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Temporariness in the Life Course of Multi-local Residents: Processuality of Home

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ABSTRACT

In late modern societies characterized by increasing mobility and individualization, temporary living and working arrangements are no longer a rare phenomenon. In many life biographies, temporary and multi-local periods, with more than one place of residence, have become common. This paper adopts a life course perspective to explore how temporary experiences influence individuals' perceptions of their current multi-local arrangements and future aspirations. Moreover it investigates how multi-local residents perceive and realize *home* in their life course. Based on biographical interviews with multi-local residents in two German cities, Frankfurt am Main and Leipzig, this study aims to deepen our understanding of multi-local living arrangement from a life course perspective and to examine its implications on the processuality of *home*.

1 | Introduction

In the past, housing was often perceived as permanent, not only in everyday life but also from an academic perspective (Flade 2020). Today, however, living in one place for a lifetime is no longer common. In modern Western societies, housing has become characterized by temporary arrangements and multi-locality (Reuschke 2010; Wood et al. 2015). In Germany, for instance, trends in individualization and pluralization (Beck 2008), increased mobility (Sheller and Urry 2006), and labor market flexibilization (Eichhorst and Buhlmann 2015) have all contributed to the proliferation of temporary living arrangements. Labor market flexibilization, in particular, has made temporary employment and frequent job changes more common (Walwei 2014; Walwei and Muschik 2023). Lifelong work at one location for one employer has become a rarity. Moreover, flexible working times, project work, and new places of work, along with innovative communication technologies and the corresponding rise of remote work, at least since the COVID-19 pandemic, have led to more dynamic and novel work arrangements (Hofmann et al. 2021).

As a result of these shifts, residential biographies are becoming more “fragile” due to being no longer characterized by linearity (Dittrich-Wesbuer et al. 2015; Häußermann and Siebel 2000; Hilti 2020). People today often change between different forms of housing more frequently over the course of their lives (Häußermann and Siebel 2000). In addition to time-limited stages of housing and working, many biographies now include phases of multi-local living, which refers to individuals living their lives across distinct locations (Hilti 2020; Hilti and Petzold 2020). Multi-local living arrangements can occur at different stages over the course of the life for various and in part overlapping reasons, such as family, leisure, family, partnership, lifestyle, training and above all work (Hesse and Scheiner 2007; Hilti 2020).

A life course approach helps to better understand intentions, moving behaviors and perceptions of residential mobility. Although multi-locality is an increasingly relevant phenomenon, the dependencies between different temporary and multi-local phases in individual biographies have remained under-

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researched (Petzold 2017). Moreover, a life course approach offers the advantage of focusing on attachments to places, which is characteristically noteworthy in the case of changing residential and working locations, and especially in the case of multi-locality. While some studies have examined attachment to places in multi-local living arrangements (Hilti 2013; Nadler 2014; Williams and Patten 2006), the perception and realization of *home* as a lifelong process has not yet been studied. This paper aims to bridge this research gap by investigating the following research questions: 1. how do temporary experience influence the perception of a current multi-local living arrangement and future ideas? and 2. how do multi-local residents perceive and realize their *home(s)* in their biography?

I begin by reviewing the literature on the phenomenon of multi-locality and decision-making from a life course perspective, as well as attachments to places and *home* in a multi-local arrangement, before describing the methodology adopted in this research. I then present my findings on how temporary experience influence the perception of a multi-local living arrangement and how *home* is realized over life course, providing new insights into the notions of temporariness and processuality of *home* for multi-local residents. I end by discussing the presented findings in detail before providing my conclusions.

2 | Theoretical Framework

2.1 | The Conceptual Framework of Multi-local Living

Multi-locality is a term that is mainly used in the German-speaking but also European context. Multi-locality means “*vita activa in several places*”, referring to a daily life that takes place across multiple locations (Rolshoven 2006, p. 181). The places are visited alternately and are often characterized by differing functions (Rolshoven 2006; Weichhart 2009). This broad definition is further specified in some studies with the term residential multi-locality or multi-local living (Dittrich-Wesbuer et al. 2015). The concept extends beyond simply visiting several places in everyday life and instead focuses on “*living practices in several places*” (Dittrich-Wesbuer et al. 2015; Weichhart and Rumpolt 2015). This definition includes regular overnight stays in various dwellings in several places (Dittrich-Weber et al. 2015; Hilti 2013). The term “*dwelling*” thereby also includes residences beyond one’s own apartment, such as long-term hotel rentals or regularly use of boardinghouses, and does not necessarily imply a registered place of residence. The spectrum of multi-local residents is broad and includes different age, social, and occupational groups, such as weekend commuters, couples in double households (“*Living Apart Together*”), expatriates, transnational carers, individuals with holiday accommodations, or commuting children in post-separation families (Dittrich-Wesbuer and Sturm 2020).

In both German-speaking and international research, there are several related terms that need to be distinguished at this point. A detailed distinction of other related German concepts, such as “*place polygamy*” (Beck 1997) or “*polytopic living*” (Stock 2009), will not be addressed here; for an extensive differentiation, see Petzold (2013a) and Hilti (2013). Although these related concepts

generally refer to multiple locations, they are less precise and less specifically related to residency and also include places of leisure, for example.

The Anglo-Saxon debate tends to use the broader term translocality (Brickell & Datta 2011). The term translocality, describes “*mobilities and multiple forms of spatial connectedness*” (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013, p. 375). The term is widely referred to in migration studies, as translocality is seen in the literature as a result of transnational migration (Didero and Pfaffenbach 2014) and thus addresses (cross-border) social and economic entanglement processes. European studies, which primarily address job-related mobility, examine specific groups having multiple residences such as “*long distance commuters*”, “*overnighters*” or “*shuttles*” (Schneider and Collet 2010). If additional residences serve leisure purposes, the term “*second home*” is used commonly (Paris 2012) and is primarily addressed in tourism research.

Since no other term has the same nuanced meaning as residential multi-locality, and thereby encompasses multiple residences within and across borders for different job- as well as leisure-related reasons, in this paper I consistently use the conceptual framework of multi-local living. This conceptual framework in turn means that this reviewed literature focuses on the German research landscape.

2.2 | Multi-local Living Decision-making and Biography

Whether people choose a multi-local arrangement depends on decision-making processes, both by individuals and, even more complex, in households. These processes can be explained using a simplified cost-benefit approach familiar from migration studies. This approach suggests that people weigh up their individual goals and the subjective expectation of achieving them by moving when deciding to relocate (Petzold 2017). In mobility studies, decision-making between mobility alternatives is influenced by various factors, with socialization playing a significant role (Döring et al. 2014). However, only a few studies to date have incorporated biographical experiences when examining multi-local arrangements. A Swiss study examined residential experiences in relation to the subjective evaluation of current multi-local arrangements (Hilti and Petzold 2020). The findings indicate that individuals who (1) have more frequent relocation experiences, (2) have lived multi-locally in the past, or (3) whose current second residence is linked to an earlier phase in their life (such as childhood or education) are less likely to intend to abandon their multi-local arrangement (Duchêne-Lacroix, Schad, and Hilti 2020). Petzold (2017) also found a positive relationship between biographical experiences and the decision for multi-local living in a quantitative study conducted in Switzerland, using hypothetical job offers. Individuals with experience in multi-local living were more willing to relocate and establish a multi-local arrangement again for a beneficial job offer (Petzold 2017), leading Petzold and Hilti (2015) to refer to such biographical experience as an “*ice-breaker*” for re-engaging in multi-locality. Hilti and Petzold (2020) conclude that, similar to mobility studies, socialization processes also influence spatial mobility in the form of multi-local living arrangements.

Assuming that biographical experiences influence the perception of the multi-local arrangement and future decision-making processes, this paper aims to expand and deepen the understanding on how this influence appears. The qualitative research design offers advantages over the previous quantitative studies: it allows me to ask specific questions about intentions, perceptions and subjective evaluations and to explore the processes behind them.

2.3 | Attachments to Places and Home as a Lifelong Process

There are numerous concepts from different disciplines that describe and explore the connection between people and places. Some of the most notable include *sense of place* (Jackson 1995), *place identity* or *spatial identity* (Brown, Altman, and Werner 2012; Weichhart 2019), *place attachment* (Low and Altman 1992), *belonging* (Antonsich 2010), and *home* (Easthope 2004). In many of these concepts, “place” plays a central role, often imbued with specific meanings in contrast to the more abstract notion of “space” (Tuan 2016). For example, in psychology studies, sense of place is often described as the “atmosphere of a place” (Jackson 1995, p. 24), referring to a product of setting and personal experience (Bruns and Mündelein 2019).

Place identity, referred to in German literature as *spatial identity* (Weichhart 2018), emerges from a sense of place that connects individuals with locations, shaping personal identity (Brown, Altman, and Werner 2012). In essence, it is a cognitive-emotional construct closely related to the feeling of *home* (Weichhart 2018, 2019). While *place identity* refers more to a state, *place attachment* is used to conceptualize the process of forming emotional bonds with places. It characterizes the emotional ties individuals or groups have to specific locations (Low and Altman 1992). Lewicka (2011) describes the different scales at which *place attachment* can occur, ranging from the smallest scale of *home* (in the sense of dwelling) to neighborhoods, cities, regions, and even countries or continents.

While the majority of studies on *place attachment* rely on quantitative survey methods, qualitative sociological research often explores related concepts such as *belonging* and *home*. *Belonging* can be understood in two distinct ways: as a formal structure, such as membership in a group or organization, or as a personal sense of place attachment formed through everyday practices (Antonsich 2010; Fenster 2004; Yuval-Davis 2006). Antonsich (2010, p. 647) describes this personal sense as “being at home” in a place, or place belongingness. Gustafson (2009) refers to territorial belonging to emphasize that this may also be at different levels (e.g. local, regional, national). One of the factors contributing to a personal feeling of belonging, alongside others for example social ties, is a “auto-biographical factor,” such as past history, personal experiences, relationships, and memories (Antonsich 2010).

While some studies associate home with “dwelling”, more recent international research suggests that *home* is not limited to a single dwelling but can encompass multiple places (Easthope 2004; Winther 2009) across different scales, such as neighborhoods, cities, or even countries (Boccagni and Kusenbach 2020). *Home* is

almost exclusively associated with positive attributes, including stability, familiarity, security, comfort, and emotional attachment (Boccagni 2017; hooks 2019). *Home* often seems to be something fixed, but individuals can have many homes, that either coexist or shift over the course of their lives (Blunt and Dowling 2022; Pérez Murcia and Boccagni 2022). In this sense, *home* can be understood as a process, “a process of creating and understanding forms of dwelling and belonging” that features material and imaginative elements (Blunt and Dowling 2022, p. 309). As Boccagni (2022) conceptualizes it, *home* is more about “becoming” than “being”, including routines and practices between the past and future imaginations. This, albeit a rather vague definition, underscores the idea of home as a dynamic process—something i.e. actively “made” and evolves over time.

Given that this study was conducted in two cities in Germany, it is necessary to clarify the linguistic and content-related peculiarities of German terminology. German distinguishes between *Zuhause* (home) and *Heimat* (place of origin). The literature relates *Heimat* to the biographical “roots” as a kind of “retrospective imagination,” whereas *Zuhause* is constituted from the context of the current lifeworld and is significant in the present (Nadler 2013, pp. 62–64; Weichhart 2019, pp. 54–56). This separation allows for a temporal differentiation between the past home (*Heimat*) and the current home (*Zuhause*). Although this distinction is often used in everyday language, it is seldom clearly defined. Besides the past home, *Heimat* can also refer to cognitive feelings of *home*.

In this paper, I use the concept of *home* for several reasons. The broad definition of *home* allows for an exploratory investigation of relationships to places within the context of multi-local living over the course of a life. More than just a meaningful place, as van der Klis and Karsten (2009) describe, *home* is a particularly significant place that is intimate and personal. In contrast to *place attachment*, which often focuses on a single scale (e.g., just cities), the concept of *home* opens the possibility to explore multiple scales within one research. Most importantly, home is understood as a dynamic process – it is not fixed to specific places or bound by time. In this paper, *home* is conceptualized as a lifelong process of developing, maintaining, discovering anew, and rediscovering feelings of home. Accordingly, *home* is not just one place but can include several places that exist simultaneously or in succession over the life course.

2.4 | Multi-local Living and Home

Several studies have more or less explicitly addressed the issue of attachments to places (*place attachment*, *spatial identity*, *belonging*) in multi-local living arrangements and related forms of spatial mobility.

Previous research has associated place attachment and belonging with permanence in one place, presuming that the relationship with a given place intensifies with the duration of residence (“roots”) (Gustafson 2001; Lewicka 2010). Consequently, studies have assumed that there is a loss of place-based attachments in an increasingly mobile world (Hummon 1992; Petzold 2013b). Nevertheless, recent empirical studies on multi-locality have found that those living with multi-local

arrangements develop attachments to several places, such as their place of residence, their place of work or their second homes (Hilti 2013; Nadler 2014; Stedman 2006; Williams and Patten 2006) or even places of routinized travel (Nadler 2020; Rolshoven 2007). These place-based attachments can be hierarchical, where individuals prioritize certain locations over others (van der Klis and Karsten 2009; Petzold 2010, 2013b; Pollini 2005) or heterarchical, characterized by equal attachment to multiple places (Cuba & Hummon 1993; Gustafson 2009; Petzold 2010, 2013b). Petzold (2010) distinguishes between “translocality” and “interlocality”, with the former indicating an equality among residences and the latter signifying a hierarchy and strong separation between residences.

3 | Methods—a Life-course Approach to Exploring Temporariness and Home

The life-course perspective is a frequently used and largely uncontroversial approach within residential mobility research (Coulter and Scott 2015, Peter, Toppel, and Steinführer 2022). This perspective focuses on individual biographies, including places of work and residence, in addition to mobility (Castree, Kitchin, and Rogers 2013). Moreover, person's relationship with places can be explored through the closely related biographical approach, which is “a way of understanding the relationship between people and places on an individual life course” (Castree, Kitchin, and Rogers 2013, p. 33). Instead of concentrating on life transitions, such as professional changes, marriage, and family formation, as is common in the life-course approach (Feijten 2015), I take a more holistic approach focusing on the entire biography. In addition to residential and working stages, past and current experiences in everyday life, as well as future aspirations, are particularly relevant in this vein. This allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the subjective determinations of residential location, facilitating the analysis of perceptions of individual places in the biography. In the sense of socialization, a life course perspective can also be “a way of understanding how events or places early in life affect later well-being” (Castree, Kitchin, and Rogers 2013, p. 286) and how residential experiences affect subsequent residential choices (Albrecht et al. 2019; Feijten, Hooimeijer, and Mulder 2008; Feijten 2015).

To gain insights into multi-local living arrangements, a qualitative approach was used in this study, utilizing in-depth interviews organized as narrative-based biographical interviews (Schütze 1983), conducted in 2022 and 2023. Following a life-course approach, interviews were structured according to a timeline on which the interviewees' residential and working biographies were drawn over the course of the interview. Recognizing that not all social groups naturally generate a significant volume of relevant information independently (Helfferich 2011), the timeline method was used to facilitate dialogical support during the narrative interviews. To prevent overwhelming the interviewees with a white sheet of paper (Worth 2011), the timeline was provided as a pre-printed document. This timeline was structured according to Garde and Greinke (2022), with two pre-structured topics, residential and working biographies, since work turned out to be one of the primary causes of multi-locality (Dittrich-Wesbuer,

Föbker, and Sturm 2015). Each interview began with an initial question designed to elicit the narrative (King and Harrocks 2010) regarding the working and housing biographies, and then interviewees were invited to draw their narrated biography on the timeline. While drawing, the mainly monological part of the interview took place. This was followed by a questioning phase, during which specific targeted topics were addressed (Rosenthal 1993, 2019); this allowed these specific topics such as the perception of temporary experiences and home to be investigated in more detail.

I conducted interviews with multi-local residents¹ in the German cities of Frankfurt am Main (approx. 750,000 inhabitants) and Leipzig (approx. 580,000 inhabitants). The cities were selected because they are expected to have a high number of multi-local residents with diverse work biographies and lifestyles due to various factors, including the size of the city, the demographic and economic dynamics of the city, the high fluctuation on the housing market, the presence of universities, and various (international) companies. The two cities serve as case studies for the research project². In selecting the cities, we intentionally avoided the federal states where project team members are based, while ensuring that the chosen cities remain easily accessible. In addition, surrounding communities in the metropolitan area were included to understand how multi-local living is shaped and experienced in different spatial contexts. The recruitment of interview participants was linked to a postal quantitative survey conducted by the research team, which involved a random sample of residents (10,000 gross sample) obtained from registration. Accompanying this survey was a postcard inviting respondents, with their consent to the statement, “I live here temporarily or have a second residence in another place”, to contact me (using the postcard, a QR code, or email) to participate in an in-depth interview. I interviewed all the multi-local residents who reached out to me to participate. Interviews were conducted in German or English and lasted between 25 and 80 min. All interviews were audio recorded with participants' permission, transcribed, and then analyzed using a coding process based on the concept of “Theoretical Coding” in the framework of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 2008). Coding and analysis were assisted by the software MaxQDA, which serves as a tool to support qualitative data analysis (Flick 2021). Categories evaluated for the analysis of this paper were the frequency of relocations and job changes, the perception of temporariness, and the understanding of home. All extracts from the interviews are presented under a pseudonym, and German quotes have been translated into English. The interviewees are listed below, along with their relevant characteristics (Table 1).

I conducted interviews with 27 multi-local residents, consisting of 20 men and 7 women. This low number of women likely reflects factors such as time constraints from family responsibilities or less awareness of their multi-local status (time/availability bias), rather than the actual prevalence of such arrangements. In the team's quantitative study, women were equally likely to have multi-local living arrangements (Willecke and Wächter 2024). Self-selection biases may also have influenced participation. The fact that the interviewer was known to be a young woman may have encouraged more men to volunteer for interviews. Additionally, other common self-selection

TABLE 1 | Multi-local Interviewees and Relevant Characteristics.

Name	Sex	City	Age Group	Current Occupation	Family	Working Stages	Residential Stages
Vanessa	W	Frankfurt	18–24	University Student (Business)	No	2	5
Harry	M	Frankfurt	25–34	First Officer (Logistic)	Yes	4	10
Tanja	W	Frankfurt*	35–44	Manager (Furniture)	Yes	5	5
Sascha	M	Frankfurt*	35–44	Research Assistant	Yes	2	4
Benjamin	M	Frankfurt*	35–44	Research Assistant	Yes	3	2
Stefan	M	Frankfurt	45–54	Manager (Auditing)	No	4	4
Hermann	M	Frankfurt	55–64	Librarian (Counselling)	Yes+	3	5
Hans	M	Frankfurt	55–64	Professional (Publisher)	No	2	6
Andrea	W	Frankfurt	55–64	Professional (Real Estate)	Yes	5	4
Dieter	M	Frankfurt*	55–64	Managing Director (Bank)	Yes	4	7
Bjarne	M	Frankfurt*	55–64	IT Professional	Yes+	11	7
Nina	W	Leipzig	18–24	University Student (Pharmacy)	Yes	1	5
Yannik	M	Leipzig	25–34	Manager (IT-Start-up)	No	5	7
Joachim	M	Leipzig	35–44	Teacher (Vocational School)	Yes	4	10
Christoph	M	Leipzig*	35–44	Pilot (Logistic)	Yes	8	8
Sarah	W	Leipzig*	35–44	Manager (Real Estate)	Yes+	6	10
Tom	M	Leipzig	35–44	Research Assistant	Yes	4	3
Robert	M	Leipzig	45–54	Manager (Railway)	Yes+	3	4
Birgit	W	Leipzig	45–54	Professional (Railway)	No	5	7
Steffen	M	Leipzig	45–54	Pilot (Logistic)	Yes+	6	7
Mario	M	Leipzig	45–54	Manager (Utility Service Provider)	Yes+	6	6
Ralf	M	Leipzig	45–54	Managing director (Construction)	Yes+	2	4
Andreas	M	Leipzig	45–54	Historian (Museum)	Yes+	4	2
Holger	M	Leipzig*	45–54	Managing Director (IT)	Yes+	9	11
Ulrike	W	Leipzig	55–64	Judge	Yes+	4	2
Manfred	M	Leipzig	65–74	Retired (Project Management)	Yes	6	5
Ulrich	M	Leipzig	65–74	Retired (Lawyer)	Yes+	1	8

City: City* = municipality in the metropolitan area of Frankfurt/Leipzig.

Family: Yes = partnership, Yes + = partnership and children.

Working stages: Number of stages of work drawn and mentioned during the interview. Studies and professional training were considered a working stage as a preparatory stage in one's working life.

Residential stages: Number of stages of residence drawn and mentioned, both sequential and simultaneous (multi-local).

biases in qualitative research, such as a higher participation rate among highly educated individuals, can be inferred from the characteristics of the interviewees.

The interviewees range in age from 18 to 74, whereby those in the 18–24 age group all have a second place of residence in Frankfurt or Leipzig due to their studies, and all interviewees in the oldest group (65–74) have already retired and therefore do not (or no longer) have a second residence for professional reasons. All the age groups in between (25–64) work and have very different work biographies and associated income situations; the majority of the interviewees are professionals in IT,

logistics, management or academic fields. The families and household situations of the interviewees vary; the majority are in a partnership (22), 11 of whom have children. Only a minority are not in a partnership (5).

4 | Temporariness in the Life Course of Multi-local Residents

Using a timeline, I documented the residential and working biographies of the interview participants, which illustrated the frequency of relocations and job changes along with the duration

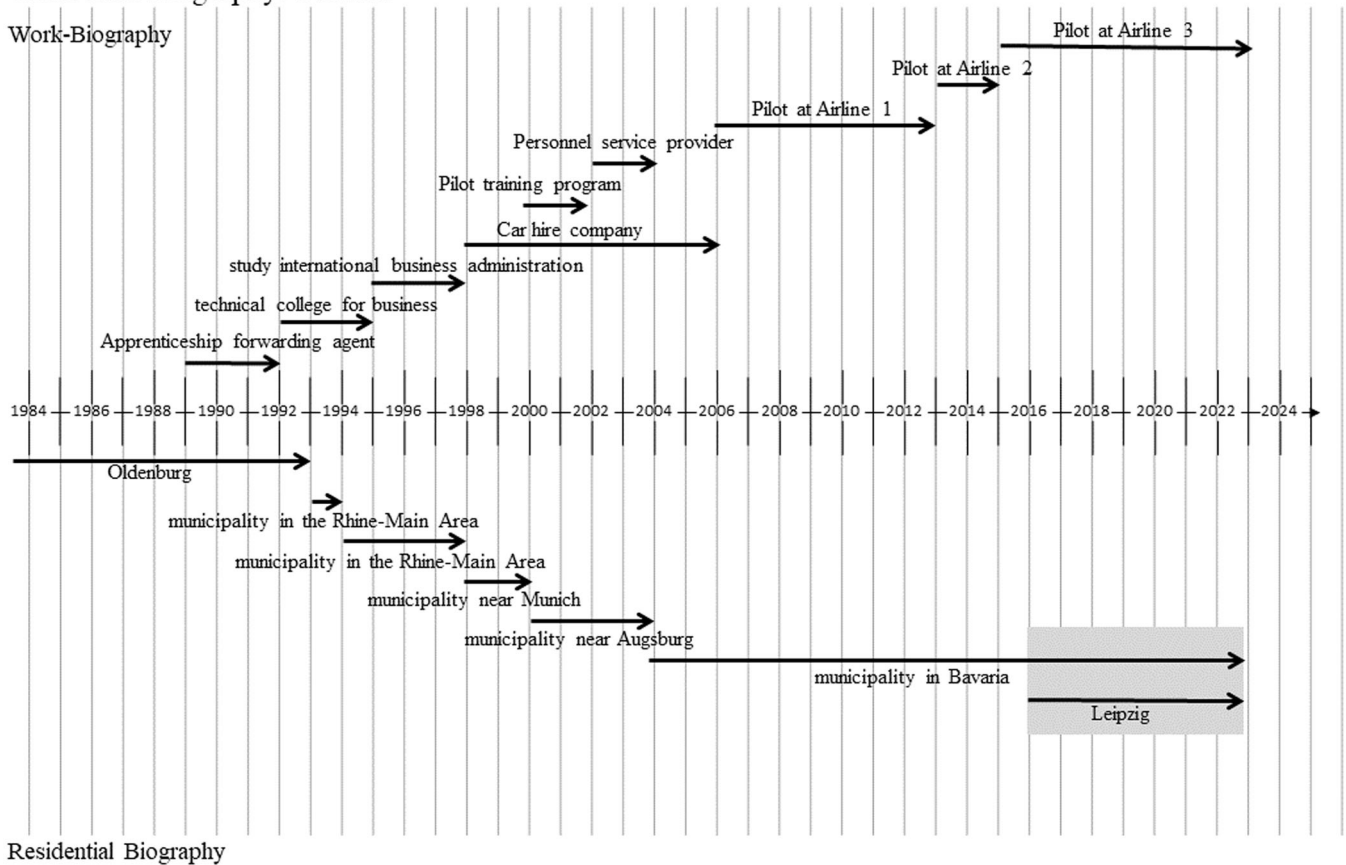


FIGURE 1 | Work-life biography of Steffen. The hand-filled timeline was digitized, and employer names and residential locations were anonymized. The names of municipalities with less than 100,000 inhabitants are replaced by the term “municipality”. The gray box visualizes a multi-local living arrangement.

of each individual stage. Almost without exception, the life course of the multi-local residents interviewed was characterized by nonlinear, “fragile” (Hilti 2020, p. 225) biographies and multiple changes in residential location and work. The stages of housing and working ranged from a few months to several years and were highly individualized. Figure 1 shows the example of Steffen’s timeline, with a high number of working and residential stages, some lasting only a few years

Although the quantity of living and working stages generally depends on the interviewee’s age, an examination of the number of temporary experiences that have shaped and continue to shape their life is meaningful. The average number of residential (between 5 and 6) and working stages (between 4 and 5) in the participants’ biographies was high in each case and differed from a linear biography. In fact, temporary stages of housing and working can be assumed to be the norm among multi-local residents. The assessment and evaluation of whether the multi-local interviewees also perceived their various life stages as temporary was determined by themselves and taken into account in the following analysis. In the following, the research questions are investigated regarding how do temporary experiences influence the perception of a current multi-local arrangement and future ideas? (4.1) and how do multi-local residents perceive and realize their *home* (s) in their biography (4.2).

4.1 | Perceptions of Temporary Experiences in the Life Course of Multi-local Residents

A life course approach offers the possibility of exploring the perceptions of individual periods and the everyday lives of multi-local residents during their life course (Castree, Kitchin, and Rogers 2013) with regard to temporary experiences. Thus, current narratives could be linked to the events that were drawn on the timeline, thereby enabling a differentiated and evaluated picture of an individual’s life course.

The interviewees had either positive, negative, or no (conscious) temporary experiences in the past. Temporary experiences in this sense could be time-limited living and/or working stages, but also multi-local stages with several places of residence. I clustered the perceptions of interviewees’ current multi-local arrangements into three categories: “desire”, “compromise”, and “constraint”. The first category “desire” indicates that the person had no negative feelings towards the arrangement or that the positive feelings outweighed the negative. The second category “constraint” implies that the interviewee perceived the multi-local arrangement as a necessity or restriction and felt negatively toward it. The third category “compromise” encompasses a wide range of positive and negative perceptions; it is significant that the interviewees weighed up the options and considered the multi-local arrangement to be the best option at

the time. As a result of these perceptions, either a (new) multi-local arrangement or a mono-local arrangement that contrasts with their current situation is sought.

4.1.1 | Compromise

The majority of interviewees had positive associations with their previous temporary experiences. For example, Harry, who moved internationally several times in his early childhood due to his father's different jobs, said, "That my father 'was moved' a lot by work (...) that was the right decision in my opinion. That was a great experience for all of us, and I think that personally gave me the confidence to move away later, too." In this way, he related his past experiences to his current life situation and the decision to move to Germany for further education after completing his university studies in his home country of England. Harry currently has a multi-local arrangement for work reasons. In addition to his primary residence with his girlfriend in Frankfurt, he stays in a shared flat in a medium-sized municipality near Leipzig with a few colleagues, which he frequents several times a month for his job as a co-pilot. He perceived this multi-local situation as a compromise. He said that he enjoys his career, but his absence from his primary residence bothered him and put a strain on his relationship: "Yes, it is quite difficult sometimes. When I look at the month, I'm more than half gone. And sometimes, that actually hurts a little bit. Not only for me but also for my girlfriend." He also described the 5-h commute between his two homes, which he usually travels by train, as "lost living time." This is one of the reasons why Harry is seeking a mono-local arrangement in Frankfurt in the future. After his temporary stages and the multi-local arrangement, he said that he prefers a fixed, permanent residence: "In the future, I would like to stay in Frankfurt without moving too often. (...) I just want to have some peace and quiet."

However, some interviewees also expressed negative connotations regarding their past temporary experiences. One example is Nina, who has lived in two places since the age of ten due to her parents' divorce: her mother's place of residence and her father's place of residence. She and her younger sister changed places every week: "I wasn't so happy before, where it was always back and forth with my dad and my mom. That's super hard for a kid, (...) I always thought I actually wanted *one* home." Despite the negative experiences and desire to have only one home, Nina has currently opted for a multi-local arrangement, spending the week in Leipzig at her place of study in a shared flat, while on the weekends, she either lives with her mother, where her younger sister still lives, or at her boyfriend's place of residence. The choice of this arrangement was a compromise that reconciles her desire to study with being close to her family:

I definitely wanted to study pharmacy, and in Saxony, that is only possible in Leipzig. (...) Another federal state would only have been an option for me if I hadn't had a boyfriend. (...) I also wanted to be close to my sister because we somehow became super close through the whole divorce thing, and she also misses me a lot.

For the future, however, she envisions a mono-local lifestyle with one home "where you have your things permanently and can take your things from there."

4.1.2 | Desire and Constraint

In addition to those who perceived their current temporary arrangement as a compromise, there were others who perceived it as a desire or, conversely, as a constraint. Ulrike and Joachim are two prime examples of this dichotomy. Both have had no (conscious) temporary experiences in the past. Ulrike decided to take the next step in her career after her children moved out, taking a job about 140 kilometers away in Leipzig. For this job, she rents a small flat in the city center, where she lives every 2 weeks from Monday to Wednesday. For her, this dual lifestyle is associated with a higher quality of life and more opportunities. The fact that three of her five children live nearby, and she can spend time with them also contributed to a sense of belonging. She perceived the current arrangement as a desire and could easily imagine maintaining her residence for leisure reasons even after her employment ends.

However, for Joachim, who likewise has a work-related second home in Leipzig, the perception was entirely different. He moved to Leipzig because he couldn't find a well-paying job in his hometown (about 120 kilometers away), where he owns a house. He rents furnished apartments in Leipzig from a housing provider and lives there during the week, traveling every weekend either to his partner's or his own house, where his mother also lives. He perceived the multi-local situation as a constraint: the decision was not voluntary but forced, and Leipzig for him was nothing more than a "working exile." He said that he would like to give up his multi-local arrangement as soon as possible.

These examples show how the current perception of the multi-local situation is linked to perceptions of former temporary experiences, as well as ideas about the future. Figure 2 illustrates these perceptions; supplemented with individual quotations, the thickness of the arrows symbolizes the number of interviewees who shared the particular perception; the dotted line denotes that none of the interviewees shared this perception.

It is noteworthy that many multi-local residents who viewed their current arrangements as a desire expressed maintaining these in the future or envisioned having different yet similarly multi-local arrangements. Conversely, many who perceived their arrangement as a compromise for various reasons, as well as all interviewees who viewed their arrangement as a constraint, mentioned the desire to seek a mono-local arrangement with only one residence. Not surprisingly, there were no interviewees who saw the multi-local arrangement as a constraint that aimed for a similar multi-local arrangement in the future. Positive temporary experiences in the past led most interviewees to perceive their current arrangement either as a compromise or even as a desire.

4.2 | Home in the Life Course of Multi-Local Residents

Understanding *home* as a lifelong process (Blunt and Dowling 2022), it is important to note how individuals define their *home* in terms of their life course. The distinction between *Heimat* (place of origin) and *Zuhause* (current home) was omnipresent in the interviews with German-speaking

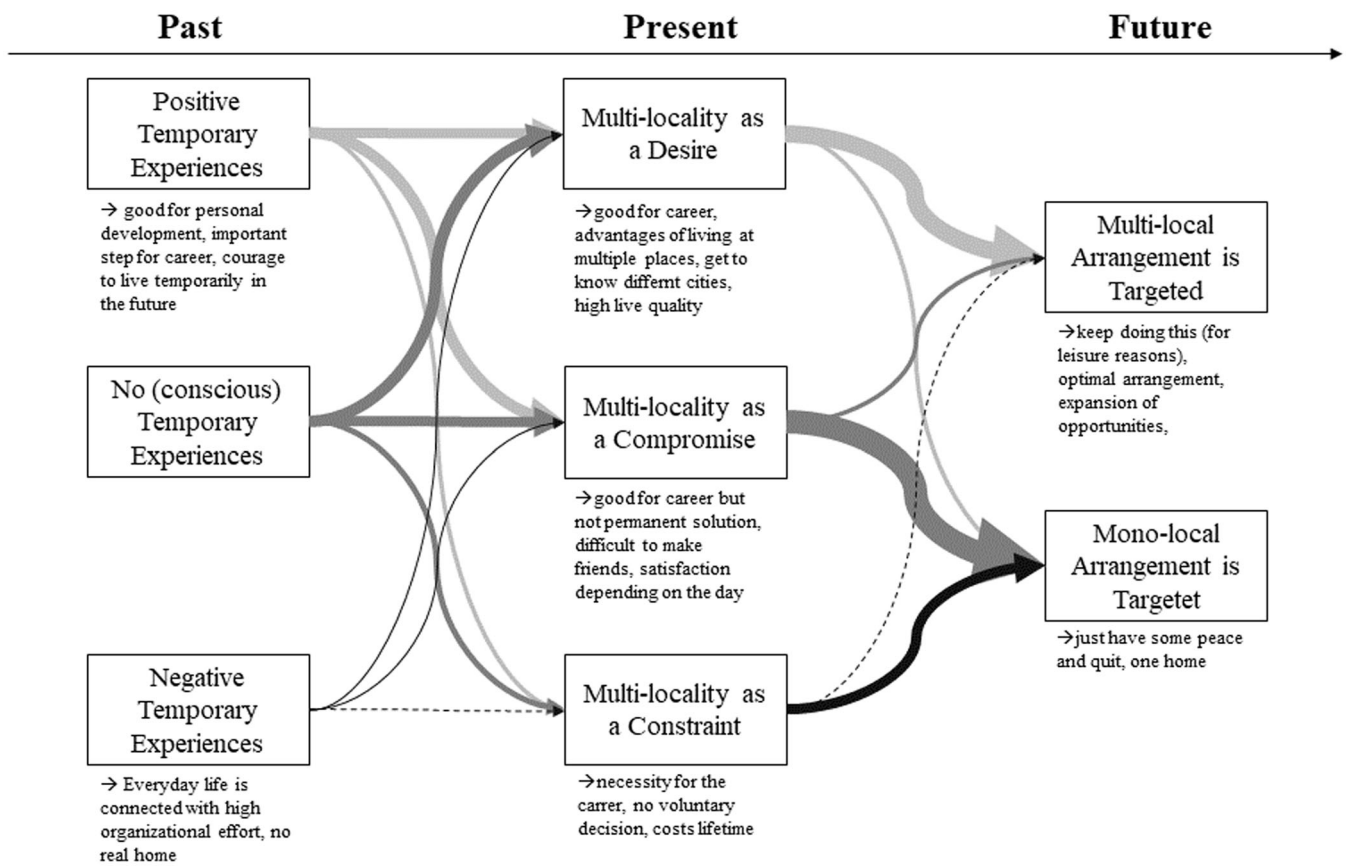


FIGURE 2 | Perceptions of temporary experiences in the life course (supplemented with individual quotations, the thickness of the arrows symbolizes the number of interviewees who share the particular perception, the dotted line denotes that none of the interviewees shared this perception).

multi-local residents. Several interviewees identified *Heimat*, particularly with regard to their life course and past, as the place where close ties exist. *Heimat* was perceived on different scales, from one's specific parental home to an entire region or home country. In the interviews, *Heimat* was often shown precisely on the timeline as the first stage in life while simultaneously being associated with the feeling of home. For Benjamin, *Heimat* was where "I grew up for a long time and where my (parents') house is," but he also said that *Heimat* is "essentially the region." Sebastian considered the city where he was born and went to school and where his mother still lives to be *Heimat*: "Well, you know the neighbors, (...) there are people who are now all in their seventies and above, you know them from your own childhood." Sarah said, "Heimat is definitely where my family is. That's very important for me, but also a sense of memory. I'm very emotionally attached to [a municipality near Leipzig, where she grew up] because I'm very familiar with the neighborhood." Stefan, who lives in several locations and feels at home in many places, nevertheless defined *Heimat* as real home: "My real home is where I grew up. My brother has now taken over my parents' house." The topic of *Heimat* was only brought into the conversation through the life course approach. Through the inclusion of past life realities, the interviewees reflected on current and past connections to home. *Heimat* was often perceived as a past home, although in many cases, it still exists today. *Heimat* was strongly shaped by memories and, as proposed in the literature, seen biographically, with one's roots as a "retrospective imagination" (Nadler 2013, pp. 62–64; Weichhart 2019, pp. 54–56).

Descriptions of their current home (*Zuhause*) varied widely among the multi-local residents I interviewed. Either exactly one place was perceived as *home*, several places, or even no current place.

4.2.1 | One Place Perceived as *Home*

If only one place was perceived as *home*, this was usually where the multi-local residents found their center of life, and in the case of interviewees with families, this was often the family residence. Mario, a father of two children who commutes between his family house in Hannover and his flat in Leipzig for professional reasons, said, "Of course, I feel at home in Hannover; otherwise, I wouldn't say I'd stay there. (...) I have my family base there; I have lots of friends there, too. Leipzig... yes, it's kind of a second choice for me." If one's *Heimat* was one of the current places of residence, this usually outweighed the newer place of residence. Nina mentioned feeling most at home in the place where she grew up before her parents got divorced and where her mother still lives. Memories play an important part in this perception. Later residential locations, like her father's place of residence or her second home for her studies in a shared flat in Leipzig, were places where she could feel comfortable, but not necessarily at home:

And at the moment, I feel at home where my family is. I feel very comfortable in [a municipality in Saxony where her mother lives] and with my boyfriend. And in [the

municipality in Saxony where her father lives] with my dad, for example, I've always lovingly described it as a holiday flat. You feel good when you're there. But when I'm there permanently, I don't feel at home. That's simply because of the memories this house brings with it. And even in Leipzig, I would say that I feel pretty comfortable in my room, within my four walls. But it's still a bit strange in the kitchen and bathroom. Sometimes, you look in the cupboards and don't even know where things are. That's a different feeling.

4.2.2 | More Than One Places Perceived as Home

Some multi-local residents mentioned having two or more *homes*, which were also associated with attributes like familiarity and stability (Boccagni 2017). Hermann described his two residences as places where feelings of home are generated through different practices: “[His second home] It's also a feel-good place, if I can sit in my armchair in the evening, turn up the music player, listen to what I want, and choose the TV program. (...) The main residence is also a place of well-being. I can light my fireplace there; I have an outside fireplace. [I feel home] If I've mowed my lawn and it looks nice.” Furthermore, there also exists the special case that *home* is perceived without a specific reference to a place; in other words, detached from place. This can be location-independent, as with Manfred, who lives with his wife alternately at three residences and uses them for leisure purposes, who said, “I felt everywhere at home, everywhere I lived,” or person-related, like with Nadine, who said, “Home is where my husband is, no matter where in the world.”

4.2.3 | No Current Place Perceived as Home

The perception of no current places of residence being *home* was only the case for a few of the multi-local residents interviewed. Steffen, who currently has a multi-local arrangement comprising his family home in a municipality in Bavaria, where he lives with his wife and his teenage child, and a rented flat at his place of work in Leipzig, does not feel at *home* in any of his current places of residence. Regarding his place of work in Leipzig, he said, “In Leipzig, of course, I don't have that kind of attachment. (...) I couldn't imagine moving here either.” By saying that he can't imagine moving to Leipzig, he clearly expressed that he does not consider Leipzig a residential location or a home. He also said that he doesn't feel at *home* in his family house either and that he has had a feeling of “homesickness” towards his *Heimat* Oldenburg since he moved from there. In contrast, he has always felt at *home* in previous temporary residences, where he has sometimes lived for only a few years:

But I have to say that I never had this feeling, this homesickness, at the other stages. (...) I felt at home in [municipality near Augsburg]. (...) This may also have been due to the fact that I made friends during my training. (...) I also found [municipality near Munich] okay. I also made friends there through my employer. Or in [municipality in the Rhine-Main Area], I've always felt

super comfortable. The people of the Palatinate are just super nice. I've already met some of them, and I think they're very nice people. (...) I don't have any friends at all here in [municipality in Bavaria]. (...) That's why I've only had this feeling of homecoming back to Oldenburg since I've been living there.

His sense of *home* was significantly shaped by the existence of friends, with the lack of social contacts restricting his feeling of home in his current community and directing his view and his feeling of belonging to past stages and *Heimat*.

The feelings of *home* differed widely among the multi-local residents with whom I spoke. Generally, at least one of the residences was perceived as *home* if it satisfied certain attributes, such as stability, familiarity, and comfort (Boccagni 2017; hooks 2019). More specifically, personal ties (Antonsich 2010), emotional relations with friends and family members, strongly influenced place belongingness and the feeling of *home*. The fact that these ties were missing for some led many to perceive their current residential locations as something other than *home*. In contrast, cultural, economic, and legal factors (Antonsich 2010) did not appear to play a role in the sense of belonging among the multi-local residents I interviewed. What has already become clear with regard to the *Heimat* is that autobiographical factors (Antonsich 2010) play a substantial role in this discussion. This becomes even clearer when the findings of the individual temporary experiences in the life course are combined with the feelings of *home*.

Bringing together the perceptions of temporary experiences in the life course (4.1) with the perception of *home* (4.2) in the biography of the multi-local residents yielded some noteworthy observations. All respondents who perceived their current multi-local arrangement as a desire felt at *home* in several current and past places of residence. Conversely, all respondents who perceived their current multi-local living situation as a constraint mentioned not feeling at *home* in at least one of their two current places of residence. Moreover, feelings of home appeared to influence future perceptions. When several of the current residences were perceived as *home*, the ambition to continue such an arrangement was high. For instance, Ralf, whose primary residence is in Munich, mentioned also being attached to his second residence in Leipzig and developing feelings of home there: “I've grown very fond of Leipzig.” Although he only rented the flat for work reasons, he does not want to give it up even after his employment contract ends and the reason for his multi-locality disappears: “I actually have two homes. It will be difficult for me to say goodbye to Leipzig. I only have the flat because I work here. But when I retire, I don't want to give it up.” In contrast, all multi-local residents who were dissatisfied with their current or past temporary situation sought a mono-local arrangement, hoping that this would make them feel at home.

5 | Conclusion and Discussion

In late modern societies, which are characterized by increasing mobility and individualization, temporary forms of living and working are no longer a rare phenomenon. In particular,

multi-local stages, with more than one place of residence, have become common in many life courses. This paper argued that adopting a life course approach expands our knowledge of the perception of multi-locality and *home*, as it offers the possibility of incorporating past experiences of temporary living arrangements as well as future ideas.

The findings revealed that the biographies of multi-local residents are characterized by periods of temporary living and working arrangements, which are realized at different ages and stages in life. The study was able to show that “socialization,” in the sense of experiences with temporariness, influences the perception of the current multi-local arrangement and also future decisions for or against such an arrangement. A differentiation between positive and negative experiences, which was not made in previous studies (Petzold and Hilti 2015), has proven to be very significant. Unlike in Duchêne-Lacroix et al.’s (2020) study, more frequent relocation experiences and past experiences with multilocality are not necessarily associated with a positive evaluation of the multi-local arrangement. Instead, what is crucial is how these experiences were perceived (positively or negatively), and whether they were seen as temporary. This, in turn, leads to different outcomes, such as the courage and confidence to live multi-locally in the future, or, conversely, the exhaustion from a temporary life across multiple places. Regarding future decisions, biographical experiences can, as described by Petzold and Hilti (2015), act as an “icebreaker” for re-engaging with multilocality. It is important to emphasize in the results that not only socialization but also other aspects are significant for the perception of the multi-local arrangement and future aspirations, aspects that were not examined in this article, such as the evaluation of economic factors or attachments to the local environment.

In line with previous studies (Hilti 2013; Nadler 2014; Stedman 2006; Williams and Patten 2006), findings suggest that multi-local residents can develop attachments to more than one place. However, more important for this study is the question if these places were perceived currently or retrospectively as particularly intimate places, as *home(s)*. In the interviews, the multi-local residents mentioned both *Zuhause* (current home) and *Heimat* (past home), often in distinction from one another. *Heimat* was perceived on different scales, ranging from the parental home to an entire region, as already explored in various studies on the concept of *home* (Bocagni and Kusenbach 2020). However, the identification with broader constructs, such as “Homeland” or “Europa” or other overarching notions, as found in other studies (Petzold 2013a), was not observed here. Regarding their current home (*Zuhause*), the multi-local residents either had only one place that was perceived as *home*, more than one place or no current place that was perceived as *home*. This corresponds to previous studies that assume different types of identification, including hierarchical and heterarchical, thus leading to different attachments (Hilti 2013; Petzold 2013b). A strong attachment to one’s *Heimat* frequently corresponded with multi-local residents not feeling at *home* in their current (second) place of residence. This shows that the biographical perspective is important for understanding the underlying mechanisms of the realization of *home*. The broad and process-oriented understanding of *home*

was particularly advantageous from a biographical perspective. However, it should be noted that the term should not be overused to avoid the risk of making overly vague statements.

Results become particularly meaningful by combining the findings from the experiences with temporary arrangements and feelings of *home* in the life course. The perception of the current multi-local arrangement has an impact on the feeling of *home*. Individuals who perceive the multi-local arrangement as a desire tend to feel at *home* in their several places of residence; while those who perceived their current multi-local living situation as a constraint tend to not feel at home. Moreover, feelings of home appeared to influence future perceptions; individuals who considered several residences as *home* expressed the ambition to maintain the multi-local arrangement; individuals who were dissatisfied with their past temporary or current multi-local situation sought a mono-local arrangement, hoping that this would make them feel at home.

Despite these insights, some important considerations must be taken into account. First, the life course approach offers only one variable to explain the perception of the multi-local arrangements and *home*. The interviews also revealed other significant factors, particularly social relationships, which play a crucial role and should not be overlooked. Second, in relation to *place attachment* and *spatial mobility*, Lewicka (2011) and Gustafson (2009) encourage a critical examination of causality: mobility influences territorial belonging, but conversely, belonging can also shape the willingness to move and be mobile. Since this study relies on qualitative narrative interviews, where the connections were made by the interviewees themselves, this reasoning can be considered valid for them. However, it remains an important consideration for further analysis.

Although the life-course perspective encompasses a longer period of time, the interview remains a snapshot. It is important to emphasize that cognitive adaptation processes can lead to distortions in the perception of previous experiences. Satisfaction with the current situation, including the perception of *home*, is influenced by the timing of the interview and can be dependent on daily factors such as mood and other transient conditions. Despite an open acquisition strategy through self-classification that includes multi-locals in different life situations even without registered residences, I primarily recruited (highly) skilled multi-local residents, as evinced in their occupational details. Less-skilled interviewees were rarely included in the sample, which may be due to the method of acquisition, accessibility, and willingness to talk, but it could also be due to the financial constraints of living in several places. It is likely that multi-local residents in lower socioeconomic situations have different perceptions of *home*, an aspect that should be further explored in future research. Another interesting aspect for future research could be a comparison between the construction and perception of *home* between multi-local residents and mono-local residents.

Despite these limitations, this work has shown that the life course approach provides new insights into the perception of the temporariness and processuality of *home* in the life course of multi-local residents.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Endnotes

¹While the broader study also included mono-local residents, who live temporarily in cities, this paper focuses exclusively on multi-local individuals. This decision was made to maintain a clear emphasis on multi-local living arrangements and their emotional attachments, which were central to the interviews with multi-local residents and align with the conceptual framework of multi-locality explored in this paper.

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