



## Unveiling her perspective: Exploring women's multi-local living arrangements in German cities

Maya Willecke<sup>a,\*</sup>, Leonie Wächter<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Geography, RWTH Aachen University, Wuellnerstraße 5b, 52062 Aachen, Germany

<sup>b</sup> Institute of Geography and Geoecology, KIT – Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Kaiserstraße 12, 76131 Karlsruhe, Germany

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### ABSTRACT

Multi-local lifestyles are increasingly shaping current living realities. Earlier German studies identified (work-related) multi-locality as a “male phenomenon” influenced by traditional gender relations. Women, especially during the family phase, are less likely to choose multi-local arrangements, while multi-local women are often childless. As tendencies towards individualization and pluralization have increased in the last years, coupled with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, the question is whether (and to what extent) differences between men and woman in multi-local lifestyles persist. Using a representative survey and qualitative interviews with multi-local residents in Frankfurt am Main and Leipzig, the study investigates the quantitative dimension of multi-locality, as well as differences in how this lifestyle is perceived. In this paper, we contribute to a better understanding of the specific multi-local living realities of women and men, as well as the differences in how they are realized and perceived.

### Introduction: researching “multi-local” women

Multi-locality describes the phenomenon where individuals live in multiple locations and regularly move between these places in alternating periods (Weichhart, 2009). This way of living has become more common in recent years. People frequently opt for multi-local arrangements at certain stages of their lives (Hilti, 2020) and for a variety of reasons. These may include work or educational opportunities, family obligations, personal lifestyle choices, or leisure pursuits (Hesse & Scheiner, 2007). In this paper, our specific focus is on residential multi-locality, which refers to the practice of maintaining multiple residences. These residences may be located in different cities, regions, or even countries (Weichhart & Rumpolt, 2015).

Earlier studies have shown that heteronormative gender relations in Germany significantly influenced decisions regarding professional mobility, e.g., a multi-local lifestyle which has been predominantly associated with men (Schier, 2010). During the phase of starting a family and having children, women are more likely than men to decide against a multi-local arrangement. On the other hand, women who are highly mobile for work-related reasons are often childless (Schier, 2010; Schneider et al., 2002b). With regard to increasing individualization and pluralization tendencies in the world of work and life, as well as the

effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, the question arises as to whether and to what extent gender-specific differences in multi-local lifestyles are still evident in Germany today.

It is important to emphasize that “gender” refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors and identities of women, men and gender-diverse people in a historical and sociocultural context (Butler, 1990). The discipline of gender studies aims to develop a comprehensive and intersectional understanding of gender roles and how they impact all genders (Connell, 2005). In this study, we focus solely on the gender-specific differences between the binary genders of men and women. Since our random sample includes very few individuals with other gender identities, it is impossible to draw reliable conclusions for this particular group.

The academic discipline of women's studies, on the other hand, specifically centers around the experiences and rights of individuals who are categorized as female. This field of research delves into the various aspects of women's lives, including areas such as health, sexuality, work, family, and education. The primary aim is to enhance our understanding of the unique realities that women encounter on a daily basis (Smith, 2000). Heteronormative role models define specific expectations for how men and women should behave, based on traditional gender roles. Men are frequently depicted as strong, dominant, and focused on their

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [maya.willecke@geo.rwth-aachen.de](mailto:maya.willecke@geo.rwth-aachen.de) (M. Willecke).

careers (Connell, 2005), while women are portrayed as emotional, nurturing, and focused on family (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). These role models influence social interactions, professional opportunities, and personal relationships, potentially limiting individual freedom and self-fulfillment.

Thus, it is particularly worth investigating the effects of heteronormative role conceptions on multi-local lifestyles. In line with women's studies, we specifically examine the situation for women and how multi-local lifestyles are affecting their (everyday) lives.

In this paper, we address the following research questions:

- 1) In quantitative terms, is multi-locality still a "male phenomenon"?  
What gender-specific differences exist in terms of age, work situation and distance of multi-local residences?
- 2) To what extent do gender-specific differences exist with regard to the reasons for multi-local lifestyles?
- 3) How do women in particular perceive their multi-local situation?  
How do they evaluate it, and what challenges do they face with such an arrangement?

To answer these questions, we adopted a mixed-methods approach. We conducted a representative survey and qualitative interviews with multi-local residents in the German city regions of Frankfurt am Main and Leipzig. With this article, we aim to address the gaps in existing research on multi-local lifestyles, specifically focusing on the experiences of women today. Previous studies on multi-locality in Germany have mainly concentrated on demographic and socio-economic factors, often neglecting the intricate ways in which gender influences these lifestyles. While some research has acknowledged the male-dominated nature of multi-local living (Schier, 2010), there is a lack of comprehensive investigations into how women navigate and perceive their multi-local arrangements. Our study seeks to fill this gap by not only offering a quantitative analysis of multi-locality as a potentially male-dominated phenomenon but also delving deeply into the qualitative experiences of women.

The paper begins with an overview of the state of the art regarding women and spatial mobility. Next, we explain the mixed-methods approach used in the research. We then present the results, which are structured according to the research questions. After a brief discussion of the results, we end the paper by drawing conclusion about the importance of researching the gender-specific differences in multi-local living arrangements.

### State of the art: women and spatial mobility

Residential multi-locality, especially if it is work-related, is a type of mobility that is in between daily commuting and relocation or migration (Weichhart, 2009; Weichhart & Rumpolt, 2015). Gender-specific effects of multi-locality have only been sporadically examined in studies to date. Therefore, this chapter presents gender-specific results from studies that address these types of mobilities before discussing more detailed results regarding multi-locality. Literature on commuting offers valuable insights into the patterns and effects of daily travel on individuals' lives. As multi-locality is also often associated with long travel distances and absences, these findings help us understand the complexities of multi-local living, including the challenges of managing multiple homes and their potential impact on gender roles and work-life balance. Studies in relocation give us insights as to how a relocation, including to a new second home, affects individuals. Furthermore, the decision to long-distance commuting or relocation is often considered an alternative to opting for a multi-local arrangement.

#### *Gender-specific differences in commuting and relocation*

A large body of research has addressed gender and job-related spatial mobility. In particular, gender differences in commuting have been

examined in numerous European and US-American studies in recent years (Chidambaram & Scheiner, 2020; Kwon & Akar, 2022; Nisic & Kley, 2019). Long-distance commuting, which refers to a one-way commute of at least 60 min, is a potential solution for individuals considering accepting a job offer that is further away while still maintaining their current residence with their family (Kley & Feldhaus, 2018). German studies found out that this decision is often made to improve earnings, job position and career opportunities (Stenpaß & Kley, 2020). Research conducted two decades ago revealed that commutes for women are shorter than those for men, in terms of both distance (Crane, 2007) and time (European Communities, 2004). Previous German research has shown a steady decline in this gender gap over the years, but women continue to have shorter commutes (Chidambaram & Scheiner, 2020).

Various aspects affect this gender gap, including family situations and the presence of children, as well as occupational-related characteristics (Giménez-Nadal et al., 2022; Kwon & Akar, 2022). Female long-distance commuters are less likely to live in a partnership or be married than their male counterparts or women without high mobility patterns. Furthermore, women who commute long-distance are less likely to have children (Rüger et al., 2011). According to some studies, an individual's professional situation also contributes to this gender gap. Research has explained that the gender gap in commuting distance may result from the secondary labor status of women within the family (Chidambaram & Scheiner, 2020). Because women often earn less than men, long-distance commuting is less attractive for them according to the willingness-to-commute literature (Dauth & Haller, 2020). In addition, the commuting distance for full-time employees is increasing and women are more likely to work part-time (Brunow & Jost, 2023). This finding was also evident in German statistics from, the 2016 microcensus: since women are more likely than men to work part-time, their commute to work tends to be shorter (Destatis, 2024).

The effects of commuting on everyday life are also gender-specific. A European study found that women report feeling significantly more time pressure than mobile men (Collet & Dauber, 2010). This may be due to the fact that while a man's longer commuting may result in the woman assuming the majority of household and childcare tasks, a woman's long-distance commuting leads to the couple sharing the tasks equally (Stenpaß & Kley, 2020).

In addition to the decision to commute, a mobility decision can also include a relocation or migration (Schneider et al., 2002a). The associated decision-making processes in the household can be explained using microeconomic migration theories. It can be assumed that a household moves if the benefits of the move exceed the sum of the costs. In this sense, costs are not only material (such as relocation expenses) but also intangible, such as the loss of social relationships (Reuschke, 2010). An unequal distribution of relocation costs and benefits results in the phenomenon of "tied partners" – partners who do not relocate despite personal benefits ("tied stayers") and partners who relocate despite individual losses in favour of the household ("tied movers"). Empirical research shows that tied partners are more often women than men (Bieby & Bieby, 1992; Smits, 2001). The explanation for this phenomenon is not only the higher economic income of the male partner but also the asymmetrical, gender-specific decision-making structures in the households.

#### *Gender-specific differences in multi-locality*

Multi-locality refers to the phenomenon where individuals maintain residences in multiple locations and regularly alternate between them (Weichhart, 2009). The spectrum of multi-locals is wide and encompasses various age, social, and professional groups. This group consists of weekend commuters (also known as overnighters), individuals with separated households, expatriates, individuals with transnational careers, as well as individuals who own holiday accommodations and children who commute in post-separation families (Dittrich-Wesbuer &

Sturm, 2020). It is evident that people choose multi-local arrangements for a variety of reasons (Hesse & Scheiner, 2007; Hilti, 2020).

Work-related multi-locality involves individuals who regularly travel between cities for their jobs, maintaining their primary residence in one city while establishing a secondary residence in another to fulfill their work obligations. Additionally, the multi-local arrangement can be arranged for the purpose of studying or apprenticeship in another city (Greinke, 2023). Family or partnership-related multi-locality is often driven by a combination of personal and professional factors (Hilti, 2020). One scenario involves both partners maintaining separate households for various reasons and regularly moving between each other's residences, referred to as "Living Apart Together" or "LATs" (Hesse & Scheiner, 2007). Leisure-related multi-locality refers to individuals who maintain secondary homes for leisure purposes. Lastly, there is transnational multi-locality, sometimes referred to as trans-locality, which involves individuals maintaining residences in multiple countries (Dittrich-Wesbuer & Plöger, 2013).

Gender-specific differences have received little attention with regard to multi-locality. A representative survey in six European countries (Germany, France, Spain, Poland, Switzerland, Belgium) examined mobile lifestyles adopted for job-related reasons (Schneider & Collet, 2010). The study combines commuters and recent relocators with groups that can also be categorized as multi-local in this paper, such as overnighters and people in a long-distance relationship (also referred to as LATs in multi-locality research). The study revealed that differences are apparent in the mobility behavior of women and men. Women "choose different mobility forms, they have to deal with consequences differences, and they are mobile to different extents" (Collet & Dauber, 2010, pp. 190–191). First, women are more likely to be mobile for private reasons, while men are mobile due to job reasons (Collet & Dauber, 2010). If women are mobile for work-related reasons, they generally prefer long-distance commuting over other forms of mobility, like overnight stays, in order to coordinate work, family and mobility needs. Men tend to make choices based on non-family considerations and opt for this form of mobility based on financial aspects, comfort or travel time (Collet & Dauber, 2010). Similar to research on long-distance commuting, mobile women tend to be slightly better educated than mobile men; furthermore, they are, on average, somewhat younger (Collet & Dauber, 2010). Mobile women are less likely to have children (30 % vs 70 %), and a fewer of them report being in a relationship than mobile men (Collet & Dauber, 2010).

In recent German-language research, the works of Schier (2009, 2010, 2016) and Reuschke (2009, 2010) are particularly noteworthy. Studies have shown that multi-local lifestyles are a "male phenomenon", particularly when they result from work-related reasons (Schier, 2010, p. 129). Traditional gender relations in Germany have a significant influence on decisions regarding a multi-local lifestyle. During the family phase, women are more likely to decide against a multi-local arrangement than men. Women who live multi-locally for work-related reasons are also less likely to be in a partnership and are often childless (Reuschke, 2010). Studies attribute this finding to the fact that it is more difficult for women to synchronize work and family. Moreover, women who are in a partnership may try to limit their multi-local living arrangements to a certain period of time, as a temporary solution (Reuschke, 2010). In terms of work arrangements, the majority of multi-local women (as well as men) have a high level of education. Women in part-time employment have shorter commuting distances; these women are more likely to reject a job offer, or they tend to move with the entire household (Reuschke, 2010). Other studies address the question of how multi-local living arrangements affect the organization of everyday life. Schier (2009, 2016) describes new demands on "doing family" that arise from the multi-local life of a household member. Multi-local women navigate the tension between self-determination through newly gained freedoms at the place of residence used for work and a restricted lifestyle due to the multitude of everyday tasks (Hilti, 2013).

While the studies mentioned so far are mainly focusing on highly

skilled professionals, several other German studies address different fields of work that lead women to a multi-local arrangement. An example of women's multi-local living arrangements in the low-wage sector is found among care workers. Due to the increasing demand for home care services for elderly individuals in Germany, a specific labor market has emerged for women, primarily from Eastern European countries. These women travel back and forth between their home country and their workplace every two weeks to three months in order to work as live-in caregivers (Hess, 2009; Raithelhuber, 2015; Schillinger, 2013).

To sum up, mobile living arrangements and (job-related) spatial mobility are gendered. The overview of previous literature and international studies demonstrates that the differences in men's mobility behavior that existed a few decades ago, still exist today. For instance, women commute for shorter distances and durations than men. This gender gap is influenced by various aspects – above all by the family situation and the presence of children, as well as by job-related characteristics. In addition, women are often "tied partners" when it comes to relocations. Previous studies in Germany, have shown that traditional gender patterns significantly influence decisions regarding multi-local lifestyles. This paper focuses on the current quantitative gender-specific relevance of multi-local arrangements. In addition, it examines the reasons for the multi-local lifestyle and perceptions of this arrangement, which have not yet been extensively considered in research.

## Research design & methods

In this article, we present the results of an empirical study conducted as part of a research project on temporary living arrangements. The data collection took place in spring 2023 in two major German cities, Frankfurt am Main and Leipzig, as well as two surrounding municipalities the case of each city (Fig. 1). These cities were selected based on their structural diversity, the presence of international companies, their significance as trade fair cities, and the presence of large universities and other educational institutions. The surrounding municipalities were chosen based on their close connections to nearby large cities (BBSR, 2021). This implies that these areas are likely to have temporary residents due to the spill-over effects and mobility patterns associated with being near urban areas. Additionally, over the past few decades, these municipalities have developed unique identities as residential, employment or recreational hubs within the metropolitan area. We used a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Our study employed a triangulation design, in which data is collected in parallel and the results are compared and interrelated (Plano Clark et al., 2008).

The table below illustrates the distribution of the binary genders in the research municipalities (Table 1). By examining the gender ratio in our population sample, which includes individuals with both multi-local and mono-local lifestyles, we can gain a deeper understanding of the demographic dynamics at work. It is evident that women are slightly overrepresented in all research municipalities except Neu-Isenburg.

### Quantitative data collection

For the quantitative empirical data collection, we drew a tripartite random sample using resident registration data, stratified based on residential status (sole residence, two residences, or secondary residence). We sent a comprehensive questionnaire by post (10,000 Gross line sample), which could be completed either on paper or online. The questionnaire was available in multiple languages, including German, English, and Turkish. The use of the registration form as a survey instrument resulted in an uneven distribution of addresses and unequal selection probabilities of individual survey units within the sample. To address this issue, we implemented design weighting to ensure an accurate estimation of the relevant population size (Sand & Kunz, 2020).



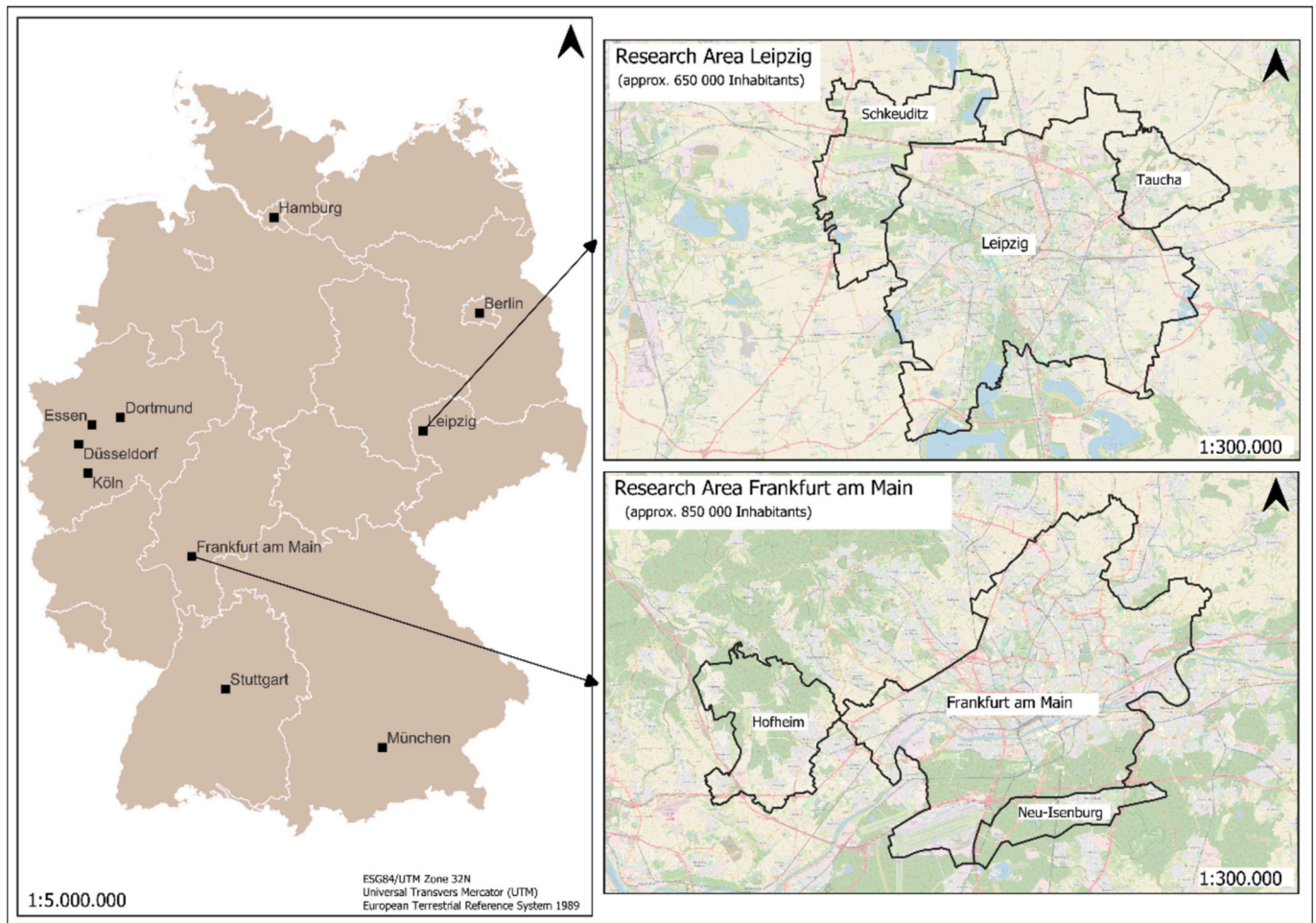


Fig. 1. Maps of the research areas and their location in Germany.

**Table 1**  
Gender-ratio in the six research municipalities.

Municipalities	Men	Women
Frankfurt/Main	47 %	53 %
Hofheim	45 %	55 %
Neu Isenburg	54 %	46 %
Leipzig	44 %	56 %
Taucha	46 %	54 %
Schkeuditz	45 %	55 %

A total of 1589 people responded to the quantitative survey, representing a response rate of approximately 16 %. The response rate was slightly lower in the four surrounding municipalities (14 %) compared to the two major cities (18 %). The response rates in the research areas of Frankfurt and Leipzig did not differ significantly. There was also no significant difference in number of male and female respondents. As mentioned before, we analyzed the data solely based on binary genders (male and female). The percentage of participants who identified as non-binary was <0.5 %, making it difficult to draw concrete conclusions about this group, therefore, we have excluded this data from the evaluation.

Our research area has a population of 1.2 million over the age of 18, which served as our population sample. The age distribution of our survey sample closely reflects the actual distribution in the population. In the age groups up to 45, there were approximately 3 % more female participants than male participants. In the age groups over 45, the proportion of men (26 %) outweighed that of women (18 %). Overall,

65 % of the respondents were employed, 19 % were retired, 10 % were students, and 7 % fell into other categories such as homemakers, trainees, and unemployed individuals. Within the research area, slightly over half of the sample (57 %) lived in the two major cities, while 43 % lived in the four surrounding municipalities.

To determine the prevalence of multi-locality, we analyze the data from the questionnaire using descriptive statistical methods (Duller, 2019). The questionnaire asks participants whether they have another place where they regularly stay overnight, in addition to their primary residence. Individuals who answered affirmatively are considered multi-local. In the Frankfurt region, there is no significant difference in the proportion of people living in multiple locations between urban and suburban areas. Approximately 30 % of people in all three municipalities engage in multi-local living. However, in the Leipzig region, the urban area has a higher percentage of individuals (35 %) who state that they live multi-local, while in the suburban area, only around 20 % report having a similar living arrangement.

In addition to nominal variables, our survey incorporated Likert scales to collect opinions, perceptions, and potential courses of action (Carifio & Perla, 2007). To capture the reactions and decisions of respondents in a hypothetical job offer situation, we employed the vignette method (Auspurg & Jäckle, 2017; Dülmer, 2007). This method involves presenting participants with fictitious scenarios or situations in which various variables or characteristics are systematically varied. Participants are then asked to react to these scenarios or describe how they would decide in the given hypothetical situation.

### Qualitative data collection

For the qualitative data collection, we recruited individuals using a postcard that was sent with the questionnaires. On this postcard, individuals were asked whether they had multiple residences and whether they described themselves as living in this place of residence for a limited period of time. If they indicated having multiple residences and expressed interest in a personal interview, we invited them for further participation. Interviews were offered in German and English.

We conducted 49 qualitative interviews (23 in the Frankfurt/Main region and 26 in the Leipzig region). Of the 49 interviewees, 27 identified themselves as multi-local, and eight of these multi-local individuals were women. The interviews with these multi-local women are particularly significant for this article (Table 2). Among the interviewees, two women were university students aged 18–24. The remaining women were aged 35–64, and all of them were married and held higher (management) positions. It is worth noting that only two of the multi-local women had children: One of these participants was aged 55–64, and she entered into a multi-local arrangement only after her five children had left home. The other woman, aged 35–44, reported that she uses her second home as a leisure residence with her children (Table 2).

We analyzed the qualitative data through a process based on theoretical coding in the framework of the grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2008). Coding and analysis were assisted by the software MaxQDA, which is a tool to support qualitative data analysis (Flick, 2007). We present all extracts from the interviews under a pseudonym, and German quotes have been translated into English. Analyzing the qualitative data enabled us to capture and understand the diversity of the interviewees' individual experiences, opinions and perspectives. Moreover, it allowed us to contextually embed the quantitative results and supplement them with in-depth findings. Our mixed-method approach thus provides a rich and nuanced insight into the underlying dynamics and meanings of the phenomena studied, leading to a more comprehensive interpretation and explanation of the research findings.

## Results

### Multi-locality in quantitative terms: gender-specific differences

In the following section, we present our findings from our standardized survey to quantify and examine gender-specific differences in the prevalence of multi-local living arrangements (Table 3). Within our sample, 31 % of respondents reported having a multi-local living arrangement, and of these individuals 54 % were women. These percentages align with the overall gender distribution in our sample, in which men are slightly underrepresented. Hence, it is evident that men do not dominate multi-local living arrangements in terms of sheer numbers.

When examining the age groups, it is evident that both the youngest and oldest age groups are more represented among multi-local women compared to multi-local men. On the other hand, 66 % of multi-local

men fall between the ages of 30 and 64, which places them in the middle age groups. This percentage is 10 points higher than that of women. The analysis of correlation measures demonstrates that there is no correlation between age and gender variables. To assess the employment situation, we considered the contracted working hours, revealing that the majority of the multi-local respondents, regardless of gender, work >30 h per week. However, the percentage of men (83 %) is significantly greater than that of women (67 %). A part-time working arrangement of <30 h per week is found among 33 % of women, while this figure is only 17 % for men. The variables of employment situation and gender exhibit a weak statistical correlation ( $V = 0.202$ ).

When examining the household structure of individuals, it is evident that both multi-local women and multi-local men are more likely to live alone compared to those who are not multi-local. There is a notable difference in the number of individuals living in single-person households in our sample (21 %) compared to the overall statistics for Germany in 2022. In the country as a whole, 41 % of households are comprised of only one person. Additionally, 40 % of respondents in our sample live in two-person households, whereas only 33 % of households in Germany as a whole are two-person households (Destatis, 2023). This distortion is likely caused by the overrepresentation of individuals with multiple residences. This particular group typically lives with others in the same household, as they would otherwise be more inclined to relocate instead of acquiring an additional home.

Among multi-local women, the majority (44 %) live with their partner, whereas multi-local men live with their partner less frequently than non-multi-local individuals. It is noteworthy that a small percentage of multi-local men, and an even smaller percentage of multi-local women, live with other family members such as children. These findings align with existing literature (Reuschke, 2010), which suggests that multi-local women are more likely to be childless and live alone. Moreover, when comparing multi-local women with mono-local women, the disparity becomes even more pronounced: only 19 % of mono-local women live alone, while 38 % live with family members. Interestingly, the literature (Giménez-Nadal et al., 2022; Reuschke, 2010) indicates that multi-local women are also less likely to be in a partnership, although this cannot be confirmed in our sample as 44 % of multi-local women live with their partner, compared to only 38 % of mono-local women. The analysis of correlation measures demonstrates that there is no correlation between household members and gender variables. We also observe that higher percentages of multi-local men and women report living with other people, such as in shared flats, compared to the numbers for the total sample. This finding further supports the idea that multi-locality is common among students (Greinke, 2023).

The findings of previous studies (Chidambaram & Scheiner, 2020), indicate that multi-local women have shorter distances and travel times to their workplaces compared to multi-local men. These results are consistent with those we obtained by categorizing the frequency of stays at the other location and the duration of the trip (Table 4). These categories account for 83 % of all possible combinations, which is why the total values for each gender do not add up to 100 %. We observed that a higher proportion (17 %) of multi-local women have a short travel time (<1 h) and report frequent stays of at least once a week compared to men (14 %). The same pattern is seen with long travel times (more than an hour) and infrequent stays of less than once a month (42 % of women, 35 % of men). Conversely, 34 % of multi-local men have a long commute (more than an hour) and report regular stays (at least once a month), while only 23 % of women fall into this category.

In quantitative terms, the proportion of multi-local men in our study does not exceed the proportion of multi-local women. Contrary to previous research in the German context (Schier, 2010), multi-locality has recently become equally common for men and woman. Part-time work has often been associated in the literature with less commuting or a decreased likelihood of multi-local lifestyles among woman because the costs exceed the benefits (Brunow & Jost, 2023). However, the results of

**Table 2**

Interviewees and relevant characteristics.

Name	Age group	City	Current occupation	Family
Nina	18–24	Leipzig	Pharmacy Student	P
Vanessa	18–24	Frankfurt	Business Student	
Nadine	35–44	Leipzig	HR Professional (Logistic)	P
Sarah	35–44	Leipzig*	Manager (Real Estate)	P+
Tanja	35–44	Frankfurt*	Manager (Furniture)	P
Birgit	45–54	Leipzig	Professional (Railway)	P
Ulrike	55–64	Leipzig	Judge	P+
Andrea	55–64	Frankfurt	Professional (Real Estate)	P

Notes:

City: \*Municipality in the metropolitan area of Frankfurt/Leipzig.

Family: P = Partnership, P + =Partnership and children.

**Table 3**  
Results from the quantitative survey regarding gender-specific differences for certain variables.

Variable	Characteristics	Multi-local		Total Sample
		Woman	Men	
		54%	46%	
Age	18–30	26%	20%	16%
	30–44	30%	31%	27%
	45–54	26%	35%	34%
	65+	18%	14%	23%
$\chi^2 = 5.831; p = .120$ $V = .112; p = .120$				
Employment Situation (Hours according to employment contract)	< 20h per week	17%	11%	11%
	20-30h per week	16%	6%	16%
	> 30h per week	67%	83%	73%
$\chi^2 = 15.239; p = .000$ $V = .202; p = .000$				
Household Members	Alone	23%	22%	21%
	Partner (2 persons)	44%	38%	40%
	Family Members (3 or more persons)	25%	31%	33%
	Other Persons	8%	9%	5%
$\chi^2 = 2.526; p = .471$ $V = .075; p = .471$				
Total Cases		249 (17%)	215 (14%)	1509 <sup>1</sup> (100%)
		464 (31%)		

**Table 4**  
Categories of frequencies of stays and travel duration by gender.

Category name	Characteristic	Woman	Men
Weekly-Local	Min. once a week/<1 h drive	17 %	14 %
Monthly-Regional	Min. once a month/>1 h drive	23 %	34 %
Infrequent-Distant	Less frequent/>1 h drive	42 %	35 %

Note: This question was answered only by people who have another place where they regularly spend the night. These combinations cover 83 % of the answers.

our study show that one-third of multi-local women have a part-time work situation. Additionally, mobility patterns show that multi-local women more frequently combine short commuting times with less frequent stays, suggesting a stronger connection to both places of residence. This finding may reflect both professional and personal reasons.

*Reasons for women's multi-local arrangements*

People give various reasons for choosing a multi-local arrangement. In our sample, family reasons are mentioned most frequently overall. Multi-local women (72 %) cite family reasons slightly more often than multi-local men (63 %). Women who choose these reasons are proportionally more likely to be retired and live in suburban areas compared to men who choose this reason. Men (21 %) mention work or education as a reason for their multi-local arrangement significantly more often than women (9 %). Additionally, women who choose work as a reason for their multi-local arrangement are more likely to live in urban areas compared to men. Interestingly, the age group between 45 and 65 years has the highest proportion of people who chose this reason, regardless of gender. Both genders mention leisure-related reasons equally. These people are evenly distributed across both genders, with 30 % being over 65 years old. Women (29 %) who cite this reason are more likely to be retired than men (17 %). The different reasons that men and women cite for their multi-locality are consistent with previous research findings (Collet & Dauber, 2010). However, this study hypothesizes that although work often initiates the need for an additional place of residence, it is the family that influences the decision to maintain the

previous place of residence.

The results of our qualitative data confirm this hypothesis. In the qualitative interviews, it is clear that almost without exception, the women interviewed live multi-locally due to work or education. Nevertheless, they justify their decision for the multi-local arrangement through personal and family reasons. The following four examples illustrate how the women we interviewed view on the multi-local arrangement – and their reasons for the decision, which involves weighing alternative courses of action. Two examples were chosen from the interviews in Frankfurt and two from Leipzig.

In the case of Birgit, who is employed in the railroad sector in Leipzig and has a secondary residence there for this purpose, the multi-local arrangement has been established because her husband could not relocate. A permanent relocation to Leipzig was “not an option” for him:

“He [husband] is self-employed there [main place of residence] and has his clients there. His parents live in the house with him. As long as his parents live there, he is more or less tied to them (...). It's not that easy to move.”

The reason for the arrangement and the residence in Leipzig is the work, but the reason Birgit maintains her other residence is her partner's attachment to his workplace and the location of his parents.

A second interviewee, Ulrike, initially tried to bridge the distance between her work and the family home (150 km) with daily commuting, but after some months she decided to establish a second home. Her reasons were manifold. First, she felt that she would be more flexible with the second residence when her working days in Leipzig went until late in the evening. Moreover, she seemed to believe that this arrangement was expected of her to a certain extent because many of her work colleagues had decided on a similar arrangement. However, being multi-local is only an option for her because her children no longer live at home. In fact, some of them even live in Leipzig and the surrounding area, allowing her even more opportunities to see them. According to Ulrike, the main reason for maintaining her residence in her family home is her husband. She said: “I am not a marriage refugee” to clarify that she does not have the second home to avoid her husband. Instead, she stated that she prefers to spend as much time with him as possible.

A third interviewee, Tanja, holds a management position in the Frankfurt area and has her secondary residence there for this purpose. She resides there because the company where she works is “unfortunately” located in the city. She and her husband have their primary residence in a town 350 km away, where her family also lives, but she does not see any career opportunities there in her field. So, she perceives the multi-local arrangement as a “necessary evil”.

A fourth interviewee, Andrea, currently has a multi-local arrangement that includes her own house in Frankfurt (the city where she works) and a house owned by her husband in Bavaria. Her husband works freelance and is flexible in terms of location. Both partners currently move between the two houses. However, she stated that she plans to sell her house and give up the multi-local arrangement in the next few months to move into her husband’s home. This move is only possible because her employer gives her the flexibility to be in Frankfurt only once a month. Thus, she prioritizes her partnership in comparison to the physical distance from her place of work. Consequently, she can be classified as a “tied mover” (Biebl & Biebl, 1992). However, her feelings about the situation are associated with uncertainty:

“It was difficult for me. Because this house here is in my name, I bought it. And the new home is the house that belongs to my husband. (...) And for me now that also means – as a woman who has always been independent, and that’s also important to me, being in control of my own life – I’m now moving in with my husband.”

These four examples from the qualitative interviews reveal that

decisions for or against a multi-local arrangement are largely influenced by decisions made within the household, either with the family or with the partner. The women that we interviewed entered into a multi-local arrangement because of their jobs, as relocation (usually for the partner) was not an option. In addition, these examples demonstrate that a woman’s age is decisive, as these women only entered into multi-local arrangements before or after the family phase. We observed this result even more clearly in the quantitative data.

To obtain our quantitative dataset, we asked specific questions about how people initiate and structured multi-local living arrangements. We wanted to understand how willingly they entered into these arrangements and whether there were any gender differences in this decision. To do this, we presented respondents with a hypothetical situation – receiving an attractive job offer in a remote location (vignettes, e.g. Dülmer, 2007). They were then asked to choose from various options on how they would react to this situation. The statistical calculation of correlation measures (Chi<sup>2</sup>) clearly indicates that both gender and age variables are significantly related in participants’ responses to the vignette (Fig. 2).

Approximately 30 % of both women and men could not envision themselves in the hypothetical situation. Additionally, about 20 % of individuals from both genders indicated that they would decline such a job offer, meaning they are not willing to relocate for work. However, regarding the prospect of a multi-local living arrangement and commuting between two residences, there were significant gender-specific differences. Only 14 % of women stated they would choose

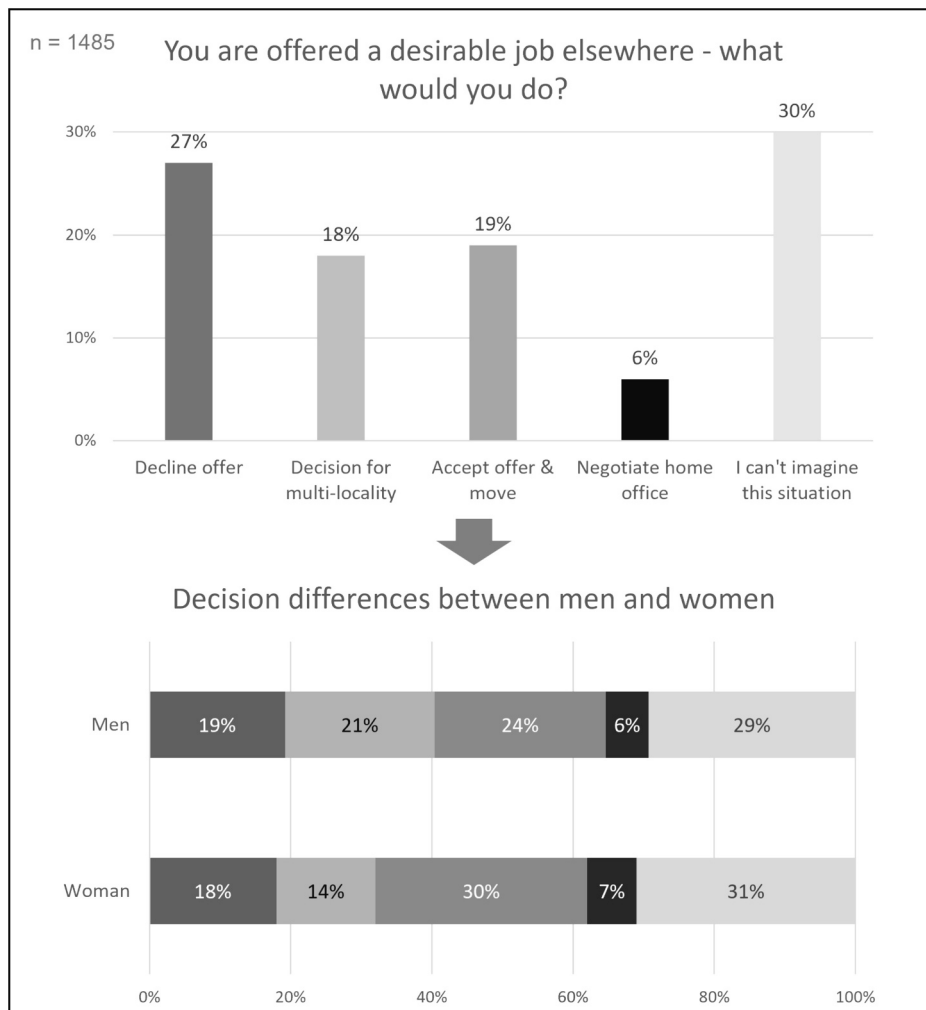


Fig. 2. Vignettes with hypothetical offer and age distribution.



this option, compared to 21 % of men. This result suggests that men may be more open to the challenges and demands of commuting between two locations, while women are more inclined to prefer a stable living situation. The data indicates that 30 % of women would accept the job offer and relocate, while only 24 % of men expressed this willingness to move. This finding demonstrates that women are more inclined to change their place of residence to take advantage of career opportunities and avoid a multi-local living arrangement, while men may be more reluctant to do so.

To address the research question regarding gender-specific differences in multi-local arrangements, we analyzed the age distribution of those for whom living in two locations is a possibility. Almost half of these women belong to the age groups up to 44 years old. In contrast, only around 35 % of men belong to these age groups. The finding indicates that younger women consider multi-local arrangements more frequently than do younger men. The highest percentage of men (48 %) who selected this option are in the 45 to 64 age group, which comprises only 31 % of women. These age-specific differences in the prevalence of multi-local arrangements may be attributed to various factors, including life stages, family responsibilities, work situations, and personal preferences. These findings are consistent with the qualitative data as well as previous studies showing that women are more likely to reject multi-local arrangements during the family phase (Schneider, Limmer, & Ruckdeschel, 2002a,b; Schier, 2010).

Women's perceptions of the multi-local arrangements

To quantitatively differentiate how women and men perceive a multi-local living situation, we used three statements that describe the associated effects (Fig. 3). These statements were only answered by multi-local participants. The first statement highlighted the positive aspect of a multi-local living arrangement by emphasizing the various everyday activities and leisure opportunities it offers. Our study finds that women are more likely to agree with this statement (68 %) compared to men (60 %). Thus, more women than men associate positive effects with a multi-local arrangement. The evaluation of this statement is significantly related to the gender variable ( $V = 0.135$ ).

The second statement characterizes a multi-local arrangement as temporary. It is evident that more men than women reject this statement (49 %) and have made their multi-local arrangement a permanent one. This data suggests that men tend to view a multi-local arrangement as a long-term lifestyle, while women perceive it as a temporary or short-term solution.

The third statement addresses the difficulties of maintaining friendships and relationships when living multi-locally. Significantly more women (74 %) reject this statement, compared to men (60 %). This finding implies that women may be less affected by the social impact of a multi-local lifestyle than men. The evaluation of this statement is significantly related to the gender variable ( $V = 0.171$ ).

The results of these statements from the quantitative survey can be

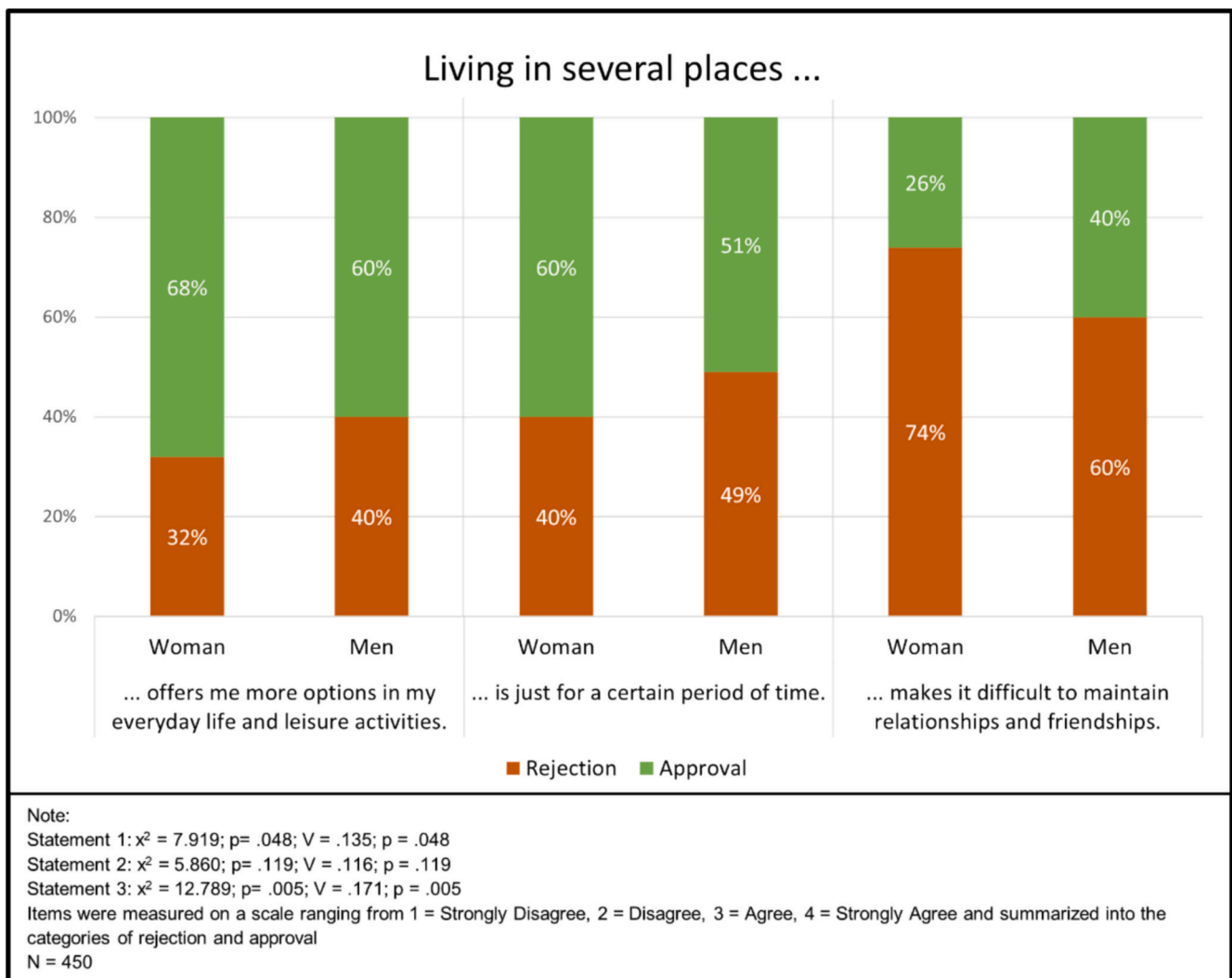


Fig. 3. Results of the Likert Scale evaluating the multi-local living arrangement.



aligned with findings from the qualitative interviews, which offer profound insights into individual perceptions of the multi-local arrangement. Overall, the women interviewed had a variety of perceptions of the multi-local arrangement. Multi-local life was described in many cases as a “balancing act” between two worlds. The feelings associated with this varied: On the one hand, some described this living arrangement as “exciting”, as it includes the opportunity for a multitude of experiences. On the other hand, this life between two worlds was associated with an inability to experience every moment with family and friends at the primary residence, which was described as “depressing”.

The reason some multi-local women regard the arrangement as a temporary solution is illustrated by the example of Tanja, who perceives being “in-between” as “exhausting”.

“I’m an absolute creature of habit. If I’ve been in [name of district] for two weeks and then come back home, where I’ve lived for eight years, the first thing I have to think about is: ‘Where are the cups?’ Or I wake up in the morning after the first night and don’t know where I am. That really gets on my nerves, I have to say. Somehow you’re never quite there mentally. Or it takes a long time to get there. And it’s exactly the same when you switch to [name of district], the other way around. And that’s why I say it’s a phase, it can’t be permanent, it’s not good.”

The majority of the women interviewed stated that they regard the arrangement as enriching for their everyday and leisure activities (a finding that mirrors the quantitative data). The multi-local women we interviewed expressed this by describing, for example, the specific qualities that the cities of Frankfurt and Leipzig offer in contrast to their other places of residence and the sometimes “rural ambience” there. Examples of enrichment include cultural offerings and the availability of doctors.

At the same time, the women also valued the second place of residence for specific qualities and activities that they do not experience at their main place of residence. For example, Ulrike reported that she is more active at her second place of residence and likes to go on bike rides on her own. However, she also believes that her husband benefits from being at the first place of residence alone, as he can then “finally listen to music as loud as he wants”. Nadine says she finds time in her second home in Leipzig “to read in peace without the TV being on at the same time”. Nadine also stated that she appreciates “having something of my own”.

“When I’m in Leipzig, when I’m on my own, it’s a bit of a home base, it’s my own little kingdom, which I don’t usually have anywhere else in this way. That’s also kind of nice. It’s my little apartment. And every now and then he [husband] comes with me and spends a weekend in Leipzig. He always says it’s great.”

Nadine also stated that her husband occasionally uses the apartment, which makes the second home a win-win situation for both spouses. Ulrike also expressed positive feelings regarding the multi-local arrangement by comparing it with the phase of life with which she associates it: “And I’m quite happy with it. I sometimes say: ‘I’m a student now with a bit more money’.”

The examples from these women’s interviews show that they largely perceive the multi-local arrangement positively. Moreover, it is associated with enrichment in many respects, not only for the women themselves but also for their partners. These positive perceptions have, with some exceptions (Greinke & Lange, 2022; Hilti, 2013), not yet been considered in the literature; on the contrary, past studies have indicated that mobile women often report being pressed for time (Collet & Dauber, 2010). Nevertheless, some women in the present study also stated that they associate the multi-local arrangement with a balancing act between two worlds. This experience makes it difficult to “arrive entirely”, and they feel unable to catch up with family members and friends. These factors are probably among the reasons many women see the arrangement as temporary.

### *Various patterns of multi-locality: perceptions of passive and hybrid multi-local arrangements*

Current research on multi-local lifestyles often focuses only on people who live multi-locally themselves. In order to depict different multi-local living realities, we asked whether there were other people in the interviewees’ households who regularly spend the night in other places. In our sample, 16 % of the respondents indicated that they live together in the same household with a multi-local person while being sedentary. These individuals, referred to as “passive multi-locals”, are deeply affected by the lifestyle of another household member who is multi-local. Among this group, 68 % are women. Additionally, we identified “hybrid multi-locals” who reside in households where all members are multi-local. Within this category, 57 % are women (Wächter, 2024).

Our qualitative data includes a few women who live according to the forms of multi-locality described above. Through these interviews, we can identify the specific effects on women that are associated with such lifestyles. The qualitative interviews make it clear that many women perceive passive multi-locality (rather than active, voluntary multi-locality) as stressful. Sarah, who currently has a multi-local arrangement for leisure purposes, explicitly addressed her experiences with passive multi-locality.

“First, my husband moved in 2015, when I was practically still on parental leave for our first child. I thought to myself: ‘I’m not moving now because I have a stable job in Hamburg.’ I was practically a single parent for almost a year. So, he commuted during the week.”

The feeling of being a “single parent” aligns with studies that have found that women often take over the entire household and child rearing if their partner is mobile or multi-local (Stenpaß & Kley, 2020).

In contrast, those affected by the hybrid model (who had several multi-local households) did not perceive it negatively. One woman who reported participating in this arrangement is Nadine. Both Nadine and her husband have a multi-local arrangement; they own a house together, and both have another secondary residence in the city where they work. Nadine perceives this arrangement as suitable. It is made possible by coordinating absences and changing household tasks, depending on who is working remotely. However, she has faced accusations and stigmatization from others in her social environment:

“When I said last year that I had a new job and was going to Leipzig, they looked at me strangely: ‘How can I go to Leipzig now, is it worth it for you?’. My husband was never asked that question. (...) The next question was then directed at my husband: ‘Do you think it’s good that your wife isn’t here during the week?’. And then the next question: ‘Who will look after the house then?’ Quite weird. I hadn’t thought about that before. (...) What kind of old-fashioned question is that? These role models should be outdated by now.”

It is clear that despite the establishment of “hybrid models”, women encounter reproach and prejudice when they opt for a multi-local arrangement. This finding can be explained by socially constructed role assignments (Schier, 2010), such as “men go to work” and “women take care of the household”. These assumptions are apparently embedded in some people’s minds.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

This study examined gender-specific differences in multi-local living arrangements. It aimed to determine whether multi-locality is primarily a “male phenomenon” and to explore the different reasons why women and men choose to lead a multi-local life. We also investigated the challenges, stigmatization, and criticism faced by women living a multi-local lifestyle, and we described new forms of multi-locality. Our research employed a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods.

Contrary to the assumptions in the literature (Schier, 2010), our results clearly demonstrate that multi-locality is not or no longer

exclusively a male phenomenon in Germany. Women in our sample engaged in multi-local living just as frequently as men. To interpret these results, it is important to consider that our research findings may only be valid for individuals from Western European economies. The gender parity observed in multi-local arrangements is closely connected to the specific economic and social conditions, including the increasing participation of women in the labor market in Germany (Walwei & Muschik, 2023). Women's socioeconomic status and professional contexts affect their multi-local living arrangements, so this may lead to different results in other parts of the world.

Based on our data, women often cite family reasons for their multi-local living situation, while men more frequently cite work. Our quantitative data led us to hypothesize that work or education initiates the need for an additional residence, while family is the primary reason for maintaining the previous residence. The qualitative data confirmed our hypothesis, as women who engaged in multi-local living due to work justified their decision based on personal and family reasons during the interviews. The divergent responses in the standardized survey may be attributed to different priorities and values among genders.

The data demonstrates that both gender and age significantly influence a person's willingness to engage in multi-local living arrangements. Fewer women than men expressed a preference for multi-local living. It is evident that a woman's age plays a role in her decision to pursue a multi-local lifestyle, as women who made such a decision were within the age range of either before (<30 years) or after (>65 years) the family phase. In contrast, most men who opted for a multi-local lifestyle were in the late family or employment phase (45–64 years). This finding suggests that preferences for multi-local lifestyles change over the course of a lifetime and are influenced by various factors such as life phases, family responsibilities, and work situations. Additionally, the data indicates that women tend to reject multi-local arrangements during the family phase, which aligns with previous studies (Schneider, Limmer, & Ruckdeschel, 2002a,b). It is likely that these gender-specific differences in the decision to pursue a multi-local lifestyle are influenced by structural inequalities and societal expectations.

In this study, we used statements about the effects of a multi-local lifestyle to identify gender-specific differences in how it is perceived. It becomes clear that women often associate multi-locality also with positive outcomes. Even if some interviewees in the qualitative interviews state that they feel depressed and find "being in-between" exhausting, the majority emphasize that they see the multi-local arrangement as an enrichment. The positive perception of multi-locality among our respondents may be influenced by the fact that our sample not adequately represent the experiences of less privileged multi-locals, such as female care workers (Schillinger, 2013). By placing our findings within this broader context, we emphasize the importance of future research including diverse socio-demographic groups. This will enable a more comprehensive understanding of multi-locality and its various impacts on individuals' lives. Despite the positive perception, our study revealed that women tend to view multi-locality as a temporary solution, while men tend to see it as a long-term lifestyle.

By integrating passive and hybrid forms of multi-locality and analyzing their gender-specific differences, it becomes clear that despite the establishment of hybrid models, women face reproaches and prejudices when they choose a multi-local arrangement. This shows that gender stereotypes and traditional expectations persist and influence women's decisions regarding their living arrangements. All our findings emphasize the significance of challenging heteronormative gender relations when examining contemporary multi-local living situations. It is necessary to adequately account for the diversity of women's and men's experiences and perspectives. The traditional assumption that job-related multi-locality is a male phenomenon must be reconsidered in order to initiate a discussion about the complex social, emotional and practical challenges that many women face in multi-local living situations.

This study provides valuable insights into gender-specific differences

in multi-local arrangements, but some limitations must be considered. One limitation is that the data comes from specific cities and regions in Germany. To validate and generalize the results, it would be useful to collect additional data in different geographical locations to obtain a broader and more diverse sample. However, it is important to note that our qualitative data is based on only 8 interviews. To enhance the breadth of our findings and strengthen their robustness, it would be beneficial to expand both the qualitative and quantitative data sets to include a wider range of perspectives. Slight bias is also possible due to factors such as educational attainment, language barriers and other socio-economic variables associated with conducting a questionnaire survey. Recruiting participants from various socio-economic backgrounds, overcoming language barriers, and ensuring educational diversity can be challenging when designing a representative sample. In future studies, specific targeted outreach strategies could be implemented.

There is a strong need for gender-specific approaches to support women and men in multi-local living situations, as traditional gender roles and social norms often influence the experiences and needs of women and men in such arrangements differently. A critical examination by academics can help overcome existing gender stereotypes and develop measures to promote gender equality and flexibility in living and working arrangements. Further research could explore the impact of multi-local lifestyles on the well-being and quality of life of women and men. It would also be interesting to conduct comparative studies in different countries to investigate the influence of cultural differences on the perception of multi-locality.

#### CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Maya Willecke:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Leonie Wächter:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

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#### Declaration of competing interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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