in politically acephalous societies (i.e.,

autonomous bands or villages). Color conventions: **(a)** Ground plan: red = angular; black = rounded. **(b)** Floor level: red = subterranean; blue = elevated (effects on societies that build houses at ground level are not plotted here to emphasize changes in the rarer categories). **(c)** Wall material: black = stone, stucco or brick; red = thatch; blue = bamboo, bark or wood; grey = hunged fabrics or skin; **(d)** Roof shape: blue = flat; black = rounded or domed; red = sloped.

### **Climatic drivers of house construction**

Overall, the level of floors, wall materials, and roof shape of vernacular houses were all strongly predicted and presumably influenced by climate (Table 2) in ways suggested by the literature (Fig. 1). The floors of houses were more likely to be elevated where conditions were warm and wet (Figs. 1E-G) where flooding is more likely. Elevated floors were almost entirely absent from other sets of climatic conditions. In rainforests, houses raised, typically on stilts, both reduce the risk of flood and provide the opportunity for air to flow through and up into houses (Nguyen et al., 2011). Raised floors appear to have emerged independently in cultures in Africa, Asia, and the tropical Americas (Jarzombek, 2013). In as much as large parts of the world are predicted to deal with more flooding and increasing variability in rainfall due to climate change, and hence some periods of heavy rain, understanding the diversity and subtleties of the adaptations of such houses seems as though it should be a priority (Nursaniah et al., 2019).

Conversely, floors were more likely to be subterranean where temperatures were cold, seasonal and unpredictable as is the case in high deserts. This pattern has been predicted based on the ability of the ground to buffer extreme temperatures and temperature variation (Zhai and Previtali, 2010; see Fig. 1E-F). Very few regions on Earth are predicted to get colder in the coming decades. However, increases in climatic variability may mean that many regions are more likely to experience occasional bouts of extreme cold. In regions where houses do not tend to be subterranean, the effects of such cold bouts may be especially problematic, particularly

when electricity grids fail. Just such a scenario befell the state of Texas in the United States in the winter of 2021 and, when it did, many houses were not buffered from the extreme cold (Doss-Gollin et al., 2021).

Wall type was predicted both by climate and by the availability of building materials. Cold, dry conditions tended, for example, to favor walls made out of thick materials (e.g., stones, or sod over wood) as predicted based on the heat capacity of such walls which absorb solar radiation during the day and reradiate it at night (Fitch and Branch, 1960; Zhai and Previtali, 2010; see Fig. 1I-J, Table S3). The predictive effect of cold, dry conditions on wall material was more pronounced in acephalous societies than in politically complex societies (Fig. 1I-J), a pattern for which hypotheses do not seem to have been suggested in the literature. Interestingly, cold conditions also favored walls made of fabric or skins. Such fabric or skin walls are often used in the summer months in cold environments (Fitch and Branch, 1960) and, as we discuss below, among people who move their dwellings. Future climates in some regions are predicted not only to have high interannual variability, but also more pronounced seasonal extremes (National Academy of Sciences, 2016; Trenberth et al., 2015; Ummenhofer and Meehl, 2017). In such regions, vernacular houses have the potential to offer key insights and solutions regarding how to build homes in ways that respond to such variability. Houses with seasonal elements are one such solution.

Finally, roof shape was also strongly predicted by climate, with sloped roofs more common, for example, where conditions are warm and wet, while flat roofs are more common where conditions are dry (Fig. 1M-O), as predicted by Fitch and Branch (1960) among others for the simple reason that sloped roofs shed precipitation more readily. Round or domed roofs, like flat roofs, were more common where conditions were cold and dry.

***Social drivers of house construction***

Social Complexity and Sedentism—At the global scale, we found that more politically complex societies were more likely to have angular ground plans, especially in cooler and unpredictable conditions (Figure 1A, B). Politically complex societies are nearly all agricultural, associated with permanent settlement and associated with high population densities (Peregrine et al., 2007). Our finding is thus in line with the prediction of a link between political complexity and angular houses and for the idea that angular ground plans allow dwellings in higher density, agricultural settlements to be densely packed, easily subdivided and extended upwards (e.g., Robbins, 1966). Archaeological studies have documented a shift from rounded to angular ground plans in concert with transitions to settled agricultural lifestyles in societies with greater political complexity (Byrd and Banning, 1989; Robbins, 1966; e.g., Whiting and Ayres, 1968). In the southwestern United States, for instance, a transition has been documented from round pithouses in the Basket maker II and II periods to separate quadrangular houses along with a transition to settled lifestyles during Pueblo I period to conjoined quadrangular “apartment” style houses during Pueblo II (summarized in Robbins, 1966). None of this is to say that politically less complex societies could not have rectangular ground plans (many did) but rather that politically complex societies nearly always did (Table 2, Tables S1-S4). It is interesting that while humans seem to have converged on angular ground plans to build modularly, this is not the same solution that other species have adopted. For example, honeybees and paper wasps have convergently evolved a reliance upon hexagonal cells to create modular nests (Jeanne, 1975; Smith, 2020), many ground-dwelling ants connect round chambers to each other via “tunnels” (or what one might call hallways; Tschinkel, 2004), and termites often construct globular rooms connected in



multiple dimensions (Noirot and Darlington, 2000).

Polygyny—As measured by their frequency, polygynous societies are or were very common. Polygyny is or was practiced to some degree in over 80% of societies in the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample (SCCS), and was “common” (at least 4 of 5 married men in a society had more than one wife) in 30% of societies in the SCCS (Murdock and Wilson, 1972). In support of the observations of anthropologists (Murdock, 1949; Whiting and Ayres, 1968), we found that polygynous societies were more likely to have houses with round ground plans (Table 3). In addition, some types of polygynous societies are more likely to have round ground plans than are others. We find that round ground plans are almost twice as common as angular ground plans in polygynous societies where co-wives *share quarters*, but no more likely than angular ground plans in societies where they occupy *separate quarters* (Table 3; Ember, 1973). The effects of polygyny on house type are interesting in and of themselves, but they also suggest a broader reality, namely that the details of house construction have been shaped by even the most intimate details of societies since long before the advent of architecture as a discipline.

Polygynous human societies were more than twice as likely to have subterranean houses than ground-level houses (which were, in turn, more common than houses on stilts; Supplementary Table S2). Future work could usefully consider the ways in which shifts in the polygyny (along with cultural evolution in particular groups), and other aspects of the culture of daily family life, tends to be associated with shifts in the construction of houses.

Nomadism—The more likely people are to move, the less likely they are to invest in an elaborate and complex house (Binford, 1990; Robbins, 1966), and to favor houses that can be easily moved (Driver, 1961). Mobile societies are more likely to build round houses (Robbins, 1966; Feather, 1996). This pattern results because of the ease with which round houses made of

skin can be erected and collapsed (Binford, 1990; Robbins, 1966; Whiting and Ayres, 1968) as well as the extent to which round houses maximize the internal volume of a home for a given quantity of material (Feather, 1996). In our global analysis of a much larger number of societies, we also found nomadic peoples to be much more likely to live in round houses (Table S1). In addition, nomadic peoples were more likely to have houses with domed or sloped roofs (Table S4), covered in animal skins or woven materials (Table S3). The need to move seems to have repeatedly, and independently, favored a certain set of architectural features, at least among those peoples who move with animals (which can help move building materials; Jarzombek, 2013). The Rendille in east Africa, for example, built portable huts, covered in woven mats, which could be reassembled in each new settlement. While the Rendille huts were domed, they shared a great deal in design with the tepees of Native Americans living in the American plains (which were not built until the advent of dog sleds which allowed the tepees to be transported) or the tents of the Nenel who follow the reindeer in Siberia (Prussin, 1995). We found no cases in which nomadic houses were not covered with skin or fabric on a light frame. We did, however, find cases in which nomadic houses were not round. Bedouin houses are built by covering a square frame composed of poles with a fabric roof and walls held in place by tethering ropes (Prussin, 1995). The tethering ropes allow larger structures to be made (and moved) but may also be an adaptation to the need for stability when confronted with desert winds (It would be useful to consider wind as a factor in future analyses of house structure). Similarly, the Tuareg used tent poles to frame a typically rectangular structure covered with mat roofs and ceilings made of palm leaves (Jarzombek, 2013; Prussin, 1995).

Social and socioeconomic pressures in many countries, as well as the boundaries among countries, have made nomadism a far less common lifestyle than it once was. However, many of

the challenges faced by nomads are now being faced by climate refugees, individuals forced to move as the regions in which they live become inhospitable. Recent models suggest that the number of climate refugees in coming years will be in the hundreds of millions (Xu et al., 2020). For aid groups that help these individuals there may be many insights to be garnered from studies of the mobile elements of nomadic homes.

### **Cultural continuity and borrowing**

In addition to the influence of climate and social environments, we also found evidence for the influence of cultural continuity and borrowing from neighboring groups on house construction. Language groupings, a proxy for cultural continuity, were important for the prediction of floor level, wall material and roof shape (Supplementary Tables 1-4). This pattern strongly indicates that ancestry influences housing designs via the vertical generation-to-generation transmission of information across generations, particularly in house features that are strongly linked to functionality or performance. In addition to culturally transmitted norms and values for particular house types, some of the influence of cultural continuity (as measured by language family) on house design may reflect the communal nature of house construction, and the difficulty of learning how to build a new type of house. Studies of barn raising in the United States, for example, suggest that a shared understanding of how to build a barn is necessary for success (Jarzombek, 2013). Similar evidence comes from an experiment testing the emergence and transmission of cumulative cultural knowledge for building. For the experiment, sequential “generations” of builders in replicate groups were asked to construct tall yet stable “spaghetti towers.” Within groups, each generation of builders was permitted to observe (but not participate in) the preceding generation’s building attempt. After 10 generations, tower designs within

groups were found to be much more similar than tower designs among groups, even though each generation had started their building anew (Caldwell and Millen, 2008). In this context, novelty in construction, even if adaptive where the house is to be built, may be maladaptive if it makes the failure of the house more likely. In other cases, however, particularly when climate changes or cultural groups move or are displaced, stability in house design may well be maladaptive. A contemporary example might be the maintenance of lawns by North Americans in extremely arid environments. While lawns in arid environments may be “adaptive” in that they remain effective signals of group membership or individual status (Jenkins, 1994), it is somewhat surprising that less costly signals have not emerged.

In addition to vertical transmission of information across generations as manifested through the possible influence of “language family”, we found evidence supporting the idea of horizontal transfer of house features between neighboring groups. Neighboring societies were more likely to have similar floor levels, wall construction materials and roof types than expected given shared climatic and social parameters (Tables 2). As such, these attributes of house design seem to be, at least in part, influenced by the practices of neighboring cultures and could be evidence that these features have spread via borrowing. Borrowing can lead to both adaptive and non-adaptive outcomes. A cultural group with a locally adapted housing style might end up borrowing from more recently arrived groups whose houses are not adapted to the local environment. For example, in many parts of the tropics, indigenous roofing materials such as palm thatch are being replaced by roofs made of sheet metal, introduced (and in some cases promoted) by settlers and colonists. Despite their durability, simple metal roofs provide little insulation from the tropical sun, often producing building interiors that are exceptionally hot and uncomfortable. Adoption of metal roofs is thus the opposite of what we would predict if

adaptation to local climate (or, at least, temperatures) were driving choices of building materials (Moriarty, 1979). However, it is important to note that some of what appears to be non-adaptive borrowing may represent very local adaptations to conditions not captured in our analyses (e.g., a valley that is much more prone to flooding or higher local rainfall than regional climate would predict).

Ground plans of houses showed the least evidence of borrowing among neighboring societies or transmission within language groups (see low relative variable importance in Table 2). These results contradict existing predictions (e.g., Binford, 1990) that adjacent cultures and history should most strongly influence aspects of material culture that do not affect function. Of the variables we considered, ground plan seems, superficially, to have the least functional significance for houses, at least with regard to functions that relate to environmental conditions. Our results also contradict arguments that the ground plan and, more generally, shape of buildings are strongly influenced by cultural understandings and uses of space (e.g., Hillier's "space syntax"; Hillier et al., 1987). If such understandings were key to ground plan, we would expect ground plan shapes to be vertically transmitted, and unlikely to be borrowed, which is also contrary to what we observed (i.e., relative variable importance for Language Family and is close to zero in Table 2). We believe that these contradictions could be explained by considering that the non-functional aspects of any cultural trait offer greater opportunities for new generations and different cultures to establish their own identity. For example, since changing the ground plan of a house from angular to rounded (or the other way around) is unlikely to affect performance within most environments and social contexts, humans may have greater freedom to vary this feature when searching for ways to stand out from neighbors and distant relatives (Bell and Paegle, 2021; Bettinger et al., 1996; McElreath et al., 2003).

## **Residuals and Implications**

Overall, our results suggest a model in which all of the house features we considered are heavily influenced by climatic drivers and social drivers. Yet for some of these aspects of architecture (i.e., floor level, wall material and roof shape), we also find the influence of cultural continuity and borrowing, and, importantly, some of the observed variation in the architecture of houses remains unexplained.

Some of the most interesting unexplained variation is that associated with features of houses that were partially explained by our models. For example, our models were relatively good at predicting the wall type of houses in a particular society, given knowledge of their climatic and social environments. However, many individual societies made houses with wall types that did not match our model predictions. Those cases represent opportunities for further study of the more complex ways in which culture and architecture can deal with conditions. Here, we highlight one example, that of Japanese houses. Our model predicts that in Japan, particularly in northern Japan, walls should be made of thick materials because winters can be very cold. However, traditional Japanese houses had thin walls of paper (Ooka, 2002). Such walls were well adapted to summer climate but not to the cold winters. Traditionally this problem was resolved by having members of a household gather around a central brazier in the winter and through the wearing of thick clothes. Ooka (2002) has argued that this solution was only possible given the value Japanese society places on the collective; it might not have been possible in the more individualistic West. Rather than warming the house, Japanese society focused on warming bodies within relatively cold houses. In the long run our models make it possible to identify many examples like that of the Japanese house in which cultural or

technological innovation break the “rules” governing what sort of house might be built in a particular context. In this regard, what we have failed to explain is far more interesting than what we have explained.

We confined ourselves to analyzing core structural features of architecture, but future work would usefully consider the many other axes along which houses vary globally. The size of houses relative to the density of inhabitants varies, and has long varied, among cultures in ways that have been suggested to be due to cultural features such as whether a residence is patrilocal or matrilineal (Brown, 1987; Divale, 1977; Ember, 1973; Porčić, 2010). In many cultures houses are decorated (Boas and Jonaitis, 1955; Emmons and Laguna, 1991; Fischer, 1961) and such decoration may depend on levels and types of social stratification (Jarzombek, 2013). Even within particular regions houses often vary greatly in more subtle aspects of their design (e.g., Jordan and O’Neill, 2010). Jordan and O’Neil (2010) consider the evolution of architecture along the Pacific Northwest coast of North America on the basis of 55 different attributes, including sleeping platforms, shelves, door structure, furniture and wall lining, all of which would be interesting to consider globally. One might also consider the colors of buildings and the materials in them (such as temporary floor coverings), which have been argued to be adaptive (Binford, 1990). In addition to houses per se, humans have gone on to produce many other sorts of buildings, which in some cases serve very different functions than houses, yet they might still be expected to respond to some of the same environmental, neighborhood, and historical influences as the house itself (Jarzombek, 2013). For example, amphitheaters emerged independently in New and Old World societies (Ching et al., 1957). Finally, a key element of vernacular architecture is not only how houses are built, but how they are arranged. A large body of theory suggests explanations for differences in the arrangement of houses from one culture to the next,

or even the ways spaces within houses are used or organized (Dawson, 2006; Hillier et al., 1987). This theory is ripe for empirical assessment, but such an assessment will require a global database beyond the scope of what we have so far assembled.

It may come as no surprise to many architects that climatic and social forces are important in explaining global variation in house design, and act independently on different features of homes. Indeed, many have called for, and worked to incorporate, local vernacular architecture into modern buildings (Zhai and Previtali, 2010). Yet, a global survey of the last half-century of state-sponsored and other housing projects would likely reflect very little of the diversity we describe here. Failure to consider tradition in building practices can have social costs (Dawson, 2008) in addition to the costs associated with resource use, energy efficiency and long-term sustainability. Globally, buildings account for nearly half of worldwide energy use and eighty percent of potable water use (Roodman et al., 1991). Building houses that are more adaptive to the local climate is of great importance in order to reduce this energy use.

The influence of social environments, culture and cultural history (as embedded in language) suggests that assuming features of houses are only shaped by climate is, at best, unwise. Yet, to the extent that some features of vernacular houses evolved to improve indoor conditions and reduce the costs of doing so, these houses and their ecology may offer some lessons that could be relevant to climate change adaptation (Olgyay, 2015). With regard to energy use, comparisons by Zhai and Previtali (2010) of a subset of vernacular houses, those houses outperformed optimally designed modern houses on the basis of their ability to maintain constant temperatures. Similarly, our analyses suggest that some dimensions of houses have clearly been shaped by the climatic past and hence potentially of utility in dealing with the climate future. A key next step is to integrate big picture analyses with more holistic, detailed



## Global diversity of the human house

studies of individual vernacular house types, particularly those associated with climates (hot and dry, hot and wet) or human conditions (climate-forced nomadism) that will become far more common in the future. We have the potential to adapt and adopt the knowledge embedded in vernacular houses associated with these increasingly more common climatic and human conditions so as to make millions and perhaps hundreds of millions of lives easier. But as the strong influence of multiple aspects of culture, including language family as a proxy for vertical transmission of culture and house design by neighboring societies as a proxy for horizontal transmission, in our analysis suggests, doing so is unlikely to be the default solution of builders or owners.

**Data availability:** The datasets analyzed in the current study are archived in Zenodo (zenodo.org) under the DOI 10.5281/zenodo.439199. They are also available through the GitHub site of the Database of Places, Language, Culture and Environment (d-place.org) at <https://github.com/D-PLACE/dplace-data/releases/tag/v1.0>.

## References:

- Al-Shaali, R. K. (2006). *Tools for Natural Ventilation in Architecture*. PhD dissertation. University of California, Los Angeles.
- Aschemeier, C. R. (1922). Beds of the Gorilla and Chimpanzee. *Journal of Mammalogy*, 3(3), 176–178. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1373665>
- Banning, E. B., & Byrd, B. F. (1989). Alternative Approaches for Exploring Levantine Neolithic Architecture. *Paléorient*, 154–160.
- Barry III, H. (1980). Ethnographic Atlas XXVIII. *Ethnology*, 19, 245–263.

- Bartholomew, G. A., White, F. N., & Howell, T. R. (1976). The Thermal Significance of the Nest of the Sociable Weaver *Philetairus Socius*: Summer Observations. *Ibis*, *118*(3), 402–411. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1474-919X.1976.tb02027.x>
- Bell, A.V., Paegle, A. (2021). Ethnic Markers and How to Find Them. *Human Nature*, *32*, 470–481. <https://doi-org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1007/s12110-021-09401-z>.
- Bettinger, R. L., Boyd, R., & Richerson, P. J. (1996). Style, Function, and Cultural Evolutionary Processes. In H. D. G. Maschner (Ed.), *Darwinian Archaeologies* (pp. 133–164). Springer US. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4757-9945-3\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4757-9945-3_8)
- Binford, L. R. (1990). Mobility, Housing, and Environment: A Comparative Study. *Journal of Anthropological Research*, *46*, 119–152. <https://doi.org/10.1086/jar.46.2.3630069>
- Boas, F. (1955). *Primitive Art* (Vol. 8). Courier Corporation.
- Bondarenko D, Kazankov A, Khaltourina D, & Korotayev, A. (2005). Ethnographic atlas XXXI: Peoples of easternmost Europe. *Ethnology*. 261–289.
- Botero, C. A., Dor, R., McCain, C. M., & Safran, R. J. (2014). Environmental harshness is positively correlated with intraspecific divergence in mammals and birds. *Molecular Ecology*, *23*(2), 259–268. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mec.12572>
- Box, G. E. P. & Cox, D. R. (1964). An analysis of transformations. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Series B*. *26* (2): 211–252.
- Brown, B. M. (1987). Population Estimation From Floor Area: A Restudy of “Naroll’s Constant.” *Cross-Cultural Research*, *21*, 1–49.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/106939718702100101>
- Burnham, K. P. & Anderson, D. R. (1998). *Model Selection and Multimodel Inference—A Practical Information-Theoretic Approach* (2nd ed.). New York, NY, Springer.

## Global diversity of the human house

- Caldwell, C. A., & Millen, A. E. (2007). Experimental models for testing hypotheses about cumulative cultural evolution. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 29(3), 165–171.
- Casteren, A. van, Sellers, W. I., Thorpe, S. K. S., Coward, S., Crompton, R. H., Myatt, J. P., & Ennos, A. R. (2012). Nest-building orangutans demonstrate engineering know-how to produce safe, comfortable beds. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 109(18), 6873–6877. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1200902109>
- Ching, F. D. K., Jarzombek, M. M., & Prakash, V. (2008). *A Global History of Architecture*. Wiley University Press.
- Clark, Grahame (1957) *Archaeology and Society: Reconstructing the Past*. Harvard University Press.
- Colwell, R. (1974). Predictability, Constancy, and Contingency of Periodic Phenomena. *Ecology*, 55, 1148–1153. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1940366>
- Danielson, J.J., Gesch, D.B. (2010) Global multi-resolution terrain elevation data (GMTED2010) *U.S. Geological Survey Open-File Report*. 2011–1073, 26 p.
- Dawson, P. (2006). Seeing like an Inuit family: The relationship between house form and culture in northern Canada. *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 30(2), 113–135. <https://doi.org/10.7202/017568ar>
- Dawson, P. C. (2008). Unfriendly Architecture: Using Observations of Inuit Spatial Behavior to Design Culturally Sustaining Houses in Arctic Canada. *Housing Studies*, 23(1), 111–128.
- de Dear, R., & Brager, G. S. (1998). Developing an adaptive model of thermal comfort and preference. *ASHRAE Transactions*, 104(1).
- Diehl, M. (1992). Architecture as a Material Correlate of Mobility Strategies: Some Implications for Archeological Interpretation. *Cross-Cultural Research*, 26, 1–35.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/106939719202600101>

Divale, W. (1977). Living Floor Area and Marital Residence: A Replication. *Cross-Cultural Research*, 12, 109–115. <https://doi.org/10.1177/106939717701200202>

Doss-Gollin, James, David J. Farnham, Upmanu Lall, and Vijay Modi (2021). How unprecedented was the February 2021 Texas cold snap? *Environmental Research Letters*, 16 (6), 064056.

Elff, M. (2021). mclogit: Multinomial Logit Models, with or without Random Effects or Overdispersion. <http://mclogit.elff.eu>, <https://github.com/melff/mclogit/>.

Elias, M., Rosengren, R. and Sundström, L., 2005. Seasonal polydomy and unicoloniality in a polygynous population of the red wood ant *Formica truncorum*. *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology*, 57(4), pp.339-349.

Ember, M. (1973). An Archaeological Indicator of Matrilocal versus Patrilocal Residence. *American Antiquity*, 38, 177. <https://doi.org/10.2307/279363>

Ember, M., & Ember, C. R. (1971). The Conditions Favoring Matrilocal versus Patrilocal Residence. *American Anthropologist*, 73(3), 571–594.

Emmons, G. T., & Laguna, F. D. (1991). *The Tlingit Indians*. University of Washington Press.

Feather, A. (1996). Circular or Rectangular Ground Plans: Some Costs and Benefits. *Nebraska Anthropologist*, 13.

Fischer, J. L. (1961). Art Styles as Cultural Cognitive Maps. *American Anthropologist*, 63(1), 79-93.

Fitch, J. M., & Branch, D. P. (1960). Primitive architecture and climate. *Scientific American*, 203(6), 134–144.

Fitzpatrick, Matthew C., and Robert R. Dunn. Contemporary climatic analogs for 540 North

## Global diversity of the human house

- American urban areas in the late 21st century. *Nature communications* 10, no. 1 (2019): 1-7.
- Flannery, K. V. (2002). The Origins of the Village Revisited: From Nuclear to Extended Households. *American Antiquity*, 67(3), 417–433.
- Gavin, M.C., Kavanagh, P.H., Haynie, H.J., Bownern, C., Ember, C.R., Gray, R.D., Jordan, F.M., Kirby, K.R., Kushnick, G., Low, B.S. and Vilela, B., 2018. The global geography of human subsistence. *Royal Society Open Science*, 5(9), p.171897.
- García-Diez, M., & Vaquero, M. (2015). Looking at the Camp: Paleolithic Depiction of a Hunter-Gatherer Campsite. *PLoS ONE*, 10(12).
- Gray, J. P. (1999). A corrected ethnographic atlas. *World Cultures*, 10(1), 24–85.
- Hammarström, H., Forkel, R., & Haspelmath, M. (2015). Glottolog 2.6. Jena: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History. (Available online at <http://glottolog.org>)
- Hillier, B, Hanson, J., & Graham, H. (1987). Ideas are in Things: An Application of the Space Syntax Method to Discovering House Genotypes. *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, 14(4), 363–385. <https://doi.org/10.1068/b140363>
- Hillier, Bill, Musgrove, J., & O’Sullivan, P. (1972). Knowledge and Design. In *Environmental Design: Research and Practice*. University of California Press.
- Iwata, Y., & Ando, C. (2007). Bed and bed-site reuse by western lowland gorillas (*Gorilla g. Gorilla*) in Moukalaba-Doudou National Park, Gabon. *Primates*, 48(1), 77–80. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10329-006-0003-4>
- Jarzombek, M. M. (2013). *Architecture of First Societies: A Global Perspective*. Hoboken, NJ, Wiley & Sons.
- Jeanne, R.L., 1975. The adaptiveness of social wasp nest architecture. *The quarterly review of*

Global diversity of the human house

*biology*, 50(3), pp.267-287.

Jenkins, V. S. (1994). *The Lawn: A History of an American Obsession*. Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Books.

Jordan, P., & O'Neill, S. (2010). Untangling cultural inheritance: Language diversity and long-house architecture on the Pacific northwest coast. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 365(1559), 3875–3888.  
<https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2010.0092>

Kirby, K. R., Gray, R. D., Greenhill, S. J., Jordan, F. M., Gomes-Ng, S., Bibiko, H.-J., Blasi, D. E., Botero, C. A., Bowern, C., Ember, C. R., Leehr, D., Low, B. S., McCarter, J., Divale, W., Gavin, M. C. (2016). D-PLACE: A Global Database of Cultural, Linguistic and Environmental Diversity. *PLoS ONE*, 11(7).

Klíma, B. (1954). Palaeolithic Huts at Dolní Věstonice, Czechoslovakia. *Antiquity*, 28, 4–14.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X00021384>

Koenig, D., & Liedtke, M. (February 17, 2021). Explainer: Why the power grid failed in Texas and beyond. *AP News*, 2.

Korb, J., & Linsenmair, K. E. (1998). The effects of temperature on the architecture and distribution of *Macrotermes bellicosus* (Isoptera: Macrotermitinae) mounds in different habitats of a West African Guinea savanna (Como National Park, Ivory Coast). *Insectes Sociaux*, 45, 51–65. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s000400050068>

Korotayev A, Kazankov A, Borinskaya S, Khaltourina D, & Bondarenko D. (2004).  
Ethnographic atlas XXX: Peoples of Siberia. *Ethnology*. 43: 83–92.

Lhotka, Ondřej, Jan Kyselý, and Aleš Farda. Climate change scenarios of heat waves in Central Europe and their uncertainties. *Theoretical and applied climatology* 131, no. 3 (2018):

1043-1054.

- Lima-Ribeiro, M., Varela, S., González-Hernández, J., de Oliveira, G., Diniz-Filho, J. A., & Terribile, L. (2015). EcoClimate: A database of climate data from multiple models for past, present, and future for macroecologists and biogeographers. *Biodiversity Informatics*, 10, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.17161/bi.v10i0.4955>
- McElreath, R., Boyd, R., & Richerson, P. J. (2003). Shared Norms and the Evolution of Ethnic Markers. *Current Anthropology*, 44(1), 122–130. <https://doi.org/10.1086/345689>
- McNett Jr., C. W. (1979). The Cross-Cultural Method in Archaeology. *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory*, 2, 39–76.
- Mitchell, T. D., & Jones, P. (2005). An Improved Method of Constructing a Database of Monthly Climate Observations and Associated High-Resolution Grids. *International Journal of Climatology*, 25, 693–712. <https://doi.org/10.1002/joc.1181>
- Moriarty, P. (1979). The case for traditional housing in tropical Africa. *Habitat International*, 4(3), 285–290. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0197-3975\(79\)90038-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/0197-3975(79)90038-9)
- Murdock, G. P., & Wilson, S. F. (1972). Settlement Patterns and Community Organization: Cross-Cultural Codes 3. *Ethnology*, 11(3), 254–295. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3773219>
- Murdock, G.P. (1962-1971). *Social Structure*. New York: Macmillan.
- Murdock, G.P. (1949). *Ethnographic Atlas, Installments I-XXVII. Ethnology*. 1–10.
- National Academy of Sciences (2016). *Attribution of extreme weather events in the context of climate change*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.
- Nguyen, A. T., Tran, Q.-B., Tran, D.-Q., & Reiter, S. (2011). An investigation on climate responsive design strategies of vernacular housing in Vietnam. *Building and Environment*, 46, 2088–2106. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.buildenv.2011.04.019>

## Global diversity of the human house

- Noirot, C. and Darlington, J.P., 2000. Termite nests: architecture, regulation and defence. In *Termites: evolution, sociality, symbioses, ecology* (pp. 121-139). Springer, Dordrecht.
- Nursaniah, C., I. Machdar, A. Munir, M. Irwansyah, and H. Sawab (2019). Transformation of stilt houses: a way to respond to the environment to be sustainable. In *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, vol. 365, no. 1, p. 012017. IOP Publishing.
- Olgyay, V. (2015). *Design with Climate: Bioclimatic Approach to Architectural Regionalism - New and expanded Edition*. Princeton University Press.
- Oliver, P. (1997). *Encyclopedia of vernacular architecture of the world*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ooka, R. (2002). Field study on sustainable indoor climate design of a Japanese traditional folk house in cold climate area. *Building and Environment*, 37(3), 319–329.  
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0360-1323\(00\)00085-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0360-1323(00)00085-8)
- Osborne, J. (2002). Notes on the use of data transformations. *Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation*, 8(6).
- Pagel M., & Mace R. (2004) The cultural wealth of nations. *Nature* 428, 275–278.
- Peregrine, P. N. (2001). Cross-Cultural Comparative Approaches in Archaeology. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 30(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.30.1.1>
- Peregrine, P. N. (2004). Cross-Cultural Approaches in Archaeology: Comparative Ethnology, Comparative Archaeology, and Archaeoethnology. *Journal of Archaeological Research*, 12(3), 281–309. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:JARE.0000040232.61243.89>
- Pidoplichko, I. G., & Allsworth-Jones, P. (1998). *Upper palaeolithic dwellings of mammoth bones in the Ukraine: Kiev-Kirillovskii, Gontsy, Dobranichevka, Mezin and Mezhirich*. Ed. Allsworth-Jones. BAR International Series 712.



## Global diversity of the human house

- Porcic, M. (2010). House Floor Area as a Correlate of Marital Residence Pattern: A Logistic Regression Approach. *Cross-Cultural Research*, 44.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1069397110378839>
- Rapoport, A. (1969). *House Form and Culture (Foundations of Cultural Geography Series)*. (1 edition). New Jersey: Pearson.
- Revelle, W. (2020) psych: Procedures for Personality and Psychological Research, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, USA, <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=psych> Version = 2.0.8.
- Robbins, M. C. (1966). House types and settlement patterns: An application of ethnology to archaeological interpretation. *Minnesota Archaeologist*, 28, 3–26.
- Rogers, D. S., & Ehrlich, P. R. (2008). Natural selection and cultural rates of change. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 105(9), 3416–3420.  
<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0711802105>
- Roodman, D. M., Lenssen, N. K., & Peterson, J. A. (1995). *A building revolution: How ecology and health concerns are transforming construction*. Washington, DC: Worldwatch Institute.
- Rudofsky, B. (1987). *Architecture Without Architects: A Short Introduction to Non-pedigreed Architecture*. UNM Press.
- Steadman, P. (2006). Why are most buildings rectangular? *Arq: Architectural Research Quarterly*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1359135506000200>
- Steadman, P. (2008). *The Evolution of Designs: Biological Analogy in Architecture and the Applied Arts*. Routledge.
- Smith, M.L., 2021. Nest structure: Honey bees. In *Encyclopedia of Social Insects* (pp. 626-632).

Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Trenberth, K. E., Fasullo, J. T., & Shepherd, T. G. (2015). Attribution of climate extreme events. *Nature Climate Change*, 5, 725–730.

Tschinkel, W.R., 2004. The nest architecture of the Florida harvester ant, *Pogonomyrmex badius*. *Journal of Insect Science*, 4(1), p.21.

Ummenhofer, C. C., & Meehl, G. A. (2017). Extreme weather and climate events with ecological relevance: A review. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*: 372, 20160135.

Vilela, B., & Villalobos, F. (2015). LetsR: A new R package for data handling and analysis in macroecology. *Methods in Ecology and Evolution*, 6(10), 1229–1234.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/2041-210X.12401>

Vitruvius, P. (1914). *Vitruvius: The Ten Books on Architecture*. Harvard University Press.

Weber, J. N., & Hoekstra, H. (2009). The evolution of burrowing behavior in deer mice (genus *Peromyscus*). *Animal Behaviour*, 77, 603–609.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.anbehav.2008.10.031>

Weber, J. N., Peterson, B. K., & Hoekstra, H. E. (2013). Discrete genetic modules are responsible for complex burrow evolution in *Peromyscus* mice. *Nature*, 493(7432), 402–405. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature11816>

White, D. R., Betzig, L., Mulder, M. B., Chick, G., Hartung, J., Irons, W., ... Spencer, P. (1988). Rethinking Polygyny: Co-Wives, Codes, and Cultural Systems [and Comments and Reply]. *Current Anthropology*, 29(4), 529–572.

Whiting, J. W. M., & Ayres, B. (1968). Inferences from the shape of dwellings. In *Settlement Archaeology*. Palo Alto, Calif., National Press Books, 117–133.

- Willits, D. H. (2001). The Effects of Cloth Characteristics on the Cooling Performance of External Shade Cloths for Greenhouses. *Journal of Agricultural Engineering*, 70(3), 331–340.
- Xu, Chi, Timothy A. Kohler, Timothy M. Lenton, Jens-Christian Svenning, and Marten Scheffer (2020). Future of the human climate niche. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117 (21): 11350-11355.
- Yan, Z., Lok, C., & Liu, J. (2005). Experimental Studies on the Thermal and Moisture Properties of Rammed Earth Used in Adobe Buildings in China. *Architectural Science Review*, 48, 55–60. <https://doi.org/10.3763/asre.2005.4808>
- Zhai, Z. (John), & Previtali, J. M. (2010). Ancient vernacular architecture: Characteristics categorization and energy performance evaluation. *Energy and Buildings*, 42(3), 357–365. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enbuild.2009.10.002>

## Tables

**Table 1.** Varimax rotated principal components analysis of normalized ecological variables (see methods). The main contributors to each component are highlighted in boldface type. In practice, sites with a high temperature harshness are cold, but also seasonal, unpredictable and variable regarding temperature. Sites with a high xeric harshness receive little precipitation and that precipitation is unpredictable. Mountain dwelling sites are high in elevation and slope.

	Temperature harshness (RC1)	Xeric harshness (RC2)	Mountain dwelling (RC3)	Uniqueness
Mean annual temperature	<b>-0.84</b>	0.02	-0.42	0.11
Mean annual variance in temperature	<b>0.76</b>	0.53	0.19	0.11
Temperature predictability	<b>-0.82</b>	-0.42	-0.2	0.10
Mean annual coefficient of variation in precipitation	<b>-0.82</b>	0.03	0.21	0.29
Precipitation predictability	0.04	<b>-0.95</b>	-0.09	0.08
Mean annual precipitation	-0.53	<b>-0.75</b>	0.07	0.16
Slope	0.07	-0.03	<b>0.91</b>	0.17
Elevation	0.07	0.13	<b>0.88</b>	0.21
SS loadings	2.93	1.95	1.91	
Cumulative variance explained	37%	61%	85%	

**Table 2.** Summary of multimodel inference analysis performed on various components of house architecture among traditional human societies. See Appendix S1 for detailed results. Values in the top part of the table correspond to the probability of predicting a house feature right based solely on chance (chance prediction), based on knowing the most common category or based on the predictive value of the average model. In all cases, the average model did better than chance or than prediction based on the most common category.

	House feature			
	Ground plan	Floor level	Wall material	Roof shape
<i>Chance prediction</i> <sup>†</sup>	0.50	0.33	0.25	0.33
<i>Most common category</i> <sup>‡</sup>	0.52	0.79	0.38	0.50
<i>Predictive value of average model</i> <sup>*</sup>	0.65	0.85	0.55	0.67
<i>Relative variable importance</i>				
Intercept	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Neighborhood effects (potential for cultural diffusion)	0.27	1.00	1.00	1.00
Polygyny	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Nomadism (ref = sedentary)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Political Complexity	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Temperature harshness (PC1)	0.94	1.00	0.99	1.00
Mountain dwelling (PC2)	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.76
Xeric harshness (PC3)	0.99	1.00	1.00	1.00
Temperature harshness*Political Complexity	0.98	1.00	1.00	0.71
Language Family (cultural history)	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00

<sup>†</sup> Computed as  $1 / (\# \text{ of categories})$  in the response variable.

<sup>‡</sup> Relative abundance of the response category with the largest number of observations.

<sup>\*</sup> Computed as the proportion of correct predictions in the entire dataset

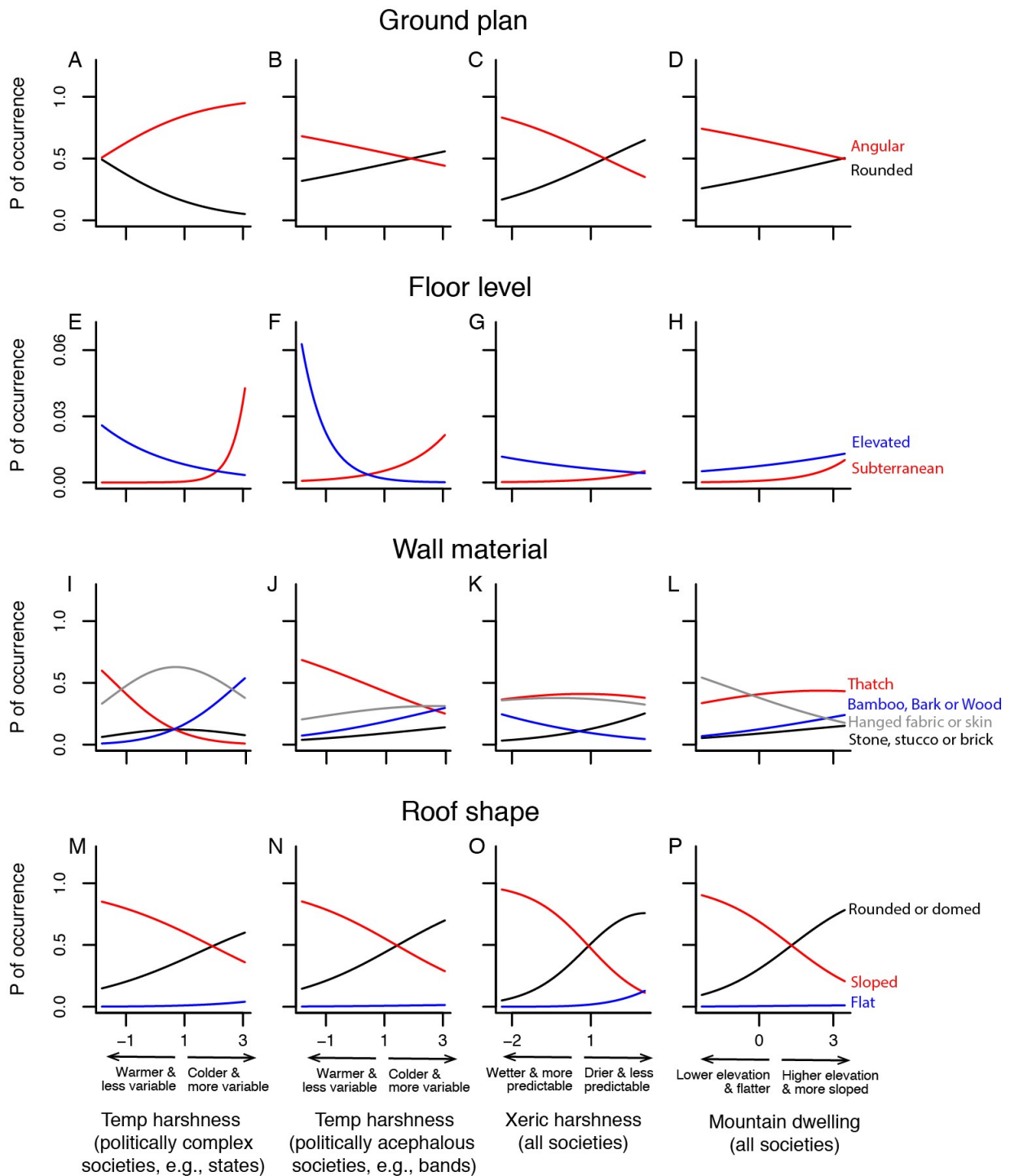
**Table 3.** Percentage of societies with monogamous, polygynous or limited polygynous family structures with rounded vs. angular ground plans.

<b>Family Structure</b>	<b>Percentage rounded ground plan (N)</b>	<b>Percentage angular ground plan (N)</b>
Polygyny in which co-wives share quarters	35% (129)	65% (242)
Polygyny in which co-wives live separately	56% (85)	44% (66)
Limited polygyny	54% (226)	46% (191)
Monogamous	83% (139)	17% (29)

## Figure legends

**Fig. 1.** Environmental effects on vernacular house features across a global sample of 1140 human societies. Panels depict how the probabilities of occurrence for different house features change as a function of temperature harshness, xeric harshness, and mountain dwelling (see methods for details on the interpretation of these principal components). The effect of temperature harshness is plotted in two columns to depict its interaction with political complexity. The first column highlights effects in large-state societies whereas the second one highlights effects in politically acephalous societies (i.e., autonomous bands or villages). Color conventions: **(a)** Ground plan: red = angular; black = rounded. **(b)** Floor level: red = subterranean; blue = elevated (effects on societies that build houses at ground level are not plotted here to emphasize changes in the rarer categories). **(c)** Wall material: black = stone, stucco or brick; red = thatch; blue = bamboo, bark or wood; grey = hanged fabrics or skin; **(d)** Roof shape: blue = flat; black = rounded or domed; red = sloped.

Figure 1.





**Supplementary materials**

**Supplementary Tables S1-S4.** Fully parameterized model for the various house features included in this study.

**Supplementary Tables S5-S8.** AICc-weighted model averages for the various house features included in this study.

**Supplementary Figures S1-S4.** Moran's I autocorrelograms of the residuals for each category of a vernacular house feature as computed from the fully parameterized model

**Supplementary Table S1.** Fully parameterized model of ground plan in vernacular houses

(significant predictors have been highlighted in boldface type).

Call:

```
mblogit(formula = HouseShape ~ Neighbor + Polygyny + Mobility + XericHarshness +
MountainDwelling + PolComplexity * TemperatureHarshness, data = HouseShape,
random = ~1 | LangFamily, method = "MQL", control = mmclogit.control(maxit = 30))
```

*Equation for rounded vs angular edges:*

	Estimate	SE	z-value	Pr(> z )
(Intercept)	0.13056	0.4184	0.312	0.755
Neighbor	0.20172	0.28511	0.708	0.479252
<b>PolygynyFrequent</b>	0.94302	0.26401	3.572	0.000354
<b>PolygynyLimited</b>	0.55523	0.24343	2.281	0.022556
<b>MobilitySedentary</b>	-1.16322	0.22955	-5.068	4.03E-07
PolComplexity	-0.15718	0.08327	-1.888	0.059078
TemperatureHarshness	0.25794	0.22137	1.165	0.243935
<b>XericHarshness</b>	0.29098	0.09612	3.027	0.002468
<b>MountainDwelling</b>	0.19945	0.08203	2.431	0.015045
<b>PolComplexity:TemperatureHarshness</b>	-0.2293	0.08739	-2.624	0.008692

**Supplementary Table S2.** Fully parameterized model of floor level in vernacular houses

(significant predictors have been highlighted in boldface type)

Call:

```
mblogit(formula = HouseLevel ~ Neighbor + Polygyny + Mobility +
  PolComplexity * TemperatureHarshness + XericHarshness + MountainDwelling,
  data = HouseLevel, random = ~1 | LangFamily, method = "MQL",
  control = mmclogit.control(maxit = 30))
```

*Equation for Level vs Elevated:*

	Estimate	SE	z-value	Pr(> z )
(Intercept)	1.58769	0.96285	1.649	0.099159
<b>Neighbor</b>	4.46721	0.46494	9.608	< 2.00E-16
PolygynyFrequent	0.33189	0.40883	0.812	0.416898
PolygynyLimited	-0.3205	0.33727	-0.950	0.34197
<b>MobilitySedentary</b>	-2.7327	0.88873	-3.075	2.11E-03
PolComplexity	-0.10876	0.12228	-0.889	0.373782
<b>TemperatureHarshness</b>	1.35742	0.37355	3.634	0.000279
<b>XericHarshness</b>	0.30573	0.15359	1.990	0.046537
MountainDwelling	-0.06674	0.1198	-0.557	0.577466
<b>PolComplexity:TemperatureHarshness</b>	-0.24884	0.1123	-2.216	0.026707

*Equation for Subterranean vs Elevated:*

	Estimate	SE	z-value	Pr(> z )
<b>(Intercept)</b>	2.5028	1.1458	2.184	0.028931
<b>Neighbor</b>	-1.5645	0.6534	-2.395	0.016643
<b>PolygynyFrequent</b>	2.0207	0.6751	2.993	0.002763
<b>PolygynyLimited</b>	1.2117	0.6100	1.986	0.046981
<b>MobilitySedentary</b>	-1.9648	0.9201	-2.135	0.032731
<b>PolComplexity</b>	-1.3296	0.3583	-3.711	0.000207
<b>TemperatureHarshness</b>	1.473	0.4651	3.167	0.001539
<b>XericHarshness</b>	1.033	0.2472	4.178	2.94E-05
<b>MountainDwelling</b>	0.5712	0.2002	2.854	0.004321
PolComplexity:TemperatureHarshness	0.2712	0.2112	1.284	0.199002

**Supplementary Table S3.** Fully parameterized model of wall materials in vernacular houses

(significant predictors have been highlighted in boldface type)

Call:

```
mblogit(formula = WallMat ~ Neighbor + Polygyny + Mobility +
  PolComplexity * TemperatureHarshness + XericHarshness + MountainDwelling,
  data = WallMat, random = ~1 | LangFamily, method = "MQL",
  control = mmclogit.control(maxit = 30))
```

*Equation for Stone/Brick/Daub/Adobe vs Hanged fabrics/Skins/Mats/Open:*

	Estimate	SE	z-value	Pr(> z )
<b>(Intercept)</b>	-3.11696	0.51415	-6.062	1.34E-09
<b>Neighbor</b>	4.89979	0.47438	10.329	< 2.00E-16
PolygynyFrequent	0.05455	0.39116	0.139	0.88909
PolygynyLimited	0.01964	0.36648	0.054	9.57E-01
<b>MobilitySedentary</b>	2.50651	0.35383	7.084	1.40E-12
PolComplexity	-0.19729	0.12231	-1.613	0.10674
TemperatureHarshness	0.44436	0.26355	1.686	0.09179
XericHarshness	0.22722	0.13977	1.626	0.10402
<b>MountainDwelling</b>	0.32845	0.12479	2.632	0.00849
PolComplexity:TemperatureHarshness	-0.12021	0.1074	-1.119	0.26305

*Equation for Thatch vs Hanged fabrics/Skins/Mats/Open:*

	Estimate	SE	z-value	Pr(> z )
(Intercept)	-0.62342	0.44552	-1.399	0.1617
<b>Neighbor</b>	2.6983	0.45444	5.938	2.89E-09
PolygynyFrequent	0.18365	0.36943	0.497	0.6191
PolygynyLimited	0.22021	0.35215	0.625	0.5318
MobilitySedentary	0.43541	0.31353	1.389	0.1649
<b>PolComplexity</b>	-0.2479	0.12487	-1.985	0.0471
TemperatureHarshness	-0.2874	0.25794	-1.114	0.2652
XericHarshness	-0.03923	0.13191	-0.297	0.7662
MountainDwelling	0.12878	0.12036	1.07	0.2846
PolComplexity:TemperatureHarshness	-0.07507	0.1195	-0.628	0.5299

*Equation for Wood/Bamboo/Bark vs Hanged fabrics/Skins/Mats/Open:*

	Estimate	SE	z-value	Pr(> z )
<b>(Intercept)</b>	-2.13869	0.53443	-4.002	6.29E-05
<b>Neighbor</b>	3.82351	0.468	8.17	3.09E-16
PolygynyFrequent	0.08216	0.39559	0.208	0.83547

Global diversity of the human house

PolygynyLimited	0.16692	0.37036	0.451	0.65222
<b>MobilitySedentary</b>	2.42457	0.36691	6.608	3.89E-11
<b>PolComplexity</b>	-0.38775	0.12651	-3.065	0.00218
TemperatureHarshness	-0.08644	0.27599	-0.313	0.75412
XericHarshness	-0.26538	0.14476	-1.833	0.06676
MountainDwelling	0.23431	0.1261	1.858	0.06315
PolComplexity:TemperatureHarshness	0.12081	0.10992	1.099	0.27173

**Supplementary Table S4.** Fully parameterized model of roof shape in vernacular houses (significant predictors have been highlighted in boldface type)

Call:

```
mblogit(formula = RoofShape ~ Neighbor + Polygyny + Mobility +
  PolComplexity * TemperatureHarshness + XericHarshness + MountainDwelling,
  data = RoofShape, random = ~1 | LangFamily, method = "MQL",
  control = mmclogit.control(maxit = 100))
```

*Equation for Rounded dome vs Flat:*

	Estimate	SE	z-value	Pr(> z )
(Intercept)	1.88178	1.0063	1.87	0.06148
<b>Neighbor</b>	3.20459	0.67316	4.761	1.93E-06
PolygynyFrequent	1.11173	0.63682	1.746	0.08085
PolygynyLimited	0.83477	0.58035	1.438	0.15032
<b>MobilitySedentary</b>	-3.30191	0.69632	-4.742	2.12E-06
PolComplexity	-0.07341	0.18837	-0.39	0.69674
TemperatureHarshness	0.73463	0.55364	1.327	0.18454
<b>XericHarshness</b>	-0.68883	0.23293	-2.957	0.0031
MountainDwelling	0.02883	0.20138	0.143	0.88616
<b>PolComplexity:TemperatureHarshness</b>	-0.54647	0.2059	-2.654	0.00795

*Equation for Sloped vs Flat:*

	Estimate	SE	z-value	Pr(> z )
<b>(Intercept)</b>	3.8311	1.049	3.652	0.00026
Neighbor	1.0743	0.6267	1.714	0.086485
PolygynyFrequent	-0.3181	0.6137	-0.518	0.604266
PolygynyLimited	-0.2848	0.5495	-0.518	0.60419
<b>MobilitySedentary</b>	-2.5967	0.7156	-3.629	0.000285
PolComplexity	0.142	0.1827	0.777	0.436965
TemperatureHarshness	-0.6925	0.5508	-1.257	0.208636
<b>XericHarshness</b>	-1.4957	0.2392	-6.254	4.00E-10

## Global diversity of the human house

<b>MountainDwelling</b>	-0.5072	0.2027	-2.502	0.012354
PolComplexity:TemperatureHarshness	-0.1966	0.1796	-1.095	0.273718

---

**Supplementary Table S5.** AICc-weighted model average of ground plan in vernacular houses*Equation for rounded vs angular edges:*

	Estimate	Lower C.I.	Upper C.I.	R.V.I.
(Intercept)	-0.169	-0.767	0.429	1.000
Neighbor	0.022	-0.123	0.167	0.270
PolygynyFrequent	2.235	1.737	2.733	1.000
PolygynyLimited	1.187	0.693	1.681	1.000
MobilitySedentary	-1.374	-1.786	-0.962	1.000
PolComplexity	-0.241	-0.386	-0.096	0.990
TemperatureHarshness	0.468	0.170	0.766	0.980
XericHarshness	0.407	0.258	0.556	0.940
MountainDwelling	0.185	0.054	0.316	1.000
PolComplexity:TemperatureHarshness	-0.265	-0.422	-0.108	0.000

**Supplementary Table S6.** AICc-weighted model average of floor level in vernacular houses*Equation for Level vs Elevated:*

	Estimate	Lower C.I.	Upper C.I.	R.V.I.
(Intercept)	1.263	-0.469	2.996	1.000
Neighbor	5.170	4.309	6.031	1.000
PolygynyFrequent	1.274	0.575	1.972	1.000
PolygynyLimited	-0.194	-0.807	0.419	1.000
MobilitySedentary	-2.852	-4.523	-1.180	1.000
PolComplexity	-0.225	-0.441	-0.010	1.000
TemperatureHarshness	1.579	0.925	2.233	1.000
XericHarshness	0.188	-0.075	0.450	1.000
MountainDwelling	-0.166	-0.379	0.047	1.000
PolComplexity:TemperatureHarshness	-0.291	-0.478	-0.105	1.000

*Equation for Subterranean vs Elevated:*

	Estimate	Lower C.I.	Upper C.I.	R.V.I.
(Intercept)	1.685	-0.571	3.941	1.000
Neighbor	-1.258	-2.610	0.093	1.000
PolygynyFrequent	3.580	2.177	4.983	1.000
PolygynyLimited	1.897	0.559	3.236	1.000
MobilitySedentary	-2.046	-3.781	-0.310	1.000
PolComplexity	-1.585	-2.347	-0.823	1.000
TemperatureHarshness	1.743	0.857	2.630	1.000
XericHarshness	0.817	0.403	1.230	1.000
MountainDwelling	0.589	0.225	0.954	1.000
PolComplexity:TemperatureHarshness	0.229	-0.221	0.678	1.000



**Supplementary Table S7.** AICc-weighted model average of wall materials in vernacular houses*Equation for Stone/Brick/Daub/Adobe vs Hanged fabrics/Skins/Mats/Open:*

	Estimate	Lower C.I.	Upper C.I.	R.V.I.
(Intercept)	-3.972	-4.930	-3.014	1.000
Neighbor	5.293	4.389	6.196	1.000
PolygynyFrequent	0.477	-0.205	1.158	1.000
PolygynyLimited	-0.261	-0.951	0.428	1.000
MobilitySedentary	3.023	2.358	3.688	1.000
PolComplexity	-0.103	-0.315	0.110	1.000
TemperatureHarshness	0.236	-0.038	0.509	1.000
XericHarshness	0.398	0.167	0.629	0.990
MountainDwelling	0.375	0.160	0.591	1.000
PolComplexity:TemperatureHarshness	-0.055	-0.221	0.111	1.000

*Equation for Thatch vs Hanged fabrics/Skins/Mats/Open:*

	Estimate	Lower C.I.	Upper C.I.	R.V.I.
(Intercept)	-0.121	-0.937	0.696	1.000
Neighbor	2.665	1.773	3.556	1.000
PolygynyFrequent	0.083	-0.600	0.766	1.000
PolygynyLimited	0.256	-0.413	0.926	1.000
MobilitySedentary	0.290	-0.284	0.863	1.000
PolComplexity	-0.578	-0.831	-0.324	1.000
TemperatureHarshness	-0.095	-0.373	0.183	0.990
XericHarshness	0.026	-0.196	0.247	1.000
MountainDwelling	0.238	0.030	0.446	1.000
PolComplexity:TemperatureHarshness	-0.203	-0.428	0.022	1.000

*Equation for Wood/Bamboo/Bark vs Hanged fabrics/Skins/Mats/Open:*

	Estimate	Lower C.I.	Upper C.I.	R.V.I.
(Intercept)	-2.041	-2.945	-1.138	1.000
Neighbor	3.693	2.779	4.607	0.990
PolygynyFrequent	-0.225	-0.913	0.463	1.000
PolygynyLimited	0.074	-0.601	0.750	1.000
MobilitySedentary	2.379	1.739	3.020	1.000
PolComplexity	-0.484	-0.720	-0.248	1.000
TemperatureHarshness	-0.004	-0.260	0.251	1.000
XericHarshness	-0.293	-0.532	-0.054	1.000
MountainDwelling	0.411	0.195	0.627	1.000
PolComplexity:TemperatureHarshness	0.208	0.040	0.377	1.000

**Supplementary Table S8.** AICc-weighted model average of roof shape in vernacular houses*Equation for Rounded dome vs Flat:*

	Estimate	Lower C.I.	Upper C.I.	R.V.I.
(Intercept)	1.628	-0.128	3.385	1.000
Neighbor	3.427	2.223	4.632	1.000
PolygynyFrequent	1.714	0.465	2.963	1.000
PolygynyLimited	1.141	-0.028	2.310	0.760
MobilitySedentary	-3.760	-5.073	-2.447	0.710
PolComplexity	-0.017	-0.103	0.068	1.000
TemperatureHarshness	0.071	-0.611	0.753	0.760
XericHarshness	-0.759	-1.166	-0.352	1.000
MountainDwelling	0.060	-0.297	0.416	1.000
PolComplexity:TemperatureHarshness	-0.128	-0.226	-0.029	0.710

*Equation for Sloped vs Flat:*

	Estimate	Lower C.I.	Upper C.I.	R.V.I.
(Intercept)	4.361	2.620	6.102	1.000
Neighbor	0.731	-0.432	1.894	1.000
PolygynyFrequent	-1.694	-2.846	-0.542	1.000
PolygynyLimited	-0.729	-1.778	0.319	1.000
MobilitySedentary	-2.220	-3.591	-0.849	1.000
PolComplexity	0.024	-0.059	0.108	1.000
TemperatureHarshness	-0.499	-1.170	0.172	1.000
XericHarshness	-1.646	-2.074	-1.217	1.000
MountainDwelling	-0.559	-0.929	-0.189	1.000
PolComplexity:TemperatureHarshness	-0.100	-0.187	-0.014	1.000

**Supplementary Table S8.** Spatial correlation statistics for model residuals in models that predict different house features*Variable: House level*

Response category	moran.i.null	moran.i	p.value
Elevated	-0.00091	-0.01172	0.51092
Level	-0.00091	-0.01372	0.34902
Subterranean	-0.00091	0.01086	0.46586

*Variable: Ground plan*

Response category	moran.i.null	moran.i	p.value
Angular edges	-0.00090	-0.00628	0.74741
Round edges	-0.00090	-0.01401	0.43250

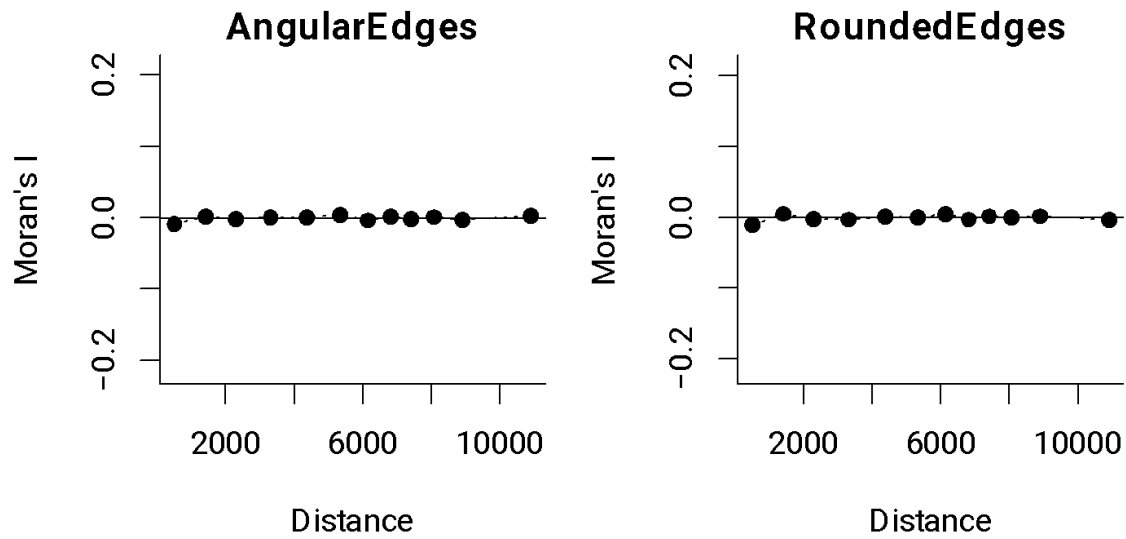
*Variable: Roof shape*

Response category	moran.i.null	moran.i	p.value
Flat	-0.00160	-0.02679	0.23200
Rounded dome	-0.00160	-0.00164	0.99553
Sloped	-0.00160	-0.00229	0.90573

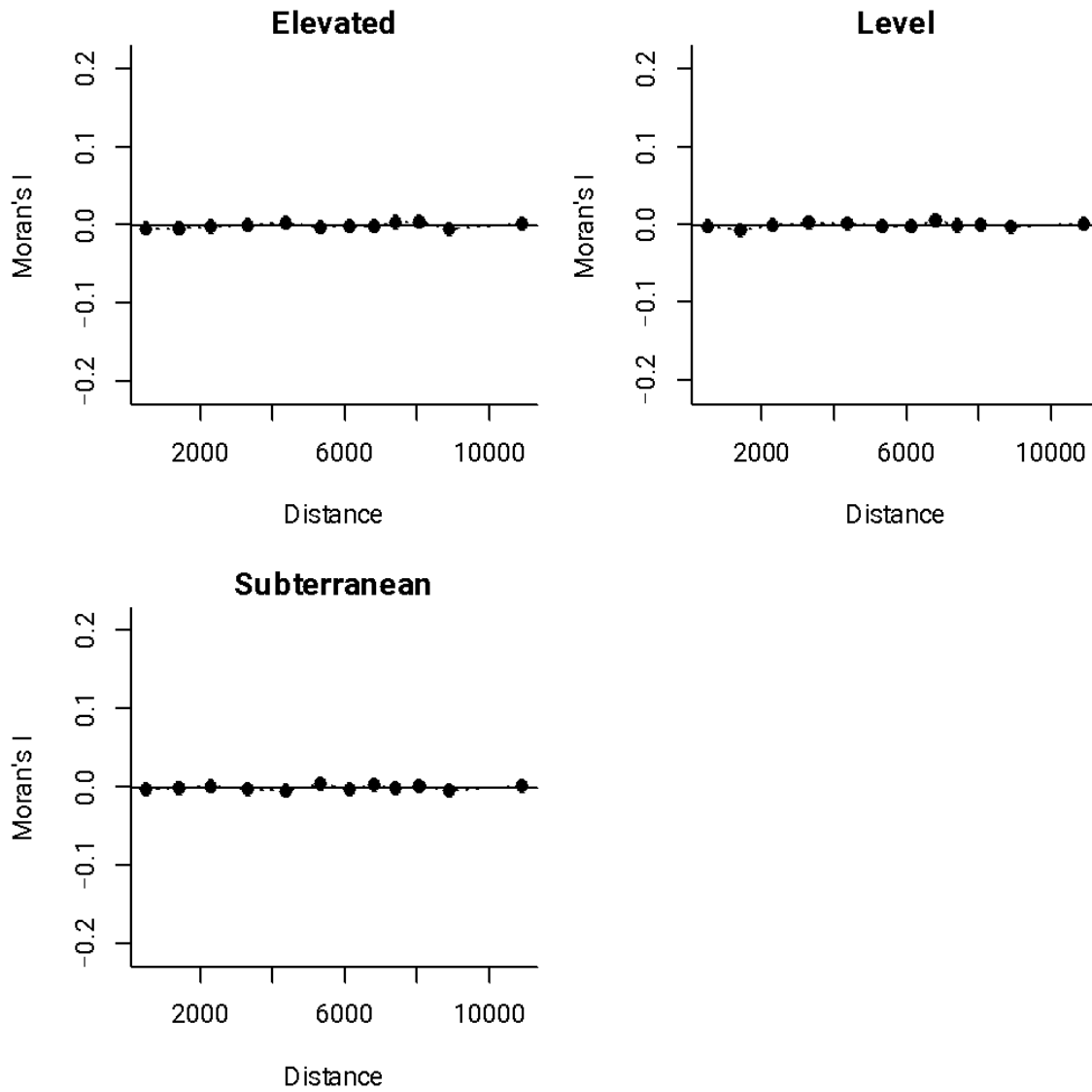
*Variable: Wall materials*

Response category	moran.i.null	moran.i	p.value
Hanged fabrics, skins, mats, open	-0.00100	-0.00571	0.78217
Stone, brick, daub, adobe	-0.00100	-0.00864	0.65582
Thatch	-0.00100	-0.02892	0.04063
Wood, bamboo, poles, bark	-0.00100	-0.01390	0.44255

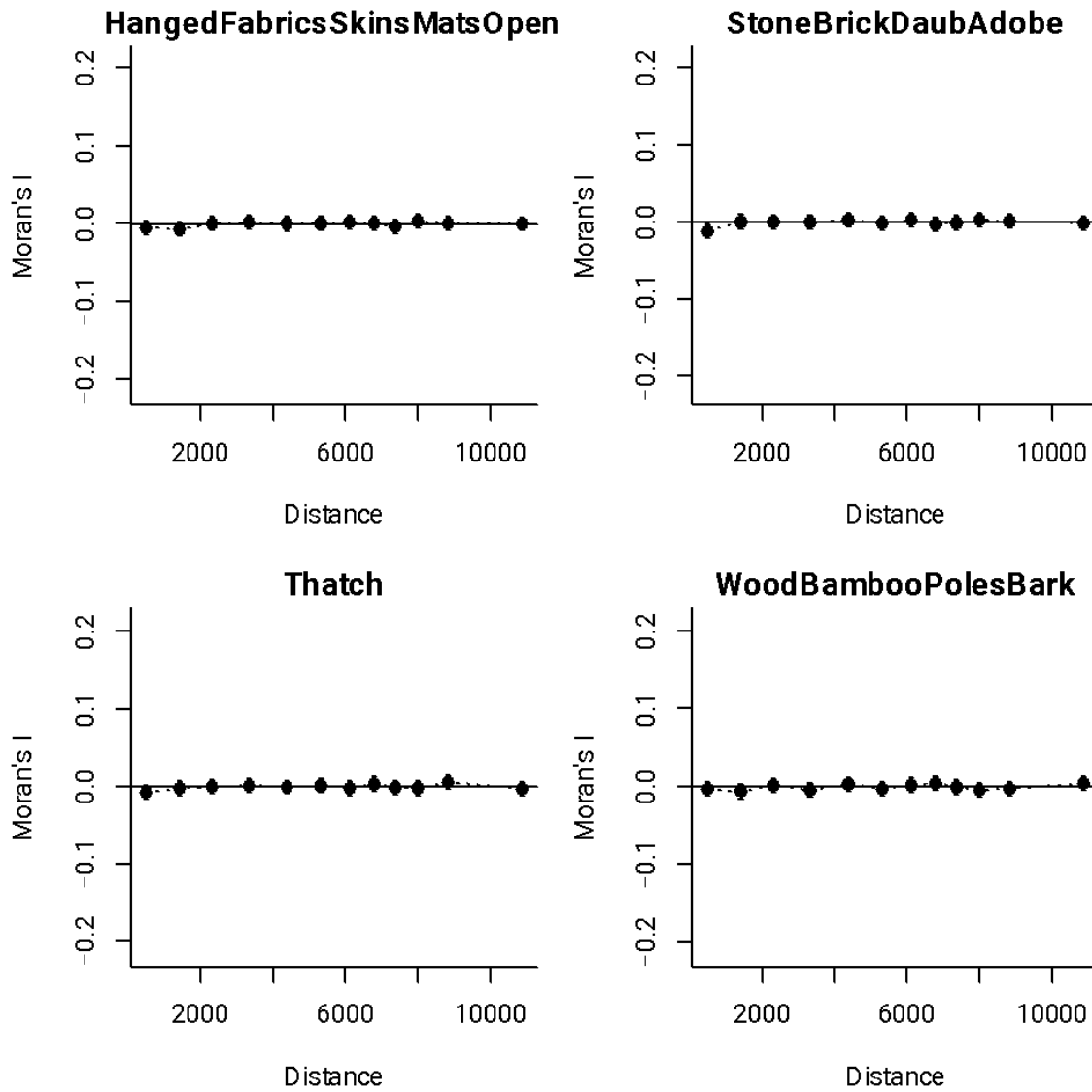
**Supplementary Figure S1.** Moran's I autocorrelograms of the residuals for each category of ground plan as computed from the fully parameterized model.



**Supplementary Figure S2.** Moran's I autocorrelograms of the residuals for each category of house level as computed from the fully parameterized model.



**Supplementary Figure S3.** Moran's I autocorrelograms of the residuals for each category of wall material as computed from the fully parameterized model.



**Supplementary Figure S4.** Moran's I autocorrelograms of the residuals for each category of roof shape as computed from the fully parameterized model.

