

Dual Residences and the Meaning of Home

Marjolijn van der Klis & Lia Karsten

m.vanderklis@uva.nl
University of Amsterdam, AMIDSt

Introduction

Combining family, work and residence is nowadays for many households a complicated puzzle. The cause of this complicity can be found in developments such as the rise of changing family structures, dual income families, the breakdown of employment security and spatial specialisations in housing and labour markets. Migration decisions have become complex decisions for households (Droogleever Fortuijn, 1993; Fagnani, 1993; Green, 1995; Karsten, 2003; Mills, 2000; Mulder & Hooimeijer, 1999). This adds to a blurring of business travel, commuting and migration (Hardill, 2002), which for some households has led to the choice for a commuter partnership.

In commuter partnerships, one partner lives near his or her work part of the time, away from the communal family residence, because the commuting distance between work and the family residence is too great to travel on a daily basis. The choice for a commuter partnership automatically implies a dual residence situation within the household. This has a significant impact on the daily life experiences of the partners, both individually and as part of a couple or family (Gerstel & Gross, 1984; Winfield, 1985; Green et al., 1999).

One of the most basic daily life experiences one can imagine is shaped by the experiences of the home. A significant body of literature has gone into this subject (Case, 1996; Despres, 1991; Mallett, 2004; Moore, 2000; Sixsmith, 1986; Pennartz, 1981; Proshansky et al., 1980). Traditionally, the home is viewed as a socio-spatial system that represents the fusion of the physical unit, or house, and the social unit, or household. The research field has for a long time mainly focussed on middle class nuclear families, that fitted best into this concept of the home.

However, the relationship between home and household is highly problematic and ideologically laden (Mallett, 2004, p. 68/69). Giddens (1991) points out that in high-modernity kinship and family no longer (automatically) imply the social, material and place-bounded anchoring of an individual's life. Place has become much less significant as an external referent for the life span of the individual. Where one lives is a matter of choice connected to one's life planning and the reflexive project of the self (p.146). Stereotypical perceptions such as house and travel, or stability and mobility have lost their dominant meaning in relation to an individual's sense of home. Whereas the feeling of belonging that is tied to the concept of home is traditionally grounded in space (the birth home, birth city, home country), a new frame of experience of home grounded in time is becoming more dominant. A distinction can be made between the home (geographical) and feeling at home (mobile) (Heller, 1995; Mechlenborg, 2005).

This raises questions about how the home is experienced by those who have multiple residences. Some examples of studies that look into this are students' transitional experiences of the parental home and the student home (Kenyon, 1999) and migrant experiences of the different places and countries that can simultaneously be experienced as home (Ahmed, 1999). The sense of home of those who routinely divide their time between two residences, in the way that commuter couples do, has not been the focus of attention before. The aim of this paper is to create insight into the sense of home that relates to the dual residence situation of a commuter partnership. The commuter partnership is a life style that exemplifies the changing connections between the house, the household and the home and between house and travel, between stability and mobility.

Looking into the meaning of home

Various research fields have over the last decades focused on the meaning of home. In the 1970's Hayward described the concept home as a label applied voluntarily and selectively to one or more environments to which a person feels some attachment. He further pointed out that the major question to be addressed is what the meaning of this label is and when it is applied (Hayward, 1975, p.3). More recently, Moore (2000, p.208) suggested that home can be regarded as an abstract signifier of a wide set of associations and meanings. The concept of home should be examined in terms of its parts as well as a whole, keeping in mind that when focusing strongly on one part, it is possible to lose sight of the whole concept itself. Home can thus be regarded as a multi-dimensional concept. Furthermore, as has been pointed out by Sixsmith (1986, p. 285), home is not for each person a single place, it can be a number of places simultaneously. She adds that interrelationships between different homes may form an important connection between meanings through which personal meanings of home emerge. This notion will be of relevance for the study of the meaning of home experienced by commuter couples with their dual residence situations.

When studying the meaning of home of commuter partnerships it is of importance to look into the physical characteristics of the two residences. The physical setting can be of great influence on how a residence is used and experienced (Mallet, 2004; Clapham, 2005). In their dual residence situation the similarities and differences between the two residences may significantly influence the meanings that these couples attach to both dwellings. The first research question of this paper can thus be formulated: *What are the characteristics of the residences of the commuter partnership?* For answering this question we will pay attention to the selection of the residence near the workplace and how it compares to the communal residence of the couple.

Tuan has pointed out that the experience of home is largely an unselfconscious process (Easthope, 2004). When looking into the meanings of the two residences of commuter couples, in the large majority of cases there is one communal residence, which was the couples' home before they started their commuter partnership. A pilot analysis into the meanings of both residences has shown that the large majority of respondents in our study regards the *communal residence* as home in an unselfconscious sense. It is a status that is attached to the communal residence without questioning by the commuter couples themselves. It is the residence near the workplace, in this study further referred to as the *commuter residence*, which is assigned a meaning in relation to the communal residence. Furthermore, the pilot analysis has made clear that for the partner that lives in the communal residence full time the commuter residence is more or less a non-existing place. It is the partner that stays at the commuter residence during workdays that actually experiences two residences as part of the usual routines. This partner we will call the *commuting partner*. In our analysis we have chosen to focus on the meaning attached to the commuter residence by the commuting partner.

As was mentioned at the beginning of this section, the meaning of home is a multi-dimensional concept (Sixsmith, 1986; Kenyon, 1999; Moore, 2000). A sense of belonging to a residence manifests itself in different ways. In this paper we make a distinction between three interrelated dimensions: a material dimension, an activity patterns dimension and a social dimension. The social dimension is subdivided into family (partner and children) and others. First, the material dimension is of importance because possessions may add to the personalisation of a residence (Clapham, 2005). Through objects and decoration homeliness can be produced, it can help transform a house into a home. The material dimension plays a crucial part in the production of domestic space (Rose, 2003). The value of the physical aspects of the home are on the one hand found in the functionality they provide, on the other hand they get their importance as emotionally interpreted elements (Easthope, 2004). Second, the activity patterns dimension is distinguished. According to Dovey a sense of belonging is not achieved by a mere passive presence in one's house but through the active investment of self in action and activity (Dovey, cited by Case, 1996, p.14). Proshansky et al. (1983, p.63) point out that day-to-day activities are an important part of a persons place-identity, because it

reflects the individual's experiences in his or her environment. Activities in different spatial settings (such as the two residential situations of the commuting partners) also give insight into relationships between these settings. Activity patterns are an important part in the process of the production of domestic space, or 'making home' (Rose, 2003; Case, 1996). The third dimension is a social dimension, consisting of social elements relating to the family of the commuting partner and to social interactions with others. The social dimension is perhaps the most widely recognised elements of a sense of belonging to a place. Home and family were traditionally seen as automatically connected concepts (Mallet, 2004). In commuter partnerships the commuter residence is characterised by the use by only one family member, not all. This might have implications for the sense of belonging of the commuting partner to this residence. In addition the social interaction with other persons at this location may also have an important impact on the experience of this residence.

The dimensions of a sense of belonging that we have elaborated on have lead to a second research question that will be discussed in this paper: *How do different dimensions of the commuter residence contribute to the commuting partners' sense of belonging?*

In order to get a good understanding of the sense of belonging to the commuter residence, the *role of time* is of great importance (Moore, 2000; Taylor, 2003; Mallet, 2004). Two elements of time are of significance in explaining the experiences of the commuting partners in this study. Firstly, there are the *linear elements of time*. For most commuter couples the idea of temporality is a fundamental part of the choice for a commuter partnership. This idea of temporality might have a large influence in how the commuter residence is experienced. Secondly, *cyclical elements of time* can be distinguished. For commuter partnerships the commuting rhythm is one of the most obvious manifestations of cyclical time. One of the main characteristics of the commuter residence is that it is used only part of the time, the rest of the time is spent at the communal residence.

By examining the stories of belonging from the viewpoint of the three dimensions, we can not automatically establish the overall meaning of the commuter residence. As Moore (2000) pointed out, we should be mindful not to lose sight of the whole concept of home when studying different dimensions of the concept. Our pilot analysis has shown that most commuting partners regard their communal residence as their home in an unselfconscious way. They seem to be *rooted* in this residence. The question that rises from this observation is whether the commuter residence can *also be a home* to the respondents. And in cases that it is not a home, we want to know what other meanings this residence might have. The residence could be an object of conscious appreciation (Tuan, cited by Easthope, 2004, p.130), which does imply that it is a place of some significance to a respondent. In such a situation a commuting partner does identify with the residence in some way or another. On the other hand, some respondents might identify themselves *against* the commuter residence, by contrasting this residence with the communal residence (Easthope, 2004, p. 130). In such situations the commuter residence might be regarded not as a place of significance, but as a purely functional space. Taylor (1999) points out that we ask of a place: 'What is it's meaning?', but that we ask of a space: 'What is it's function?'. Taylor suggests the introduction of a geography developed from the tensions between place and space and similarly between place and home, without focussing on one or the other. Space, place and home are thus seen as part of a multiple-scale concept, one location can be seen as space, place or home, depending on whose perspective is involved. We will adopt the concepts of space, place and home as part of one continuum of meanings that can be attached to the commuter residence by the commuting partner. This leads to the third and final research question that will be discussed in this paper: *What is the meaning of the commuter residence for the commuting partner in terms of home?*

In the following sections of this paper we will firstly go on to discuss the context, data and methods of our analysis. In the next three sections the three research questions are addressed subsequently. We will conclude our analysis with a reflection.

Context, data and methods

Context

Commuter partnerships in the Netherlands show resemblance to those in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom (Gerstel & Gross, 1984; Winfield, 1985; Green et al, 1999). However, there are also some distinctions that can partly be explained by the socio-spatial context of the Netherlands.

The Netherlands is a geographically small country. The longest distances within the country do not exceed 300 kilometres. The largest concentration of jobs is to be found in the Randstad, the western part of the Netherlands, with the larger cities Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague. The housing market in the Randstad is highly pressured; prices are high and available space per property is relatively low. Those households that pursue rural residential styles or affordable housing, are often forced to look for property outside the Randstad.

The Dutch economy is characterised by a large service sector, which has a strong international orientation. A substantial part of commuter partnerships based in the Netherlands have the commuter residence abroad; mainly in countries surrounding the Netherlands, such as the United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany, but also Switzerland. In a couple of instances the partnerships that were part of this study have a commuter residence in a non-European country (Bolivia, China).

The participation of women on the labour market is a relatively new, and still growing, phenomenon in the Netherlands. Issues surrounding the sharing of income, household and family responsibilities between husbands and wives have been, and still are, highly under debate.

The most common dual income strategy in the Netherlands involves one (usually male) breadwinner and a (usually female) partner with a part time job. Gradually, part time working has also become more accepted under male workers, making it a possibility for some commuter partners to work a four-day week and spend three-day weekends together.

Data & Methods

This paper is part of a study into the choices and daily experiences of commuter couples. Thirty couples took part in the project. The couples were found through a snowball method and were selected to take part in the project on the basis of a conceptual sample. The conceptual sample was based on variations in household characteristics, such as household phase (young couples without children; couples with dependent children living at home; and relatively older couples without children (some of them being empty nesters); single and dual income households; type of profession (profit; non-profit; government; self employed) and duration of the commuter partnership (varying between a couple of months to over 10 years). The type of commuter residence was deliberately not part of the selection criteria to be able to include couples with all kinds of residential budgets and residential solutions. Half of the couples commute between two locations within the Netherlands. In most instances, one of both locations lies in the Randstad area and the other location outside of this concentrated part of the country. Couples that commute between one location in the Netherlands and one location abroad also constitute half of the respondents.

All couples that participated in this project were interviewed. Each partner was interviewed individually. The interviews were semi-structured and afterwards fully transcribed. Respondents were preferably interviewed in the residential location used during work days. Some commuter partners were interviewed at their communal residence or at another location. As a result, the interviewer personally visited many, but not all of the residential locations of the respondents. This paper is based on a thorough analysis the stories told by twenty-one couples, nine cases were analysed in a basic way.

Based on a pilot analysis, in which both partners' views on both residences were analysed, we have chosen to focus on the residential experiences of the commuting partner. In the majority of cases it is only one of both partners that experiences a dual residence situation as part of the normal routines, this partner is called the commuting partner. Two thirds of the

commuting partners were male, one third female. The view of the partner that permanently lives in the communal residence is left out of the analysis. To be able to clearly distinguish between the communal residence and the commuter residence, three criteria were used. Some couples fit into all three criteria, for others only one or two criteria apply. The first criterion states that the communal residence is the residence in which both partners once lived together full time; in the commuter residence, they did not. The second criterion states that the communal residence is the family residence; the children live there or this residence is deliberately labelled as the communal place by both partners, even though the commuting partner might never have lived in this place permanently; the commuter residence is used (almost) only by the commuting partner. The third criterion decides that the communal residence is the place in which the majority of the time together is spent.

Two residential situations

Aim of this part of the analysis is to create insight into the two residential situations of the commuting couples. We look into the question: What are the characteristics of the residences of the commuter partnership?

During the selection of commuter couples, no requirements were set regarding the residential situations of the couple. Such requirements would imply an indirect biased selection toward those who are financially capable to pay for two dwellings. The only residential requirement was that the commuting partner should have one stable place to return to each time, so travelling business people staying at different places all the time, were excluded.

In general, couples that start a commuter partnership have been living together in one shared residence. This residence is kept as one of the two dwellings the couple will use during the commuter partnership. Usually, the commuting partner will acquire a second residence to stay during workdays.

Occasionally, the employer provides this residential facility in the form of a hotel or staff residence. However, in general commuters search for a place to stay autonomously. Some couples have chosen the commuter residence together, because it helps them to make the commuting more into a shared experience. Just as often the partner that is going to use the residence during working days searches alone. Some respondents pointed out that for them it is a typical consequence of a commuter partnership that they had to find the commuter place on their own.

A wide range of residential solutions is used among the respondents. On the one hand, some stay with friends or family, live in lodgings, or stay in a hotel. On the other hand, a few commuting respondents live in a bungalow or villa. The majority of commuting respondents however, have arranged an apartment near the workplace.

The type of housing arrangement is for many a crucial element of their sense of belonging. Therefore, some basic requirements have to be met. To have a place for yourself, over which you have some basic control is a characteristic to which many commuters attach importance. One respondent for example, pointed out that in a prior period of weekly commuting, some years before, he stayed in a hotel. He did not mind doing so at that time and spend most of his evenings in a local pub. In his current commuting period on the other hand, he strongly prefers to stay in an apartment. *“I want to be able to make a cup of tea. If you stay in a hotel you’re always a kind of travelling salesman who walks around town bored.”* [resp 2027].

Another characteristic of commuter residences is that this place is located in an easily accessible area. On the one hand for travelling to and from the communal residence, on the other hand for daily commutes to work. A commuting partner who lives in London during weekdays and travels to Amsterdam on weekends says: *“I wanted to have a good commute, so I chose a location near Paddington. That’s easy for flying.”* [resp 2030]

If the commuter residences are compared to the communal residential situations, some striking contrasts surface. For example in the owner state. Though only a fraction of the commuter residences is owner occupied (about one seventh), a large majority of the

communal homes is (about three quarters). This can be explained by the idea of temporality of the situation that many respondents have. If one expects to need this residence only for a relatively short period of time, renting seems the best option (Helderman et al., 2004; Clapham, 2005). One respondent exemplifies this in a rather extreme way, he stayed in a hotel for over ten years, the reason he gave for not getting a private residence was that he held on to the thought of his commuter partnership being of a temporary nature.

Another contrast is that the communal residences are in majority family dwellings. Either terraced houses or detached or semi-detached homes. A significantly smaller part of the communal residences is apartments. Subsequently, most communal residences are found in suburban or rural settings, whereas the commuting residences are mainly found in central parts of cities. Interestingly, only few respondents make note of these contrasts between both residences and the settings. Some see this as an important plus of their situation. A fifty year old male respondent used to live alone in Amsterdam. Since he met his wife, he commutes between a rural family setting and a commuter residence in Amsterdam. About this contrast he remarks: *"I call it 'best of both worlds', I mean, over there I have my country house and I have my wife and children. And here I have my life in Amsterdam with the hectic of the city, that I keep enjoying."* [resp 2033]. Another respondent, who also commutes between a rural family residence and a commuter place in town, emphasises his negative feelings about this contrast. He points out: *"the Randstad smells, is overcrowded, you name it. It's expensive to live in. Over there you get more square meters of land... more nature. That keeps us over there."* [resp 2002].

A large majority of couples meet each other every weekend. In general, the commuting partner travels to the communal residence on Thursday evenings or Friday evenings. The return trip to the commuter residence is made on Sunday afternoons or Monday mornings. Most couples hardly ever stay in the commuter residence together. This results in a situation that the commuter residence is more or less a non-existing place for the partners that permanently live at the communal residence. In cases that the couple does use the commuter residence for spending weekends together, the visiting partner regards the commuter residence as a kind of vacation home, not as a regular dwelling.

Comparing the two residential situations shows that the commuter residence is in some ways always a less ideal place than the communal residence. A striking element in the interviews is that respondents continually compare the commuter residence with the communal residence. That the communal residence is the primary residence, is for a large majority of respondents taken for granted. This raises questions about the meaning and experiences of the commuter residence. That will be the focus of the following sections of this paper.

Stories of belonging

This section of the paper seeks to answer the second research question: How do different dimensions of the commuter residence contribute to the commuting partners' sense of belonging?

These residential situations are analysed along the lines of three interrelated dimensions. The dimensions are a *material* dimension (what do respondents physically have at their place near work), the *activity patterns* (what do they do when they're there), a *social* dimension (with whom do they have contacts). Within the social dimension a distinction is made between the family (partner and children) and others. The three dimensions are discussed in this section.

Material dimension

In order to make a commuter partnership practically possible the commuting partner needs a suitable place to stay in during working days: the commuter residence. This place has to meet the material requirements set by one or both partners; requirements that not always can be realised. The material aspects provide a basic setting from which a person can engage in

activities on this location. Furthermore, the material setting often plays a direct role in a person's experience of a place.

The interior of the commuter residences can be described from a functional and a personal viewpoint. On the functional side almost all respondents mention that their residence meets the minimal requirements (such as a properly functioning heating system), though some only established this situation after moving several times. In about half of the interviews, respondents were of the opinion that their dwelling fully met their functional needs. Having a washing machine, a good quality bed, or a separate study, are some of mentioned conveniences. A forty-five year old woman points out: *"I wanted an apartment that you can really live in ... Having a washing machine, for example, contributes to being able to experience your time together differently"* [resp 3012]

The degree to which the interiors were personalised shows an enormous variety. On one end of this spectrum, we find a small group of male respondents staying in hotels and furnished apartments to which they have made no personal changes. A fifty-five year old manager, who worked in a city abroad for thirteen years, stayed in a hotel for more than ten of those years. *"It was a good hotel ... I did not have to make my bed, nothing, I went downstairs like that, hang my coat on the rack and could start breakfast. ... a luxurious life."*, he remarks [resp 2018].

The majority of commuting partners, including all female commuting partners, did put an effort into personalising their dwelling. These respondents took superfluous furnishings from their communal homes, bought some new furnishings, or at least paid attention to putting up some photographs and decorations. In this group, there is a distinction between those who gave their place a personal touch that can be shared with their partner and others who show a more individual type of personalising. This individualisation is not necessarily meant to exclude the partner. More often, it is the utilisation of the opportunity to make personal decorating choices that the partner would not agree on in the shared home. Examples are decorative items purchased when travelling abroad, collectors' items, art, design objects and books. The commuter residence thus provides the opportunity for the commuter partner to create a territory of individual character (Aragonés, 2002), marked with symbolic objects that could not play such a dominant part in a communal residence. However, not everyone feels the need to utilise this opportunity. Some respondents, who consciously personalised their place, remarked that after all this effort, their commuter residence still could not compete with their communal home. A fifty-seven year old respondent, who has a large apartment in Brussels, remarks: *"I have many personal items in Brussels ... I collect glass, I have part of my collection in Brussels, but my real things, those are in The Hague. ... the most beautiful glass is in The Hague."* [resp 2013].

Activity patterns dimension

The activity patterns dimension goes into the ways respondents spend their time while they stay at the commuter residence. How respondents spend time in their dwelling, but also how they do not spend their time there, or how they spend it outside of the dwelling, tells us something about their feelings of belonging in that location.

One of the major time consumers of commuter partners outside office hours, is work. Some point out that when they were living in one shared home with their partner they also used to work late, thus they regard their behaviour as no different than before. They get enjoyment out of this work and either stay at the office late, or work at home. For some, not having to take account of their partner, gives them a more restful feeling. A manager who works in the south of the Netherlands and has his wife and teenage children in the north, says: *"If there would have been someone waiting for me at home, I would have taken account of that, but that is not necessary now. Therefore I can carry out my job as best as possible, that is pleasant feeling."* [resp 2001]. For others, however, working extra hours is an expression of a lack of feeling of belonging in their commuter residence. Working is an escape because they don't feel at ease in their residence or don't know how to spend their time otherwise. A fifty-two year old manager points out: *"Almost every time you end up working again in the*

evenings. That has been a drawback for me, the work day almost automatically lasts a lot longer." [resp 2017].

In contrast with those who work late, a substantial minority does not. They have other activities in the evenings. Only a small portion of the interviewees receives people at their dwelling for dinner, the same respondents also go out to sport or to hobby clubs. A few more meet with people in bars or restaurants. A substantial part of the respondents, mostly the same persons that work extra hours, mention only individual leisure activities. Some go out in the evenings to walk or for a bike ride, most stay at home, watching TV or reading newspapers.

When looking at dinner habits, traditionally seen as a fundamental part of 'home making', the respondents can be classified into three groups. The majority of female respondents and a small group of men usually cook their own dinners. Some also invite friends over for dinner on a regular basis. They use their commuter residence in the same way as their communal residence. The second group, mostly male respondents, also has most dinners at home, but choose for meals that take hardly or no preparations. Examples are microwave dinners; take out food; soup with bread; or 'Tupperware' meals (being (frozen) leftovers that their partner gave them along). The third dinner habit is to always eat outdoors. This group exists of an even share of man and women and shows a diverse set of explanations by respondents themselves. Some mention to have a particularly demanding work situation and have a restaurant at the workplace. Others decided that they just do not feel like cooking their own meals and choose to go to cheap restaurants, like university restaurants.

One female respondent has the opportunity to compare the routines of the commuting partner with those of the partner that stays put at the communal residence, because she has been in both roles. Her partner used to do the weekly commuting but now she is the commuting partner. She explains: *"over here I do a minimal amount of grocery shopping, single-person meals, some fruit, some milk. ... I used to cook more. Now you buy things that stay fresh during this week, you know that you'll have to buy new things next week."* [resp 3009]. This example shows that the commuting rhythm highly influences the activity patterns of commuting partners. Several respondents also mentioned that it is almost impossible to become a member of a sports team or choir. These activities often require presence during a weekday, when training or rehearsals take place, and in the weekends when games and performances are scheduled. A significant number of commuting partners feel they live in two separate worlds, which both have their own routines. The routines have to be fitted into the time spent on one location or the other.

Social dimension

Contacts with other people are for most persons a crucial part of feeling at home in a place or a situation. Within the wide range of persons that one can have social connections with, a distinction can be made between one's family, being the partner and children, and others.

Whether a feeling of belonging in the commuter residence is related to one's family, is largely influenced by the family's presence at this location. Since the partner (and children) are never, or hardly ever there, many experience a hampered sense of belonging in the commuter residence. They find it cheerless to spend time in this dwelling without their family. A few others do not feel the absence of family makes them belong less to this residence. A male respondent, who has two teenage children, points out: *"We are both independent persons ... I really enjoy being with the four of us, but being on my own is something I enjoy too ... But I am very clearly part of the family"* [resp 2001].

For many the telephone serves some compensation for the absence of their family, but this does completely not solve the negative connotation of not having them around. This negative impact on the sense of belonging raises the question whether contacts with others than family might compensate for this absence of family. This does not seem to be the case for most commuter partners. A clear distinction can be made between those who do show initiative in engaging with other people and those who do not.

A strikingly large part of the respondents (about two thirds) shows no, or hardly any, initiative in making social contact with other people at their location near work. About half of

these respondents elaborate explicitly on their motivation for this behaviour. They do not want to shift the central focus of their social life away from the communal residence, which they consider their primary place. They expect a second centre of social ties to become competing with their primary social life near the communal residence. This is a complication they want to avoid. A male commuting respondent, who was interviewed at his communal home, remarks: *"It is more that I think for myself... your social life is quite limited in such a situation, you're there for your work. I could become a member of a choral society or something, but that will make you a bit schizophrenic. I have my city over here, most of my friends and family and I make music a lot. If you start building something like that over there, than it will start to compete in other ways too. Than you will start to lead two separate lives, so that's something you don't do, but if you say like ok, than I'll only do my work over there, than it is a quite plain existence essentially."* [resp 2027]. Others mention that it does not seem worth the effort. They see their commuter residence as a temporary arrangement, which they'll leave behind in the foreseeable future: *"You're here for a couple of years, so I don't put much effort into building something... I hear that from other people too, that it is hard to build a network"* [resp 2013]. This behaviour shows that many commuting partners more or less consciously choose not to let their place near work become a place of social belonging.

A much smaller part of the respondents (about one third) does show initiative to engage in social activities. Most of them have some social activities in sports clubs or volunteer clubs. They also meet with colleagues outside work every now and then. For some, flat mates play an important social role. Just a handful of respondents have build a complete new social network of friends with whom they meet regularly, which does provide in a sense of belonging to this location. Interestingly, most friends at the commuter residence are also colleagues. A forty-nine year old woman, who works for an assurance company, tells: *"In [city name] I also have three girlfriends, they are colleagues of work that live over there. With them I go to the cinema, out to dinner, the theatre, to sport. We also go on vacation together. And there is also a group of men from work, that I regularly go into town with on Thursday evening"* [resp 3009].

Sense of home in the commuter residence

In the section above, the experiences of the commuter residences were analysed through three dimensions. In this section the experiences are further explored. The central question is: What is the meaning of the commuter residence for the commuting partner in terms of home?

In general, commuting partners regard their communal residence as their home. They do not seem to question, nor define this status of the communal home for themselves. What the commuter residence means to them is less obvious. If this residence is not a home to them, what can it be then? Maybe it is a place of significant importance, or it might be a functional place only to sleep during working days.

In order to explore the meaning of this residence to the commuting respondents, their experiences are connected to a concept of space, place and home. This distinction is derived from Tuan (1977). Tuan describes a space as more abstract than a place. Space can be regarded as movement and place as pause. Tuan further mentions that when space feels thoroughly familiar, it has become place. Additionally, home is described as an intimate place. Taylor (1999, p.11) points out that home viewed as intimate is one stage on from 'thoroughly familiar', which makes home into a particularly special place.

Taylor adds to this distinction between space, place and home that usually place is regarded as local, but that space can be local too. Space, place and home are part of a multiple-scale concept. The same location can be a home, a place or a space depending on whose perspective is involved. Spaces can be transformed into places and places into homes (Taylor, 1999, p.12).

In our analysis we follow this concept of space, place and home and connect it to the three dimensions through which the experiences of the commuter residences were analysed (material, activity patterns and social dimensions). We interpret space, place and home as a continuum of meanings, scaled from anonymous, unfamiliar, purely functional (space),

through significant, thoroughly familiar (place), to intimate, personal (home). The three dimensions of analysis were placed in a qualitative data matrix with the continuum of space, place and home (see Table 1). The cells were filled with stories of respondents that fitted a cross combination of a dimension and a characteristic in terms of space, place or home. For each respondent some cells would fill up with stories and other cells stayed empty.

Table 1: Model of qualitative data matrix of three dimensions and continuum of space, place and home.

<i>Respondent X</i>	Space	Place	Home
Material dimension			
Activity patterns dimension			
Social dimension			

The framework of the three dimensions of analysis and the space-place-home continuum, tells us much about the meaning of the commuting residences to its users. Regarding the material dimension, a majority of the respondents indicate that they have put effort into personalising their residence, which provides a homely feeling. A male respondent says about his apartment: *"I do feel at home there, though I would not call it my home, but I am o.k. over there."* [resp 2027]. Only a few respondents indicate that they have done nothing to personalise their space, or, if they did, that this did not help in providing some significance to their residence. A male respondent remarks: *"I like my job. In a certain way I do my job for my enjoyment, but I don't stay there for my enjoyment."* [resp 2017].

When looking at the activity patterns dimension a different picture shows up. From this point of view a majority of respondents state that their commuter residence has only a small significance to them. Many avoid their commuter residence by working extra hours at the office. Many also have dinner habits that are by far not as homely as what they are used to in the communal home. On the other hand, many respondents do indicate that 'having a place for yourself', in which you can behave in your personal ways and over which you have basic self control, is an important function of the commuter residence. In that respect it cannot be regarded as an unfamiliar or purely functional space. When viewing the material and activity patterns dimensions together, it becomes evident that in general commuter partners show behaviour of domestication or 'homing it' (Mechlenborg, 2005). In this interpretation the home is seen as a space under control. Homing a space is a tactic of an individual that will help to create a sense of home, a process which is also referred to as the production of domestic space (Rose, 2003).

The social dimension is subdivided into the family (partner and children) and other social contacts. For the social dimension concerning others than family the commuter residence gives a strong indication of space. Many respondents refrain from building a social life at their location near work. A significant part of the respondents explicitly mention that they deliberately choose not to build a social life there. It would feel like this location would become 'competition' for their communal home. However, just having a few daily contacts does make a difference for some. A respondent that stays in a hotel, remarks: *"Yes, the hotel has become a little like a home, or something. Where you know the employees well. Kind of like your hangout pub. Not really great, but still a little like home."* [resp 2029].

The social dimension with regard to partner and children indicates a slightly higher significance to the respondents, though still far from the idea of intimacy that would be shared at the communal home. It is the lack of sharing daily life with partner and children that adds to a lack of significance as a home for these respondents. The explanation for this finding may (partly) be of a psychological nature. To admit (to oneself or to others) that a feeling of belonging can be experienced just as strongly without partner and children present as with these family members, might suggest that a life without significant others is just as valuable and complete as when it is shared with these others. A few respondents do indicate the

commuter residence as intimate and personal with regard to family because for them the experience of the intimacy of home is not necessarily connected to the presence of family. These couples can be regarded as examples of the 'pure relationship' (Giddens, 1991). They underline that to have a fulfilling life they not only pursue a shared experience with their partner, but also individual development both for themselves and for their partner.

Conclusion and reflection

In this paper the aim was to create insight into the sense of home that relates to the dual residence situation of commuter partnerships. The research population was a group of thirty commuter partnerships that have at least one of both residential locations in the Netherlands.

In the first part of the exploration we looked into the characteristics of both residences of commuter couples. From this part of the study we concluded that almost all commuting partners view the communal residence first and foremost as their home. This is the place where they have 'anchored' themselves. Before they started their commuter partnership, most commuter couples have lived in their communal residence together permanently. However, this anchoring in the communal residence by the commuting partner was not in all cases build on a personal rootedness in that location. Even in situations where the communal residence was a place where the commuting partner has never lived permanently because the couple has moved to this place after the commuter partnership already exited, this communal residence functioned as an anchor. This evidence suggests that it might be very difficult, or hardly possible, for a person to regard more than one place as the primary place of reference for their lives.

For the following parts of the analysis we focussed on the commuter residence. What was of interest to us is what the meaning of the commuter residence might be, with the communal residence functioning as a primary place. Firstly, we explored how three different dimensions of the commuter residence contribute to the commuting partners' sense of belonging in that residence. The three dimensions of analysis were a material, an activity patterns and a social dimension. We then went on to establish what the meaning of the commuter residences is for the commuting partners in terms of home. For each of the three dimensions we determined what the meaning was within a continuum of space, place and home. This approach fitted the subject well. The multiplicity of the concept of home was shown in its full advantage through our analysis.

The meaning of the commuter residence to the commuter partners does not show a consistent picture. Our findings coincide with the observation by Heller (1995) that the density of home-experience varies from home to home. "One home is closer to the logic of the heart, the other to the logic of reason. There is a multiplicity of hierarchy among these homes, criss-crossing one another. This hierarchy is strictly personal and not normative" (p.17). In our analysis for most cases it is not an easy task to scale respondents into one category of space, place or home, because the outcomes vary across the material, activity patterns and social dimensions. It is possible, however, to distinguish several types of respondents based on the combinations of outcomes of the three dimensions and the space, place and home continuum. First of all, there are the types that clearly fit into one of the three categories for each of the three dimensions. These respondents show an consistent picture of the meaning of their commuter residence over the three dimensions, this meaning varying on the scale of a space to a home. In the case of the experience of space the commuter residence is materially a purely functional residence where the variety in activities is low and no social ties were created. On the other end of the continuum of meanings, some respondents experiences in both the material, the activities patterns and the social dimensions add up to this location being a full home. Interestingly, even in these most homely cases, the commuter residence could not completely live up to the anchor of the communal home. This is largely explained by the impact of temporality, sometimes further expressed in the difference between a privately owned communal residence and a rented commuter residence.

It is in the range of meanings of the commuter residence as a place of some significance, that a greater variety is found between the three dimensions. Whereas some respondents

stories are consistently showing a meaning as a place over all three dimensions, most cases are built from less consistent combinations of meanings of the dimensions. There were a couple of cases where the material dimension showed a meaning as space, while the meanings attached to the activity patterns and social dimensions were in the range of home. These cases show that for some persons a sense of home can exist in a social sense, without the support of a stable physical setting in that place. We should keep in mind that this absence of a stable physical setting is for these commuter partners compensated in their communal residence. For a substantial number of other respondents the material aspects of their commuter residence did show a meaning of home. For them, however, the social dimension and often also on the utility dimension scored in the range between space and place. The basic investment in the physical setting provides these persons with a functional basis and a sense of control and privacy, which is important for experiencing a sense of self in that location. The absence of social relations at the location near work shows that the overall emotional attachment to this location remains at a level of anonymity of low significance. A major explanation for this combination of meanings is found in the role of time.

The analysis of the role of time was divided into linear aspects and cyclical elements of time. When looking at linear time, the idea of temporality of the situation causes respondents to regard the commuter residence as purely functional or slightly significant and not as personal. This indicates that time plays an important part in regarding a place as a home. An idea that is confirmed by some respondents, who pointed out that while they regarded the commuter residence as an impersonal space at first, over time they have grown to appreciate it more and experience it as a homely place. Some exceptions to this experience are respondents who stated that while the commuter partnership was alright in the beginning stage, it has become more and more of a burden over time.

The cyclical aspects of time for many tell a story of space, rather than home. These respondents feel they are living in two separate worlds, divided by time. The weekdays are characterised by work and work only, verbalised by some as a kind of 'sub-life'. The weekends are filled with their 'private lives', as some put it into words. Others however, who are also aware of the differences in routines between weekdays and weekends, regard both as part of a continuous circle. They regard the trips between the two residences as an integral part of the commuter partnership. During these trips they change their thoughts over from the routines of one location, to those of the other location. These findings coincide with what Giddens (1991) calls one of the dynamics of modern social life, being the separation and recombination of time and space in ways that co-ordinate social activities without necessary reference to the particularities of place. An idea that was further explored by Heller (1995), who suggests that while the traditional home was grounded in space, a new frame of experience is grounded in time. The case of commuter partnerships in the Netherlands shows that the combination of these interpretations might be closest to peoples time-space experiences. These couples do have specific locations in space, that serve as loci for their daily lives. However, their sense of belonging might be grounded more in the temporal elements of their lives, than in the two locations in space.

References

- Ahmed, S. (1999) Narratives of migration and estrangement, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2(3), pp. 329-347.
- Aragonés, J.I. (2002) The dwelling as place: behaviors and symbolism, in: J.I. Aragonés, G. Francescato & T. Gärling (Eds) *Residential environments. Choice, satisfaction, and behavior* (Westport, CT, Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.).
- Case, D. (1996) Contributions of journeys away to the definition of home: an empirical study of a dialectical process, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 16(1), pp. 1-15.
- Clapham, D. (2005) *The meaning of housing; a pathways approach* (Bristol, The Policy Press).

- Després, C. (1991) The meaning of home: literature review and directions for future research and theoretical development, *The Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, 8(2), pp. 96-115.
- Droogleever Fortuijn, J. (1993) *Een druk bestaan. Tijdsbesteding en ruimtegebruik van tweeverdieners met kinderen* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press).
- Easthope, H. (2004) A place called home, *Housing, Theory and Society*, 21(3), pp. 128-138.
- Fagnani, J. (1993) Life course and space. Dual careers and residential mobility among upper-middle-class families in the Ile-de-France region, in: C. Katz & J. Monk (Eds) *Full circles. Geographies of women over the life course* (London, Routledge).
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and self-identity* (Cambridge, Polity Press).
- Green, A.E. (1995) The geography of dual career households: a research agenda and selected evidence from secondary data sources for Britain, *International Journal of Population Geography*, 1(1), pp. 29-50.
- Green, A.E., Hogarth, T. & Shackleton, R. (1999) *Long distance living: Dual location households* (Bristol, Policy Press).
- Hardill, I. (2002) *Gender, migration and the dual career household* (New York, Routledge).
- Hayward, D.G. (1975) Home as an environmental and psychological concept, *Landscape*, 20(1), pp. 2-9.
- Helderman, A.C., Mulder, C.H. & Van Ham, M. (2004) The changing effect of home ownership on residential mobility in the Netherlands, *Housing Studies*, 19(4), pp. 601-616.
- Heller, A. (1995) Where are we at home?, *Thesis Eleven*, (41), pp. 1-18.
- Karsten, L. (2003) Family gentrifiers: Challenging the city as a place simultaneously to build a career and to raise children, *Urban Studies*, 40(12), pp. 2573-2584.
- Kenyon, L. (1999) A home from home. Students' transitional experience of home, in: T. Chapman & J. Hockey (Eds) *Ideal homes? Social change and domestic life* (London, Routledge).
- Mallett, S. (2004) Understanding home: a critical review of the literature, *The Sociological Review*, 52(1), pp. 62-89.
- Mechlenborg, M. (2005) Two dominant ideas of home in the renaissance of home in today's culture. *ENHR Conference 2005* (Reijkjavik, Iceland).
- Mills, M. (2000) *The transformation of partnerships: Canada, the Netherlands, and the Russian Federation in the age of modernity* (Amsterdam, Thela Thesis).
- Moore, J. (2002) Placing home in context, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 20(3), pp. 207-217.
- Mulder, C.H. & Hooimeijer, P. (1999) Residential relocations in the life course, in: L.J.G. Van Wissen & P.A. Dykstra (Eds) *Population issues. An interdisciplinary focus*. (New York, N.Y., Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers).
- Pennartz, P.J.J. (1981) *De kern van wonen op het spoor* (Muiderberg, Couthinho).
- Proshansky, H.M., Fabian, A.K. & Robert, K. (1983) Place-identity: Physical world socialization of the self, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 3, pp. 57-83.
- Rose, G. (2003) Family photographs and domestic spacings: a case study, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 28(1), pp. 5-18.
- Sixsmith, J. (1986) The meaning of home: an exploratory study of environmental experience, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 6, pp. 281-298.
- Taylor, P.J. (1999) Places, spaces and Macy's: place-space tensions in the political geography of modernities, *Progress in Human Geography*, 23(1), pp. 7-26.
- Taylor, S. (2003) A place for the future? Residence and continuity in women's narratives of their lives, *Narrative Inquiry*, 13, pp. 193-215.
- Tuan, Y.-F. (1977) *Space and place. The perspective of experience* (Minneapolis, University of Minneapolis Press).
- Winfield, F.E. (1985) *Commuter marriage. Living together, apart* (New York, Columbia University Press).