



Wellbeing, space and society

This special issue presents research exploring various aspects of wellbeing in relation to diverse dimensions and experiences of 'home spaces'. These papers draw attention to the significance for wellbeing of 'home spaces' conceptualised as both material and psychosocial environments as they relate to the immediate home environment of individuals and their households, as well as to their wider community. Several of the papers discuss home spaces and wellbeing in relation to impacts of the COVID pandemic – a period during which home spaces became even more central to wellbeing. When we consider these papers in combination, some broader conclusions about the complexity of associations between home spaces and wellbeing emerge; these are addressed in the conclusion.

Different dimensions of wellbeing associated with home spaces

This special issue includes studies focused on various aspects of 'wellbeing' (interpreted in different ways, in terms of mental and physical 'wellness' or 'illness'), and the ways these are experienced among different population groups and individuals thus reflecting the complex and multifaceted nature of 'wellbeing' (Atkinson, Fuller & Painter, 2012). The research reported illustrates that home spaces matter for dimensions of wellbeing that include, for example: self-reported sense of wellbeing and quality of life (Sait & Jivraj; Harding & Smith; Onyango & Elliott; Foley et al.; Houweling et al.; Sanchez; Olin et al.); medically diagnosed mental disorders (Halliday et al.; Sanchez); embodied and relational experience of wellbeing (Harding & Smith), including sexual wellbeing (Copella et al); aspects of 'physicality' associated with wellbeing (Sait & Jivraj; Harding & Smith); learning experiences (Agyekum); and understanding and control of 'physical' determinants of wellbeing caused by environmental exposure (Larcombe et al.). This collection of papers reflects a wide range of empirical methods and theoretical approaches ranging from qualitative research on individual perceptions and experiences, quantitative analyses of larger population samples, and mixed-methods research. Furthermore, some papers also focus particularly on the importance of the home environment for wellbeing of individuals at specific life stages, including adolescence and young adulthood (Agyekum; Harding & Smith; Copella et al.), parenthood and older age (Houweling et al.; Sait and Jivraj; Onyango & Elliott). In the context of various national and regional settings across the globe, the papers also consider the experiences of people in particular groups defined in terms of gender or ethnicity, e.g.: women and girls (Onyango & Elliott; Copella et al.; Harding & Smith); indigenous peoples (Larcombe et al.; Olin et al.).

Material features of home spaces

This special issue includes research which exemplifies how wellbeing relates to the physical environment in one's home space. For example, in findings reported from many parts of the world, facilities in the dwelling space are shown to be significant for wellbeing.

In a Ghanaian context (Agyekum), homes are often overcrowded, and different households have to share cooking and sanitation facilities while also coping with lack of a constant and reliable power supply. This situation also presents challenges to wellbeing and learning among young adults. Larcombe et al. comment on the inadequate conditions of housing for First Nations living in remote parts of Northern Canada, including the '*lack of appropriate ventilation, poor air quality and overcrowding* [which are] *contributing factors for the occurrence of tuberculosis, influenza, allergies and other respiratory conditions*'. They also discuss evidence suggesting that the physical construction of individual homes increases the risk of exposure to radon –with demonstrated impacts on health. Their paper also draws attention to the social and economic challenges of remediation and the importance of informing residents about the significance for health of air quality in their homes. Houweling et al., in their study of parents in the UK, also emphasise the significance for wellbeing of the physical nature of the home environment, including levels of crowding in the household space and access to private garden space.

Noise levels are important as part of the physical environment in one's home. Quiet spaces were shown in several papers to be valued by residents. For example, Agyekum records that crowded home environments with high noise levels presented a practical problem for students trying to focus on their academic work.

Access to internet is also shown in several studies to be important for social contact (Houweling et al.), accessing information (Larcombe et al.), and for other activities such as student learning (Agyekum). While virtual spaces accessible from within the home can be helpful for social contact, they can also be a space of scrutiny, which can be distressing, especially for girls (Harding & Smith).

The home as a psychosocial space

Research papers in this special issue consider the psychosocial features of the home space, that may support or impede social interactions beneficial to wellbeing. These papers link with earlier literature on 'sense of home' and 'ontological security' (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998) in the home environment as important factors for wellbeing, identity formation, and self-actualization.

Agyekum, for example, emphasises that the '*dwelling place as "home"*

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is not just a physical shelter, but also a foundation for social, psychological and cultural well-being'. The 'immediate' home space (at the more 'private', household scale) is considered in several papers as a place of intimate social interactions, sanctuary, privacy, home making, and caring practices, which are related to wellbeing.

Harding & Smith report a study based in the United Kingdom which focussed on young women and exemplified how they can feel socially isolated and bored when at home alone for extended periods and separated from their friends (as experienced during the COVID pandemic). For some respondents, therefore the home space was experienced as restrictive, damaging their sense of independence. However, for others the home was perceived as a space where they could feel more in control of their living space, and more relaxed, being free from social judgement by their peers.

Houweling et al. situate the home as an essential space for parenting in the UK and how this relates to wellbeing. Their paper demonstrates varied experiences of the home environment among household members in 'lockdown' conditions imposed during the COVID pandemic and focusses especially on perceptions of parents. Again, we see contrasting points of view. Some parents were emphasising the ways that the home space provided a good environment for 'time together' and bonding with their children. However, there were also reports of more stressful aspects of parenting when it became more restricted to the home environment due to lockdown, giving rise to parents' feelings of lack of time and space for themselves and tensions between household members.

Restorative and healing home environments are also explored in this special issue through the lens of therapeutic landscape theories (Gesler, 2003). Sanchez examines the experiences of people suffering from panic disorders, linked in some cases to agoraphobia. She records the significance of the home space experienced as a 'safe' place in which to rest and recover, and she emphasises that participants in her research had experienced benefits from home spaces that were separate from their original family homes and where they felt able to be in control of their environment.

The community setting of home spaces

The complex interactions between individual household spaces and the surrounding community setting are also apparent in research reported here. In a study set in Sweden, Olin and Thompson-Fawcett consider how the idea of 'cosy' spaces extends beyond one's private home space into the immediate residential neighbourhood. This paper also discusses how participants valued experiences of these 'cosy' spaces combined with a wider sense of 'freedom' in more public spaces at a broader scale across the city, and they reflect on how this point of view is reflected in urban design in Stockholm.

The community social environment, considered in terms of social cohesion and satisfaction with social relations in one's community, shows associations with various aspects of wellbeing. Several papers in this special issue emphasise the significance of the wider social network in one's local community, beyond one's own household. Houweling et al. find that social support networks were significant for wellbeing among parents in their study. Using a large representative sample of the population in Scotland, Halliday et al. report that lower levels of social cohesion in local communities, measured by surrogate indicators of 'social fragmentation' (first proposed by Congdon, 1996), and of 'social gifting', seem to be significantly associated with individuals' risk of mental illness recorded by self-report and medical prescription. Sait and Jivraj show that among older people responding to the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing, wellbeing in terms of 'quality of life' (measured by the CASP-19 scale) and self-reported physical activity were associated with greater levels of satisfaction with one's community and greater community social engagement.

The socio-cultural significance of home spaces, within and beyond the individual household, are also emphasised in studies of other geographical and cultural settings. Olin et al. identify potential

wellbeing benefits of urban home spaces that acknowledge the value of inclusive and collective living for Māori communities in New Zealand, not only in private home spaces but also in collective spaces of cultural and social significance for wellbeing.

Papers in this issue also show how material aspects of the wider community environment contribute to the quality of home spaces. For example, we see how physical features of community settings such as access to green space, exposure to environmental pollution and the quality and design of buildings may comprise benefits or risks to health and to wellbeing.

This special issue contributes to a well-established international literature emphasising the significance of natural spaces for wellbeing (Foley et al. 2019; Bell et al., 2014). Foley et al. present an analysis of qualitative data from the 'greenCOVID' survey, carried out in Spain, England and Ireland during the COVID-19 pandemic and associated periods of lockdown. They demonstrate the significance of access from one's home to nearby natural spaces and how these moderated the wellbeing of the participants while they were 'locked' into their home and the spaces nearby, restricting their normal everyday flows over wider daily action spaces. Taking a perspective which emphasises the idea of the home and nearby community environment as an assemblage, Foley et al. report the value of nearby natural spaces in providing places for physical exercise and relieving the sense of entrapment and anxiety associated with confinement in the home space. Their account emphasises the restorative impact of interacting with nature and the value of 'green and blue spaces' in private gardens and nearby public settings.

Foley et al also comment that their findings were broadly comparable across the countries studied, although they comment that "*The different cultural relations between the countries matter in terms of lifestyles outside and the obvious differences in seasonal flow between Spain, where being outside is a way of life; and the more enclosed spaces of home shaped by Atlantic climates*".

The mental health benefits of access to healthy and restorative natural 'green and blue' spaces may also be partly reflected in the findings reported by Halliday et al. indicating lower levels of self-reported mental illness and of receipt of prescriptions for depression or anxiety in rural settings in Scotland. Harding & Smith report comments from participants in their research which indicated that young women had taken advantage of conditions during lockdown to explore their immediate residential area and benefited in new ways from local outdoor spaces.

This special issue also includes references to other structural dimensions of the community that are significant for wellbeing, such as opportunities offered in the wider community, as discussed by Olin and Thompson-Fawcett, and local socioeconomic conditions and job opportunities accessible from one's home (e.g. Agyekum). These are found to be important for the financial security of populations studied and also for the diversity of experiences in daily life. Forms of tenure and rights and control over the design and organisation of home spaces and communal areas are seen to be important for the ways that residents experience their living environment. These issues are emphasised especially in the paper by Onyango & Elliott, who also demonstrate how lack of security or displacement from home space relate to wellbeing in Kenya.

Complexity of home spaces and wellbeing and the implications for policy and practice

This special issue exemplifies the complex nature of relationships between wellbeing and homes spaces, viewed from a geographical perspective. This complexity derives partly from the 'relational' manner (Cummins et al 2007; Atkinson, 2013) in which individuals with different personal attributes and resources interact with, and within, the geographically variable social and material spaces that they occupy. The issue brings together findings reflecting the links between wellbeing and home spaces in diverse settings, which are widely globally distributed, with studies from Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Spain, Sweden,

New Zealand, Kenya and Ghana. The experiences of home spaces and wellbeing among indigenous communities in Canada and New Zealand are also represented in some of the papers. This international and cross-cultural perspective draws attention to the importance of global diversity in the experience of home spaces and the specific factors influencing associations with wellbeing, but also demonstrates international similarities in terms of the general importance of home spaces for health and wellbeing. Several of the papers also make original contributions to the literature in this field by showing how experience of home space relates to individuals' cultural, ethnic and gender identities, and their lifestyle.

Complexity also has a temporal dimension, so that wellbeing is influenced by changing experiences of the home space over the person's lifecourse, including 'critical events' that are exemplified in several papers in this issue relating to experiences during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Several authors also emphasise the importance of the home space – wellbeing 'nexus' as a factor that should influence policy and practice in the design of home spaces and the wider built environment and in the promotion of wellbeing. Policy makers planning public health policies and interventions therefore need to consider the determinants of health inequalities operating at the scale of the home and neighbourhood, as well as larger scale national and regional processes. This implies that local knowledge and networking needs to be connected to decision making at the central level of policymaking and practice. This echoes with calls to take a 'whole system approach' to research, interventions, and policies pertaining to home spaces and health, recognising the intertwined nature of the material, psychosocial and spatial dimensions of home in relation to wellbeing (Sharpe et al., 2018).

Emerging themes in research on home spaces and wellbeing

This set of papers demonstrates several developing themes in research on relationships between home spaces and wellbeing, indicating promising fields for future work.

The role of the home space for wellbeing varies according to cultural, economic, and political conditions and aspects of governance, including land tenure rights. International and cultural perspectives can be broadened in future research, and it will be important to include more research from the perspective of diverse equity-seeking population groups. These conditions are very diverse globally. There is clear scope for increased focus on countries in regions beyond parts of the world where much of the work on space, society and wellbeing has been focussed hitherto. Therefore, the future agenda is likely to include more attention to research in regions such as the African and Central/South American countries as well as in Eastern Eurasian nations.

The experience of home spaces amongst the younger generation merits increased attention in future research, especially in light of the increasing challenges for younger adults as they seek to establish independent living spaces, beyond their parental homes, that meet their needs. Issues relating to housing quality, tenure, availability, affordability, and security seem likely to be of growing significance for this generation, as populations in many countries are facing impacts of economic recession and shortages of affordable housing. This special issue highlights the likely implications for wellbeing among younger adults at present, and further research is needed to monitor these effects. Increasingly, longitudinal research is demonstrating the significance of environments experienced in childhood and early adulthood for wellbeing later in life, so this 'lifecourse' perspective is also likely to be an important focus for future work on socio-spatial determinants of wellbeing.

Another expanding field of research illustrated in this issue relates to the growing significance of virtual spaces and how these interact with other dimensions of home spaces to impact on wellbeing. We expect that future work on this theme will increasingly be featured in this journal.

Challenges associated with environmental pollution and crises

associated with climate change also have increasing significance for security of home spaces of populations globally. In the face of extreme weather events, (for example, heat waves, floods, hurricanes, storms), we are reminded that home spaces often offer shelter and refuge yet some weather extremes quickly destroy home space infrastructures, profoundly disrupting wellbeing. As the impacts of climate change are expected to increase under current climate scenarios, more research on adaptations and resilience of homes spaces is needed to inform local and global actions.

We conclude by returning to the idea of home spaces and wellbeing as a complex topic. Elements of complexity theory, which have frequently been discussed as a framework to interpret research in health geography (e.g., Gatrell, 2005; Curtis and Riva, 2010 a & b; Curtis et al, 2018; Curtis 2021; Pearce, 2018) would be relevant as an 'overarching framework' for future research on the themes summarised above. Taking this approach to future research on home spaces and wellbeing also calls for cross-disciplinary and mixed methods research conducted across a range of geographical contexts and populations.

The papers in this special issue which are referred to above are the following

Agyekum, B., 2022. Adult student perspectives toward housing during COVID-19. *Wellbeing Space Soc.* 3, 100086. doi:10.1016/j.wss.2022.100086

Coppella, L.I., Flicker, S., Goldstein, A., 2023. "Make sure I hear snoring": Adolescent girls, trans, and non-binary youth using sound for sexual wellbeing boundary-making at home during COVID-19. *Wellbeing Space Soc.* 4, 100117. doi:10.1016/j.wss.2022.100117

Foley, R., Garrido-Cumbrera, M., Guzman, V., Braçe, O., Hewlett, D., 2022. Home and nearby nature: Uncovering relational flows between domestic and natural spaces in three countries during COVID-19. *Wellbeing Space Soc.* 3, 100093. https://doi:10.1016/j.wss.2022.100093

Halliday, K., Clemens, T., Dibben, C., 2022. The island effect: Spatial effects on mental wellbeing and residence on remote Scottish islands. *Wellbeing Space Soc.* 3, 100098. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wss.2022.100098

Harding, S., Smith, L.M., 2022. Freedom through constraint: Young women's embodiment, space and wellbeing during lockdown. *Wellbeing Space Soc.* 3, 100101. doi:10.1016/j.wss.2022.100101

Houweling, R., Power, A., Smith, D., 2022. Parent health and wellbeing at home before and during COVID-19. *Wellbeing Space Soc.* 3, 100082. https://doi:10.1016/j.wss.2022.100082

Olin, C.V., Berghan, J., Thompson-Fawcett, M., Ivory, V., Witten, K., Howden-Chapman, P. et al., 2022. Inclusive and collective urban home spaces: the future of housing in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Wellbeing Space Soc.* 3, 100080. doi:10.1016/j.wss.2022.100080

Olin, C.V., Thompson-Fawcett, M., 2022. At ease in the city: Neighbourhood as an extension of the cosy Swedish home. *Wellbeing Space Soc.* 3, 100114. doi:10.1016/j.wss.2022.100114

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Sánchez-Rodilla Espeso, C., 2022. From safe places to therapeutic landscapes: The role of the home in panic disorder recovery. *Wellbeing Space Soc.* 3, 100108. doi:10.1016/j.wss.2022.100108

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