Multi-local Living in the Global South and Global North: Differences, Convergences and Universality of an Underestimated Phenomenon

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Multilokales Wohnen im Globalen Süden und Norden: Unterschiede, Konvergenzen und Universalität eines unterschätzten Phänomens

Multilokalität hat in der Forschung sowohl im Globalen Süden, als auch im Globalen Norden zunehmende Aufmerksamkeit erfahren. Jedoch haben sich die Forschungsstränge unabhängig voneinander entwickelt, so legen beispielsweise nur wenige Studien ein gemeinsames Analyseraster zugrunde. Dies versucht der vorliegende Artikel, in dem Einflussfaktoren und räumliche Muster von Multilokalität sowie Merkmale multilokaler Individuen und Haushalte im Globalen Süden und Norden miteinander verglichen werden. Die AutorInnen identifizieren fortdauernde markante Unterschiede multilokaler Lebensformen in beiden Kontexten, weisen jedoch auch auf sich angleichende Ursachen und Merkmale hin. Insbesondere trägt die soziale und ökonomische Globalisierung zu neuen und quer zu Nord-Süd Kategorien verlaufenden Erscheinungsformen bei. Der Artikel trägt vorwiegend Erkenntnisse aus der Sekundärliteratur zusammen. Diese werden ergänzt durch Fallbeispiele aus empirischen Studien beider AutorInnen.

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Introduction

In both the Global South and North, multi-locality has become an increasingly studied phenomenon. Scholars of different disciplines have pointed to a growing relevance of multi-local[1] living arrangements and their implications for future research methodologies as well as policy and planning approaches. This being said, research on multi-locality in the South and North has largely evolved separately, with only few publications adopting a comparative perspective (e.g., Dick and Reuschke 2012; Schmidt-Kallert 2012).

In the present paper, we argue that such an integrated or at least comparative perspective should be carried further, due to the following observations. Multi-local "residential systems" (Dureau 1991) exist in all parts of the world and some of them are very old (Duchêne-Lacroix and Mäder 2013), like the "ubiquity of the African societies" (Amselle 1976). Apart from the common structural drivers (economic globalisation, development of transport and communication technologies, social change) spurring migration and multi-locational households in the North and South, the characteristics of the "multi-locals" and purposes of these arrangements are also more similar than often assumed. We also argue that multi-locational actors and arrangements shape the development paths of municipalities and regions in the South and North in quite comparable ways. For instance in both contexts local governments and administrations need to find responses how to better account for more part-time dwellings and infrastructure demand.

At the same time, we are convinced that South and North ought not to be looked at as dichotomies in the strictest sense. While this common differentiation may be useful as a heuristic device, in this article we draw attention to a more differentiated set of key (spatial) conditions leading to distinct multi-locality-related outcomes that can be identified in both settings.

Our article is structured as follows: after a short explanation of the research background and methods, the topic is discussed alongside three propositions regarding the nature of driving factors, spatial patterns, and features of the concerned individuals and households. In each proposition, we first reflect on the more conventional assumptions and subsequently sustain our arguments for a more integrated view. In the conclusion, we provide a summary of our main findings and an outlook on governance and policy challenges associated with multi-locational living arrangements.

Research background

This article is based on the analysis of existing literature about multi-locality in the Global North and South. Additionally, statements about key patterns and trends are underscored with insights from empirical research separately carried out by the two authors over the last five years. Eva Dick's study focus is on migration and urbanisation dynamics in the South. Most recently, together with Thorsten Heitkamp, she conducted a research project about "Migration, Translocality and Urban Governance in 'Transit Cities' in Ghana and South Africa".[2] Cédric Duchêne-Lacroix focuses on multi-locality in the North. After studying the transnational migration of French people in Berlin, he co-initiated and conducted the research project "Multilocal Living Arrangements in Switzerland (2012–2015). Mobility in the Interplay of Material, Social and Biographical Conditions" (MWinCH).[3]

1
In this article the terms "multi-local" and "multi-locational" are used as synonyms.

2
The research was supported by a seed-funding of the Mercator Research Center Ruhr (Mercur). As main empirical methods, the project involved semi-structured expert interviews and interviews with migrants.

3
This research project was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). The research team, constituted by Margrit Hugentobler, Nicola Hilti and Helmut Schad, used a mixed-method approach based on empirical research including a panel survey (N=3246) and semi-structured interviews. See MWinCH (2015).

Three propositions regarding multi-locality in the Global North and South

Proposition 1: *The individual and household-related drivers of multi-local living arrangements can be conceived of as an intermeshing between structural "necessity" and actors' "deliberate choices" with varying ratios*

Residential multi-locality in the South has predominantly been conceived of as driven by structural constraints, i.e., a reaction of people and households to an adverse social and economic environment and the intention to improve their situation by combining living places (Schmidt-Kallert and Franke 2012: 268). Since transnational migration is partly explained using this interpretative grid, Susan Thieme (2008) has recently proposed to merge transnational migration and livelihood theories in a multi-locality perspective.

Apart from adverse socio-economic circumstances, political or environmental factors may also be drivers of multi-locality, respectively in post-conflict countries or in areas affected by natural disasters or extreme weather events. For instance, in the Sahel region, which in the last years has experienced intensified and extended drought periods, circular migration is common and still augmenting (Hyo-Chung Chung and Guénard 2013). However, scholars have also pointed to the multi-faceted causes of migration within which ecological drivers tend to be related or aggravated by, e.g., political instability or people's socio-economic vulnerability (e.g., Schraven et al. 2011/12: 21f.; Véron and Golaz 2015: 2) or the dispossession of traditional land (Meliki 2016).

In contrast, with respect to the Global North, multi-local arrangements are often perceived as "easy practises" for leisure, which is – indeed – the first motive of the multi-locals in many of these countries.

Individual choice or preference are obvious drivers in the case of amenity migration, leisure-related multi-locality, or residential multi-locality as a lifestyle, in the context of which, for instance, people use a second home in the Swiss Alps or pensioners hold part-time residence in Mediterranean or farther-away coastal zones. But also in the case of job-induced multi-locality, the literature has long suggested that such household arrangements in the North are predominantly choice-related; for instance, if a job elsewhere is deliberately sought out in order to advance one's career and professional status or, also, to gain an increase in income (Dick and Reuschke 2012).

We wish to draw attention to the fact that much of the figured constraint-driven multi-locality in the South is a result of individual agency and choice, and inversely, that many multi-locational living arrangements in the North are not free from structural constraints.

In some parts of the Global South, an increasing number of people use a secondary home for leisure. For instance, in Mexico, Central America and South Africa empirical studies point to a rising relevance of "residential tourism" in which non-resident nationals buy or re-establish private residences for spending part of the year or their holidays in the country of origin (Hoogendoorn and Visser 2015; van Noorloos 2011). Moreover, in Africa and elsewhere

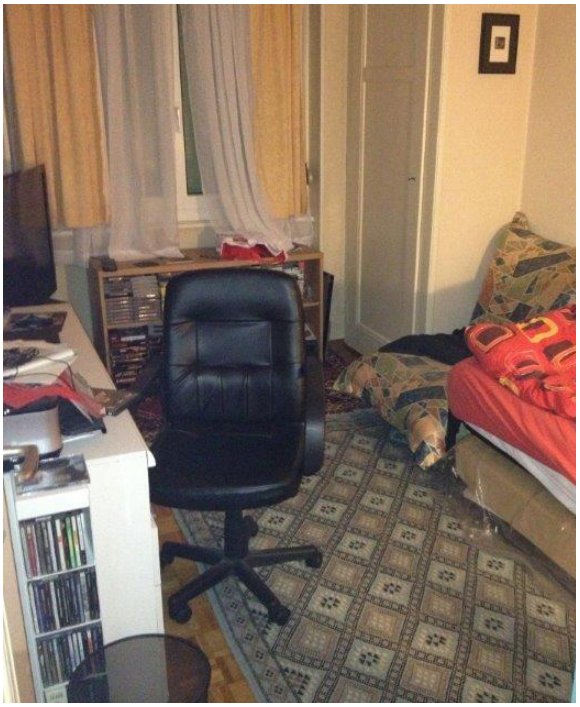

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Figure 1: Second residences in the global North can be quite basic and poorly maintained. Here, the interior of a second residence for job reasons in Switzerland. Photo: Cédric Duchêne-Lacroix

one can observe an increase of migration by young females (Hillmann 2010; Beauchemin 2011: 56f.), which seems to be at least partly related to individual consumption choices and lifestyle considerations. In the context of their study on transitory migration in Ghana, Dick and Heitkamp (2015) identified single females as a group consciously opting for a multi-locational living arrangement during the pre-marriage phase (see Box 1).

Meanwhile, a number of studies realised on multi-locality in the Global North in the last years refute the notion of it being a mere matter of choice. For instance, based on a study in Germany, Weiske et al. (2009) have developed a typology of job-induced multi-locals among which some indicate that this is not the desired living arrangement (id., 70f.). Sometimes multi-locality is imposed by "patchwork" family arrangements, where children are raised in joint custody and live intermittently in the dwelling of each parent (Schier 2014). Studies on working conditions and life

Box 1:
Case of young female migrant in Kumasi, Ghana

She comes from the country's Northern Region and sells millet balls at Kumasi Central Market. She shares a room with seven other young women who are all related in terms of being from the same ethnic group and area of origin, though not "from the same parents". She has been in Kumasi for four years and came alone, with the other seven subsequently arriving one after the other, following notification by mobile phone that the prior one arrived safely. All of them work at the market. They pay rent to a woman who lives in a close-by settlement and is also from their home region. She did not know the owner of her housing structure before migrating, but somebody in Kumasi brought her to the woman. She usually stays in Kumasi for three months, and then returns to her hometown for two months to rest. With the money the young women earn in the big city, they buy clothes in order to get ready for marriage. Once they have gathered enough money to get married, they intent to return up North (...).

balance indicate that people "give in" to live multi-locally in order to avert downward social mobility (Schneider and Meil 2009; Vignal 2005). The constraints of these arrangements are, for instance, the distance between locations related to the necessity (or not) to be here and there. In Switzerland, about a quarter of the multi-locally living people would like to stop their multi-local arrangement if they could (Schad et al. 2014). This proportion is even larger among people with a secondary home in a city (30%), particularly if this home is used for work (39%) or education (55%), less if it is used for leisure (20%).

The case of a transnational mother and scientist interviewed (see Box 2) illustrates the technical and psychological difficulties of managing a multi-local life split between a working and a family place (Duchene-Lacroix 2007).

Concluding, we assume a difference of frequencies and forms of multi-local living between the Global North and South, but no substantial differences. In the two presented cases, for instance, it is not possible to clearly establish if the practises are externally, morally or economically imposed, or genuinely deliberate. The respective context could lead to a different ratio and combination of driving elements. Therefore, it is fruitful and necessary to examine the "spatiality regime"[4] (Duchêne-Lacroix et al. 2016), the "spacing capacity of action" (Duchêne-Lacroix and Schad 2013), the "life strategies" (Schmidt-Kallert 2009), and the "tactics" (Certeau 1984) of one's situation and their interplay with respect to as well as beyond local contexts.

Proposition 2: *Regional disparities strongly contribute to the spatiality of migration and multi-locality, reaching far beyond traditional rural-urban patterns*

Traditional geographical settings within which multi-local living arrangements in the South develop are the impoverished countryside and rapidly urbanising city regions. The underlying assumption is that under conditions of land scarcity and/or agricultural modernisation, peasant migrants are pushed from their lands but, as a consequence of "urbanisation without growth", cannot be permanently absorbed by the urban labour market and thus need to maintain a foothold in the rural/agricultural economy. Many studies have thus pointed to non-permanent migrants seeking to combine resources from both ends by way of economic, social and cultural relations of reciprocity (Hyo-Chung Chung and Guénard 2013; Pulliat 2013; Schmidt-Kallert 2009; Schmidt-Kallert and Franke 2012; Steinbrink 2009; Dick/Schmidt-Kallert 2011; Greiner 2008; Deshingkar/Farrington 2009).

Box 2:
Case of a young, transnational mother and scientist moving between Berlin (Germany) and Marseille (France)

Brigitte lives with her husband and children in Berlin. As a French scientist, her normal workplace would be France. However, due to research missions and parental leaves, she has worked for years in and from Berlin. After a while, it was no longer possible to continue her mission "abroad" and she started to commute between Berlin (family place) and Marseille (working place). At the beginning, she regularly took a non-stop flight between the cities, which was logistically difficult in comparison to the previous "next-door job", but convenient considering the distance between the cities. Then the airline stopped the direct flight connection – and she had to change flights in London. During this period she was so exhausted and out of step that she often awoke wondering in which dwelling she was.

In the Global North, since the majority of people live in urban areas (in Germany approx. 74% in 2010, UNDESA 2014), such rural-urban circular job-induced migration is not so prominent, as studies on job-induced circular migration in Germany (Reuschke 2010), France (Imbert et al. 2014) and Switzerland (MWinCH) corroborate. Rather, residential multi-locality occurs between economically lagging and economically growing urban areas (Dick and Reuschke 2012:184). Trends are similar in other countries of the North with comparably elevated levels of urbanisation, e.g., the United States (Brown/Cromartie 2004). This said, the configuration of a family residence in a rural area (often with owned real estate) and a residence near the urban workplace is nevertheless common, in particular after a professional transfer or dismissal (Vignal 2005), or among university students or researchers (Kramer 2014). Rather than constituting the main pattern, the rural-urban is one among other possibilities in spatially-fragmented job/family arrangements.

In the North, the urban-urban pattern predominates even among multi-local living arrangements for leisure. In Switzerland, 75% of the multi-locals have their main residence in an urban area, and among 54% of them the secondary residence is located in another urban area (24% in city centre, 30% in agglomerations outside the centre) (MwinCH 2015). This indicates that the traditional social representation of this form–the main residence in the city and a second home in the countryside (the Roman "villa", the summer residence of a sovereign, etc., see Duchêne-Lacroix and Mäder 2013) – is no longer suitable. But, secondary homes for leisure and amenity-migration (having socially expanded) do contribute to transforming rural areas and representations of rurality (Perlik 2011; Rolshoven and Winkler 2009: 100). Living conditions and lifestyles in specific rural and urban areas become increasingly similar (Dick 2013: 117) and service demands assimilate too.

Under conditions of globalised and flexibilised labour markets, urbanisation dynamics change; former spatialities of migration and multi-locality tend to dilute while new forms emerge criss-crossing North-South boundaries. For instance, in many countries in Sub-Sahara Africa, urban poverty, economic crises and job insecurity have lowered the attractiveness of large urban centres as traditional migration destinies (Potts 2009; Beauchemin 2011: 57ff.). Meanwhile, global investments have contributed to the rise of new employment centres and migration dynamics. International tourism sites, for example, which attract urban-rural or rural-rural (sometimes cross-border) employment flows, e.g., between rural Nicaragua and the Guanacaste coast in Costa Rica (van Norloos 2011; Zoomers/van Westen 2011: 384f.). Or new urban employment centres that arise as a consequence of their articulation with international manufacturing and trade networks, a development van Halvoirt has described for

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A "spatiality regime" is "the set of conditions, rules and habits, activated in a geographic, social and biographically situated framework, allowed, influenced or forced by it for a specific period of time and specific people" (Duchêne-Lacroix et al. 2015).

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Figure 2: Not all migration and multi-locality in the South is poverty-driven: Upmarket residences of Ghanaian expatriates in Kumasi, Ghana. Photo: Eva Dick

Cebu City on the Philippines (van Helvoirt 2011; Zoomers/van Westen 2011: 384f.). Moreover, transnational multi-localities are developing within continents and between the North and the South. Besides transmigrants who work in another country and come back home occasionally (e.g., between Germany and Spain, France and Algerian, Switzerland and Poland, etc.), other transmigrants from Germany, France or Switzerland spend holiday time in their second homes in Morocco, Spain or Portugal.

In summary, in both South and North income and cost differentials within or between countries strongly influence mobility decisions of (multi-local) individuals and households. They produce rural-urban or urban-urban configurations typical for the South and North respectively, which, however, tend to dilute in the context of globalisation and advanced urbanisation. Apart from economic objectives, motives such as "doing family" (Schier 2009, von Arx/Duchene-Lacroix 2014), feeling at home, constructing oneself or experiencing nature also feed into people's mobility and locational decisions. They are tied to specific places and cannot easily be transferred to others. As a result, the spatial configurations of migration and multi-locality are becoming more diverse, alongside specific economic and socio-cultural pathways of societies and world regions.

Proposition 3: *Structural and cultural evolution of societies give way to particular multi-local living forms*

The state and evolution of cultural behaviours and socio-economic characteristics open or restrict the potentiality and forms of multi-local living. In the Global North, the rise of individualism, newly adopted fathers' roles, and women's emancipation contribute to the emergence of specific household and multi-local living arrangements (Singly 2000) including, for example, couples "Living Apart Together" (LATs), who spend part-time together in one of the members' residence without unifying their homes. These couples represent about 10% of the population in several European countries (Duncan and Phillips 2010; Stoilova et al. 2014; Toulemon and Pennec 2010). Also, the proportion of children living in joint custody is increasing in many Western countries (Schier 2014). The living arrangement of a large part of students is also multi-local e.g. in France (Imbert et al. 2014), or in Switzerland (45% of the students, see MWinCH 2015). They often live part-time in shared dwellings near or within their higher-education establishment and part-time at their parents.

These and other multi-local living forms – for instance, those related to maintaining second homes– are also made possible by a relatively high living standard and cultural capital. In other words, the likelihood for multi-local living increases with people's and households' financial and cultural resources. In Switzerland, 47% of the people with an annual income of more than 460,000 EUR are multi-local compared to less than 25% of the people with less than 23,000 EUR. Nevertheless, we observe that even a significant part of people with lower incomes in the North are multi-local. Among the job-related multi-locals, including the "shuttles" (Reuschke 2010), there are different categories of high-skilled professionals (Dick/Reuschke 2012: 187) – such as management consultants, researchers and academics – and thus differing socioeconomic status groups (Kramer, 2014; Plöger/Becker 2015: 10; van Riemsdijk 2014: 2).

In contrast, in the South multi-locality has been seen as typical for poor (rural) households seeking to sustain their livelihoods. While multi-local living in the Global South continues to be an important means of survival for the poor, in the context of economic globalisation and the democratisation of education it also becomes relevant for what is being discussed as a rising (and educated) middle class.[5] This development may be particularly relevant in emerging economies such as China (Schmidt-Kallert 2009; Schmidt-Kallert and Franke 2012) or South Africa (Hoogendoorn et al. 2009), but is also perceivable in other countries. Some of these middle classes remain in the national context, others may be transnationally oriented (e.g., as are international students and high-skilled workers in transnational companies) and able to invest the surplus incomes earned elsewhere into status symbols back home (view figure 2). Furthermore, traditional models such as the cohesion of the rural family are also progressively losing relevance, as is evidenced by an individual encounter recalled by Einhard Schmidt-Kallert (see Box 3).

Conclusion

In all parts of the world, contextual combinations of drivers lead individuals and households to live in more than one residence and to cope with intermittent presence and absence in their living places. These drivers are the result of an intermeshing of structural "necessity", action capacity and living strategy. Multi-local living needs at least one anchorage motivation (work, family, etc.) per location.

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The African Development Bank defines its members as persons spending between 2 and 20 US$ a day, an admittedly large range (AfDB 2011: 1).

This old phenomenon has local and social specificities. Many regions of the Global South are affected by rural depopulation and thus rural-urban multi-locality is common, a pattern witnessed in the Global North during industrialisation. In many countries of the Global South, particularly in Africa, the link with the rural family roots is very strong and often combined with living in the city for income generation. In the Global North, beside urban-urban or urban-rural multi-locality for enjoying a second home, some other social forms of multi-local living also appear, such as children who stay alternately in the dwelling of separated parents or couples whose members decide to keep their own dwelling and visit each other.

These specificities develop alongside certain social, urban, economic and cultural configurations, which are highly dynamic themselves. Between global regions, some convergences of multi-local living patterns can be noticed. In the Global South, rural exodus, the growth of the middle class and the rise of individualism set off new living aspirations such as the amenity-second home or moving to the city for studying. In both the Global North and South, new regions and (often smaller) cities acquire new functions as employment centres, partly within global production or service chains and ensuing migration networks.

Whereas the drivers of multi-locality, spatial patterns and features of multi-local households differ but assimilate to certain degrees in the Global North and South, the consequences related to their governance are surprisingly similar. At least three points need to be made: (1) In both the North and South, local governments assuming sedentary and monolocal populations pursue territory-based approaches limiting, e.g., the provision of public services, to the area within fixed administrative boundaries. (2) As a consequence, in neither context does multi-locality possess prominence in policy agendas (e.g., for urban and regional planning) in the sense of a common understanding and strategic approaches towards the phenomenon. (3) Since (work and leisure) activity spaces of an increasing number of individuals and households extend beyond these boundaries, governmental policies in certain sectors (housing, health provision, participation) also ought to extend their range of action. This is even more so as new technologies facilitate the linkage between locations for individual and institutional networks beyond the physical locality. In both the Global North and South, conditions are thus favourable to change the local policy into a multi-local one.

Box 3:
Case of young engineer working for an electronics company in Shenzhen, China

"He hailed from a district town in Hubei Province (…) and had studied electrical engineering in Wuhan. He certainly belonged to the upper echelon of migrants to the Pearl River Delta. (…) He talked about his life in Shenzhen, how he enjoyed the night life in the local dance parlours ('I am a good dancer'), about his memories of Hubei, and his family. Eventually I asked him whether he sent money back to Hubei to support his family. At this point of the conversation he lost his self-assurance for the first time, he said something about capitalism in China and made a vain gesture, he suddenly avoided eye contact with me and I saw him burst into tears. A very brief encounter and a superficial one at that. But it clearly showed the tragedy of first-generation migrants who find themselves sandwiched between the promises of the urban, to some extent globalised culture and traditional family values." (Schmidt-Kallert 2009, p. 18)

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Figure 3: A political action: In 2005, the city of Cologne has introduced the second home tax to reduce the number of second residences in its jurisdiction. Source: Amt für Stadtentwicklung und Statistik Köln

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