

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

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# «I'd rather live in Munich, but my job in Stuttgart is more attractive». The role of corporate ties in decisions to maintain multi-local living arrangements<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

In industrial countries, employees in knowledge-based or creative sectors in particular tend to regularly change jobs. The spatial distribution of job opportunities leads to internal migration mainly to regions with thick labour markets (Green, 2018) and to increasing work-related mobility such as long-distance commuting (Bauder, 2015). Over the last decades, increasing numbers of employees find themselves living in more than one place - so-called 'multi-local living' (Hilti, 2009). At the same time, the increasing flexibilization of labour markets as well as progressing demographic change are leading to skills shortages even in economically dynamic regions, with a high number of vacancies in the above-mentioned sectors. To attract and retain a highly qualified workforce, corporate ties are increasingly becoming an important issue in the competition for employees.

The literature in human resource management and the sociology of work shows that employees who are satisfied with their jobs, who have developed a good work-life balance, including flexible working arrangements and who have a strong organisational commitment are less likely to change jobs (Meyer, Allen, 1997; Allen *et al.*, 2015; Rubenstein *et al.*, 2018). This literature implicitly assumes that employees live close to their workplace or at least within daily commuting distance. In spatial sciences, the topic of corporate ties is rarely examined, above all not in association with multi-local living. Literature focusing on knowledge and creative workers has shown that factors other from hard location factors influence staying in one place. However, this strand of literature also mostly focuses on people living only in one place.

This contribution aims to expand these strands of literature by emphasising that people are often tied to more than one place. In our study, we consider the complexity of mobility decisions, the relationship between people and places as well as the 'linked lives' of people (Findlay *et al.* 2015) - especially negotiations within couples and families (e.g., Green, 1997; Blaauboer *et al.*, 2011) - taking account of the processual and relational nature of multi-local living (Schier *et al.*, 2015).

Therefore, this paper analyses the corporate ties of multi-local employees and how they influence multi-local living arrangements. Furthermore, the paper examines the dilemmas arising from multi-local employees' strong corporate ties on the one hand and their personal and as well as their partners' or families' needs on the other. With specific reference to employees in Stuttgart (Germany), the research questions are: 1) Why did multi-local employees decide for Stuttgart and their current workplace? 2) How are strong corporate ties of multi-local employees shaped? 3) And which dilemmas arise from strong corporate ties and couples' and family needs and how are they resolved?

The analysis draws on 24 problem-oriented interviews with multi-local employees working in knowledge-based sectors such as engineering or academia having a residence in Stuttgart and another one outside the region. Providing a high number of such jobs, Stuttgart, a major city in South-West Germany, serves as our case study.

The paper is structured as follows: In our literature review, we focus on location decisions of knowledge workers, corporate ties as well as personal, couples' and family needs. The third section describes our research design and presents the case study city. Our findings are presented

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in two sub-sections: 1) Reasons why multi-local employees came to Stuttgart and to their current workplace; and 2) Strong corporate ties, related dilemmas and how they are resolved. The paper then discusses the findings and ends by drawing conclusions and providing proposals for future research.

## 1. Literature review

### 1.1 Location decisions of knowledge workers

A significant strand of literature on employees' location decisions has developed, in particular from an urban and economic geography perspective. This strand of literature focuses on the relevance and prioritisation of various factors in the location decisions of knowledge or creative workers. In our study, we focus on knowledge workers, though also consider the literature on creative workers and their location decisions, and understood decisions about internal migration or becoming multi-local as 'holistic investment decisions based on long-term as much as short-term considerations, while assuming that these considerations are both rational and conscious to varying degrees' (Halfacree, Rivera, 2012, p. 101). Internal migration is conceptualised as a 'labour market adjustment process' adjusting the spatial distribution of job opportunities and thus explaining it with advanced job opportunities at the destination region, e.g., economically dynamic areas, compared to the source region (Green, 2018, p. 38). Maintaining a continuous working career is one of the major reasons for internal migration decisions in the working age population (Morrison, Clark, 2011). Thus, motives for internal migration might not directly be aimed at the current job or avoidance of unemployment, but at future employment, upward social mobility and career prospects (also in terms of financial security) (Bartolini *et al.*, 2017). Especially urban agglomerations are seen as 'thick labour markets' offering job opportunities of higher quantity and quality (Green, 2018). Explaining the career outcomes when people move to dynamic urban agglomerations and leave after a time is central to 'escalator' theories (Fielding, 1992; Findlay *et al.*, 2008). However, these studies do not examine whether the observed effects are considered by workers in their initial location decision-making. Gordon *et al.* (2015) study assumes that these moves are also related to gaining professional experience and networks that might also be beneficial in other types of cities. Montanari *et al.* (2018) have shown the relevance of subjective job-related factors such as a job opportunity matching individual professional quests.

Studies focusing on attracting and retaining knowledge workers have shown that hard location factors seem to be more important for attracting workers, while soft location factors are more important for retaining them (Musterd, Murie, 2010). Decisions to maintain a job are made based on living experiences compared to expectations and an evaluation of alternatives of where to live (Hracs, Stolarick, 2014). Qualitative research has pointed to factors such as local atmosphere and personal networks for staying in cities that are not so attractive (Ehrenfeucht, Nelson, 2018). Within these studies, ties to the organisation where one works are often not considered. They implicitly focus on people with only one option for decision-making, thereby lacking a deeper insight into the fine-grained decision-making processes in which people weigh up different factors and possibly end up deciding to establish or maintain a second residence. They also implicitly assume that decisions to stay are made only between the single city where one works and lives and other potential cities and thus neglecting people who are tied to more than one place.

### 1.2 Corporate ties

Also, corporate ties of multi-local employees have rarely been studied so far. To investigate the work-related and personal reasons why employees stay at their workplace, we draw primarily on

organisational commitment as a concept in human resource management, by complementing it with literature on, amongst others, job satisfaction, organisational embeddedness and personal factors.

Organisational commitment (OC) is defined as an attitude and desire to remain within an organisation (Meyer, Allen, 1991), here with an employer. It describes the extent to which an employee is connected to or identifies with the employer. There is a positive correlation between OC and desirable outcomes such as high performance, low staff turnover, and low absenteeism (Meyer, Allen, 1997). Thus, a strong OC has advantages for both employers and employees. Allen and Meyer (1990) developed a scale with three dimensions to measure OC quantitatively:

Affective organisational commitment describes employees' high emotional attachment to their employer (Luthans, 2010) including, for instance, stable social relationships with colleagues or superiors and identification with the employer's goals and the assigned work. In addition, a high degree of flexibility and support can contribute to people feeling connected to their employer (ibidem). People with a high affective OC are intrinsically motivated to work for their employer and can hardly imagine changing jobs (Felfe, 2008).

Continuance organisational commitment refers to loyalty to a company for cost avoidance reasons. Employees with a high continuance OC do not change jobs due to such reasons as salary level, position, networks which they might lose on changing jobs (Luthans, 2010) or lack of job alternatives. When better job opportunities arise, employees with a high continuance OC, but low affective commitment are likely to quit (Felfe, 2008).

Normative organisational commitment exists when employees do not leave their employer for ethical and moral reasons. For instance, if a company has supported employees through a trainee programme, they feel obliged to stay (Luthans, 2010).

While OC is the employees' attitude towards their employer, *job satisfaction* means the employees' attitude to various aspects of a job (Avunduk, 2021). Thus, employees might feel positive about their employer, while being unsatisfied with their job with that employer. Internal job satisfaction means, e.g., the usage of skills, creativity and responsibility, while external job satisfaction relates to working conditions or employer practices (ibidem).

Organisational commitment, job satisfaction and thus employees' willingness to maintain a job have been linked to flexible working arrangements. Especially working from home which has increased during the Covid-19 pandemic (Geh, 2022) can contribute to enhanced job and life satisfaction, especially among high-skilled employees (Wheatley, 2016), reduced work-family conflicts (Allen *et al.*, 2013), more family and leisure time and thus to an improved work-life balance (Geh, 2022). It can also improve opportunities for employees living in specific areas, such as rural areas, which usually do not provide thick labour markets and job opportunities of high quality and quantity (Allen *et al.*, 2015). However, working from home can have negative impacts such as a lack of separation between work and private life (Allen *et al.*, 2013) or social and professional isolation (Kurland, Cooper, 2002).

In one of the rare studies linking location decisions with organisational perspectives, Montanari *et al.* (2018, 1125) employ the concept of organisational embeddedness: 'the forces that affect a person's intention to stay in her present employment setting in terms of fit with the organisation, links developed with organisational members, and the sacrifice an individual would incur if she leaves her present organisation'. In their empirical study, the primary motivation to staying in the city was related to organisational embeddedness. Organisational embeddedness is linked with opportunities for skills development, collaborative work environments within and outside the organisation and the potential to develop a network of personal contacts relevant for work, thus enhancing future employability in the respective sector. Moreover, negative aspects of the job are compensated by positive ones.

Apart from work-related aspects, the literature also mentions relevant personal factors influencing employees' willingness to maintain a job. The older employees are, the less likely they are to leave the company (Rubenstein *et al.*, 2018). Younger people have higher expectations of their

company and are therefore more willing to seek their fortune with a new one. Furthermore, employees with children are more likely to stay with the company. However, there is a lack of studies on corporate ties and the turnover of employees who do not live within daily commuting distance.

### *1.3 Location decisions and corporate ties of multi-local employees*

As mentioned above, internal migration is often aimed at future employment and career prospects and to maintaining a continuous working career (Morrison, Clark, 2011). Scholars have argued for taking account of a complex set of motives in the decision-making process and, thereby, of motives and contexts beyond economic reasons for internal migration (e.g., Halfacree, Rivera, 2012). Similar needs, restrictions and ties are considered in decisions to become multi-local (Hilti, 2009). Having more than one residence has been understood as a strategy to extend (job) opportunities (Weichhart, 2015).

As multi-local employees are present in and absent from places alternatingly, their living arrangements do not only affect multi-local individuals themselves, but also their partners and families (Van der Klis, Karsten, 2009; Schier *et al.*, 2015) such as time together spent together, distribution of household and care duties. Similar to that, internal migration decisions are seen as household decisions where not only job opportunities but also the needs, spatial ties and 'linked lives' of all household members are considered (Findlay *et al.*, 2015). Complementing this, there is an extensive literature dealing with local and distant ties and family migration (e.g., Van der Klis, Karsten, 2009; Mulder, Malmberg, 2014), as well as the negotiations within couples and families (e.g., Green, 1997; Blaauboer *et al.*, 2011).

Acknowledging that people can have multiple ties and more than one relevant place at the same time (Halfacree, 2012), emotional and personal reasons built an important part of spatial ties while hard factors such as home-ownership, a partner's job or children's schools further contribute to them (Schier *et al.*, 2015). People living multi-locally with their aim to combine important life domains at different places might be especially reliant on the reconciliation of different life domains due to absence-related time constraints. It could be assumed that such aspects form an important part of the organisational commitment and job satisfaction of multi-locals. Especially working from home has been seen as being important to combine living in several places (Van der Klis, 2009; Garde, 2021) and thus presumably for strong corporate ties of multi-local employees.

## **2. Research design and description of the case study city**

The paper focuses on a city characterised by a tight labour market in the tech sector. Located in South-West Germany, Stuttgart has 636,000 inhabitants and is one of Germany's most dynamic regions. Knowledge-based industries are among the key sectors and the city is known for its international tech and automotive companies. Furthermore, it features above-average income levels and is easy to reach for commuters and multi-local employees due to its good transport connections. Due to demographic change and a high share of specialised jobs, forecasts for 2035 see a skills shortage in highly qualified jobs of up to 25 percent of positions (BWIHK, 2022), increasingly forcing employers to recruit people from outside the region and to retain them. Using Stuttgart as case study city, we examine decisions to move to and stay in a city offering a tight labour market in a specific sector.

To capture the complexity of multi-local employees' corporate and spatial ties, an explorative-qualitative research design was chosen. The participants were recruited via social media groups as well as mailing lists of academic networks. They had to meet the following selection

criteria: a) working in a knowledge-based sector; b) living in Stuttgart primarily for work reasons; c) having a further residence at least one hour away; and d) having at least a monthly commuting rhythm with a minimum of 60 nights per year spent in each residence. The paper draws on 24 problem-oriented interviews (Witzel, 2000), including narrative elements with multi-local employees, conducted in German in 2018 and 2019. The interviews lasted 80 to 120 minutes. All citations in this article were translated into English by the authors. For data protection reasons, participants' names were pseudonymized, only the first letter of all places mentioned (except Stuttgart) is shown and company names are completely pseudonymized.

Our participants (see Table 1) consisted of 16 male and 8 female multi-local employees with a median age of 31. 15 had permanent contracts, 9 fixed-term ones. Twelve participants were 'shuttles', i.e., employees living and working in Stuttgart, but with their main residence elsewhere. Ten were living-apart-together partners (LAT-partners), i.e., people in long-distance relationships with two separate households, while two were 'young multi-local employees', i.e., people working and living in Stuttgart and at the same time at their parents' homes (Garde, 2021).

Although not representative, the research provides in-depth insights into the considerations of multi-local employees, focusing on their corporate ties as well as personal conditions and needs. The interviews were recorded, fully transcribed, and analysed in accordance with qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2021) using the MAXQDA software. We used Allen and Meyer's (1990) quantitative approach to assess participants' organisational commitment from their narrations, taking the dimensions and underlying items into account.

Table 1. Overview of research participants

Name	Age	Sex	company	Employment contract	Form of multi-local employee	Preferred place of residence	Corporate ties
Alexander	23	male	large	fixed-term	Young	Stuttgart	average
Bernd	38	male	large	permanent	Shuttle	both	strong
Christoph	42	male	SME	permanent	Shuttle	both	strong
Daniela	30	female	large	permanent	Shuttle	other	strong
Esther	31	female	Public authority	permanent	Shuttle	other	average
Felix	25	male	large	fixed-term seconded	LAT-partner	open	average
Gregor	27	male	Research institute	fixed-term	LAT-partner	open	average
Heiko	32	male	Research institute	fixed-term	LAT-partner	Stuttgart	average
Inga	30	female	Foundation	permanent	Shuttle	other	strong
Jonas	31	male	SME	permanent	LAT-partner	Stuttgart	average
Kai	28	male	large	permanent	LAT-partner	open	strong
Léon	27	male	large	permanent	LAT-partner	other	strong
Michaela	30	female	SME	permanent	LAT-partner	open	average
Nils	34	male	large	permanent	Shuttle	both	strong
Oliver	33	male	Research institute	fixed-term	LAT-partner	open	low
Pia	33	female	SME	permanent	LAT-partner	Stuttgart	strong
Raúl	52	male	large	permanent	Shuttle	both	strong
Stefanie	31	female	large	fixed-term	Shuttle	other	average
Tim	37	male	Research institute	fixed-term	Shuttle	both	strong
Uwe	47	male	Research institute	fixed-term	Shuttle	both	average
Vincent	40	male	Research institute	fixed-term	LAT-partner	open	low
William	31	male	Research institute	fixed-term	Shuttle	open	average
Xenia	28	female	SME	permanent	Young	both	strong
Yasemin	39	female	SME	permanent	Shuttle	both	strong

### 3. Empirical findings

This section presents our empirical findings, showing the reasons why participants came to Stuttgart and their workplace. We describe how strong corporate ties of multi-local employees are shaped, which dilemmas arise from strong corporate ties and specific couples' and family needs and how these dilemmas are resolved.

#### *3.1 Why multi-local employees came to Stuttgart and to their workplace*

This section focuses on the complex decision-making processes behind why multi-local employees came to Stuttgart and their workplace, albeit not focusing on why they decided to keep their other residence and live multi-locally, as a large corpus of literature on this aspect exists. We discuss the various reasons why participants applied for jobs in Stuttgart and - in the case of several job offers - why they decided to accept their job.

First, it must be noted that the number of available jobs was limited for each participant, meaning that they were mostly unable to choose between several job offers and deliberately decide where to work. It was generally a coincidence that they had found their current job and not another job.

*«You never choose where you work, you just choose where you apply. And whether you accept an offer. [...] Of course, I wanted to go there [current employer], but the fact that I ended up there and not anywhere else is because I got an offer at exactly that time and accepted it». (Kai)*

#### *Work-related reasons*

Several work-related reasons were linked to the specific economic structure of Stuttgart, in particular its regional specialisation, though tight labour markets in these sectors were not mentioned. As participants were working in knowledge-based sectors such as engineering or IT and the city is well-known for its tech companies, some participants consciously searched for jobs here and applied to specific employers. Many of those working in highly specialised jobs even felt forced to work in Stuttgart, as their jobs and similar positions were not available in other regions of Germany due to the spatial distribution of job opportunities. Raúl, who lives in the city of A together with his family, explained: «If I take my experience in my specific field to Stuttgart, it has more value than near A».

Many participants applied in Stuttgart because salaries were higher than elsewhere in Germany: «An engineer can find a job everywhere, but when it comes to salaries, especially in Stuttgart, it's oceans apart». (Bernd). Nevertheless, the salary needs to cover not only usual living expenses, but also costs related to multi-local living arrangements such as housing and commuting between places of residence.

Participants working in jobs such as engineering or IT consciously searched for jobs in Stuttgart and applied to specific employers due to their positive image. Kai's company «always features among the top three employers in Germany. People apply on their own. They don't need to do any marketing».

The specific sectoral structure of Stuttgart can contribute to subjective professional benefits. Working for certain employers contributes to building up career capital and professional networks, thereby raising expectations of future employability and improved career prospects after working there, an aspect mentioned as a key argument particularly for employees at the beginning of their career. Alexander applied for his company far away from his hometown to improve his career prospects: «If you have the chance to put that company on your CV... Once you've been there for two years, you'll be accepted almost anywhere».

Existing networks helped employees get a job. Participants already with roots in Stuttgart, were able to build on existing professional networks, as Heiko explained: «I wrote my diploma thesis at this institute and applied there». Similarly, existing personal networks helped participants: «A friend referred me to my boss, who is very active in my specific field» (William).

Further reasons for accepting the job include gaining diversified work experience, such as «to have a look at something else» (Nils).

Others applied to their employers due to specific company sizes. For example, Yasemin switched from a large company to her current SME because «in big companies, you're just a number. In smaller companies I like that family-like atmosphere». By contrast, Léon wanted to work in a big company to have the chance of gaining experience in different work areas: «It is easier to change work within a company than between two companies».

Also, the impression gained during the job interview, e.g., of potential superiors or working atmosphere, featured among the reasons for accepting a job offer. Jonas «had the best overall impression of the atmosphere here».

In the case of having more than one job offer, the promised support for multi-local living arrangements such as financial support or telework were important reasons for accepting the job. This was especially the case for 'shuttles', such as Christoph:

«My boss wanted me to be there the whole week, I said: 'No, my centre of life will remain in B. If we do five days, my centre of life is Stuttgart' [...] We agreed that I fly to Stuttgart on Tuesday and return on Thursday».

In contrast to these more voluntary motives of living multi-locally, some participants felt forced to take up their job far away from their main residence. Many employees in project-based jobs, e.g., in the IT sector, are seconded to different locations as part of their job description as a consultant. Felix had a permanent contract with an IT company at his girlfriend's place of residence but was seconded to Stuttgart. He could «not choose the location and had no word in it».

Others felt forced to live multi-locally as there were no other job opportunities available at the time. Particularly, young participants were unable to choose between several positions and took up the first job offer they received. Stefanie applied within her company for a job close to her main residence, but was not accepted for that job, but instead for the job in Stuttgart. Even though she found it too far away from her hometown, she liked the promised working tasks and was thinking about her future employability:

*«I wrote an incredible number of applications. [...] I was faced with the decision: Do I move far away to my current company to get my foot in the door or do I keep trying and end up somewhere out of necessity? It might be a worse job».*

### *Personal reasons*

Although work-related reasons played a decisive role in deciding to work and live in Stuttgart, personal reasons for applying and taking up a job there were mentioned due to the 'linked lives' of couples and families. LAT-partners based their workplace decisions on proximity to their partner, with places of residence supposed to be within weekly commuting distance: «My job search radius was 200km around my girlfriend's study location» (Gregor).

In other cases, living close to family and friends was a reason to choose a job in Stuttgart. Jonas had two job offers. He chose the one in Stuttgart due to the company itself and to the fact that he could «reach most of the friends and family within two hours».

After her studies, Esther wanted to move closer to her hometown. She consciously applied in Stuttgart and not in other regions within feasible weekly commuting distance, as her «brother, his wife and a good friend live in Stuttgart, meaning I already have connections».

No participant spoke of Stuttgart's amenities, such as infrastructures or the natural environment as reasons to apply there. But many younger employees decided to apply there, even though the city was far away from their hometown, as they wanted to experience «something different» concerning their place of residence and thus experience (temporary) multi-locality, such as Michaela:

«I wrote one application, which was farther away - in Stuttgart. The interview was really cool. I had several other jobs offers, but I said 'This is my chance to get away, to get to know something new. I'll probably only do this once in my life, to go somewhere where I don't know anyone. I'll do it now'».

In all cases, no single factor was important for deciding for the workplace in Stuttgart. Decisions were prompted by multiple work-related and personal reasons. Léon described his decision to work in Germany for an IT company, weighing up a bundle of reasons:

«I wanted to gain international experience in my career [...] In Germany and Northern Europe, salaries are high for engineers. That was an argument. Not the main one, not third best one, but it's still a good thing to think about. [...] There aren't jobs everywhere. It's a kind of specialised area. [...] I had several interviews. The one at my company: first, the interview went very well with the guys and the work seemed very interesting. [...] I thought it was the best option and the company is also a big name. That surely has an influence. Plus, Stuttgart is not far from France, so I get to see my friends in N or my parents in L.»

Similarly, employees accepted jobs because of the «best fit» (Kai). Work-related reasons such as salary levels and the subjective work area were decisive for accepting positions in Stuttgart, albeit in different combinations. Personal reasons such as Stuttgart being close(r) to the partner and family further determined decisions to accept jobs.

### *3.2 How strong corporate ties are shaped, related dilemmas and how they are resolved*

In this section, we look at the corporate ties of multi-local employees and how these affect possible intentions to quit Stuttgart and the job. One third of participants could imagine staying with their current employer and remaining multi-local in the future. Two-thirds planned to stop living multi-locally soon. Among those, plans were mixed: four planned to only keep their residence in Stuttgart, five planned to only keep their other residence, while seven were open about where to live in the future. Concerning corporate ties, two participants had low corporate ties, ten average ties, and twelve strong ties. We focus on those with strong corporate ties. Furthermore, we will discuss the dilemmas arising from strong corporate ties and how these are resolved.

#### *Staying due to strong corporate ties*

Twelve participants had developed strong corporate ties via a combination of affective and continuance OC as well as organisational embeddedness. Strong affective OC was due to satisfaction with the assigned job, relationships to colleagues, flexible working time, or the superiors' acceptance of living multi-locally. Most of them also had a strong continuance OC when job opportunities at their other place of residence were limited or due to the higher salaries paid in Stuttgart. In the case of participants with average corporate ties, while their affective OC was less developed, their continuance OC was very pronounced. Many said they would quit if suitable job opportunities arose elsewhere (e.g., at their other place of residence). In all cases, normative OC was rather low, with no one expressing ethical or moral reasons for staying with their employer. Multi-local employees intending to live a mono-local life faced few tensions when they had developed strong corporate and spatial ties to Stuttgart and when their partner or family were willing to relocate to Stuttgart. This comprises four participants - interestingly three with average and one with strong corporate ties. As they would be able to live with their partner or families at their preferred place, tensions and conflicts were low.



Pia works in Stuttgart and lives in a LAT-partnership. She has developed a strong affective OC: she sees herself «as a PAKler», likes her colleagues and «feel[s] really comfortable» at work. Pia and her boyfriend have a strong attachment to Stuttgart as both grew up there. They plan to live together there as their single place of living, because «to start a family we want to be close to our parents». Her boyfriend's company has a department in Stuttgart, and Pia is sure he will be able to relocate to Stuttgart soon.

This is a typical case of multi-local employees where everything fits into implementing the plan of living together in the future.

Eight participants, most of them already deep into their professional careers, could imagine living multi-locally in the long term. One had average corporate ties and seven strong ties. Living multi-locally was accepted initially or over time and had since become a practice no longer questioned by themselves or family members. As they and their families accepted their temporary absences, they did not see their multi-local living arrangements as producing dilemmas or great tensions within their social relationships. Aware that there were no (good) job opportunities available close to their other place of residence, they received support for their multi-local living arrangements.

52-year-old 'shuttle' Raúl intends to stay with his company for a long time. Because of his specialised profession, he has lived multi-locally almost his entire professional life and is used to only seeing his family at weekends. He has a strong affective OC due to his work, but also due to receiving «a lot of recognition from the boss and colleagues» and being able «to decide what to improve at work». Allowed to work from his main residence once a week and with his commuting time counting as working time, he enjoys a flexibility facilitating his living arrangement.

### *Quitting despite strong corporate ties*

Most participants with strong corporate ties and strong ties to Stuttgart assumed they would stay at their current workplace for a long time. But because of their partners' ties, they would like to stop living multi-locally, forming a dilemma for them.

33-year-old Daniela has her main residence together with her boyfriend in H. She has been working at her company in Stuttgart for seven years, developing a mix of strong affective and continuance OC. She feels «branded, having experienced much with the company». Moreover, her «bosses take care that [she] can develop the career». At the same time, she «feel[s] very good in Stuttgart», amongst others because of her friends. Due to her strong corporate and spatial ties, she faces a dilemma: on the one hand, she wants to stop commuting as she is «extremely annoyed by the commute» and wants to start a family. On the other hand, her company has no location in H and there are no other employers in her field of work: «If it wasn't for my boyfriend living in H, I would stay in Stuttgart, because the whole package suits me». However, they want to live close to one of their families: «My boyfriend's family lives in H and my family is not in Stuttgart either». In her view, her boyfriend's ties to H are stronger than hers to Stuttgart. «That's why at some point I said, 'I'll come to H, even if it's not ideal for me from a job perspective'».

In other cases, partners could imagine living in Stuttgart but were not able to work there due to the specialised nature of their jobs and the regional specialisation of Stuttgart.

Léon has developed strong corporate ties, because he feels comfortable at work due to, e.g., social contacts or space-time flexibility. He wants to stay with the company in the future, but meeting his girlfriend has put paid to his plans, as she has a specific profession where no jobs are available in Stuttgart. Léon has had to decide whether to move to his girlfriend or stay with the company. As he is an engineer, «the chances of her moving here are much smaller than the chance of me moving there and finding something interesting to do». Thus, he decided to move to his girlfriend and leave his company. Despite his strong corporate ties, it was not that difficult for him, as he hardly had any other ties to Stuttgart.

Daniela and Léon are typical examples of multi-local employees in the (pre-)family formation phase. After living multi-locally for several years, the wish to live together in one place leads to increased tension and negotiations among couples about where to live and thus to a weighing of the needs of both partners. Daniela's case illustrates the prevalent argumentation in our research on how the regional distribution of sectors and job opportunities influence mobility decisions. Léon's case illustrates how the regional specialisation of Stuttgart can become an obstacle rather than an asset. In both cases, quitting the job and moving to the partner, even though not always ideal regarding job prospects, can be a solution to the private dilemmas in dual-earner couples. In these cases, the couples' needs such as living in one place to start a family were prioritised over the corporate ties of the partners.

### *Staying longer due to strong corporate ties*

Some participants accepted the dilemmas - at least for a certain time - , resulting in enduring (temporary) multi-local living arrangements longer than initially intended due to strong corporate ties. Inga has her main residence in B with her boyfriend and her «expectation was to do a 15-month parental leave replacement» in Stuttgart. This period seemed «long, but bearable». Over time, she developed strong corporate ties, learning a lot and being given more responsibility. After one year, she was given a permanent contract. She felt a dilemma due to her corporate ties, as the commuting «put a strain on the relationship». As Inga «didn't want to pull up stakes in B» because of her friends and family there, she couldn't imagine moving to Stuttgart permanently. Eventually, instead of 15 months she stayed three and a half years, saying «that's typical when you enjoy a job and are passionate about it: You'd like to take this or that milestone or experience this or that».

There are also multi-local employees, especially LAT-partners, who temporarily accept their dilemmas. As none of the ten LAT-partners could imagine living multi-locally in the longer term, the decision about where to live with their partners was just postponed.

Kai has been working for an automotive company in Stuttgart for two years. He has developed a strong affective and continuance OC due to his identification with the company. Describing himself as «hooked on cars», he works for «one of the most respected employers in Germany», has «more responsibility than normal at that age» and «is moving up the career ladder». In his view, «leaving would be the stupidest thing to do». Kai and his girlfriend want to live together in the future. But his strong corporate ties and his girlfriend's ties to her hometown M pose a dilemma for the partners: «I'd rather live in M, but my job in Stuttgart is more attractive [...] Where we want to live in the future is a very difficult topic».

Inga and Kai are examples of multi-local employees staying much longer at their workplace and being passionate about working there due to their strong corporate ties and job satisfaction. In their cases, strong corporate ties weighed more than their personal and couple's needs, which have led to personal dilemmas such as partnership conflicts.

## **4. Discussion**

The paper analysed the reasons for accepting a position in Stuttgart and living multi-locally. Moreover, it examined corporate ties and reasons for staying at their workplace or quitting, as well as dilemmas arising from living multi-locally and how these were resolved. Decisions on starting, continuing, or stopping living multi-locally are complex, as are all mobility decisions. In addition to existing literature focusing on reasons for becoming multi-locally (e.g., Hilti, 2009; Schier *et al.*, 2015), we discovered why multi-local employees decided for a job in Stuttgart and for their workplace. We found that the number of available jobs was limited for each participant and

that it was a coincidence that they had found their current job and not another one. Nevertheless, the reasons to apply and - in case of several job offers - decide to work in Stuttgart and for a specific employer were mostly linked to the spatial distribution of job opportunities in Germany and Stuttgart's regional specialisation in the tech sector, but interestingly not to its tight labour market. Thus, we assume that people initially living multi-locally focus more on their career capital and future employability - both locally and generally but not specifically in Stuttgart. This adds to 'escalator theories' that people already expect certain benefits for their future careers when moving to a specific place. These and further work-related reasons such as salary levels were decisive for accepting the job, while personal reasons such as being at least in weekly commuting distance to the partner and family further determined decisions to accept jobs. This underlines the dynamics between economic reasons such as job opportunities and couples' and family choices.

Furthermore, this paper focused on the corporate ties of multi-local employees and their intentions to stay in Stuttgart at their workplace. Even if the findings of Meyer and Allen (1991, 1997) on quantitatively measuring organisational commitment do not focus on employees living in several places, our analysis has confirmed that qualitative interviews are also suitable for studying corporate ties and especially those of multi-local employees. Our results show that multi-local employees can also develop different dimensions of OC: while some develop a (strong) affective OC, for instance due to their identification with the employer, others have (additionally) developed a (strong) continuance OC, for instance due to higher salaries paid in Stuttgart or limited job opportunities elsewhere (Luthans, 2010). Employees with only strong continuance OC tended to leave their companies, if better job opportunities came up. This applies to both mono-local employees and multi-local employees. Contrary to what is stated in the literature (Luthans, 2010), our participants' normative OC tended to be non-existent, with ethical or moral reasons being no motives for multi-local employees to stay.

Looking at affective and continuance OC, the same factors were found for both multi-local and mono-local employees, though certain factors seem to be more important for multi-locals. For instance, salaries needed to be high enough to cover additional expenses for living in more than one place, while employer support such as teleworking was a crucial factor prompting multi-locals to stay with their employer as it can lead to a good work-life balance (Van der Klis, 2009).

Literature assumes that (mono-local) employees with strong affective and continuance OC are likely to stay with their employer for a long time (Meyer, Allen, 1997; Luthans, 2010; Rubenstein *et al.*, 2018). By contrast, multi-local employees are more likely to quit, despite having developed strong corporate ties. Their subjective evaluation of maintaining multi-local living arrangements and staying at their workplace is complex, and underlines that multi-local individuals' decisions depend on job prospects and future employability as well as personal needs of both partners or all family members. Multi-local living does not only affect multi-local individuals, but also their household members (Van der Klis, Karsten, 2009; Schier *et al.*, 2015). Thus, couples' needs and the partners' spatial ties to the other residence can weigh more than strong corporate ties of the multi-local individuals. This also underlines that even strong corporate ties cannot prevent employees from quitting, if reasons to relocate to the other residence dominate. This finding also resembles previous studies pointing to different factors determining decisions to move on or stay (Ehrenfeucht, Nelson, 2018; Montanari *et al.*, 2018). When there are no job opportunities in the place where one wants to live in the future due to thin labour markets (e.g., in rural areas), tight labour markets (regional specialisation, e.g., in Stuttgart) or when professions are so specific that even in a thick labour market it is impossible to find a suitable job (personal specialisation), this can lead to work-related dilemmas. Only 'shuttles' with strong corporate ties, receiving employer support for their multi-local living arrangements by space-time-flexibility can imagine living multi-locally long-term. Some have come to terms with these arrangements because of their individual professional specialisation. If no solution to the dilemma of finding a common place of residence is found, some multi-local employees stay longer at their workplace and just postpone their decision to quit.

## 5. Conclusion

The study underlines the dynamics between structural factors such as spatial distribution of job opportunities and couples' and family needs on the other. Internal migration, long distance commuting, but also living multi-locally can be strategies to combine these structural factors and personal needs. We investigated, first, reasons for accepting a position in Stuttgart and thus living multi-locally and, later, for staying at a workplace or quitting. Involved in the decision-making process is a complex set of factors. While some participants felt forced to accept their job in Stuttgart and to live multi-locally - e.g., receiving only one job offer -, others voluntarily decided to take a job farther away from their other residence to gain experience in personal and work life, expressing a continuum between forced and voluntary multi-local living.

Strong corporate ties and the willingness to stay at a workplace can have advantages for both employers and employees. The study has shown that flexible working arrangements can facilitate multi-local living, contributing to strong corporate ties and a good work-life balance. Working remotely, which has increased due to the Covid-19 pandemic, is seen as a chance to widen job opportunities of knowledge workers (Bartik *et al.*, 2020). The implications of the pandemic on multi-local living arrangements in the long-term remain open. A decrease could be assumed if employees can end living multi-locally in case they are allowed to fully work from home. In contrast, a higher amount of households might consider living multi-locally as the possibilities to work from home might lead to extended search radiuses in residential location decisions and open up job opportunities farther away. Work flexibility can also mitigate structural factors when employees can live in areas offering limited job opportunities. Thus, further empirical research is needed on the impacts of increased possibilities to work from home on the living arrangements of households.

Finally, it should be noted that our results concerning corporate ties and couples' and family needs focus on knowledge workers. For other professional groups and regional contexts with a different sectoral structure, results might differ.

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