

CLAS Events - Lent Term 2025

Tuesday 04 February - 12:30pm | Lunchtime Seminar

Room S2 - Second Floor, Alison Richard Building

More Than a Home: Dwelling, Place, and Poverty in Rural Uruguay

[Samuel Brandt](#) (University of Cambridge)

Chair: [Graham Denyer Willis](#) (University of Cambridge)

Abstract:

How do you house the rural poor at a national scale? This question drove one of the most audacious social policies in late-twentieth century Latin America. *More Than a Home: Dwelling, Place, and Poverty in Rural Uruguay* is a historical, ethnographic, and policy-oriented account of the origins, evolution, and impact of Uruguay's Movement for the Eradication of Unhealthy Rural Housing (MEVIR). Guided by the slogan, "To see it rain from inside without getting wet", MEVIR was founded in 1967 to provide dignified living for rural laborers residing in precarious mud and straw dwellings. A parastatal institution premised on mutual aid construction, MEVIR has since built over 33,000 homes and exists in nearly every small town across Uruguay. A sui generis effort to bring housing policy, urban planning, formal homeownership, and a sense of community to remote areas, MEVIR keeps the rural working poor rooted in the places they call home and away from informal settlements on the periphery of cities. In the predominantly urban field of social housing, MEVIR is a rare case of best practices in a rural setting. Three factors explain MEVIR's sustained effectiveness: a clear objective to serve a specific geographical context, a methodology of policy implementation as a process of social growth, and a sensitivity to the scales and places where it operates. As my travels to all nineteen departments (akin to counties) of Uruguay with MEVIR technicians illustrate, MEVIR vindicates the power of geographic knowledge.

Samuel T. Brandt is a cultural-historical geographer of Latin America, namely the Southern Cone and Brazil. He is a Research Fellow in Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences at Gonville and Caius College, University of Cambridge. His scholarly work has been published in the *Geographical Review*, the *Journal of Latin American Geography*, and the *AAG Review of Books*. The recipient of two Fulbright awards, he has also written about Uruguay for a variety of magazines and newspapers.

