



RECONSIDERING THE MEANING OF HOME AND THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL WELL-BEING PERCEPTION

A CASE STUDY IN A DUTCH NEIGHBORHOOD

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Abstract: The paper examines the extent to which the meanings given to home and neighborhood are associated with the perceived psycho-social well-being of inhabitants and households, based on a review of the literature and a conceptualization of the meanings of home and neighborhood in various dimensions. The paper analyzes data from a survey conducted in the neighborhood of Barkmolenstraat (Groningen, The Netherlands). Using the factor analysis, two factors indicating meanings of home are distinguished: the home as a “Predictable Environment”, and the home as a “Status”. Four factors indicate neighborhood attachment: sense of belonging, safety, sociability and the feeling of being controlled. The findings from OLS regression analyses show the importance of the home as a “predictable environment” in perceived psycho-social well-being. The sense of belonging to the neighborhood and safety are positively associated with psycho-social well-being, whereas the feeling of being controlled is negatively associated with it.

Keywords: Meaning of home, Ontological security, Neighborhood, Psycho-social wellbeing, Cultural sociology

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Introduction

The transition to homeownership took place in many European countries during the last decades (Andrews, Caldera Sánchez 2011). The Netherland has the largest share of social housing sector with the highest quality in Europe, and the rented dwellings rate as a whole on housing stock is very high compared to the European average (40% - Housing Europe 2016). Nevertheless the Public housing sector is significantly changing (Mustered 2014) and the homeownership has become increasingly a viable perspective to households (until 2009, and with a stable trend until 2013, Bouyon 2015).

This trend can be described through economic policy of the states (ESRB 2015; Andrews, Caldera Sánchez 2011), by macro-structural changes (Murie, Williams 2015)

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and by ideological aspects (Ronald 2011). However it remains to understand the deeper reasons relate to the choice for home-ownership for individuals and families in times of uncertain.

Many scientific contributes and empirical researches on housing studies have been focused on tenure, on the sense of community and neighborhood issues. The core of the debate could be summarized as the extent to which the psycho-social benefits depends on dwelling condition, tenure or neighborhood context. The debate treated the meaning of home as a dependent variable, considering the physical features of the dwelling, the tenure and the neighborhood relationships as the only independent variables of housing. Our study introduces a cultural dimension - the meaning of home - as an independent variable on the psycho-social benefits for individuals and households. In our opinion, the meaning of home should be considered as an “independent” variable, at the same level of neighborhood relationships, tenure and the house’s physical structure, where the psycho-social benefits should be taken as a “dependent” variable. In our conceptualization, home and neighborhood have specific and combined roles in psycho-social benefits even though the meaning of the home influences psycho-social benefits directly, because it refers to deep psychological and cultural dimensions.

From a theoretical perspective, our approach starts from some considerations developed by “the strong program of cultural sociology” according to which the culture «is an “independent variable” that possesses relative autonomy in shaping actions and institutions» (Alexander, Smith 2001: 136). Where the “sociology of culture” considers the cultural expressions - meanings, symbols, rites, etc. - as part of an ideological system dependent upon the social structure, a strong program of “cultural sociology” introduces the autonomous role of the cultural dimension that shapes the social life. The strength of the cultural dimension influences actions, values and social relations because every action «is embedded to some extent in a horizon of affect and meaning» (ivi) allowing for the reproduction and transformation of structure. We want to apply these considerations to the housing studies debate, analyzing the influence of the meaning of home on the psycho-social benefits, as regulating mechanism between home tenure and psycho-social well-being.

The paper focuses upon the cultural factors that lead towards this preference, through a fieldwork in a small Dutch neighbourhood: Barkmolenstraat.

Choosing the neighborhood. Why Barkmolenstraat?

Barkmolenstraat¹ is a neighborhood of the city of Groningen (The Netherlands) built around the mid-1990s. We can classify it as a “home area”, a type of neighborhood that has the function and the aim to create psycho-social benefits as a sense of belonging and place identity, through the mechanisms of familiarity and community (Kearns, Parkinson 2001).

The houses are terraced and set in two concentric housing complexes with a central

1 <http://barkmolenstraat.nl/>

pedestrian courtyard. The courtyard is a secure environment for children to play outside their houses. In the settlement there are also two blocks of apartments. The apartments of one block are owner-occupied, whereas the apartments of the second block are social housing, rented out to older people and people with disabilities. We only included the inhabitants of owner-occupied dwellings in the survey. The boundaries of Barkmolenstraat are marked on the east by a canal and in the other direction by a major road (Europaweg) and a busy street (Griffeweg). Barkmolenstraat is effectively connected to the inner city of Groningen by a pedestrian path and cycle lanes (a distinctive trait of Dutch cities). In a few minutes one can reach the train station, the public library, the main buildings of the University and the main entertainment and shopping areas. Moreover, in Barkmolenstraat an inhabitant committee takes care of the maintenance of the courtyard, organizes parties, sport and leisure activities for children and manages a street community web-site.

In some respects the construction of the neighborhood is inspired by the principles of new urbanism, according to which the physical features of the settlement, the walkable pathways and the green areas foster social interactions, neighborhood attachment and exchanges among neighbors. The layout of the new urbanism neighborhoods are designed for enhance social capital constitution and it is supposed to have a positive impact on the inhabitants' psycho-social well-being, sense of security and belonging (Kim, Kaplan 2004; Talen 2002; Brown, Cropper 2001; Sander 2002; Bohl 2000).

Improving exchange, sociability and sense of community is the aim of many planners, policy makers and urban sociologists. Certain characteristics of urban neighborhoods are thought to raise the quality of life and psycho-social benefits for inhabitants, for instance the settlement form, the public facilities, the type of dwellings, the quality of buildings, the presence of pedestrian paths and cycle lanes. New Urbanism neighborhoods are therefore often taken as a context to analyze the relation between urban space and social space, where the constitution of sense of community and social capital affects the psycho-social benefits. The Barkmolenstraat neighborhood shares some aims and functions of New Urbanism program because it is walkable, with a public green area and terraced houses. Moreover it has a high homeownership rate and shared facilities. All these conditions: tenure, type of home, urban context, neighborhood design, and the presence of a neighborhood committee should increase the perception of psycho-social well-being. For this reason we chose this neighborhood for the survey.

The twisted meanings of home

The literature on the meaning of home is very comprehensive because it involves cultural and symbolic dimensions, emotive and cognitive aspects, as well as economic and social factors. The meaning of home is a multidimensional concept (Mallett 2004; Easthope 2004; Clapman 2005). To understand what home means we can think of it as a layered concept. It is possible to separate these layers analytically and empirically, but the whole meaning of home refers to the interlinkage of physical, economic, social, psychological and symbolic experiences (Sixsmith 1986; Després 1991; Somerville 1997).

According to Gaston Bachelard, home is a place of *reverie*, it is the place through which we build the imaginative and poetic dimension that supports the buildings of our self-identity (Bachelard 1969).

Karjalainen states that home is a relation «home is an emotionally based and meaningful relationship between dwellers and the dwelling places» (Karjalainen 1993: 71). Mallett talks about the home as a virtual place, a repository for memories of the lived spaces (Mallett 2004). According to Gurney, «home is an ideological construct created from people's emotionally charged experiences of where they happen to live» (Gurney 1990: 26-9, quoted in Somerville 1992). Home is a complex relation among physical, emotive, symbolic and social dimensions that influence people's identity construction processes. Relph underlines the centrality of the home for the human existence because around it we perform everyday activities: home is «the central reference point of human existence» (Relph 1976, quoted in Proshansky 1983). Home is the principal space for what Proshansky terms «place identity» (Proshansky 1983: 59). According to him, the place identity is a sub-structure of the self-identity consisting of cognitions about the physical world in which the individual lives. These cognitions represent memories, ideals feelings, attitudes, values, preferences, meanings, and conceptions of behavior and experience which relate to the variety and complexity of physical settings that define the day-to-day existence of every human being. The geographer Yi-Fu Tuan calls *sense of a place* the deep tie between physic space and personal feelings (Yi-Fu Tuan 1974). The sense of place leads and influences the individual choices and actions in the space. So, we can understand the meaning of home also from a self-identity constitution perspective. Starting from the psychoanalytic Jungian perspective, Clare Cooper Marcus states that the house is a cultural archetype, a symbol of collective consciousness through which we communicate among ourselves and belong to a culture. It is a *symbol of the self* (Cooper Marcus 1976).

One of the meanings that connect physical, psychological, symbolic and social dimensions of home is the boundary. Making boundaries is the first act through which we create a place. The physical space becomes social space when we mark boundary lines. Home is a borderline (the threshold) that separates us from others. It allows the change of status (Van Gennep 1960). Crossing the threshold, a worker becomes a father or a mother, a student becomes a child, and a stranger becomes a guest. The threshold allows the control of the space through the complex mechanism that we call privacy. According to Altman privacy is «an interpersonal boundary-control process, which paces and regulates interaction with others» (Altman 1975: 10). Without the privacy mechanism we are not able to control the space and establish social relations with others. Without privacy regulations everything appears unmanageable and a source of stress. It «serves interpersonal, self/other interface, and self-identity functions that are central to psychological benefits» (Harris *et alii* 1996: 288). Privacy regulation is a tool to improve the quality of the internal and external relationships. Controlling the access of home means to decide what kind of relationship we take and with whom. According to Somerville, privacy «means the possession of a certain territory with the power to exclude other persons from that territory» (Somerville 1992: 532). Privacy is a functional tool to sociability. Saunders and Williams distinguish privacy from privatism (Saunders and Williams 1988). Privacy refers to the freedom from surveillance and to

the autonomy to control a place while privatism is defined as withdrawal or detachment from collective life. In their research findings the two concepts are not associated with each other. Their evidence completely undermines any assumption that the spread of private ownership of housing is generating a privatized culture (Saunders 1989: 185).

The doorstep of home is the boundary that separates the order from the disorder, the purity from the impurity. For this reason, close to it we find tools and symbols of purification: carpet, umbrella holder, coat hook, mirrors (Rossellin 2006). The house preserves the immunity from external elements not only for a purely hygienic purpose, but for order purposes. The house is a space of order that helps us to reduce the complexity (Pasquinelli 2004). So to be a home, a space has to be a controlled space. According to Mary Douglas, home provides the correspondence between time and space (Douglas 1991). Home is the memory codified in a space, which defines the predictability of events. It supports the daily life of the individual and family biography. It means order, routine, habits (Korosec, Serfaty 1985). Home has a normative character through which we act automatically and with a strong sense of predictability. So, home is the place of security not only because it is a defensive haven from the external forces but because it is the place of what is expected. It is the place of the practical consciousness that is part of the reflexive monitoring of actions (Giddens 1991).

From the meaning of home to ontological security and psycho-social benefits

In a time of deep and fast social changes (Rosa 2010), home represents a tangible and symbolic place of stability and rootedness for people. Some recent studies have focused, in different ways, on the psycho-social benefits from the home using the concept of “ontological security”. Anthony Giddens states that the ontological security is: «the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of their social and material environments» (Giddens 1990: 96). According to Peter Saunders (Saunders 1989; 1990) homeownership is the principal resource to reach ontological security because «Home is the place in which people feel free to be themselves and at ease, in the deepest psychological sense, in a world that might at times be experienced as threatening and uncontrollable» (ivi: 361). Starting from these ideas about home he compares the meaning of home between owners and social tenants, pointing out that “autonomy” and “financial security” are the essential aspects that distinguish the two categories from each other. So, the housing tenure can influence the experience of ontological security for many people. «The sense of pride and autonomy which home ownership enables can, it seems, contribute to an enhanced sense of self and to strong and enduring feelings of security and belonging» (Saunders 1989: 191).

Dupuis and Thorns use the ontological security definition of Giddens, but they focus on the active and consciousness experience of ontological security. For them a sense of security is rooted not only in the unconscious sphere but it is actively sought and «it is shaped and constrained by the particular framework or setting in which it occurs» (Giddens 1998: 30). According to them the meaning of home is linked not only to deepest psychological aspects but it relates to cultural, political and economic

dimensions of a specific social context. Analyzing the consequences of the Great Depression of 1929 on housing choices and behaviors of older New Zealand home owners, they argue that homeownership is pursued as a reaction against the economic and ideological impact of the Great Depression and it provides a locale in which people can work at attaining a sense of ontological security because it represents: constancy in the social and material environment; day to day routines of human existence; a site where people feel most in control of their lives; a secure base around which identities are constructed.

Kearns and colleagues reconsiders the tenure as the principal predictor of the psycho-social benefits of the home in their empirical analysis (Kearns et alii 2000; 2001). Their objective is to find other housing characteristics associated to the sense of ontological security. According to them, the previous studies have paid little attention to the impact of characteristics of the neighborhood on the psycho-social benefits of home: “a gap that needed to be filled”. The Glasgow University team introduces new explanatory factors related to the neighborhood exchanges and social relations and replaces the ontological security concept – which they considered too complex to operationalize – by three psycho-social benefit dimensions from home: haven, place of autonomy, and social status. An important finding from their research is a strong positive association between these variables and the perception of the neighborhood context (*people in the area*), while the dwelling problems (*dampness/condensation, difficulties keeping the home warm, too little space, etc.*) have a negative effect. Controlling by neighborhood context and dwelling condition variables, housing tenure is no longer a significant predictor of haven, place of autonomy, and social status.

Fieldwork and research - Research questions

In which extent the meaning of home affects the psycho-social benefits due by home? It seems that these two concepts often get confused with each other. If that is the case, we cannot evaluate the role of the symbolic dimension of home associated to the psycho-social benefits experienced by inhabitants.

We address the following questions: What does the home mean to its inhabitants? To what extent does the meaning of home have an independent role on psycho-social benefits?

Adapting some recursive meanings provided by the daily practices of housing we used nine key-concepts relate to home: representation of the self, sense of proud and satisfaction, practices of personalization, sense of self-realization, economic value, relaxation and comfort, peacefulness, privacy and sense of stability (tab.2). Each concepts refers to different behaviors, practices and habits for people.

With regard to *representation of the self*, talking about our home to friends, colleagues or relatives means that we are speaking about ourselves. Sometimes, through the house and housing career we describe our biography. Home is the place that we *personalize* more than any other place. We shape the place according to desires, needs, values, habits. We perform several activities that makes the home show parts of ourselves: we arrange the furniture, decorate the walls, put up pictures and photos, bring in plants

and flowers, etc. Through these actions, we control the place and, at the same time, the place becomes a second skin that reflects how we see ourselves (Heywood 2005). The tenure could be important to mean *proud and satisfaction*. Moreover we know that the home has an important *economic value* for most households. It could be perceived as an economic investment, but it could be perceived also as a waste of money that places a burden on savings or that competes with other costs of living. So, home could be perceived as a source of economic security or as a threat to it (housing stress). The relationship between home and relaxation and comfort need not be the same for everyone because it could be a place of *comfort and relaxation* for some and a place of domestic work for others. Moreover relaxation and comfort is not an universal meaning of the home but, just a social construction of modernity.

Home could be considered a place where we can face the future *peacefully* but it can become a worry owing to mortgage, rent or maintenance costs. *Privacy* is the mechanism through which the social space is regulated. It indicates a balance between an extreme attitude of privatization, when the inhabitant is closed to others, from an extreme form of openness, when the space is totally open to others but we risk to miss its control. Finally, home could also influence the inhabitants' sense of *stability*. Homeownership discourages residential mobility and migration (Helderma, Mulder 2007) and is often associated with a decision or willingness to remain in a specific place.

The extent to which these meanings of home are associated to the psycho-social well-being, is the research question of the paper.

Sample and measures

During the fieldwork we counted 258 terraced houses and 20 apartments (excluding those in the social housing sector) and we approached all the inhabitants, ringing at every door. To each household met and willing to collaborate in the survey we delivered a questionnaire (n=231, or 90%). A few days before the questionnaire was distributed, we delivered a letter to present the reasons, the authors, the object and the aim of the survey. In the same period we talked to some members of the neighborhood committee asking them to support this research activity. They put a notice on the website and sent an e-mail to the inhabitants of Barkmolenstraat who were on the neighborhood mailing list.

In this way it was easier to explain the project to the inhabitants and increase the number of returned questionnaires. Out of 231 delivered questionnaires, 164 have been collected (71%; total response 64%). Of these, only 6 are from households living in apartments, while 158 are from households living in terraced houses. Information was collected from the heads of households and, if applicable, their partners (total number of respondents: 278).

The sample mainly consists of couples with children (45% of the households; see Tab.1) and couples without children (25.6%). The average age of the respondents was almost 47 years, with the youngest 23 years old and the oldest 79. Most respondents were employed (73.2%); 12.8% were self-employed; 13.9% were unemployed, retired

or otherwise not in the labor force. The achieved educational level was generally high: 46.4% of the respondents had a bachelor degree and 23.4% had an MA or PhD degree.

The inhabitants of Barkmolenstraat live in good financial conditions: when asked how they consider their financial situation, 57% declared «fine; we can fulfill most of their wishes» and 41% of them were satisfied enough: «satisfactory; we can meet most of our needs». Only few answered «not completely satisfactory; we can only meet our basic needs», and no-one used the category «unsatisfactory» (in the analysis, the category «fine; we can fulfill most of our wishes» has been coded as “1” while the other categories have been recoded as “0”). In 60% of the households both respondents worked for pay for more than 24 hours per week (or the single respondent did). The 52% of the respondents were owners of their previous home and 48% were tenants or lived with parents. Considering the high share of highly educated, the share of employed in the category “middle/lower level professional” and the fact that all were homeowners, it could be said that the sample consists mainly of middle and high class respondents.

Dissecting the meanings of home

We used nine forced choice statements to gather information about the meanings of home (tab.2). Each of the nine dimensions of the meaning of home was measured using two opposite statements to which the respondents were asked to mark a degree of agreement from high (5) to low (0) with the phrase on the left or with the phrase on the right (from 0 to 5). The value zero indicates that a respondent agrees equally with the two opposite statements. During the stage of data input, the values were recoded to a scale from 1 to 11. The value 0 became 6; the value 5 of the first statement became 1 while the value 5 of the second opposite statement became 11; the value 4 became 2 or 10, and so on. The nine variables were used in a principal component analysis with varimax rotation. Tab.2 shows the descriptive statistics of the variables and the results of the principal component analysis. Two factors emerged, through which we define and synthesize the meanings of the home. The first refers to the home as representation of us, it is a symbol, hence, it is an expression of a social Status. The semantic area of this factor is partially overlapped to the definition by Clare Cooper Marcus in which the home is a symbol or a mirror of the self (Cooper Marcus 1976; 1995). Home is a deep expression of us and we communicate feelings, moods, sense of satisfaction and self-realization through it. The economic resource variable is mostly related to this factor rather than the second one, so we call the new variable: “Home as a Status”.

The second factor refers more to the sense of security. Home gives a sense of relaxation, peacefulness, privacy, rootedness and stability. It is a place of “practical consciousness”, habits, order, and routine, which provides us with a sense of security. This factor is close to the ontological security concept of Giddens described as, the confidence in the constancy of social and material environments. So we call the second factor: “Home as predictable environment”.

Tab.1- Some characteristics of the sample

<i>Characteristics of the sample</i>		
Household composition (n =164)	Couple with children	45.0
	Couple without children	25.6
	Single-parent household	10.4
	Single (living alone)	17.7
	Single (living with friends)	1.2
	Total	100.0
Child(ren) in household (n =164)	Yes	55.4
	No	44.6
	Total	100.0
Level of education completed (n=278)	Primary school	1.8
	Secondary school	19.4
	Higher professional education (Hbo, Bachelor)	46.4
	University (MA, PhD)	23.4
	Post doc	9.0
	Total	100.0
Profession (n =273)	Higher-level professional – self employed	6.2
	Large or small business owner – self employed	6.6
	Higher-level professional – employed	13.2
	Middle/lower-level professional – employed	34.4
	Routine non-manual worker – employed	18.7
	Skilled or unskilled manual worker – employed	6.9
	Not employed	13.9
	Total	100.0

Characteristics of the sample

Financial condition of household (n =163)	Fine	57.1
	Satisfactory	41.1
	Not completely satisfactory	1.8
	Total	100.0
Full/part-time job (n =164)	Full-time job (both, for couples)	60.0
	Part-time job or not working (at least one, for couples)	40.0
	Total	100.0
Tenure of previous home (n =164)	Home Owner	52.0
	Tenant or lived with parents	48.0
	Total	100.0
Age (n=273)	mean: 46.6; range: 23-79; st.dev.: 11.3;	
Number of rooms (n =163)	mean: 4.8; range: 2-8; st.dev. : 1.01;	
Dwelling size (m2) (n =164)	mean: 134.94; range: 60-280; st.dev. : 32.04;	
Years since moving in (n =161)	mean: 8.75; range: 0-16; (from 1996 to 2012) st.dev. : 5.06;	

Tab.2 -The meanings of the home. Descriptive statistics and output of factor analysis (range: 1-11; Crombach's Alpha: 0.75; total explained variance: 55.4%)

Forced Choice Statements about the House	Dimension	n	mean	std.dev	1factor	2factor
<i>We do not like to talk about our house.</i> VS <i>We like to talk to others about our house.</i>	Self Representation	162	8.47	2.29	0.84	0.18
<i>If we compare it with others, or with the past, our house makes us feel unsatisfied and not proud.</i> VS <i>If we compare it with others, or with the past, our house makes us feel satisfied and proud.</i>	Proud and Satisfaction	163	8.67	2.22	0.79	0.26
<i>We do not want to invest time and money in decoration and furnishing.</i> VS <i>We pay attention to decoration and furnishing, to make it to our liking.</i>	Personalization	163	9.18	2.26	0.86	0.17
<i>Our housing costs are a waste of money.</i> VS <i>Our housing costs are a good investment.</i>	Economic value	162	8.45	2.23	0.69	0.24
<i>It is a gift from our parents</i> VS <i>It is the result of our own efforts</i>	Self Realization	161	8.98	2.87	0.73	-0.1
<i>It is a place of work.</i> VS <i>It is a place of relaxation.</i>	Relaxation and comfort	153	8.98	1.82	0.1	0.72
<i>We fear for not being able to pay for mortgage, rent or maintenance costs</i> VS <i>It is a place to face the coming years peacefully.</i>	Peacefulness	162	9.39	1.78	0.16	0.78
<i>It is a private place where we retire.</i> VS <i>It is a place where neighbors come and go.</i>	Privacy	161	3.74	2.33	-0.09	-0.44
<i>It is a temporary residence.</i> VS <i>It is our definitive residence.</i>	Stability	163	6.86	3.11	0.32	0.49

The dimensions of neighborhood attachment

To measure neighborhood attachment we used some items developed in psychosocial environment research (Bonaiuto *et alii* 2006; 2003). We asked the respondent to mark a degree of agreement (from 0 to 10) with 18 statements referring to their neighborhood. The results of a factor analysis (Tab. 3) show four factors that explain 60.8% of the total variance. We interpret these factors as: belonging; safety; sociability; the feeling of being controlled. Taken together these describe neighborhood attachment.

Tab.3 - Neighborhood attachment. Results of factor analysis (Cronbach's Alpha: 0.43; total explained variance: 60.8%)

<i>Indicators of neighborhood attachment</i>	<i>Belonging</i>	<i>Safety</i>	<i>Sociability</i>	<i>Controlled</i>
This is the ideal neighborhood for me	0.838	-0.129	0.024	-0.239
When possible I will move from this neighborhood	-0.760	0.195	0.051	0.181
I am attached to this neighborhood/ this neighborhood belongs to me	0.843	0.095	0.088	-0.161
I identify myself with this neighborhood's inhabitants	0.564	0.132	0.544	0.023
I feel at home in this neighborhood	0.813	-0.152	0.114	-0.086
People are intrusive here	-0.230	-0.599	0.091	0.456
This neighborhood is too crowded	-0.332	-0.629	0.092	0.121
Late at night there is a risk of encountering dangerous people	0.047	-0.741	-0.026	0.023
People often behave impolitely here	-0.195	-0.537	-0.141	0.309
The green areas here are frequented by unpleasant people	0.061	-0.675	0.057	0.006
It is easy to get to know people here	0.032	0.025	0.843	0.111
People keep to themselves here	-0.037	-0.253	-0.746	-0.066
People only have superficial contacts here	-0.095	0.035	-0.710	-0.041
People cooperate easily here	-0.034	-0.160	0.652	-0.156
I feel observed here	-0.277	0.160	0.149	0.661
People are discreet here	0.093	0.290	0.150	-0.635
People gossip too much here	-0.062	0.301	0.018	0.753
I feel controlled by others here	-0.277	0.427	0.101	0.681

Tab.4 - The dimensions of help and activity exchanges with households in the neighborhood.

<i>What type of helps or activities do you exchange with them?</i>	<i>Type of exchange</i>	<i>Basis for exchange</i>
Taking care of the house, plants, pets, collecting mail (in case of absence)	Neighbors	Nearness
Lending or borrowing tools, bikes, car		
Care or assistance in case of sickness		
Contacts and information on job search	Friendship	Expressive relationships
Keeping an eye on children		
Listening and advice for making difficult decisions		
Joint leisure activities: parties, trips, cinema, visits, etc.	Domestic help	Domestic activities
Domestic work: cleaning, cooking, shopping (unpaid)		
Small maintenance works in home or garden (unpaid)		
Administrative jobs (for example: filling out forms)		

As part of the social dynamics of the neighborhood we analyze the dimension of reciprocity. We know that reciprocity - a form of exchange among people based on trust - is at the base of the social capital development. According to Fukuyama, social capital is a capability that arises from the prevalence of trust in a society or in certain parts of it (Fukuyama 1995). So we asked the respondent to indicate what type of exchanges they usually had with three households in the neighborhood. We summarized the variables in three types of exchange (Tab.4). The criteria for exchange with neighbors is that it usually takes place with people living nearby. Friendship exchange is based on expressive relationships such as care, listening, advising, etc. Domestic help is based on the exchange of housework, small maintenance works and administrative jobs.

Moreover, for each of the three households, we asked about similarity in age, educational level and type of profession. The degree of similarity ranges from 0 to 1 and the mean value is 0.4 (st.dev: 0.24). Values below the average have been classified and labeled as “heterogeneous” and the values above the average as “homogeneous”.

The Psycho-social well-being

The dependent variable of the research project is the psycho-social well-being of households and single persons. Using some domains chiefly provided from the eudemonic perspectives (Samman 2007; Ryan, Deci 2001; Ryff, Keyes 1995; Keyes 1998), we investigated the concept of psycho-social well-being through a block of

eight statements. Each statement indicates the general feelings and moods of the respondents concerning internal and external household relationships associated to the psycho-social well-being.

The principal domains operationalized within the analysis are: work–live balance; stress from domestic work (Competence); thoughts, expressions and decisions among family members and with themselves (Autonomy); happiness; feeling of stress and nervousness/irritable (Happiness); feeling of confidence or trust; neighbors' social control and neighborliness (Relatedness). The statements are formulated separately for individual and family respondents.

Using factor analysis, two principal dimensions emerged that explain the 52.5% of the total variance (Tab.5). We refer to these factors as psycho-social well-being and social well-being. The first is based on deeper feelings of happiness, reflexivity (speak about ourselves, think about myself), confidence in others, and organization of daily life. We only use the psycho-social well-being factor as a dependent variable.

Tab.5 - Family and personal well-being. Domains and output by factor analysis (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.635; Total explained variance: 52.5%)

<i>Statements about family and personal well-being</i>	<i>Concepts</i>	<i>Eudemonic domain</i>	<i>Psycho social</i>	<i>Social</i>
We are satisfied about our balance between paid work and family care; I'm satisfied about my balance between paid work and leisure time	Work–family balance	Competence	0.649	0.031
Domestic work is equally distributed between us; Domestic work is not too heavy for me	Domestic work stress	Competence	0.413	0.212
We take time to speak about ourselves: problems, solutions and perspectives; I take time to think about myself: problems, solutions and perspectives.	Thoughts, expression, decision	Autonomy	0.789	-0.004
We are happy as a couple; I am happy	General feeling of happiness	Happiness (+)	0.807	0.149
We are (I'm) stressed and nervous	General feeling of stress and nervousness	Happiness (-)	-0.582	0.148
We are (I am) confident in others	General feeling of confidence	Relatedness	0.647	0.292
The inhabitants the neighborhood know who we are (I am) and where we (I) live	Neighbors social control	Relatedness	0.000	0.927
We have (I have) tied up with other people in this neighborhood	Neighborliness	Relatedness	0.056	0.911

The determinants of psycho-social well-being

The tab.6 shows the results of three multiple linear regression models, in which psycho-social benefits is the dependent variable. It is important to note that, even though regression models normally assume causality from the independent variables to the dependent variable, the causality assumption is not necessarily justified in our case. Although it is quite possible that neighborhood attachment and the meaning of home influence psycho-social benefits, it cannot be ruled out that the direction of causality is in fact opposite: those with high psycho-social benefits might be more inclined to attach a positive meaning to their homes or to feel more attached to the neighborhood. We therefore refrain from interpreting the associations found in the models as strictly causal.

In the first model we analyze the associations between some household characteristics, housing aspects and reciprocity dimensions on the one hand and psycho-social benefits on the other. The Adjusted R^2 is not very high. Nevertheless, having exchanges with households whose characteristics differ from the respondent's ("heterogeneity") is positively associated with psycho-social benefits ($\beta = 0.211$; $p < 0.05$). The parameters for types of exchange are not significant, and neither are those for the physical structure of the house and the previous tenure (whether they were homeowners before moving). The "household's financial situation" is a strong and significant predictor ($\beta = 0.184$; $p < 0.05$). Remarkably, the coefficient for number of years lived in the neighborhood is significant but with a negative sign ($\beta = -0.181$; $p < 0.05$). This finding could be related to the comparison with the previous housing and residential conditions: newcomers might be particularly enthusiastic about house and neighborhood and this enthusiasm might taper off with longer duration of residence. Finally, age and having a part time or no job are rather weak but significant predictors of psycho-social benefits.

In the second model we added neighborhood attachment factors to the independent variables. The statistically insignificant variables of the first model have been removed. In this model the "sense of belonging" to the neighborhood is the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.287$; $p < 0.01$) followed by "the feeling of being controlled" ($\beta = -0.251$; $p < 0.01$) which has a negative parameter. We can translate it into "feeling of being able to behave freely" to better understand the association with psycho-social benefits. The predictors of the first model remain almost the same, with the exception of the financial situation and the part-time or no job variables that lose significance. Moreover the adjusted R^2 increases from 0.10 to 0.23 and Fisher's test from 2.16 to 5.32. The second model confirms the importance of the neighborhood attachment for the inhabitants' psycho-social benefits, against the statistic incidence of households' economic status.

In the third model we introduce the two principal dimensions of the meaning of home at the second model (without the variables of part time job and financial conditions). The adjusted R^2 rises to 0.26, and the F-statistic is also greater (5.56), but the number of cases falls to 119 units (valid - listwise). This is caused by missing factor scores. The β coefficient of "belonging" is slightly lower than in the previous model but remains highly significant ($\beta = 0.258$; $p < 0.01$). The parameter estimate and significance level of the "feeling to be controlled" and "age" remain quite stable and the sense of "safety" from neighborhood emerges as a new weaker but significant predictor

of psycho-social benefits ($\beta=0.170$; $p<0.05$). The variables “years since moving” and “heterogeneous ties” are no longer significant. Considering the meaning of home, the relation between home as “Status” and psycho-social benefits is not significant ($\beta=0.101$; $p>0.1$) while the β coefficient of home as “Predictable Environment” is strongly significant ($\beta=0.232$; $p<0.01$). This difference might partly be caused by a difference in distribution between the two variables. For 67.6% of the respondents, the range of value of the variable home as “Status” is between 0 and 1 (range values: -4.03 to +1.49), whereas the variable indicating the meaning of home as “Predictable Environment” is more evenly distributed. Nevertheless, it can be argued that some meanings of home are strongly associated with psycho-social benefits. Home plays a role in psycho-social benefits, because it is the place of “predictability” that offers a sense of peacefulness, relaxation, privacy, rootedness and stability. It provide order and predictability in times of instability and uncertainty.

Tab.6 - *The role of home and neighborhood in psycho-social benefits. Results of OLS regression*

		Psycho-social well-being					
		β model 1		β model 2		β model 3	
	Age (mean)	0.151	*	0.141		0.141	*
	Couple (Y)	0.133					
	Having children (Y)	-0.041					
Household	Part-time or no job (Y)	0.163	*	0.131			
	Financial household situation fine	0.184		0.111			
	Previously homeowner	0.092					
Dwelling	Years from moving	-0.181	**	-0.204	**	-0.138	*
	Number of rooms	-0.122					
	Size of dwelling	0.041					
Reciprocity	Exchange with neighbors	-0.040					
	Friendship exchange	0.088					
	Domestic activity exchange	0.068					
Neighborhood attachment	Heterogeneity (Y)	0.211	**	0.184	**	0.140	
	Belonging			0.287	***	0.258	***
	Safety			0.116		0.170	**
Meaning of Home	Sociability			0.038		0.008	
	Feeling of being controlled			-0.251	***	-0.226	***
	As Status					0.101	
	As Predictable Environment					0.232	***
Adjusted R2		0.10		0.23		0.26	
N		139.00		131.00		119.00	
F		2.16		5.32		5.56	

* $p<0,1$; ** $p<0,05$; *** $p<0,01$

Conclusion

The current debate on the psycho-social benefits of the home usually focuses on some key aspects: the presence of neighborhood services, community social capital and neighbor relationships, housing tenure and characteristics of the dwelling. It is said that high levels of these kinds of residential characteristics should improve the psycho-social benefits experience of inhabitants. Rarely the debate has been focused on the symbolic and cultural dimension of home. We started from the contribution of the strong program of cultural sociology. According to this theoretical approach symbols, meanings, icons have a causal autonomy dimension on agency, values and social structure. For the same reason - according to us - the cultural dimension of home - the meaning - has an independent role from dwelling and neighborhood on the psychosocial benefits (that lead the households towards the choice of home ownership). That is not a social or economic symbol of Status issues but a deep relationship that the inhabitants have with a reliable place, in time and space. That is, an environment of predictability. We used the principal dimensions of the meaning of home: home as Status and home as Predictable Environment. We have also considered four dimensions of neighborhood attachment: sense of belonging, sense of safety, the feeling of being controlled and sociability. Moreover we used various dimensions of social capital to refer to exchanges among neighbors. As we have said, we cannot assume causality to run exclusively from the meaning of the home and neighborhood to psycho-social benefits. We want emphasize the associations between the concepts.

The findings show that the home as a “predictable environment” is a rather strong predictor of psycho-social benefits. Two other strong predictors are related to neighborhood attachment: the sense of belonging and the feeling of being controlled (negative sign). As the scientific literature points out the neighborhood context is strongly associated with the psycho-social dimension of benefits. It can be observed also that the best predictors have mostly to do with psychological dimensions rather than social dimensions (sociability and reciprocity). It can be argued that this association is in line with the “place identity” concept: a sub-structure of self-identity consisting of cognitions about the physical world in which the individual lives. The home also shapes “place identity”.

Finally, we should take on the outcomes of this study with great carefully, for two reasons. The first is the small sample size. Further research would benefit from a larger sample of respondents in more than one neighborhood. The second: the respondents involved in the research were mainly from middle-high classes and it would be interesting to include lower social classes in further research. It could also be useful to include other kinds of tenures, for example social or private rent using the meaning of home as independent variable.

In all, we would like to invite urban sociologists to reconsider the multidimensional meaning of home. They and the policy makers should consider the deep relation that the inhabitants create with the place that they call home. The strength of this intangible relation - as well as the sense of belonging and attachment to neighborhood - is associated with psycho-social benefits.

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