

Special Issue Multi-locality studies:
Recent insights and future pathways

FUORI LUOGO

Journal of Sociology of Territory,
Tourism, Technology

Guest editors

Marco Alberio
Simone Caiello
Tino Schlinzig



Editor in chief: Fabio Corbisiero
Editorial manager: Carmine Urciuoli

YEAR VII - Vol 20 - Number 3 - November 2024
FedOA - Federico II University Press
ISSN (online) 2723 - 9608 - ISSN (print) 2532 - 750X

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English text editors: Pietro Maturi.

Cover by Fabio Improta. Image from Unsplash.

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FedOA - Federico II University Press
Centro di Ateneo per le Biblioteche "Roberto Pettorino"
Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II

Editorial responsibility

Fedoa adopts and promotes specific guidelines on editorial responsibility, and follows COPE's Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors.

Authorization of the Court of Naples no. 59 of 20 December 2016.

ISSN 2723-9608 (online publication) ISSN 2532-750X (paper publication)

Articles

In evaluating the proposed works, the journal follows a peer review procedure. The articles are proposed for evaluation by two anonymous referees, once removed any element that could identify the author. Propose an article. The journal uses a submission system (open journal) to manage new proposals on the site.

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Fuori Luogo is included in the ANVUR list of Area 14 scientific journals, class A for the sociological sectors, 14/C1, 14/C2, 14/C3, 14/D1,

Fuori Luogo is indexed in: DOAJ Directory of Open Access Journals - ACNP Catalogue code n. PT03461557 - Index Copernicus International ID 67296. The journal is part of CRIS Coordinamento Riviste Italiane di Sociologia.

Fuori Luogo is included in the LOCKSS (Lots of Copies Keep Stuff Safe) network of the Public Knowledge Project (PKP PLN)

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Multilocalism: the Fragmented Global for a Widespread Local

Sociologically, the concept of multilocalism describes an extended and interconnected space in which individuals and groups “mobilize”: they travel, interact, and develop their professional and personal trajectories. In a globalized and digitally connected context, multilocalism recognizes that people can be simultaneously tied to multiple places, both physically and socially (Colleoni, 2022). Living between two or more locations, maintaining a functional residence in each, is no longer an exceptional condition but an increasingly widespread practice. This shift is enabled by modern mobility infrastructures and social digitalization—two key factors that have driven this transformation. High-speed trains, well-developed roads, and low-cost flights allow people to cover considerable distances in reasonable timeframes, facilitating frequent movement and residence across multiple locations (Urry, 2000). This phenomenon is particularly evident in large cities and their hinterlands, where multilocalism often responds to the growing flexibility of work and the need to balance different aspects of life.

In the literature, numerous examples of multilocalism are linked both to work and life biographies. In terms of the workplace, multilocalism involves various remote work practices (e.g., co-working hubs, hybrid work routines, digital nomadism), offshoring strategies where production sites are distinct from consumption sites, or fly-in, fly-out work models (Lapintie & Di Marino, 2018). Professionally, multilocalism signifies the ability to operate (simultaneously) in distant and different locations, leveraging their specific characteristics. This proactive adaptation contrasts with the uniformity of a borderless global landscape. The result? A greater ability to generate and extract value from relationships (Kawata, 2016). In a way, multilocalism emerges as a globalized response to embracing change while preserving the right to maintain connections not with just one place but with multiple, interacting places that reflect our identity and worldview—a fragmented yet rooted global.

Who are the Players of Multilocalism? Businesses, for instance, multilocalize their production and sales networks, even when their goods and services are closely tied to a specific place of origin. Innovative companies working with typically global technologies (such as digital capital) must still align with local needs, which often have unique specificities. In other words, they must be grounded by interacting with local dynamics. This is the challenge faced by incubators and hubs that are part of international networks and promote scalable innovation initiatives—sometimes even at a grassroots level. Financial organizations, which have historically expanded globalization processes, are now recognizing the need for a particular sensitivity to the resources and characteristics of different territories. It is no coincidence that some large and mid-sized banking groups are reviving the appeal of being a “local bank,” challenging actors that have long identified their mission within the local sphere—such as cooperative credit banks—which now seek to expand their reach. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also play a role, operating through retrofit innovation processes that bring back home service models tested in other contexts, as seen with some Italian NGOs in the healthcare sector. On one hand, multilocalism can stimulate the local economy by increasing demand for services and infrastructure in the areas involved. On the other, it poses challenges in territorial management and sustainability.

From a personal perspective, sociology focuses on housing forms related to different types of mobility. In the context of multilocal life, neither mobility nor stability should be overly emphasized, as they are intricately intertwined. Their interaction manifests in at least four ways:

Mobility to Ensure Stability – People who live in multiple places choose mobility to maintain stable reference points in their lives. This could mean preserving a close connection to a specific place, a property, or people residing there. Other reasons include improving family living conditions (Reuschke, 2010) or enriching one’s life experience (McIntyre *et al.*, 2006).

The Need for Stability to Be Mobile – To move frequently, multilocal residents require a certain degree of material stability. This includes not only infrastructures like train stations, parking areas, or rest spaces (Hannam et al., 2006) but also the support of less mobile individuals to whom they can “return,” who ease their burdens, or help them reintegrate (Kellerman, 2006).

Mobility Involves Moments of Immobility – The recurrent mobility of people living in multiple locations inevitably includes moments of pause, such as when they are on a train or in a car, or during waiting periods, which can be experienced according to personal preferences (Bissell & Fuller, 2010). Additionally, like daily commuters, multilocal residents develop routines and rituals along their routes, providing a form of stability even during movement (Hilti, 2013).

Physical Immobility and Virtual Mobility – The absence of physical movement is often accompanied by forms of virtual mobility, encompassing the flow of goods, information, ideas, or imaginaries (Urry, 2007). Thus, even when remaining in one place, people can be highly mobile and connected to other locations through virtual communication or imaginative travel. This complex interplay between mobility and stability defines multilocal living, demonstrating that movement and permanence are inseparable aspects of contemporary dwelling experiences.

Multilocalism is inevitably linked to tourism, manifesting in two primary dynamics: first, the rise of digital nomad workers, who perform their jobs from various locations without being tied to a fixed office; second, the decentralized management of tourism activities, which enables industry professionals to oversee facilities and services across multiple locations. With the rise of remote work and digital platforms, tourism has undergone a transformation that makes it increasingly interconnected. Multilocalism allows tourism professionals to swiftly adapt to market demands, offering personalized and diversified experiences. This results in a more dynamic business model where physical presence in a single destination is no longer necessary for managing a successful enterprise. The tourism industry has embraced multilocalism with innovative strategies that enable professionals to operate in multiple destinations simultaneously. Hotel chains and tourism service providers, for instance, manage facilities spread across different regions through digital platforms and remote management tools. Advanced booking, marketing, and customer experience software have made it possible to efficiently control operations without requiring constant physical presence.

Even independent tourism professionals, such as tour guides, travel consultants, and experiential tourism operators, benefit from multilocalism. They can work in a hybrid model, offering services both in-person and remotely. Many tour guides, for example, have adopted virtual tour formats, allowing them to provide immersive experiences without being physically present.

Adapting tourism destinations to multilocalism is essential for maintaining competitiveness in the global market. Cities and tourist areas are investing in digital infrastructures to attract multilocal workers and visitors by offering co-working spaces, high-speed internet connections, and welcoming policies for digital nomads. Additionally, multilocalism is promoting the de-seasonalization of tourism, as remote workers tend to travel during off-peak periods and stay longer in destinations. This trend helps balance tourist flows and reduce environmental impact caused by seasonal overcrowding.

Despite its many advantages, multilocalism also presents challenges. Managing remote work requires regulatory adaptations, particularly concerning taxation and labor rights. Furthermore, regions hosting “multilocalists” must balance the needs of local residents and newcomers, avoiding phenomena like gentrification and rising living costs. Looking ahead, technological innovation and sustainability policies will play a crucial role in ensuring that these fragmented professional and personal trajectories are inclusive and responsible—truly capable of meeting new mobility needs across various territorial scales.

Multilocalism is redefining societal structures, offering new opportunities, especially for younger generations. The ability to live and work in multiple locations simultaneously is a strategic asset for contemporary society, contributing to its flexibility, sustainability, and competitiveness. To successfully navigate this transition, host locations for multilocal individuals and organizations

must invest in infrastructure, regulations, and innovative, cross-cultural models. This will ensure that, despite its fragmented nature, multilocalism remains impactful and sustainable.

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