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# Multi-locality in rural areas – an underestimated phenomenon

Lena Greinke <sup>a</sup> and Linda Lange <sup>b</sup>

## ABSTRACT

Multi-locality – a lifestyle involving living in several places – is very diverse. Involving temporary presences and absences, it can impact local communities and the environment. This paper looks at the effects of multi-local lifestyles in three rural districts in Lower Saxony, Germany, evaluating quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with multi-local residents, company representatives and officials. The methods are supplemented by visualizations and reflexive photography. Multi-locals can be seen as both an opportunity and a risk for civic involvement: multi-locality makes it possible to avoid relocation, but the limited periods of presence make it unlikely for multi-locals to become involved locally. Likewise, multi-locality impacts the environment, leading to an increasing volume of traffic and higher land consumption, even if it less significant than the impact of daily commuting.

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## THE PHENOMENON OF MULTI-LOCALITY

Multi-locality describes a way of life where a person lives in two or more places, with a functionally used residence in each. It can be practised regularly or irregularly (Rolshoven, 2006, p. 181). As a current topic of discussion in several research fields (e.g., Danielzyk et al., 2020a; Wood et al., 2015), multi-locality is distinct from daily commuting (circulation) and relocation (migration) (Weichhart, 2009, p. 6). Depending on the reason for practicing multi-locality, long distances between residences may be involved, but shorter distances predominate. Modern mobility options (e.g., fast rail connections, well-developed roads, domestic flights, etc.) enable multi-local lifestyles, since longer distances can be covered within a reasonable timeframe. The motives for and characteristics of multi-local lifestyles vary (Akademie für Raumentwicklung in der Leibniz-Gemeinschaft (ARL), 2016, p. 4). While research on multi-locality in urban areas is already available, few studies have yet focused on rural areas (in Germany with the exception of Greinke & Hilti, 2019; Lange, 2018).

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While rural areas are predominantly characterized by agriculture, Germany features many companies tucked away in the countryside and services for tourism, recreation or residential areas (cf. Dannenberg et al., 2010, p. 55; Leber & Kunzmann, 2006, p. 59). In Germany, many rural areas are affected by demographic change, featuring ageing populations and the out-migration of younger generations (cf. Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung im Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung (BMVBS/BBSR), 2009; Küpper, 2010). In this context, public debates and academic discourses are increasingly focusing on civic involvement and responsibility – in part to counterbalance state withdrawal (Olk & Hartnuß, 2011, p. 145). Rural villages are often characterized by a vibrant social life and well-functioning communities – conditions favourable for civic involvement (cf. Prognos AG et al., 2008, pp. 17ff.). This paper focuses on rural areas selected via a socio-spatial analysis using the Niedersächsisches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung (NIW) (2012) statistical criteria to define rural areas in Lower Saxony. These relate to ‘Labour market structure and unemployment rate’ and ‘High percentage of commuters out of all employees subject to social insurance contributions at the place of residence and labour market linkages’. Rural districts are characterized by fewer than 100,000 inhabitants and a generally low population density (NIW, 2012). However, statistical data are limited when considering rural areas. Their development and structures vary (e.g., historical development, demographics, economic structures, mentalities and traditions) (NHB, 2014, p. 3), meaning that it is not possible to define a homogeneous area as a ‘typical’ rural area (Mose, 2018, p. 1324). Significantly, there is no clear definition of the term ‘rural’ in international debates, even though almost half of the world’s population lives in rural areas (Dasgupta et al., 2014, p. 616). Rural areas in Lower Saxony mirror this diversity. Some feature significant economic and demographic growth (structurally stable or vibrant), some are far from larger cities (e.g., Emsland), while others are structurally weak with stagnating or declining economic and demographic growth despite being closer to agglomerations (e.g., Lüchow-Dannenberg).

Multi-local living arrangements<sup>1</sup> are associated with temporary presence and absence. In rural areas this can lead to changes in social involvement, local communities and ecological aspects whereby a distinction needs to be made between incomer and outgoer: the former have their main residence elsewhere, temporarily leaving it to work in the place in question, while the latter have their main residence in the place in question, temporarily leaving it to work elsewhere. Considering the points mentioned above, the following questions arise:

- What social and ecological effects can multi-local living arrangements have in rural areas?
- How can policymakers and planners respond to these effects?

The paper is based on two doctoral theses by Lange (2018) and Greinke (2020) dealing with the effects of multi-local lifestyles in three different rural districts in Lower Saxony. Drawing on these theses, the focus of this study is the influence of multi-local lifestyles on social involvement, local communities and ecological aspects in rural areas.

## MULTI-LOCALITY IN RURAL AREAS

Multi-locality is a highly relevant social, spatial and regional planning topic (Danielzyk & Dittrich-Wesbuer, 2020, p. 197; Weichhart, 2009, p. 10). This is reflected in the fact that living in two or more places leads to temporary presences and absences, in turn with complex consequences on both locations with regard to, for example, the maintenance, provision, and financing of technical and social infrastructures, housing demand (Danielzyk et al., 2020a; Dittrich-Wesbuer et al., 2015) or the public provision of mobility services (Weichhart, 2009). Multi-local lifestyles impact the civic involvement of the persons concerned (Dirksmeier, 2012;

Greinke et al., 2020) and have ecological consequences (cf. Danielzyk & Dittrich-Wesbuer, 2020, p. 198; Othengrafen et al., 2021). In this paper, we expect social effects to impact the civic involvement and voluntary activities of the multi-locals themselves and the communities they live in or with. Turning to ecological aspects, negative environmental and ecological impacts are to be expected, with particular attention paid in this paper to increasing traffic volumes and higher land consumption.

European research attention to multi-locality is rising as increasingly more people live multi-locally (ARL, 2016, p. 1; Danielzyk et al., 2020b). Multi-locality can also arise when someone visits a distant place frequently, at some point taking up a secondary residence there due to the onus of long-distance commuting. In addition, changing framework conditions in the economy and politics are leading to increased mobility requirements (Hesse & Scheiner, 2007, p. 139) favouring multi-local lifestyles. A further factor is the individualization of lifestyles, aided by changes including work flexibility due to structural changes and increasing modernization and globalization processes (Reuschke, 2010, p. 275; Schier et al., 2011, p. 402). Multi-locality is also facilitated by new information and communication technology and transport solutions (Hilti, 2013, p. 17; Scheiner, 2020a). Forms of mobility between two or more places are increasingly short term, less regular and less predictable, as well as more individual, with many Europeans increasingly organizing their lives across national borders – a phenomenon which ‘does not fit into traditional concepts of migration’ (Nadler, 2014, p. 1).

Especially in rural areas in Germany, it is argued that there is a high bonding effect keeping multi-locals from relocating completely (Lange, 2018, p. 158). This place attachment is usually stronger due to family and friends at the place of departure (Nadler, 2014, p. 366), in contrast to other European countries where relocating seems to be more commonplace. Furthermore, a multi-local life can also be seen as a deliberate option to prevent a complete relocation.

Though data on multi-locality are limited (Dittrich-Wesbuer & Sturm, 2020, p. 105), empirical studies show that multi-locality is undoubtedly significant in quantitative terms (Schad & Duchêne-Lacroix, 2013, p. 360). Since official statistics need to assign every person living in Germany to a specific administrative unit (ARL, 2016, p. 6; Dittrich-Wesbuer & Sturm, 2020, p. 106), multi-local lifestyles are not represented statistically (Dittrich-Wesbuer et al., 2015; Weichhart & Rumpolt, 2015, pp. 17f.). German residency legislation requires people to register a secondary residence, with some federal states levying a second residence property tax. However, registration is sometimes neglected, leading to discrepancies between registered residences and the actual number (Sturm & Meyer, 2009). Thus, ‘reporting reality’ generally differs from the ‘reality’ on the ground (Hilti, 2013, p. 60; Weiske, 2013, p. 354), meaning that there is a significant ‘dark number’ of multi-locals not appearing in official statistics (ARL, 2016, p. 6; Dittrich-Wesbuer & Sturm, 2020, p. 110).

Multi-locality research can be traced back to various interdisciplinary research fields (Danielzyk et al., 2020b, p. 6), for example, research on family lives (Kilkey & Palegna-Möllenbeck, 2016; Schier et al., 2015a; Schlinzig, 2017), on specific target groups (e.g., flight attendants and pilots; cf. Huchler et al., 2009), or on migration, transnationalism and development (cf. Albrow, 1997; Pries, 2000). Transnational multi-locality has been studied in South Africa (cf. Steinbrink, 2009), as have transnational multi-local households of French origin (cf. Duchêne-Lacroix, 2009). Other studies have looked at second homes used for leisure (ARL, 2016, p. 16; Bender & Borsdorf, 2014; Horáková, 2014). However, research focuses on housing, households and families (Dittrich-Wesbuer et al., 2015; Schier et al., 2015b; Weiske et al., 2009) and ethnography (cf. Duchêne-Lacroix et al., 2016; Schmalenbach & Kiegelmann, 2018), with as yet just few studies in the field of regional and spatial sciences (e.g., Danielzyk et al., 2020a; Dirksmeier, 2012; Dittrich-Wesbuer, 2016; Dittrich-Wesbuer & Föbker, 2013; Greinke et al., 2017; Hilti, 2015; Lange, 2018; Leubert, 2013; Nadler, 2014). These have shown initial effects on the housing market, local economies, urban development, infrastructures, local communities or civic

involvement, illustrating adverse effects, for example, on housing markets due to rising housing and real estate prices (Weichhart & Rumpolt, 2015, p. 47), or local economies when people shop elsewhere (Leubert, 2013, p. 140). But there are also positive effects to be gained from living in multiple places, such as broadening one's horizons and new opportunities for creativity (Hilti, 2009, p. 83).

A closer look at the interaction between civic involvement and multi-locality seems especially appropriate in rural areas. Civic involvement is understood here as the entirety of voluntary, non-profit and unpaid activities (Kahle & Schäfer, 2005), including classical honorary offices and functions within the framework of associations and institutions (Becker et al., 2010). Accordingly, civic involvement is characterized by a public welfare orientation occurring in public spaces and generally performed in association with others (Deutscher Bundestag, 2002, pp. 38f.).

Looking at Germany, the case studies in Lower Saxony are well suited to studying multi-locality. With its 8 million inhabitants and 47,000 km<sup>2</sup>, Lower Saxony is the second-largest state in terms of territory in Germany. Its economy is characterized by the automotive industry, high-production agriculture and food processing (Land Niedersachsen, 2021). Under the regional classification (NIW, 2012, p. XVII), 24 of 46 its regions can be classified as rural areas. In such areas, civic involvement is above average (see also Prognos AG et al., 2008, pp. 17ff.). Henkel (2010) notes, however that though village associations are generally numerous and active, villages often do not enjoy broad civic involvement in their development.

From an ecological point of view, it is important to focus on multi-locality, as it can, for example, influence housing and property markets by increasing housing demand in the place (s) of secondary residence (Dittrich-Wesbuer et al., 2014, p. 367; Hesse & Scheiner, 2007, p. 141). Although multi-locals can reduce vacancies in certain (non-holiday) periods (Dittrich-Wesbuer, 2016, p. 49; Leubert, 2013, p. 132), they can also cause housing and property prices to rise if demand outstrips supply (Weichhart & Rumpolt, 2015, p. 47). In addition, multi-local lifestyles can influence modes of transport and communication (Schad et al., 2015, p. 197; Scheiner, 2020a, 2020b). However, the reduced commuting rhythms of multi-locals through extended stays at the secondary residence can also lead to lower demand for infrastructure, with positive effects on the environment (Dittrich-Wesbuer et al., 2014, p. 367).

Overall, not enough research has been invested in looking at the extent to which multi-locality influences civic involvement and what consequences this has for the communities, local social practices and the environment, especially in rural areas.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS FROM TWO DOCTORAL THESES

This paper presents selected results from two doctoral theses on multi-local lifestyles in rural areas in Lower Saxony, but with different focal areas and in part different methods. The first focuses on the voluntary civic involvement, predominantly of outgoers, while the second considers the work-related multi-locality of incomers and its effects on rural development. Both start by introducing multi-locality via a comprehensive analysis of fundamental research and literature. Three case studies analyse the social and ecological effects of multi-locality, looking at the municipalities of Boffzen in the district of Holzminden, Bad Grund in the district of Göttingen (both in Lange, 2018) and the district of Diepholz (Greinke, 2020).

Lange (2018) focused her doctoral thesis on two municipalities in southern Lower Saxony profoundly affected by demographic change, with ageing populations and high outmigration posing significant challenges for the municipalities and the whole region. In both, key traditional industries have ceased operations (e.g., mining in the region of Harz) or have drastically changed (e.g., glassmaking in the region of Holzminden), leading to an in-depth restructuring of the local labour markets. The lack of job opportunities leads to people looking for work

elsewhere, and thus in many cases to multi-locality. The two municipalities were chosen as case studies based on the following criteria: population density, distance to economic centres, distance to the motorway, labour market structure, unemployment rate and commuter movements. Structured qualitative in-depth interviews with multi-locals were conducted with a participatory element (designated as visualization; for details, see below) designed to reflect on and visualize narratives. In addition, further interviews with local stakeholders (e.g., local authorities and politicians, representatives from voluntary organizations) were conducted to gain different perspectives of the phenomenon and discuss possible ways of integrating multi-locals in local communities. In total, 29 interviews were used for qualitative evaluation.

Greinke (2020) analysed the district of Diepholz in north-west Lower Saxony. The district is well suited for investigating multi-local lifestyles, as its southern part – with the municipalities Altes Amt Lemförde, Barnstorf, Rehden, Wagenfeld and the town of Diepholz – is basically rural (Lange, 2018, pp. 66f.; Othengrafen et al., 2021). The selected municipalities represent a structurally vibrant district characterized by diverse opportunities in business, culture and tourism, and good technical and social infrastructures, making it an attractive district for both incomer and outgoer multi-locals. Being a long distance away from large labour market centres or business locations (Lange, 2018, p. 64) means that work-related multi-local lifestyles are to be expected. On the other hand, the district features a high number of commercial and industrial parks (Lange, 2018, pp. 155f.), hosting many internationally active companies. This leads to a high demand for (skilled) workers, many of whom are incomers (pp. 176f.). Structured qualitative in-depth interviews (in accordance with Helfferich, 2011; Mayer, 2013; Meuser & Nagel, 2002) were conducted with multi-locals and political-planning representatives. In addition, reflexive photography was used to get the interviewees to reflect more deeply (Dirksmeier, 2009, p. 168). Interviews were also conducted with company representatives to analyse how multi-locals are treated. In total, 45 interviews were subject to qualitative evaluation.

In both doctoral theses, data evaluation was performed via qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2010) using MAXQDA software. In addition to the classical methods of socio-scientific research, the participatory elements of visualization (Lange, 2018) and reflexive photography (Dirksmeier, 2009, p. 164; Greinke, 2020) were used in the interviews with the multi-locals.

In Boffzen and Bad Grund, the participatory visualization element was followed by the systematic assembly, often used in organizational research (Lange & Levin-Keitel, 2018). Specially developed for this thesis, visualization served to initiate in-depth reflections and systemize different aspects (for a detailed methodology, see Lange & Levin-Keitel, 2018), thereby generating knowledge on the classification of places and the voluntary involvement of the multi-locals. During interviews, interviewees were invited to assign activities and contacts to the places in which they lived. This was done using cartoon-style sketches which were subsequently ranked according to personal significance. The interviewees were thus verbally and visually inspired to reflect on and illustrate their narratives, leading to extended and, in some cases, unexpected findings.

In Diepholz, reflexive photography was used. Originating in cross-cultural studies, this method combines interview and photography procedures to form a coherent methodology (Brake, 2009, p. 378; Dirksmeier, 2007, p. 87). In contrast to photo-elicitation (cf. Harper, 2002) and similar to the photovoice method (cf. Warren, 2005), candidates are requested to take pictures before the interview. In the case at hand, multi-locals sent the researcher up to three photographs of their everyday life at each location. These were printed out and used as a kind of ‘starting mechanism’ or narrative impulse for the interviews (Brake, 2009, p. 379; Dirksmeier, 2007, p. 88). With this method, a researcher gains insights into interviewees’ perceptions (Amerson & Livingston, 2014, p. 204). The photographs are evaluated with the help of image interpretation (in accordance with Brake, 2009; Breckner, 2012; Schulze, 2007), allowing

interviewees to leave an actual interpretation of the images. The pictures were described in detail and sorted into categories. This method was used because the actual interpretation of the images is left to the interviewees in the method of reflexive photography. In total, these methods significantly contributed to gaining deeper insights into the lives of multi-locals.

## DEALING WITH THE SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF MULTI-LOCALITY

International studies tend to focus on trans-local rural–urban lifestyles (cf. Benz, 2014; Schmidt-Kallert, 2012), but the analyses in this study show that multi-locality is no one-way street. Just as some workers may live rurally but work in a city, others may live in a city and work rurally. In the case studies concerned, different forms of multi-local lifestyles were to be found (cf. Greinke, 2020; Lange, 2018).

### Social effects of multi-locality in rural areas

The fact that temporary presence and absence in rural areas can have complex effects on communities and social lives has already been described above. In particular, civic involvement plays a unique role in small communities or villages, not least in the field of services of general interest where it can be crucial (cf. Henkel, 2016; Weitkamp, 2014). In many cases, villages in rural areas face problems such as job and population declines or vacant and decaying buildings (Siedentop et al., 2011). Holzminden and Osterode am Harz, for example, are affected by such problems, in contrast to the structurally vibrant Diepholz. What happens with voluntary activities if someone lives in more than one place? Over the past few years, political debates about the role of civil society have become increasingly important (Deutscher Bundestag, 2002, p. 25; Henkel, 2016, p. 77).

In this context, the analyses show that multi-locals fundamentally have the opportunity to be involved in more than one place, possibly helping determine local developments. Hence, a broader range of options can lead to a broader range of activities. Nevertheless, regardless of location, limited periods of presence make it difficult to become involved in or to be a regular member of a social association or sports club. In many cases, active involvement changes into passive involvement or the activity is given up completely. In addition to limited time resources, only a few interviewees developed a sense of emotional attachment or a sense of home in their secondary residence.<sup>2</sup> This was illustrated by the selection of photos that mainly show private aspects of the primary residence and not of the secondary one. This, in turn, makes it more unlikely that multi-locals become involved in a local community. Moreover, other obligations (e.g., family, house, garden) in the primary residence often have priority. Emotional attachment to places was often only revealed in the cartoon-style sketches such as those drawn in the interviews in Holzminden and Osterode am Harz, not in the spoken narratives. Although the lifestyles of the interviewees differ greatly, many similarities can also be shown and visually presented. A 39-year-old male multi-local explained that he was involved in a kayak club (translated German quotation): ‘Less so lately, though, because the season just started and I am dealing with the kids, meaning that most of my free time is spent with the family.’ International studies have already shown that multi-locality requires the support of families (Schmidt-Kallert, 2012, p. 174).

Nevertheless, it became clear that multi-locals ‘feel at home’ in several places and are often able to live in two (parallel) worlds (Greinke, 2020; Lange, 2018, p. 187). Multiple territorializations, according to Duchêne-Lacroix (2015), can also be observed, with multi-locals having apparently divided territorial feelings of belonging and thus ties (Duchêne-Lacroix, 2015, p. 224). This result is mirrored by the selection of photographs by interviewees: whereas they take many work-related photographs at their secondary residence, the photos taken at their

primary residence show private scenes. However, there are occasional overlaps, indicating that a strict work–life separation is not always the case. Furthermore, work-related multi-locality means that absence from the primary residence predominates. Looking at international migration, migrant workers from (Eastern) Europe or elsewhere are motivated mainly by work, for example, taking on seasonal work in agriculture. Here, multi-locality can be seen as a possibility to prevent complete relocation. This underlines the multiple territorialization finding, with multi-locals not relocating completely from rural to urban areas. Most interviewees perceived their situation as not being of their own accord (e.g., fitters or technicians), often leading to a negative subjective feeling, as many would prefer a life in just one place. To quote a 32-year-old female multi-local (translated German quotation): ‘In the future, however, I would like to live in just one place.’

However, it is also possible to generate advantages from such a way of life, combining the opportunities and amenities of both localities. Some multi-locals quickly familiarize themselves with their new local circumstances, enjoying their active and mobile life and thus benefiting from it. For example, they gain knowledge or physical fitness from their involvement elsewhere, as evidenced in some photos featuring sports activities where interviewees mentioned that they took place in both localities. They may even explicitly take place in the secondary locality in order to be fit in the primary one (e.g., altitude training), as stated by a 41-year-old male multi-local (translated German quotation): ‘And I even had an advantage in [the secondary locality] because of the mountains. There is [a mountain] there, 600 metres high. ... I really ate up altitude metres there. I was fitter than here [in the primary locality].’ Due to personal commitments, some multi-local interviewees succeed in becoming integrated into (village) communities or neighbourhoods, for example, taking part in local events or church meetings and thus coming into contact with the communities there. Moreover, interviewees benefited from developing a (personal and work-related) network at the secondary locality which they could use later or in other contexts. Schmidt-Kallert (2012, p. 177) has already pointed out that such networks ‘may span short or large distances, transcend provincial, regional or even national borders’.

Incomers can also be seen as potential candidates to counteract the decline in membership of many associations and clubs. Even if only temporarily, they can become involved, presenting an attractive opportunity for clubs and associations in (rural) areas already struggling with recruitment problems and declining membership numbers. A prerequisite for this is the establishment of new forms of participation in local structures and communities, especially for multi-locals. Existing local clubs could offer a temporary or joint membership for multi-locals or postpone certain events. A good example of this in rural areas is volunteer firefighters: they were previously only allowed to participate in emergency responses at just one location. Since the amendment of the Fire Protection Act in 2012, joint memberships in fire brigades have been possible in Lower Saxony to ensure the longevity of volunteer fire brigades. Such arrangements can play a crucial role in cushioning shortages in structurally weak rural areas.

### Ecological effects of multi-locality in rural areas

There are several ecological effects of multi-locality of great importance to sustainable spatial development. To start with, the research shows that, overall, living in more than one place automatically leads to an increased volume of traffic (Scheiner, 2020b). The analyses indicated that weekly commuting predominated, thereby increasing the use of resources for the construction, operation and maintenance of transport infrastructures and their associated environmental impacts (Schad et al., 2015, p. 197). Moreover, vacation home settlements in the studied rural areas had been developed also for use as secondary residences, leading not only to increased land consumption but also to additional resource use for infrastructure. This can become a challenge in (rural) areas with limited budgets or unable to zone any more land.



A further issue associated with multi-locality is higher land consumption due to more than one residence. Multi-locals take up space that is also vacant at times. In rural areas with tight housing markets, the increased demand can cause competition. Typically, multi-locals prefer small furnished apartments, as do students or single households. When demand exceeds supply, this can lead to competition and possibly the construction of new buildings. On the other hand, an inflow of multi-locals can also be seen as potential for combating vacancy, a challenge facing many villages in Lower Saxony. Multi-locals can (partly) reduce vacancy by utilizing vacant or insufficiently used living spaces. This can also be an opportunity for property owners to convert (oversized) properties into smaller residential units without wasting land. In some cases, interviewees were quite willing to use such living space or were already using it.

In contrast to urban areas, public transport in rural areas is often limited, meaning that cars are the primary mode of transport (Wittowsky & Ahlmeyer, 2018, p. 2795), even for multi-locals. This, in turn, can have adverse effects on the natural environment and climate (Albrecht et al., 2008, p. 94), for example, through increased carbon dioxide emissions. Nonetheless, weekly commuting is better than daily (long-distance) commuting which often causes significantly more emissions than a multi-local lifestyle with less frequent changes of location (Othengraf et al., 2021). In rural areas already characterized by car-based mobility, this can lead to higher traffic volumes.

As regards the use of infrastructure, the studies show that in most cases no additional infrastructure was necessary to meet the needs of multi-locals. They use the existing roads or bus and train networks. However, high numbers of incomers may result in periodic high demand and shortages, for example, in tourist regions during vacation seasons, as evidenced in international studies (e.g., Lehtonen et al., 2019, p. 259). Furthermore, incomers may benefit from lower prices in the secondary locality. For example, beautician services in Diepholz are better and cheaper than in the primary locality, as affirmed by a 32-year-old female multi-local (translated German quotation): ‘And otherwise I can do everything here in terms of activities that I do at home. Even better, because the beautician here is cheaper than at home. I am totally thrilled with her.’

### Dealing with multi-locality in rural areas

Given the complexity and the extensive scope of multi-locality, it is not easy to cope with it at municipal level, and it is naturally not expedient or even possible to make blanket statements. Given that multi-local lifestyles are set to increase, it is essential to take the phenomenon seriously. Understood in response to different developments and social upheavals, municipalities must consider multi-locals’ unique needs and demands. Awareness-raising measures are necessary to put this topic on political agendas.

While interviewing planning policymakers, it became clear that one possible approach by companies and local authorities to curb the demand for multi-locality would be to reduce commuting frequency and increase the time spent at the locations in rural areas. An example of this could be the establishment of co-working spaces near the place of departure of multi-locals in cooperation with other companies, and ensure that incomers can use them. This would reduce commuting frequency (and the concomitant emissions) and the time and cost of mobility for multi-locals. Older debates have already shown that there are possibilities for tele-cottages or teleworking in rural areas (e.g., Albrechtsen, 1987; Heilig, 2003; Sangam, 2008). At the same time, co-working spaces in rural areas are liable to be cheaper than in larger cities. Studies on work-related multi-local lifestyles have already shown that this target group can be reached by both individual and shared workspaces like libraries or cafés (e.g., Di Marino & Lapintie, 2018). Though such opportunities will not mean the end of multi-local lifestyles, they may motivate employees to stay with a company without having to change their lifestyle too much from a mono- to a multi-local one. Particularly in the Covid-19 crisis, research shows

that multi-locals are increasingly working from home. Moreover, the surge in demand for second homes in some countries illustrates that a more permanent shift to telework and the growth of multi-locality is possible (Willberg et al., 2021, p. 12). At the same time, it remains unclear how (mandatory) telework affects productivity and mental health (Reuschke & Felstead, 2020, p. 211), meaning that it is not yet foreseeable whether multi-locality may start declining.

Another idea stemming from the interviews with multi-locals could be a more flexible and short-term integration of incomers into local associations. Long contractual terms and inflexible formats are unattractive for multi-locals. When opening hours are adjusted, for example, for swimming pools, multi-locals can successfully become involved. Examples in Diepholz show that incomers are quite willing to participate in activities in their secondary locality. One example of this was an honorary pastor performing pastoral duties in the secondary locality.

In debates on multi-locality, questions of social inequality naturally arise. On the one hand, the theses show that most interviewees perceive their situation as being involuntary, leading to a negative subjective feeling. They view multi-locality as a way to bridge a particular phase in life (e.g., pre-retirement, a training period) or even as the lesser of two evils – in contrast to complete relocation. On the other hand, some have chosen this status voluntarily and have no intention of changing it. In this context, we need to ask whether social justice is being ignored here or whether, at the end of the day, it is just a question of money. Particularly against the background of precarious working conditions, for example, seasonal field workers from abroad, we need to critically examine whether multi-locality ‘is the lifestyle of choice’. To sustain their families, such workers have to live in several places because this is the only way to generate sufficient income. Accordingly, multi-locality is an opportunity for many people from which they benefit. However, at the same time, it is also a challenge, as without multi-locality they would not be able to survive.

## MULTI-LOCALITY – AN (UN-)IMPORTANT PHENOMENON?

The research shows that multi-locality can have social and ecological effects on communities in rural areas, to which policy and planning representatives could respond. In the future, and not just with regard to multi-local lifestyles, the trend in civic involvement is set to move towards more project-based activities and less long-term ones. The time constraints of multi-locals can explain this, but also those of other target groups, for example, (long-distance or daily) commuters, single parents, the elderly or students. Furthermore, the literature and the interviewed representatives observe that overall demand structures for voluntary work are changing, needing to become shorter term, project-related and flexible. A future challenge is to integrate multi-locals into local communities and to facilitate their involvement. To this end, it is essential to develop forms and formats of services better tailored to the limited time resources of multi-locals and other target groups, and to develop appropriate activities. Multi-locals offer great potential for securing civic involvement and the provision of public services in villages facing decline, thereby boosting their attractiveness as places to live and work and mitigating the consequences of demographic change.

In times of climate change, the ecological effects of multi-locality should be placed on the political agenda. It is quite clear that multi-local life automatically leads to increased traffic volumes and environmental pollution. Furthermore, the high land consumption associated with having multiple residences cannot be ignored. Land consumption should be an urgent topic for local authorities to support demand-based and sustainable spatial development, not only on account of multi-locality.

The results presented in this paper are based on findings in selected rural areas. However, they are to a certain extent transferable to other rural areas with similar framework conditions. The studies reveal that structurally vibrant areas (e.g., the district of Diepholz) are affected by

multi-locality. Therefore, there is no urgent need for the involvement of multi-locals to be curbed in these areas, as the existing structures in associations and institutions can usually absorb a certain amount of loss (e.g., through newcomers or new recruits). In structurally weak rural areas (e.g., in the districts of Holzminden or Osterode am Harz) already affected by outmigration, multi-locality and the associated phases of reduced (civil) involvement can certainly be a challenge, as those remaining are unable to fill up ranks. Areas unable to attract newcomers and young people are set to face significant challenges. Tourist areas could both benefit and lose out from multi-locality. Recreational multi-locals usually have more time on their hands, which they are inclined to spend in the secondary locality, to its benefit. In Finland for example, the majority of multi-local lifestyles are due to recreation, not work (Lehtonen et al., 2019, p. 259). At the same time, vacation home developments can be challenging because they consume land and development resources. Agricultural areas could benefit from multi-locals because, for example, they can substitute seasonal workers and even become involved in the community. At the same time, this potential is only temporary, meaning that municipalities or associations cannot benefit from it in the long term.

It is crucial to inform municipal officials, companies and policymakers about the pros and cons of multi-locality, especially as, to date, the phenomenon has not arrived in the consciousness of local authorities and civil society. For this reason, its consequences are often ignored. However, this phenomenon can be an excellent opportunity for communities and municipalities, with each cooperating in preparing and implementing proposals allowing processes and projects to be jointly established and sustainably developed. The approaches adopted by the various stakeholders for dealing with multi-locality should be individually formulated and then coordinated to reflect specific local framework conditions.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> ‘Multi-local living people’ and ‘multi-locals’ are used synonymously.
- <sup>2</sup> In a large number of multi-local arrangements, there is one place of departure (usually where the rest of the family lives or stays) and one or more secondary or subordinate places (e.g., work-places, second homes, etc.).

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