
What is Meaningful for a Resident? Exploring Experiences of Dwelling Spaces through Participant-Produced Photographs

Jenni Kuoppa*[†]

¹University of Tampere (UTA) – FI-33014 Tampereen yliopisto, Finland

Abstract

The paper examines the use of participant-produced photographs in the focus group interviews aiming to apprehend the actual lived experiences of residential places. It is based on a research in Finland, aim of which was to explore the practices of inhabiting the residential places, how the material environment affords different uses and what kind or meanings emerge. The photography-interview method was chosen in quest of giving research participants more power in shaping the research process. Furthermore, our aim was to study the inherent meaningfulness of a home closely connected with its' materiality and tangible dimensions (Clapham 2011). In the photo-interviews, the method of photo elicitation enables research to surpass the restrictions of mere verbal communication. Photographs as visual data were also brought into the analytical process applying the approach by Shortt and Warren (2017). We argue that photography is a useful tool for gaining bottom-up, specific and grounded knowledge of housing. Through the photographs, the embodied and multisensory engagements with dwelling spaces were discussed. In our research, the method contributed to finding such perspectives to residential and architectural spaces that avoided the preconceived ideas. The data emphasizes the continuities between interior and exterior spaces of a dwelling and those aspects in material environment that connect inhabitants with the outside world (see Jacobs & Merriman 2011). The importance of spaces often regarded as secondary or "in-between" was also revealed. However, what is *missing* in our data also provides interesting possibilities for critical methodological reflection.

Keywords: participant, produced photographs, photo, interview, housing

*Speaker

[†]Corresponding author: jenni.kuoppa@uta.fi