

English Summary

Virtual home

Home experiences in the network environment

People's perceptions of their home are always based on their experiences. When thinking of the home, we recall memories and scenes of places and events that are important to us: home and the city, a summer cottage by a lake, turning points in life, and important human relations. The whole region encompasses all that makes you feel homey, comfortable, and natural.

The Internet is a novel aspect of hominess. For many, it is like a home, where you spend time, meet friends, and have a good time. It is also a work environment. The forums and social media services of the Web are virtual by nature; they do not exist in the same way as our tangible living environment does. They are, nevertheless, an essential part of our living environment. The Web includes the books, maps, movies, and music that are important to us. Documents, account information, and research data are saved there. People study, work, pursue hobbies, and meet other people there. On the Internet, everybody finds interesting things to do and to experience.

The Internet is no longer a world apart but an essential part of our everyday life. According to Statistics Finland, 89 per cent of 16–89-year-old people use the Internet, and especially young people enjoy themselves on the Web. According to a study by the Finnish Society on Media Education, 18-year-olds spend 14 to 18 hours on the Internet every week. The Internet has become a key element for young people and adults alike. Virtual spaces, be it about gaming, e-business or Facebook, are part of our everyday life. In many cases, they have become as precious for us as places in the physical world. They are home region-like spaces in the virtual world. Since the virtual sphere of home has not been systematically studied before, it has not have established research concept. However, virtual home is not a self-evident or the only possible term for the target of our interest. Another option could have been digital home (cf. digital culture, digital humanism).

Digital or virtual? Both attributes have some strengths and weaknesses. In its basic meaning, *virtual* refers to something expected and in principal possible, but in information technology, the word has also received some special meanings. For instance, virtual reality and virtual technology have already been accepted as dictionary entries and as part of people's everyday language. They refer to the convincing simulation of things and the technology used for its production. Moreover, *virtual* may refer to all intangible things, such as virtual particles and reflection. Yet, phenomena of these kinds fall beyond the scope of this book.

In our opinion, the concept of virtual world still describes the essential content of the Internet better than that of digital world. The focus of the latter is rather in technology than in content. Digitalization refers, in the first place, to the saving, transfer and processing of data in a format understood by the computer – as ones and zeros – whereas virtuality refers to the nature, status and interaction of content. For example, when talking about digitally implemented cultural heritage, *virtual* is a term that dominates academic discourse.

As a concept, digitality is narrower than virtuality (digitality as a technological solution), but it is also broader and more ambiguous. Did the newspaper become digital when digital printing was introduced? Or maybe as early as the start of the processing of text in the form of punched tape in printing machines? Or as late as the printing of news on paper was discontinued in favor of digital distribution and reading? All these phases used to be called digitalization, and were referred to with the attribute *digital*.

This book combines two topical discussions, experiential home research and research on digital culture. The framework of the book consists of the research line in the experiential home pursued at the University of Helsinki since 2011, which so far has generated nine data collection and research projects. Along with the project, interest in the experiential interpretation of home has spread within the research community: the authors of this book are research directors and doctoral students at six Finnish institutions of higher education. They represent the fields of history, information research, museology,

regional studies, musicology, social work, and administrative science. This, we believe, shows in the richness of the treatment of the theme.

The nine chapters of this book deal with the virtual home experience in two ways. Firstly, the virtual home denotes the visual representations of the already existing home, i.e., the manifestations of the home on the Internet. We focus on how the home is moving and being moved to the Web. Secondly, we consider all those things that have become familiar and homey in a digital environment that emerge on the Internet and do not exist anywhere else. In other words, we deal with how the home is complemented and emerges online. Between the extremes, there is a transitional zone with features of both extremes: the home has partially been moved to the Internet, and has partially emerged there.

The articles include a great deal of Internet empirics. The phenomenon of virtual home experience is approached and depicted through examples from South Ostrobothnian home discussions, Facebook's locality-based communities, the virtual implementations of the Satakunta small local history museums, the digital Järviseuutu geographic information system (GIS) database, Finnish soundscape research projects and the Sound Nights of Radio Finland, home-related interviews with people living in several locations, online discussion boards (weblogs) of Finnish expatriates, and online gaming forums.

Sulevi Riukulehto's article "The home experience on the Internet" constitutes the theoretical introduction to the topic area of the book. Introductory chapters of scientific collections often summarize the topics of the subsequent articles. For this book, a different solution was selected. Instead, Riukulehto's article presents the common research concepts of the theory of experiential home as they are used in this book and, based on empirics, the idea of a virtual home, which is elaborated on from different perspectives by the following articles.

The book starts from the quite traditional example of home region work: the article "Nurmoo-seura goes Facebook," by Matti Mäki and Teppo Ylitalo, takes a look at what happened when a local history association was strengthened with social media, in the case example, Facebook. In the article "The virtual realizations and opportunities of small local history museums," Magdalena Laine-Zamojska treats

the new virtual implementations of another traditional field of our interest. The article shows that local museums and their collections have received highly divergent and finely nuanced forms. In his article “The home on a digital map,” Timo Suutari analyses the data collected with the SoftGIS method, and describes how the home experience takes shape on a map, but also recognizes problems with this. Although the thickened areas of the map relate to a collective sense of home, the experientiality of the home is difficult to reach solely with digital GIS methods.

In his article titled “Sounds of this world,” Heikki Uimonen considers the soundscape experience especially in relation to the homey environment, discussing the cultural significance of sounds. The author concludes that it is possible for the cross-generational soundscape experience to also live on in a virtual form. In his article “The socially withdrawn and the small world of the Internet,” Ari Haasio considers the Internet culture of *hikikomoris*, young people who have withdrawn from society, and the importance of the Internet in their everyday life. In this case, the Internet forms a “small world” around which their life and social contacts revolve. In her article “Multilocational and digital municipal citizenship,” Katja Rinne-Koski distinguishes between three forms of a multilocational home. Multilocational drift and digitalization have such an impact on people’s home experiences that, before long, this can also be expected to be seen in the definitions of municipal citizenship.

In their article “The welfare state as the sphere of home in Finnish expatriates’ blogs,” Minna Zechner and Tiina Hautamäki describe how Finnish welfare state-like hominess is made tangible in writing in the form of personal life situations, and, in a way, is stopped and transformed in blogs into an ideal to which one can always return. Finally, in their article “Games as a virtual home,” Haasio and Riukulehto analyze the importance of game worlds for the formation of the individual’s sphere of home. When juxtaposed, the home experiences of the game world and the physical world are highly similar. For players dedicated to their hobby, the feeling of immersion is so strong that the game world may even be more real and significant than the physical world.

Despite its wide range of viewpoints, our book is merely an opening into the phenomena of the virtual home. Apart from its manifestations dealt with in this volume, the home also occurs in countless other forms, such as language, architecture, local history, and music. They, too, may have digital manifestations and start to become the official home. We hope our book invites reflection on the varied nature of the home and hominess and helps in clarifying the importance of the virtual world in people's everyday lives.

Sulevi Riukulehto and Ari Haasio