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**Saving home from the pitfalls of the home, through
homing
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Saving home from the pitfalls of the home, through homing **Paolo Boccagni**

Abstract

The idea(l) of the home as the place where people "naturally" want to stay or return to, and as a unique source of protection, privacy and self-achievement, has an extended intellectual history and cultural prevalence, with its own socio-economic determinants, at least in Western countries. What the home means in practice besides brick and mortar, under what conditions it is indeed a source of home-like feelings, and to the benefit of whom, are all – however – more complex and elusive questions.

My contribution provides a critical overview of the inclusive and supportive potential of the home, with particular regard to vulnerable dwellers. It does so, conceptually, by interrogating the material, relational and emotional conditions under which a given place is indeed experienced as home-like in light its characteristics, of those of dwellers themselves, and of the underlying conception(s) of home. Such an exercise calls for deconstructing the ideological representations of the home as a necessarily and naturally "good" entity which, as such, should not be discussed, let alone researched, further. For sure, this commonsensical view touches deep chords and emotional needs in people's everyday life. It is also amplified and capitalized in the political discourse, in ways that range from the emphasis on the home as the ideal setting for ageing, in social and health care policies, to less benign ways of setting the "national home" against immigrants, in nativist politics. Nonetheless, much critical literature has radically questioned the inherently warm, inclusive or protective nature of the home, or of the metaphors associated with it. This has led to more reflexive and nuanced views of what home means to whom, under which temporal and spatial coordinates; in other words, inviting to study the protective and inclusionary scope of the home as an empirical question, rather than a pre-given assumption – in fact, a normative ideal. No doubt, some sort of experience of home applies anywhere, regardless of one's social or cultural background; the same seems to hold for the human need to feel at home somewhere. Yet, whether and how a particular domestic setting does overlap with home – as a distinctive source of security, familiarity and control – is a major research and policy issue, which requires more investigation.

By revisiting the transdisciplinary debate of “home studies”, and based on my current research on home and mobility (Boccagni, 2017), this paper argues for a novel understanding of the environmental, family and personal variables that can turn a dwelling into a home in a “deep” sense; a complex, but critical transition for an empirically-based view of home to inform new developments in health and social care. The currency of positive, even romantic views of the home is interrogated in the first place, together with the pervasive yet problematic use of “home” in the public discourse. As I illustrate, there is nothing obvious in tracing what actually lies behind discursive representations of home – and the emotional and value constellations associated with them. The emerging field of home studies is then reviewed, prior to presenting my own approach, which revisits the experience of home through a conceptual distinction between home, homemaking and homing. Last, the main implications of my argument for research and policy purposes are sketched out.

Full Paper awaiting publication