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IN THE LEIBNIZ ASSOCIATION

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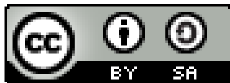
Housing



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URN: 0156-559927696

This is a translation of the following entry:

Hannemann, Christine (2018): Wohnen. In: ARL – Akademie für Raumforschung und Landesplanung (Hrsg.): Handwörterbuch der Stadt- und Raumentwicklung. Hannover, 2917-2930.

The original version can be accessed here:
urn:nbn:de:0156-55992769

Typesetting and layout: ProLinguo GmbH
Translation and proofreading: ProLinguo GmbH

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Based on etymological understandings of the German term Wohnen (dwelling, housing), this article describes the ideal type of dwelling using five socio-historical development strands. Fundamental processes of the post-modern transformation of living conditions are interpreted in terms of their relevance for dwelling and housing today. Reurbanisation and multilocality are explained in depth as central factors influencing urban housing.

1 Exploring the German term Wohnen *(dwelling, housing)*

The term *Wohnen* (dwelling, housing) is extremely diverse in meaning and is addressed by various disciplines, which in turn work with different terminologies and concepts. The various English translations of the word *Wohnen* indicate the range of meanings: housing, habitation, to live, to dwell, to reside, to stay. A glance at an etymological dictionary reveals the broad meaning of the German word. It is derived from the Old High German word *wonên* which originally meant *to be fond of*, *to wish*. Elements of comfort, cosiness and peacefulness also play a role in the meaning and use of the word. Furthermore, the important notion of satisfaction is linked to the word's derivatives: *to become accustomed to (sich gewöhnen)* and *to be used to (gewohnt sein)*. There is always a link to the place where people spend time or dwell, their personal connection to the location where they have their place of residence and the landscape or urban environment in which this residence is found (cf. Grimm/Grimm 1971). A famous, phenomenological definition of the term comes from the philosopher Martin Heidegger, who enquires into the meaning of the word *to build*. 'The Old High German word for to build, *buan*, means dwelling in the sense of staying, residing.[…] The way you are and I am, the way we humans on earth are, that is *buan,* that is dwelling. To be human means to be on the earth as mortals, which means dwelling' (Heidegger 1952: 73).

Figure 1: Dwelling in the medieval household

Source: Andritzky/Selle 1979

Figure 2: The current ideal form of dwelling in Germany

Source: db 2008

Clearly, from a philosophical point of view, dwelling or housing is an elementary human requirement, a basic existential need like safety, protection, a sense of security, contact, communication and self-expression. At the same time, dwelling and housing are subject to constant transformation (see Fig. 1, Fig. 2) and display very different regional, social and individual characteristics. The way in which basic needs are satisfied changes over time, both on a historical scale and through the course of an individual lifecycle. At the same time, a dwelling (or a house) is the socio-spatial centre of life for most households. A dwelling influences the everyday lives of individuals and families, individual opportunities, the socialisation of children, and the health and well-being of all who live in it. The dwelling determines how intimacy and the private sphere are

protected. Social status is manifested in dwellings. The site and location (neighbourhood, street), the form of housing (villa, apartment block), the residential environment and the architecture have been representative of the social position of the residents throughout the entire history of housebuilding (▷ *Housing development*). In the 19th century the middle classes lived in country houses and villas or occupied the distinguished principal floor of town houses. The urban labour force lived in rented tenements or company-owned dwellings. After the Second World War an owner-occupied home and a car became the most important status symbols. At the other extreme, the loss of a dwelling – homelessness – represents a significant social decline and tends to lead to marginalisation from society.

2 The ideal type of modern dwelling

The current image of housing only developed with ▷ *Urbanisation* and industrialisation, thus since the emergence of modernity. The sociologists Häußermann and Siebel described the 'ideal type of modern dwelling' using four 'specific characteristics' (Häußermann/Siebel 2000), tracing its transformation from the preindustrial to the industrial society. In light of the technological standards which are common in our culture, a further strand of development should be considered. This is implicitly included but is not defined as an individual characteristic despite the enormous influence it has gained: the growing importance of technology in housing (Mannemann 2014).

All five strands of development can also be found in premodern epochs. Thus forms of living based on the nuclear family developed among homeworkers in the countryside during early industrialisation. Crucial to the definition of the ideal type of modern dwelling is the strands of development that characterised mass housing up to the 1970s, if not to this day. The strands of development explain why the dwelling with hierarchically and functionally arranged rooms – living room, bedroom, children's room, kitchen, bathroom, hallway – is so anchored as a model of housing today.

What distinguishes a dwelling and ways of living today is defined by the Zeitgeist and, especially in Western cultures, by legislation. We typically live in houses and not in tents. In addition to the ideal type of dwelling there are, of course, always special forms of dwellings (cf. Hasse 2009) such as cloisters, care homes, hostels, student halls, boarding schools, etc., and the special cases of closed institutions and prisons.

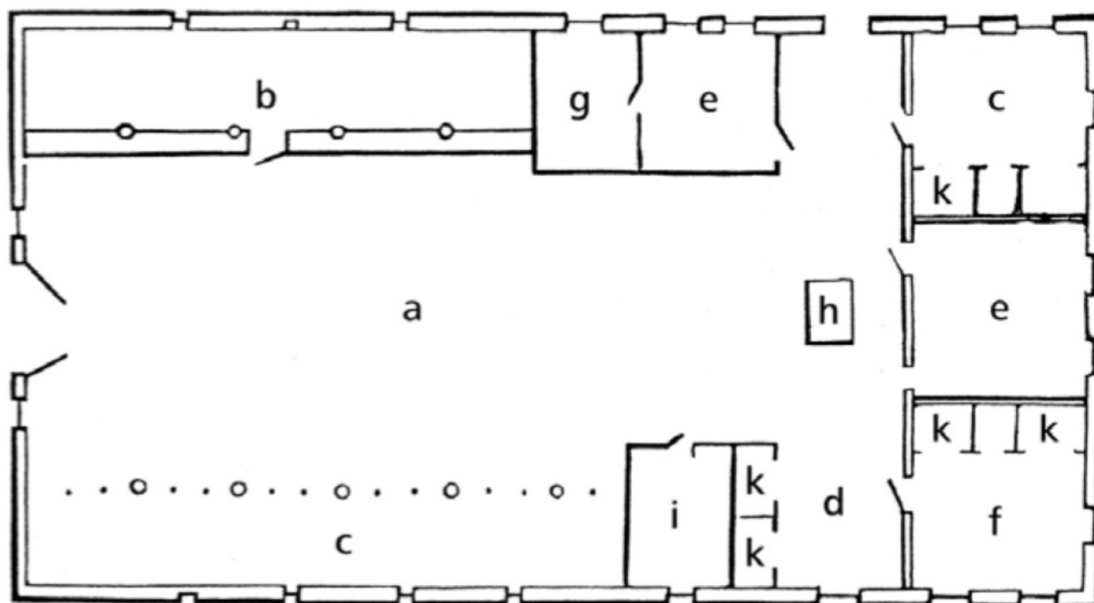
2.1 The separation of work and dwelling – dwelling as 'non-working' life

The development of paid work outside the house – which dates back to the Middle Ages – was essential for the emergence of today's understanding of dwelling and housing. In premodern lifestyles no differentiation was made between working and dwelling. Gainful employment only developed with the detachment of particular activities that were then organised in particular locations. Periods of time that were not tied to work (free time) were distinguished from periods that were directly filled with productive activities (work). The function of work as gainful employment was thus transferred out of the dwelling. The dwelling is clearly perceived as a location of non-work, where intimacy, rest, relaxation and reproduction are lived out.

2.2 Delimiting people – dwelling as life in the nuclear family

Today, people who live together are usually related by consanguinity and are thus members of a family. The location of the family is the dwelling or the house. Large families with lateral relatives, grandparents and great-grandparents or domestic workers are now rarely encountered in Western societies. The Austrian historian Otto Brunner described this form of dwelling as a preindustrial way of life using the term *'the whole house' (Ganzes Haus)* (see Fig. 3) as an ideal type to refer to a self-sufficient unit in which the household comprised all aspects of everyday life (cf. Brunner 1956). The whole house brought together work, rest, sleep, food and prayer, servants, children, husband and wife, all under one roof – and often in the same rooms. In contrast, functions and people are separated by the material and symbolic arrangements of modern dwelling. The two-generation nuclear family dominates the general principles of dwelling.

Figure 3: Floorplan of a Low German House in Lower Saxony – the house as the location of production and dwelling with a large hall (a), horse and cattle stables (b, c), high wall (d), rooms (e), cellar room (f), householders' bedroom (g), open stove (h), labourer's room (i) and bunks (k)



Source: Hucker 1979

2.3 The division of public and private – the dwelling as the location of intimacy

'The relocation of productive functions from the household to the market, state and the system of organised paid work combined with people who are not relatives or are only distant relatives moving out of the household is what literally and metaphorically first creates space for the cultivation of intimacy. The bourgeois private sphere emerges, which is delimited spatially as a dwelling, legally as a private sphere of control, and socio-psychologically as intimacy vis-à-vis others' (Häußermann/Siebel 2000: 32). The sociologist Peter Gleichmann described this process

as the ‘domestication of all vital bodily functions’ (Gleichmann 1976: 321). As a result of the growth of intimacy, thresholds of shame and embarrassment were established, which largely eliminated corporeality and emotionality from the public sphere, moving them into the privacy of the dwelling. Today, central practices of life are automatically associated with the dwelling: rest and sleep, hygiene and the lavatory, eating, private communication and sexuality. From a socio-psychological perspective the value of the dwelling is that it allows the development of emotionality, sociability, personality and individuality.

2.4 The development of the housing market – the dwelling as a commodity

Legally speaking, a dwelling is acquired through purchase or rental. In particular cases, for example for asylum seekers, German repatriates returning to the country after the Second World War or recipients of benefits, dwellings are provided by the state. Alternative forms of housing and cooperative models are of little significance here. A series of legal instances regulate access to housing and its use: contracts of sale, taxes, tenancy law, neighbourhood law and house rules.

Since the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany the social market economy has been dominant and regulates the provision of housing. Every household is responsible for providing itself with appropriate living space. The extent to which households can cover their housing needs depends primarily on their ability to pay. The building and distribution of housing is governed by supply and demand, although in Germany both are to a certain extent controlled by policy: the degree of state intervention (social housing, housing benefit, tax relief, etc.) is always politically controversial. Since the reduction of the greatest housing shortage in the post-war era the ▷ *Housing market* has been characterised by a sustained policy of liberalisation. In light of the increasing shortage of housing, calls for stronger state intervention in ▷ *Housing policy* are currently increasing.

2.5 The influence of technological developments – the dwelling as a place of technology

No building, no dwelling functions today without ‘heating, electric installations, water and sanitary installations, security technology and satellite technology’ (Leicht-Eckert 2010: 44). In Germany legal requirements ensure that nearly all buildings are in some way grid-bound. In addition, technical developments influence housing standards and requirements. For example, the industrialisation of food preservation significantly reduced the household work necessary for storing food. Previously, the preservation of food stuffs was one of the main household tasks. The emergence of the food preservation industry in the late 19th century relieved private households of the arduous curing, drying, pickling and smoking. High temperature sterilisation, freezing technology, canning and new preservatives also changed the spatial requirements of housing: storage spaces such as smokehouses and larders disappeared from the standard floorplan (cf. Meyer/Schulze 1992).

A particularly striking technological development in terms of its social and spatial effects on housing was the television and its entry into the living room. Evenings around the television ended the long fight about the parlour or 'front room' with its armchairs and sideboard, which had previously only been used for special occasions. This was replaced by a seating area with flexible elements. The television forced the opening up of seating arrangements, breaking down closed cells (cf. Warnke 1979), but it did not bring back the open constellation of the salon. On the contrary: 'the closed group of seats with its crisscross geometry which forced communicative positions and social gestures was replaced by immobility with one single fixed visual axis, following the central perspective towards the television screen' (Selle 1993: 12).

It is not yet clear what new dimensions will emerge due to the impact of the internet of things within households.

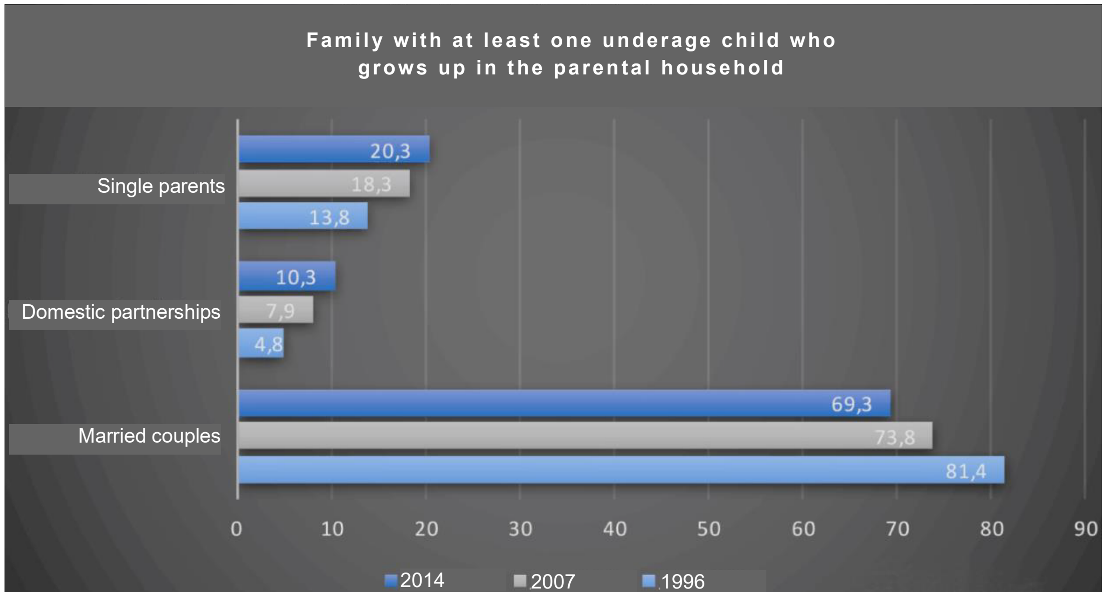
3 Postmodern transformations of living conditions

In the 20th century, social housing, technical standardisation and attempts to avoid socio-spatial inequalities, particularly ▷ *Segregation*, were characteristic of the development of dwellings and housing. Today, however, housing is being transformed primarily by the postmodern transformation of all living conditions, particularly due to individualisation, ageing, (trans) migration, debordering and the subjectification of work. The following section elucidates and discusses important aspects of the transformation of urban dwelling and housing and the key factors that influence this transformation.

3.1 Individualisation

'Individualisation' (Beck 1986) describes the process of transition of the individual from heteronomy to autonomy, which is associated with the industrialisation and modernisation of Western societies. The reasons for this are diverse and primarily concern changes in social values (▷ *Social change*) which began in the late 1960s. In the present postmodern society this process is influenced by a qualitatively new radicalisation. Basic social patterns like the traditional nuclear family are losing their dominance (see Fig. 4). The increasing drive towards reflexive ways of life leads to a pluralisation of ▷ *Lifestyles*: identity and the quest for meaning become individual achievements. Of most relevance for dwelling and housing is the singularisation that occurs in the form of living alone, be it voluntary or involuntary, and the consequent shrinking of the size of households. The behaviour and needs associated with living alone change the ▷ *Infrastructure* in the ▷ *Inner city*: facilities outside the home such as cafés and snack bars increasingly influence the publicly visible infrastructure in urban areas and boroughs. This is also true of the ▷ *Services* on offer and communications of all kinds.

Figure 4: Development of the form of the family



Source: The authors (2016) based on data from the Federal Statistical Office *(Destatis)*

3.2 Ageing

An ever increasing proportion of people live alone in old age. Particularly characteristic is the increasing number of very old women who live alone in private dwellings. This results from the continued long life expectancy of women and the prevalence of a strong wish to remain in one's own home for as long as possible, something which today is increasingly possible. But above all, these days older people remain active and healthy for longer. Traditional care homes do not cater for the dominant wish of many to preserve their habitual, independent lifestyle. A diverse range of housing for older people has developed in place of care homes and care within the family. Two popular models are shared accommodation for older people and the multi-generation house.

3.3 The debordering and subjectification of work

The debordering of work is a manifestation of structural changes in work and organisations, which comprises a number of dimensions. The temporal debordering of work is particularly radical and relevant for ▷ *Urban development* and changed housing needs. Working hours are no longer tied to daytime and night-time, as is the case with shift work. This debordering is accompanied by a spatial debordering: flexible working models like working from home or outside the office are increasingly becoming the norm in working life. Especially dramatic for living conditions is the legal debordering of work, also termed deregulation. Indicators of this are increased incidences of temporary and agency work, limited-term contracts and lower standards of protection against dismissal. The term subjectification is used because research has noted an intensification of individual, personal involvement in interactions between people and organisations and in commercially organised work processes. This demonstrates itself in two ways. Firstly, a

commercially driven form of subjectification is seen as new strategies of rationalisation change the job demands for working subjects or individual workers. Secondly, there are changes in the expectations of workers in terms of the meaning and purpose of their work. Common to both of these developments is that debordering and subjectification lead to systematic depletions. Thus, for instance, fixed wage agreements are relevant to an ever fewer number of workers, as increasing numbers are employed on temporary contracts, internships or projects. Furthermore, debordering and subjectification give new dynamics to working structures. Thus, for example, spatial flexibility is increasingly necessary as the strict division between working and dwelling becomes ever more blurred with changing spatial demands (working from home), or a willingness to move or accept long commutes is required (cf. Voß et al. 2016).

3.4 (Trans-)migration

Another very different dimension of the postmodern transformation of life results from migration to Germany, which has been enormous at times (cf. Destatis 2016). Firstly, the societal dynamics of ▷ *Globalisation* are leading to increasing international and transnational ▷ *Mobility*. Ever more people live as transmigrants, moving from one country to another or back and forth between their country of origin and foreign countries without settling anywhere for an unlimited amount of time. Secondly, there is also growth in the number of people who permanently settle in another country (▷ *Migration*) and in some cases also take that country's nationality (cf. Kreutzer/Roth 2006). The urban and spatial consequences of this are diverse: social problems arise particularly from the lack of affordable housing in cities characterised by diverse employment opportunities, more higher educational opportunities, urban diversity and tolerance. The conflicts in urban space are exacerbated by recent housing shortages. In this context certain phenomena can be seen to heighten the 'precarious social structure of cohesion' (Somm 2006) in a particular location: coexistence becomes characterised by conflicts. In neighbourhoods with a high proportion of immigrants this is further heightened by the instability of the population structure, as certain districts also act as temporary immigration and transition zones. New residents usually only move to such areas on a short-term basis. There is also distinct migration between cities and urban boroughs.

The resident population is often characterised not only by great fluctuation but also by visible heterogeneity: social, cultural and political distance indicate contrasting local interests. The increasing social divisions among the population are visible in socio-spatial terms as residential segregation in housing. Without social-state intervention, growing social inequality in Germany leads to urban socio-spatial segregation, which in turn triggers self-reinforcing processes of social selection. In the end neighbourhoods emerge that are affected by a cumulative downward trend (▷ *Neighbourhood/neighbourhood development*).

4 The transformation of ways of life – consequences for urban dwelling and housing

The postmodern transformation of living conditions outlined above has influenced dwelling and housing both in the cities and in rural areas (cf. Hannemann 2011). This is demonstrated by two important trends affecting urban dwelling: ▷ *Reurbanisation* and multilocality.

In light of individualisation, ageing and changes in gainful employment, the housing function of the city (▷ *City, town*) has gained new significance in the form of reurbanisation trends (cf. Brake/Herfert 2012). Although ▷ *Suburbanisation* represented the determining trend of dwelling and housing for many years, today an urban-based life is the preferred objective of various disparate user groups. There is much debate among academics about whether it is possible to speak of a real urban renaissance, but the changes in inner-city residential areas are obvious. Many inner-city residential areas that used to primarily house socially disadvantaged groups, including those of mixed ethnicity with migration backgrounds, have been transformed. They are now characterised by young families, 'upscale urbanites', joint building ventures, students, young academics, solvent older people and others who can afford to pay the high-end housing prices. An older and more socially and ethnically mixed urban population and changed lifestyles lead to the emergence of dwelling forms other than the traditional independent small dwelling unit, such as lofts, studios, boarding houses, luxury housing, high-rise residential buildings and residences for older people and others.

In light of increased life expectancy, older people want comfort and convenience and search for potential care provision close to their dwellings. The very old pursue a way of life that is not dependent on the car, either due to experiences and convictions or pure necessity.

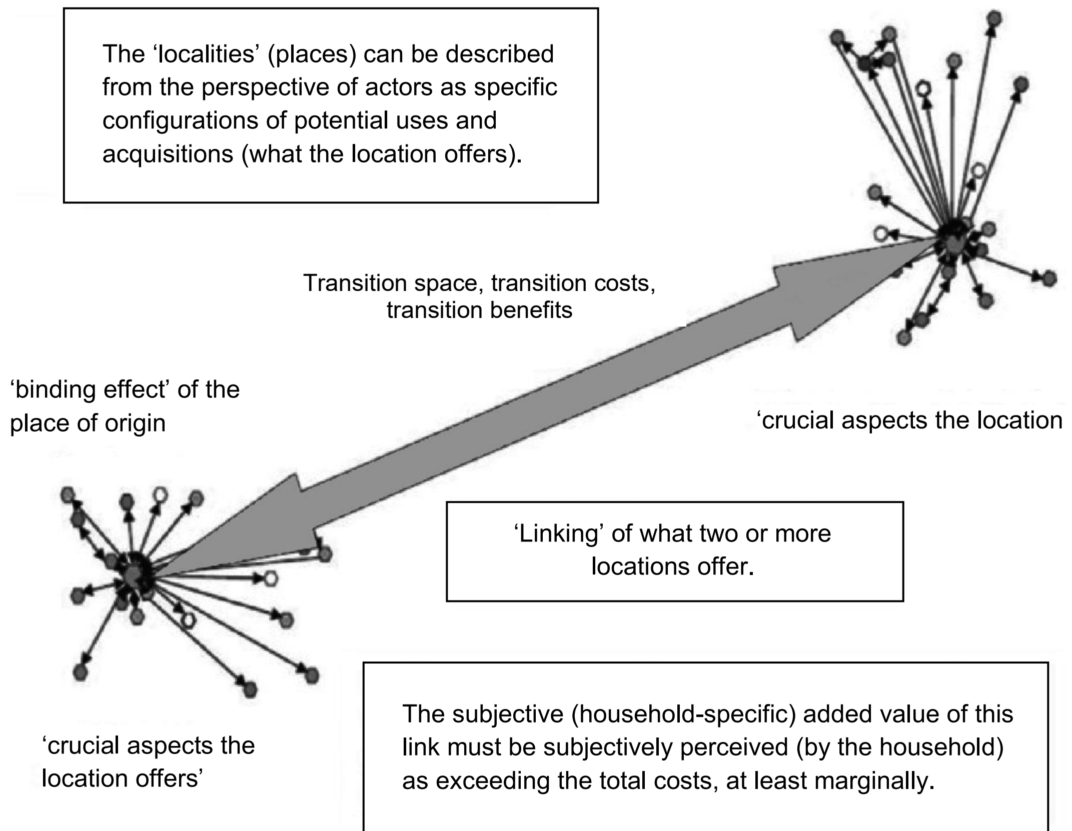
High earners, often without children, fulfil their trend-dependent housing needs in popular inner-city districts for reasons of prestige and professional practicability. This includes the growing group of economically and socially well-placed migrants who live permanently or temporarily in German cities. Entire urban neighbourhoods have thus been ethnically redefined. It is no longer just low-income migrants who transform the traditional infrastructure but also those with considerable economic and cultural capital. The different requirements of these new urban interests combined with the intensification of socio-spatial divisions in cities have led to living and housing situations that offer new features in the cityscape, which are welcomed by the vast majority of urban residents as positive identifiers. Such identifiers are manifested, for instance, in the ethnic diversity of food outlets, urban events or small retailers (e.g. electronics, food retail, cooking utensils or clothing).

Students and graduates in large cities often have limited budgets and therefore live in shared accommodation, which enables them to afford the high inner-city rents and satisfy their desire for an urban life and dwelling. This sharing of accommodation is usually a matter of convenience rather than a community-oriented housing concept or a model that offers an alternative to the traditional family.

Multilocal living is a specific form of mobility, which is becoming social practice for increasing numbers of people (see Fig. 5). Multilocal living lies somewhere between mobility and a settled lifestyle and requires the organisation of everyday life across two or more places of residence. This particularly affects young professionals, as today professional mobility is a basic requirement for gainful employment and is often linked to spatial mobility. Multilocality has achieved such dimensions and such specificity that socio-spatial research assesses this social practice as being as important a way of life as migration and circulation (Weichhart 2009: 7). This break with previous ways of life that were monogamous with respect to place, whether voluntary or forced, increasingly takes the form of 'being married to multiple places' (Beck 1997: 129). Dwelling can even be reduced to spending the night, to nothing but a container-type function: social integration and neighbourly or cultural activities are not undertaken in the most-used place of residence but rather at the principal residence, although less time is spent there. The 'container' function of the dwelling as the fundamental form of human existence continues, but its local importance is shifting and becoming more hybrid: temporary dwelling forms of all kinds are more common.

Since there is no quantitative information about the number of such residential locations used on a part-time basis (Sturm/Meyer 2009, 15), research approaches that focus on typologies of multilocal dwelling are relevant. Hesse and Scheiner (2007), for instance, have identified nine types. The main group of the typology comprises the *shuttles* or *weekend commuters* whose multilocality is primarily linked to work. They commute between a primary and a secondary residence, usually over great distances. The group of *transmigrants* is characterised by multilocality, for instance in the form of seasonal migrant workers. The type *LATs* (living apart together) describes new living arrangements between equal partners. *Long-distance LATs* are people who move between two equally valued places of residence because of their partnership but who do not commute in the classic sense. Constraints caused by the labour market nonetheless play a relevant role. This is not the case with *short-distance LATs*. Due to their lifestyles, partners in this group minimise a reduction of freedom on both sides by each maintaining their own place of residence, for instance within the same city. The *second home as a retirement residence* group prevents household members from being divided over long distances for longer periods of time. This contrasts with the *recreational residence close to the primary residence* group; the recreational residence is frequently visited and used for more than just recreational activities. The *joint second residence as a working residence* multilocality type differs only in terms of motivation. Here the partners remain together despite large distances. The *frequent mover* group is a contrast here. They are defined as modern nomads without divided households, who repeatedly move their places of residence. They move house more frequently than is usual. The *commuting children and young people* group can be attributed to the growing divorce rate. Varying distances are involved and the young people are always separated from household members.

Figure 5: Definition of multilocal living



Source: Weichhart 2009

To summarise, dwelling and housing in the city has become a differentiated, hybrid matter. The importance and heterogeneity of dwelling as a social practice has increased in urban everyday life, as has its influence on urban structures. At the same time, there are increasing numbers of people who live in a city but explicitly do not feel at home there and, indeed, do not want to feel at home there. For ever more people simply spending the night and/or residing is, or has to be, sufficient.

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Last update of the references: May 2017