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THE SYMBOLIC REALM OF ITALIAN MIGRANTS' POST- WWII HOUSES IN AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT The Post-WWII period witnessed a large immigration flow of Italians towards Australia. This was facilitated by the assisted passage scheme funded by the Italian and Australian governments. Italian migrants, as well as diverse migrant groups, brought with them cultural practices and a way of life, which are nowadays part of the multicultural Australian society. Namely, it is argued that first-generation Italian migrants' houses are embedded by cultural meanings. Therefore, this research study investigates the symbolic realm of Post-WWII domestic dwellings built by Italian migrants in Brisbane, that is, the various meanings they associated with their homes. The data was collected from focus group discussion and in-depth interviews held at the Italian Club in Newmarket

and at the residences of forty Veneto first generation migrants, who migrated to Australia in the Post-WWII period. The collected data has been subjected to thematic and to hermeneutic analysis. This procedure generated a list of various meanings embedded onto migrants' houses in Brisbane. The revealed findings contribute (1) to explore a historically significant process of Australian domestic architectural development and (2) to expose the symbolic realm preserved into the built environment, which represent the national cultural heritage of Australia.

KEYWORDS: immigration, culture, house form, veneto, meanings

BACKGROUND

➤ According to the humanistic phenomenological theories on the concept of home, the symbolic realm, which refers to the meanings that people assign to their home, is one of the investigated cardinal components (Relph 1976). Thus, the aim of this section is to review the literature about the meanings that elderly migrants attached to their homes in their host countries. In charting home as a symbolic place specific for elderly migrants, the authors draw upon various theoretical and empirical work developed in Europe (Lewin 2001; Walsh 2006; Gram-Hanssen & Bech-Danielsen 2007), in America (Becker 2003) and in Australia (Thompson 1994, 2005; Hage 1997; Supski 2006, 2007).

The literature on the “meaning of home” has been reviewed in North America by the environmental psychologist Manzo (2003) and the environmental behavior scholar Després (1991), in Britain by the environmental psychologist Moore (2000, 2007), the social scientist Sommerville (1992, 1997) and the barrister Fox (2002), in New Zealand by the social scientists Dupuis and Thorns (1996), Perkins, Thorns, Winstanley & Newton (2002), and in Australia by the anthropologist Mallet (2004). While these scholars have focused on the meanings attached to home by people based in their home countries, others have investigated the meanings attached to home by people who move to a different country. They have uncovered some hidden aspects in this everyday domestic place with a distinction between refugees (see for example Thomas 1997; Korac 1999; Miadjenovic & Matijasevich 1999; Gedalof 2000; El-Fassed 2001; Al-Ali 2002; Armbruster 2002; Dorai 2002; Fábos 2002; Frykman 2002; Koser 2002) and labor migrants, both transnational (Riccio 2001, 2002; Salih 2002; Brettell 2006; Kabir 2007; Lucas & Purkayastha 2007; Nowicka 2007) and elderly migrants (Thompson 1994, 2005; Pulvirenti 1996, 1997, 2000; Hage 1997; Baldassar