



Leaving/returning: how people remotely manage their homes

Ongoing research

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The "leaving and returning" project, combining the two themes of mobility and "dwelling", focuses on the temporary physical absence of people from their homes. What links do they maintain with their homes when they are on the move? What consequences do these mobilities have on the social and spatial organization of their homes? It would appear that being physically away from home through some form of mobility doesn't automatically entail a social, spatial, temporal or even digital separation from it.

Research participants

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Managing one's absence from home seems to have become a major issue in today's so-called "hypermobile" society where individuals very often find themselves away from their home environment. Despite more and more people working from home and the development of long distance communication, some claim we've become a "society of ritualized absence" (Viard, 2014). This society, enabled by a greater mobility in terms of leisure and work, leads to more time spent away from home. In this context, being absent from one's own home appears to be an emerging feature in contemporary ways of dwelling, based on specific social practices. Managing this absence influences the

material organization of the home and more generally one's relationships to the habitat - understood as the living environment that includes all local and social ties.

This research project focuses on the temporary physical absence of people from their homes while they are being mobile, in order to study how people manage this absence and explore their attachment/detachment behaviors with regard to their home in the context of their mobility-related needs and habits.

It is hypothesized that the absence situation gives rise to specific social, spatial and temporal behaviors related to the organization, management and preservation of the home – whether the home in question has other occupants or not. Indeed, these behaviors are worth studying even if the house is still occupied when away from it, by another member of the household for instance or a sub-tenant. As such, these behaviors contribute to a symbolic and material ownership of the home.

Several reasons may explain why people implement methods and devices for managing and even counteracting their absence from home:

The issue of home security against intrusions or accidents explains why people resort to insurance, surveillance systems (cameras, sensors, automation, etc.), neighborhood information sharing, storing valuables or setting up certain services (such as a neighborhood watch or a security company).

The need for maintaining plants (watering), animals (food) or parts of the house (cleaning) can lead people to hire specific services (concierges, caretakers, etc.), buy programmable or remote controlled devices (automatic watering systems, animal food dispensers, etc.) or rely on the solidarity of neighbors and relatives (to check the mail, feed the cat, water the plants and let some air into the house, etc.).

In order to make money or simply keep the home occupied for any of the previous reasons, people also lease or sublease their homes to other individuals (through AirBnB, for instance) or sometimes lend them to people they know (house-swaps, rent-free loans, etc.).

Meanwhile, anticipating the effects of one's absence from home upon return may explain why people use programmable thermostats, buy stocks of food in advance, postpone renovations, etc.

These practices are not exclusive and work in conjunction, producing what we can call forms of "remote dwelling." People resort to two kinds of methods to manage their homes when they are away:

technical resources, digital networks and objects (smartphone, home automation, keys, alarms, etc.)

and social resources, human networks and people (friends, family, tenant, superintendent, neighbors, etc.).

The goal is to analyze what their use and significance is in people's relationship to housing and mobility.

It is important to note that what is being observed here is one's absence from a home that may or may not be otherwise occupied by other people. Indeed, it could be sub-rented or occupied by another member of the household. The idea remains to see how the absence of one of the occupants can produce specific dwelling behaviors.

The project will favor a multidisciplinary approach and create a dialogue between photography and sociology. Starting from the premise that people create an imaginary of their home when they are away from it through a situation of mobility, the goal here will be to capture a trace of this through photography, to produce pictures to show the places and devices through which people remotely manage their homes, whether physically, socially or symbolically. Photography in this context also provides an opportunity to capture certain behaviors performed by the inhabitants that reveal how they manage their absence from home.

The photography work will be put into perspective with an analysis of how people behave and represent their homes when they are away, as reported in the sociological survey.

The goal here is therefore to understand people's representations of their homes when away from them and how their relationships to them drive the implementation (or not) of home management practices, to describe, categorize and contextualize them in connection to the kinds of movements that produce the absence.

Research hypotheses:

The different modalities of absence and their associated representations lead to different ways of managing this absence and, ultimately, to different modes of remote dwelling.

Hypothesis 1 : The devices employed to manage one's absence from home and their specific uses vary depending on the kind of trip made and especially how reversible it is. The frequency (in terms of routine), duration (in terms of time spent away) and distance (in relation to the home) of trips have an impact on the nature and use of these devices.

Hypothesis 2 : The devices employed to manage one's absence from home and their specific uses vary depending on the type of dwelling: what kind of accommodation (house or apartment, size, configuration, etc.), surroundings (rural, suburban, urban, density, collective building, subdivision, etc.) and ownership status (is the person a tenant

or co/owner, how long has he/she lived there, etc.).

Hypothesis 3 : The devices employed to manage one's absence from home and their specific uses vary depending on localized social capital, i.e. people's social networks in the spatial environment of their homes. Weak ties (neighbors, colleagues, acquaintances, etc.) and strong ties (family, friends, etc.) are resources that facilitate departures and absences from home.

This research project is conducted in partnership with Leroy Merlin Source. It was launched in June 2018 and results are expected in December 2019.

Mobility

Broadly, the word mobility can be defined as the intention to move and the realization of this movement in geographical space, implying a social change.

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Movement

Movement is the crossing of space by people, objects, capital, ideas and other information. It is either oriented, and therefore occurs between an origin and one or more destinations, or it is more akin to the idea of simply wandering, with no real origin or destination.

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Keywords : **residential mobility, home, High mobility, Leroy Merlin**

Disciplines : **Social sciences, Art, litterature and design**

Transport mode(s) : **All modes of transport**

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² <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/mobility-450>

³ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/movement-460>

⁴ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/mots-cles/residential-mobility>

⁵ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/mots-cles/home>

⁶ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/mots-cles/high-mobility>

⁷ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/mots-cles/leroy-merlin>

⁸ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/disciplines/sciences-sociales>

⁹ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/disciplines/art-litterature-et-design>

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