



WHAT IS HOME? | Briefing Paper for Academic Contributors to HRF Research

We see home as the universal human context. It includes the physical environment and the work needed to care for and maintain it, as well as the emotional and relational work of families and households.

Home also includes all people not living in family structures but functioning as households in flat shares, college residences, care homes and other settings. We champion and provide evidence for the lifelong value of home through multidisciplinary academic research, expert debate, publication and wide dissemination. What follows is a rationale for our work, the vision that informs it, our approach and a description of the field.

Home means different things to different people, societies and cultures, but we can find a few common features, which are found in all of them, albeit with different meanings. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as "a dwelling place; the house or domicile of a person; the fixed residence of a family; the seat of domestic life and interests; the dwelling in which one habitually lives, or which one regards as one's own home...". It is thus a physical place or space.

But it is also much more than that (Argandoña 2018). It is the place for the intimacy of the person, to which he retreats to keep his life in order and regain control over it; "the open space for the silent flourishing of the human" (Marcos and Bertolaso 2018, 53); "the most recondite, private, safe and comfortable place for the 'I' (self), where it is sheltered from the natural world, to which it belongs as its most intimate refuge, and where it addresses the world and the other, opening itself to transcendence" (Patrão Neves 2018). It is "within but open" (Marcos and Bertolaso 2018). "Of all places, home has a particularly powerful symbolic and psychological significance... home is more than a place where an individual resides; rather, it is a unique place where a person's past, present, and future 'self' is reflected and brought to life" (Graham et al. 2015, 346). "Home is where the heart is" (Fox O'Mahoney 2013, 164). It is "the place to which one returns", not only physically, but also with memory, imagination and emotions (Alvira 2010).

The home is a space in which a social group or community of people - a family, although not necessarily with ties of kinship or affinity - develops its private life. In this sphere, these people develop relationships with each other and with the outside world, giving rise to diverse ties and affective relationships; where they learn to live with others, to share resources and capacities and carry out service activities. It is not a voluntary organisation, to which one chooses to belong; it is necessary and "natural", although it is also the result of the decisions and actions of the people who form it.

All the above is not a description of a real home, but shows its important social function, which it may or may not fulfil. Indeed, like any human creation, the home can and does have important failings; it can be an arena of violence and abuse of power, of loneliness and suffering, of hostility and oppression, often unacknowledged (cf. Douglas 1991, 303). What follows is a set of reflections on what the home is and what its function is for the people in it and for the society in which it develops.

Space

Home is a living space, a physical and material realm: house, dwelling, room, flat, dwelling, with its accompanying furniture, fittings, technology and decorations - and also hut, tent, boat, trailer, corner of a refugee camp..., as the case may be. It is a closed, isolated, separate place, with walls that offer security and protect the privacy of those inside; without walls there is no interiority. But it is also an open place: it has doors and windows that are not mere holes, but filters that allow the selective entry and exit of objects, people, ideas...; without doors and windows the house turns out to be a prison (cf. Marías 1979, 130-131).

But the home as a physical space also has a psychological, cultural or emotional dimension. In the home, the inner world of the people who live there is manifested. "While the idea of home can be seen as a universal, the experience of home is socially and culturally determined" (Fox O'Mahoney 2013, 165). "Home is a material object, but it is also an (...) emotional and meaningful relationship between the inhabitants and the living spaces" (Karjalainen 1993, 71). Home is "awareness of a fixed point in space, a firm position from which we 'proceed'... and to which we return in due course. To 'go home' is to return to that firm position which we know, to which we are accustomed, in which we feel secure, and in which our emotional relations are most intense" (Heller 1984, 239). In a way, home is like the extension of the 'I', as expression, identification, belonging or appropriation. Logically, this emotional dimension of spaces is not given, but is shaped and changed over time.

Functionally, the home is a kitchen, a restaurant, a bedroom, a hospital, a place of leisure, rest and work, and much more. The use of domestic space is developed through social norms and cultural customs. The names of the rooms - bedroom, kitchen, dining room, living room, bathroom, study, playroom... - describe the relationships between the practices carried out in the home and the physical spaces.

At all times there are displaced people (migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, temporary workers) who do not have a home as such, but will have the memory of the home they left, some current transitional solution, and the hope and desire to create a new home, or to return to the old one. For them home will not be a physical presence, but mediated between what they had and what they hope to have in the future.

People

Home cannot be understood without the specific people who make it up. Feeling at home is an existentially fundamental, primary need (cf. Menatti 2013, 145), which relies on familiarity, which internalises and consolidates the home as something that is part of the person who lives in it. This leads to intimacy, to protection, to the trust that a familiar and safe space inspires.

The person is body and spirit. The presence of the body in the home is obvious, but the body exists because of its subjectivity: it is an 'I' (self) that inhabits the body. The spirit also manifests itself in the home. The mother tongue constructs a person's thinking and identity; in

the home we are recognised as persons for the first time and are accepted for what we are, not for what we have, do or give. At home we build our self-understanding, our self-esteem and our identity; it is there that we receive our first moral instruction, it is there that we come into contact with culture and traditions; it is there that we open ourselves to transcendence, at least in many cases.

In the home one cultivates interiority; there one explores oneself; there one establishes the most intimate relationships; there one can shed one's limitations and reveal one's vulnerability. Home provides shelter for the suffering, the possibility of a fresh start and the resources to cope with crises.

Of course, when people act at home they are motivated by a variety of motives: extrinsic, seeking outcomes that others give to oneself; intrinsic, outcomes that one generates in oneself (in the form, for example, of learning knowledge and developing skills and virtues - or vices); and transcendent or prosocial, outcomes that others receive as a result of one's action (Pérez López 1991). Extrinsic and intrinsic motives are not necessarily selfish: the home is the ideal place for the satisfaction of many of one's own needs (food, rest, order, good environment, services...); prosocial motives, positive or negative, are always directed towards others. All kinds of motives are probably present in every action: the person who has prepared the meal does so, naturally, for transcendental reasons, to meet the needs of others, but also to satisfy his appetite, improve his culinary skills and receive the thanks of all; the common objective does not imply renouncing personal objectives. What is important in the household is that transcendent or prosocial motives are present, in one way or another, in all the actions carried out by its members.

Relationships and community

Talking about actions in the home brings us to relationships. The home is relationship - or rather, the home builds relationships which, as we have just seen, are often other-oriented, i.e. guided by love. They are not market relationships, where the giver asks for something equivalent in return and takes account of what each owes the other; in the home nothing is asked in return, but a lot is given, everyone gives a lot, often without realising it. Relationships in the home are governed by gratuitousness and gift, among other reasons because they are often planned over a very long period of time. Parents, for example, may reasonably expect that their children will take care of them when they are old, but this is not what drives them in the continuous details of generosity they have with their children over many years. There is no accounting of the services each gives and receives: there is a time to receive and always a time to give.

The people who make up a household are not abstract entities, but very concrete, with a face and a name. They form the social group or community of the household, which can take many different forms: nuclear family, extended family, single-parent, separated parents, compound family, same-sex parents and other variants, between the one-person family and the extended family of the tribe, of an old people's home or of a portion of a refugee camp. Not surprisingly, each of these forms will have different characters, problems and opportunities.

Of course, in the household there may be a formal organisation (rules, hierarchy, authority...), but the informal organisation, based on free services, trust and a sense of responsibility of the actors, is often more important. There is a common purpose, project or mission in the household, although it will probably never be explicitly formulated, and it will probably have some immediate objectives (meeting a set of needs of its members: food, rest, health, training, care...) and others in the long term (such as the development of the children's knowledge,

attitudes, skills, values and virtues, in order to achieve the flourishing of all and, therefore, of the society in which they will move in the future).

Vulnerability, dependence, autonomy, care, work

People are vulnerable beings, always in need of physical, cognitive and spiritual protection. This vulnerability is related to our bodily being, and its coverage has to do with the physical dimension of the home. This vulnerability is at its highest at the beginning of life, is reduced later on, but never disappears completely, and is accentuated again at the end of life or in situations of serious illness or loss of capacities. The condition of being vulnerable does not diminish the humanity or dignity of the person, which is based on the very condition of being personal for what he or she is, not for what he or she does or can do, for what he or she possesses or for what he or she gives.

The vulnerable person is dependent on others, who help him or her; dependence gives rise to relationships of complementarity and reciprocity, first within the home, but also in external relationships. Dependence has to do with the social nature of the person.

The growth, maturation and flourishing of the person leads to his or her autonomy, his or her capacity for self-development, linked to his or her spiritual condition, and is placed at the service of others. This call to the service of the vulnerable and dependent and the effective response to this call constitutes care.

The home, in fact, is the paradigm of care, which occurs spontaneously in the family or household community, where it is exercised by all, each in his or her own way. What characterises care is openness to the other and to his or her needs as a person, not just as a sick or weak body. Care is always a physical labour, but it is rooted in the caregiver's spirit of service and sense of responsibility and goes beyond the performance of a task, because it involves cooperation in a shared purpose, a common action in which everyone feels involved - as opposed to a collective action, where everyone feels responsible only for his or her part in the task.

Care is a form of work in the home - and, vice versa, work in the home is also a form of care. Both satisfy people's needs (cf. Schwartzbach 2009). Work satisfies them indirectly, in that it focuses on the object, which is a physical activity: for example, cleaning the house or preparing the food, whether it is done by a family member or a household employee. Care directly meets the needs of the vulnerable and dependent person, through a subjective relationship between carer and cared-for. Work and care are social actions of service, which generate in those who practice them attitudes, virtues and values that create mature personalities and deep relationships (cf. Bernacchio and Knight 2020). The practice of domestic life is the best school of care, which strengthens relationships in the household; it is more a matter of quality than quantity. Caring in the family generates more spontaneous trust and more natural intimacy (cf. Redgrave 2014, 75).

Both work in the household and care for children, the elderly or the sick may be carried out by some members of the household or by paid external helpers. What has been said above about such work and care applies to both. External workers are paid, which may be the main reason for their presence in the household. But they too must be motivated by pro-social motives, make strong commitments, be generous in their work, grow as people and create sources of personal flourishing for themselves.

The home is also a source of working relationships with outside employers: family members spend hours, often many hours, working outside the home, or working at home for outside employers. Resources are derived for the household, mainly financial, but also skills, attitudes, values and virtues that shape people's character, while those people contribute to creating an environment of efficiency in enterprises and new skills and values that are then manifested in the household.

External environment

We said that the household is open to its physical and social environment, so that numerous relationships take place between its members and the rest of the world. Obviously, many of these relationships take place with the immediate environment, mainly neighbours in the village, neighbourhood or city, with whom there are relationships in geographical terms (physical proximity), social and cultural (sharing with them is social space, symbols and norms) or psychological-affective (through friendship and affinity, acceptance and mutual identification). Many of these relationships are mediated by institutions and organisations (markets, businesses, schools, universities, churches, social and cultural entities, authorities, etc.) and governed by normative frameworks (laws, regulations, social and ethical norms, customs, etc.). As an African saying goes, "it takes a village to raise a child".

These relations of proximity are also derived from the functions of the household, sometimes not expressly sought: reproduction, bodily care, care of children, the sick and the elderly, construction of identities, education and development of new generations, etc. Life in the home conditions the character of its members and their harmony with society, but also the customs, institutions and norms of communities condition family life. Healthy households generate virtuous and responsible citizens and create healthy communities. And healthy communities provide social and material structures and educational resources that support families in their efforts to create healthy homes.

The home is thus a fundamental building block in describing and understanding social life; it is true that there is a great variety of cultures, but the home always retains its primary function of serving and protecting the unity of society. It is therefore important for society to protect households and for households to be active in solving their problems, with real, albeit limited, autonomy.

Time

The household is essentially dynamic, i.e. it is in continuous change. It begins in the mother's womb, the child's first 'home'; it continues in the parental home, where the child 'learns to live' and relate to others, develops knowledge and skills, and continually adapts to life in the home and, through it, to the society in which he or she grows up. Later on, he or she will become autonomous, leave the parental home and create his or her own, repeating his or her own experience in his or her children, but always in a different way, because internal and external circumstances are constantly changing. In the end, people are likely to "return" to their home, physically or psychologically.

The home is thus the place where the stages of people's lives take place, and therefore it is also the place where generations live together, each with its own characters, but with an intergenerational link that maintains the unity of the household. The home is permanent, because each member lives fully the present in it, but "only for now", because it is also transitory. At every moment, there are the pasts, different for each member, and the plans for

the future, also different for each one. And these changes take time: the evolution of the home takes a long time, much longer than that of other human realities, such as the company, the school or the hospital.

The household changes from the inside, because people change, and from the outside, because society, culture, the economy, technology and many other variables that influence family life change. Over time, its members will try to reach a stable balance, which will be influenced by the changing environment, which is influenced by all actors: governments, civil society, churches, schools, companies... So it is important that changes in these external circumstances take into account the impact they will have on all dimensions of the household, with a long-term vision, and that the cooperation of internal actors in these changes is encouraged.

Dimensions of the household

The household is not an economic organisation, although it uses economic instruments and makes economic decisions. Economic science often considers the abstract person as the main agent of economic decisions: it is "the" person who collaborates in production, makes decisions about his or her work, decides on his or her consumption and plans his or her future. But when the household is introduced, it is observed that a large number of these decisions are made within the household. The wealth and income of the household are shared by all its members; housing is a durable consumption good and an investment that generates economic returns and security for all; income is also shared, and serves to meet the different needs of all household members, and hence consumption and savings decisions....

The household is the place of joint production of the family, including the unpaid work of its members, and is also the place of shared consumption. The welfare state (pensions, unemployment insurance and benefits, transfers for needy groups, etc.) is oriented towards the household as a whole, to guarantee a sufficient standard of living, and gives rise to intergenerational transfers between its members. For traditional economics, the household does not add value to gross domestic product, but it is the main centre for the generation of human and social capital, which makes much of labour productivity possible. It is thus understood that many economic decisions are based on the household, even if the household does not appear in their treatment. This implies that the analysis of these decisions must take into account, in some way, their impact on the household.

There are many other dimensions in the household that must also be considered: legal (rights and duties of citizens, protection), cultural (the household as creator and recipient of the culture of society, or rather, of the different cultures in society), political (as a political agent and as a target of policies), sociological, religious, etc.

Among these, there is one dimension that should always be taken into account: what we can call the geographical-historical dimension. There have been households on earth since the first family or tribal community, and there are households in all latitudes and in all corners of the planet. When we speak of "the" household, we can generalise our assumptions, but when we refer to the households of a locality or nation at a given moment in history, we cannot forget their peculiarities. For example, when experts discuss compulsory minimum income as a solution to a problem of inequality in the standard of living in a country, they may omit many details, but when policymakers consider its application to a given community, they must go into detail.

How the household can be analysed

The household is a complex, multidimensional reality that can be analysed from many angles, some of which have been presented in the previous pages. There is no "science of the household", no single, complete and determined unitary approach; each discipline will study it from its own points of view and with its own basic assumptions. But it is desirable that, as far as possible, such studies should be carried out with an interdisciplinary, or rather, multidisciplinary approach: it is not enough for the sociologist to present his sociological view of the household, the social psychologist and the economist to add theirs, and the political scientist to then offer his or her view. It is advisable for each specialist to broaden his or her assumptions with those of other disciplines, in order to have a more complete vision of the phenomenon to be studied. In other words, experts must be open to different approaches, including those with an ideological basis, so that solutions can be found that better respond to the complex and multidimensional reality of the household. And finally, the global vision of "the" household must be combined with the local vision. A contributor to this work is invited to engage with challenges and the rewards of such multidisciplinary study, bringing his/her own expertise and a readiness to connect with and develop that of others.

References

- Alvira, R. (2010), *El lugar al que se vuelve. Reflexiones sobre la familia*. Pamplona: EUNSA.
- Argandoña, A. (2008), "Integrating ethics into action theory and organizational theory", *Journal of Business Ethics*, 78(3), 435-446.
- Argandoña, A. (2018), "The home: Multidisciplinary reflections", in A. Argandoña, ed., *The Home: Multidisciplinary Reflections*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 8-31.
- Bernacchio, C. and Knight, K. (2020). "MacIntyre and political philosophy", in R. Breadle, and G. Moore, eds., *Learning from MacIntyre*, Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 117-139.
- Douglas, M. (1991), "The idea of home: A kind of space", *Social Research*, 57(1), 287-307.
- Fox O'Mahony, L. (2013), "The meaning of home: From theory to practice", *International Journal of Law in the Built Environment*, 5(2), 156-171.
- Graham, L.T., S.D. Gosling and C.K. Travis (2015), "The psychology of home environments: A call for research on residential space", *Perspectives of Psychological Science*, 10(3), 346-356.
- Heller, A. (1984), *Everyday Life*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Karjalainen, P.T. (1993), "House, home and the place of dwelling", *Scandinavian Housing & Planning Research*, 10, 65-74.
- Marcos, A. and M. Bertolaso (2018), "What is a home? On the intrinsic nature of a home", in A. Argandoña, ed., *The Home: Multidisciplinary Reflections*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 35-56.
- Marías, J. (1979), "Al margen de la casa encendida", in L. Rosales, *Rimas y La Casa Encendida*. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe.
- Menatti, L. (2013), "Parlare di paesaggio tra locale e globale", *Ricerche di S/confine* 1, 139-154.

Patrão Neves, M.C. (2018), "Self and others: Home as a cradle of a non-violent relationship", in A. Argandoña, ed., *The Home: Multidisciplinary Reflections*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 57-76.

Pérez López, J.A. (1991), *Teoría de la acción humana en las organizaciones. La acción personal*. Madrid: Rialp.

Redgrave, K. (2014). "Moved by the suffering of others: Using Aristotelian theory to think about care", in A.M. González and C. Iffland, eds., *Care Professions and Globalization*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 63-86.

Schwartzbach, S.A. (2009), *On Civic Friendship. Including Women in the State*. New York: Columbia University Press.

By Antonio Argandoña, HRF Director and Emeritus Professor of Economics and of Business Ethics at IESE Business School