



5th International and Interdisciplinary Conference

Happy Homes, Happy Society?

The Contribution of Domestic Life in a Time of Social Changes

The “Neighbourhood” as a Pivotal Element of the Infrastructure of a Flourishing Society

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The central theme of this conference is the contribution of home and family life to a healthy society. In reality, of course, the relation between the home and the society that hosts it, is not merely a one-way relation, but a complex, dialectical relation. The life of the home obviously conditions the character of members of the home, and their fitness to participate responsibly in social life. But it is also true that the customs, institutions, and mores of small, medium, and large communities condition the life of the home and shape the capacity of parents to make a responsible contribution to society and to prepare their children to do the same. In a healthy society, a well-functioning family and home will have a fruitful, mutually reinforcing relation with healthy and well-functioning communities. In a healthy society, the influence between the home and the communities it is embedded within will form a virtuous circle: healthy homes will produce virtuous, responsible citizens who can build healthy communities; while healthy communities will provide social structures and material and educational resources that support families in their efforts to create healthy and vibrant homes, as well as in their efforts to contribute to the life of society outside the home

In this paper, I propose to focus on one specific dimension of this virtuous circle of the home and the society within which it is nested, namely, the role of the neighbourhood in preparing individuals to participate responsibly in social life beyond the home. The central hypothesis to be explored is that (a) the neighbourhood plays a critical role in introducing family members to the concepts,

values, and rituals of social life beyond the home, and (b) the fate of society at all levels greatly depends on how well or poorly the neighbourhood performs this socialisation process, and (c) the socialising function of neighbourhoods may be greatly enhanced by deliberate human interventions at the level of urban design, institutional design, social policy, and individual action (including several measures to be considered in this paper). The paper is a philosophical reflection on our shared experiences of neighbourhoods and family life, rather than an empirical study of a specific neighbourhood or set of neighbourhoods. As such, rather than disclosing new empirical data, my paper aims to explore the critical role of the neighbourhood as a structure that introduces families into the life of society at large.

I begin by discussing four terms that play an important role in my argument, and stipulating what I mean by them: family, home, community, and society. Second, I discuss the concept of "neighbourhood," and argue that the neighbourhood will normally play an especially important role in introducing members of the home to the concepts and rituals of social life. Third, I suggest that the contribution of the neighbourhood to socialisation and human development will depend on the degree to which the neighbourhood is functional or dysfunctional, and I present a number of typical features of functional and dysfunctional neighbourhoods respectively. Fourthly and finally, I offer some practical suggestions concerning how vibrant, flourishing neighbourhoods may be promoted at the level of individual and collective action.

*Full papers are being prepared for publication. Further details to be announced.