Commuter partnerships: balancing home, family, and distant work
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Commuting partners, dual residences and the meaning of home

Abstract
The experience of home is one of the most basic of daily-life experiences. Traditionally, the home is grounded in a specific place; in commuter partnerships, however, for part of the time one partner lives near the workplace and away from the family residence. This paper provides insight into the sense of home that relates to the dual-residence situation of a commuter partnership. The meaning of the residence near the workplace is analysed through three dimensions: material, activity patterns, and social. We further classified each dimension in a continuum of meanings of space, place or home. Empirical evidence comes from in-depth interviews with 30 commuter couples in the Netherlands. The results show that the material dimension is most often used to create a sense of home. The activity patterns are primarily focused on the job. The social dimension is the most difficult way of experiencing a home because there is yet a strong relationship between being with one’s family and experiencing a sense of home. As a result, many feel as living two separated lives: a work life and a private life. Only a small minority experiences the commuter dwelling as a home away from home in all its three dimensions.
3.1 Introduction

Nowadays, combining family, work and residence is a complicated puzzle for many households in post-industrial countries. Changing family structures, the rise of dual-income families, the breakdown of employment security, regional differences between housing markets and regional specializations in labour markets have contributed to this complexity. As a result, migration decisions have become intricate decisions for families (Droogleever Fortuijn, 1993; Fagnani, 1993; Green, 1995; Karsten, 2003; Mulder & Hooimeijer, 1999; Mills, 2000). Work-related mobility has expanded in relation to new travel opportunities, such as fast (inter)national railroad connections and budget airlines. Business travel, commuting, and migration have become blurred (Hardill, 2002) and for some households lead to the choice of a commuter partnership. Here, one partner lives near his or her work for part of the time and away from the communal family residence. The choice of a commuter partnership automatically implies a dual-residence situation, which 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; Green, Hogarth & Shackleton, 1999; Van der Klis & Mulder, 2008; Winfield, 1985). In these couples, the commuting time and distance between the communal residence and the workplace of one partner (who we refer to as the commuting partner) has become too great to travel on a daily basis. The traditional daily commute of the commuting partner is, therefore, replaced by a (bi)weekly long, and sometimes international, commute between the communal residence and the work location, in combination with a short daily trip between the workplace and a residence near this workplace. The situation of living in two residences creates questions about the experience of home.

The experience of home is a basic daily-life experience. 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 home is regarded as a fundamental base from which people’s daily lives commence. A significant body of literature features this subject (for example: Case, 1996; Despres, 1991; Mallett, 2004; Moore, 2002; Pennartz, 1981; Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff, 1983; Sixsmith, 1986; Somerville, 1997). However, the relationship between home and household is highly problematic and ideologically laden (Mallett, 2004). According to Giddens, in high modernity, kinship and family no longer automatically imply the social, material, and place-bound anchoring of an individual’s life. For a growing number of people, place has become less significant as an external referent for the individual life span. Where one lives is a matter of personal choice and connected to one’s life planning (Giddens, 1991). Other authors have suggested that traditional dualistic 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 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 gaining ground (Heller, 1995; Mechlenborg, 2005).

New experiences of home are related to the increased mobility of households and of individual household members. Several studies report on the influence of household migration on the experience of a sense of home (Cuba & Hummon, 1993; Feldman, 1990; Gustafson, 2001). Other studies focus on forms of migration with multiple residences or home places as a result, such as is the case with students’ transitional experiences of the parental home and the student home (Kenyon, 1999) and the home experiences of retired seasonal migrants (sunbirds and snowbirds) (McHugh, Hogan & Happel, 1995). Furthermore, there is a growing body of literature that looks into the multiple home experiences of international migrants who are embedded in expatriate networks or other transnational communities in both localities (see for instance: Ahmed, 1999; Boyd, 1989). In new experiences of home, a distinction has to be drawn between the residences as geographically fixed locations, and feeling at home, which can occur in different places and in that sense might be regarded as mobile. Questions arise about how those who have multiple residences experience home. In this respect, commuter couples form a special case. A characteristic of the dual-residence situation of commuter couples is that only one of the partners – not the entire household – routinely divides time between two residences. To date, this dual-residence situation has not been the focus of attention in studies on the meaning of home.

The aim of this paper is to provide insight into the sense of home that relates to the dual-residence situation of a commuter partnership. Data for the research was drawn from individual in-depth interviews with both partners in 30 commuter couples. At least one of the residences is located in the Netherlands. In this paper, we focus on the commuting partner’s experience of home, particularly in the commuter residence, the residential location near work. The following question is addressed. What is the meaning of the commuter residence for the commuting partner in terms of home? After an elaboration of the theoretical concepts concerning the meaning of home, we describe the methods applied and the respondents’ characteristics. A description of experiences with the commuter residence follows and a typology is presented of the meanings that commuting partners attach to this residence. The paper ends with a conclusion, reflection and avenues for further research.

### 3.2 Conceptualizing the meaning of home

In the 1970s, Hayward described the concept of *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
Commuting partners, dual residences and the meaning of home

(Hayward, 1975). More recently, Moore (2002) 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 not only in terms of its parts, but also as a whole, keeping in mind that when focusing on one part it is possible to lose sight of the whole concept itself. Furthermore, as has been pointed out by Sixsmith (1986), home is not a single place for each person; it can be a number of places simultaneously. The meaning connected to the commuter residence may be established through comparing the dwelling near the workplace with the communal residence.

3.2.1 Meaning as a continuum: space, place and home

The concept of home needs clarification as a meaning that can be attached to the commuter residence by the commuting partner. The question addressed is, whether the commuter residence can be a home to the respondents and, should it not be experienced as a home, what other meanings this residence might have. Stokols (1990) points out that it is possible to have a purely instrumental or functional perspective on a residence. An instrumental perspective views physical settings as tools for human activity without the attachment of emotional values to that setting. In such situations, the specific commuter residence might be experienced not as a place of emotional significance, but as a purely functional space near the workplace, which can easily be replaced by another residence with the same functional qualities. Taylor (1999) points out that we ask of a place: ‘What is its meaning?’ But we ask of a space: ‘What is its function?’ This distinction is derived from Tuan (1977), who describes a space as being more abstract than a place. Tuan further contends that when a space feels thoroughly familiar, it has become a place. Additionally, home is described as an intimate place. Taylor (1999) points out that home viewed as intimate is a stage further than thoroughly familiar, which makes home a particularly special place. The same location can be experienced as a home, a place or a space depending on whose or which perspective is involved. Over time, spaces can be transformed into places and places into homes.

In our analysis of the meaning of the commuter residence, we interpret space, place, and home as a, continuum of levels of experience of the commuter residence, scaled from anonymous, purely functional or instrumental (space), through well-known, thoroughly familiar (place), to intimate or personal (home). By applying this continuum of levels of experience, we avoid the dichotomy of home versus not home and try to accommodate in-between experiences. Space, place and home are regarded as concepts to indicate different types of experiences that are not as intrinsically positively or negatively laden. The distinction drawn between space, place, and home should, therefore, not be confused with the degree of contentment that commuting partners have with their commuter residences.
3.2.2 Residence as a three-dimensional concept

The meanings that people attach to a residence manifest themselves in different ways and, therefore, must be related to a multi-dimensional concept (Kenyon, 1999; Moore, 2002; Sixsmith, 1986). We distinguish three mutually related dimensions of a residence through which residents actively construct meanings. Meaning can be constructed through arranging a material setting, through engaging in activities and through organizing a social life. The material dimension refers to the physical setting of the commuter residence. A residence itself and the material objects in it can have value for their practical use or as emotionally interpreted items (Mallett, 2004; Clapham, 2005). Personal objects and decorations can produce a sense of domesticity and can help transform a house into a familiar place or into a real home (Easthope, 2004).

The activity patterns dimension is important in the process of the production of domestic space, or the making of a home (Case, 1996; Rose, 2003). According to Dovey, the meaning of home is not achieved by mere passive presence in one’s house, but through a process of appropriation. This is rooted in a concerned action through which people appropriate aspects of their world as anchors of their self-identity (Dovey, 1985). Proshansky and colleagues (1983) point out that day-to-day activities are an important part of a person’s place identity, because they reflect the individual’s experiences in his or her environment. Through activities, the commuter residence can be made from a functional space into a familiar place or a home.

The social dimension consists of social interactions involving the family (partner and children) and people from outside the household, such as friends, neighbours and co-workers. The social dimension is perhaps the most widely recognized condition for experiencing a residence as a home. Home was traditionally regarded as a concept that automatically implied the presence of family life in the residence (Mallett, 2004). In commuter partnerships, the commuter residence is characterized by its main use by only one family member, not all members. This residence might, however, be a base for social contacts with persons from outside the household, such as flatmates and co-workers. Organizing a social life at the commuter residence might add to a sense of home.

Finally, it is important to note that we distinguish these three dimensions only in an analytical sense. As Moore (2002) points out, we should take care not to lose sight of the concept of home as a whole when studying its different dimensions.

3.2.3 Cyclical and linear time

In addition to the three dimensions through which meaning of a residence is constructed, the role of time is important in understanding and explaining the meanings attached to one residence or the other (Mallett, 2004; Moore, 2002; Taylor, 2003). First, there are cyclical elements of time. A commuting partner divides his or her time between the commuter residence
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and a residence in which the (majority of) time together with the family or partner is spent (the communal residence). For the commuting partner, the routinely travelling between two residences can be viewed as a form of cyclical migration (other manifestations are seasonal migration and recurrent mobility between primary and vacation homes) (McHugh et al., 1995; Smith, 1989). The recurrent mobility of the commuting partner between the two residences has a distinct temporal element of repetition. McHugh and Mings (1996) conceptualize this repetition over time as a circle of migration that consists of three recurrent phases: separation, experience and return. In commuter partnerships, these cyclical elements of time are manifest in the commuting rhythm; one of the main characteristics of the commuter residence is that it is only used for part of the time. Daily routines are another feature of cyclical time elements; routines can differ quite markedly between the two residential locations. The cyclical elements of time also relate to Hägerstrand’s (1970) time-geography, which explains that individuals have to travel within their daily activity space in order to fulfil all kinds of obligations, for instance, for work and family care. As a result, people cover paths in time and geographical space that are referred to as day-paths and week-paths. In the case of commuting partners, the (bi-)weekly paths are divided over two separated activity prisms.

Second, there are linear elements of time. For most commuter couples, the idea that the commuter partnership involves a temporary situation of dual-residency is a fundamental part of the choice for a commuter partnership (Van der Klis, 2008; Van der Klis & Mulder, 2008). This idea may have a significant influence on how the commuter residence is experienced and on the efforts made to construct ‘a home away from home’. The actual period over which a residence is used also influences the meaning of a residence and this meaning can change over time (Mallett, 2004; Moore, 2002; Taylor, 1999; Taylor, 2003).

To summarize our analytical approach, we distinguish between three different dimensions of the commuter residence (material, activity patterns, and social dimension) and explore the meanings of these dimensions in terms of experiences in a continuum of space, place and home. Furthermore, we keep in mind that both cyclical and linear elements of time influence meanings attached to the commuter residence.

3.3 Commuter partnerships studied

3.3.1 Context of the Netherlands

Some developments in the socio-spatial, economic, and demographic context of post-industrial countries such as the Netherlands indicate that more couples than ever before might find combining their jobs with one shared residence difficult. The greatest concentration of employment opportunities is to be found in the Randstad region, the western part of the Netherlands, with the larger cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague (Dieleman...
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& Musterd, 1992). Notwithstanding the high density of infrastructure, including motorways, Schiphol International Airport and (inter)national rail connections, the Netherlands and particularly the Randstad is struggling with mobility problems like traffic jams and train delays. This reduces the accessibility of work places and increases the necessity of a strategic residential location (Karsten, 2007; Van Ham, Hooimeijer & Mulder, 2001). Living in the north of the Netherlands (which is around 180 km from Amsterdam) or in the south (at about 210 km from Amsterdam) and working in the Randstad cannot be combined on a daily basis.

The housing market in the Randstad is highly pressured; prices are high and the available space per property is relatively low compared with other parts of the country. Households searching for rural residential styles or affordable housing are often forced to look for property outside the Randstad. Combining an affordable or rural residence with good employment in the Randstad may lead some families to start a commuter partnership.

The participation of women on the labour market has been growing in the Netherlands for some time, slowly catching up with the levels in other European countries. The Netherlands is now one of the countries in Europe with the highest participation of women on the labour market, although the majority of women work part-time (Portegijs & Keuzenkamp, 2008; Portegijs, Hermans & Lalta, 2006).

The economy of the Netherlands is characterized by a large service sector. This has a strong international orientation, which leads to both the attraction and sending out of highly skilled expatriate workers (Musterd, Bontje & Ostendorf, 2006). So far, (international) commuter partnerships do not occur in great numbers in the Netherlands (Van der Klis & Mulder, 2008). However, the combination of individuals working outside the Netherlands as expatriates and the growth in female labour-market participation have set the conditions for this number to grow in the future.

3.3.2 Respondent selection and characteristics

Thirty commuter couples took part in this study. Owing to the absence of databases through which commuter partnerships could be located and selected, we searched for respondents through networking, advertising, approaching companies, and the snowball method. We used purposive sampling (also known as theoretical sampling) for the selection of respondents (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Mason, 1996). We applied several selection criteria. Couples had to have been living together for some time before starting the commuter partnership. In their dual-residence situation, at least one of their dwellings should be in the Netherlands. Partners should spend at least three nights a week in separate locations and the travel time between the two locations should be well above a maximum time for daily commuting (2 h or more per trip). A couple’s basic intention of living in one shared home (in contrast with Living-Apart-Together couples, who prefer separate residences in any event) had to be unambiguous. Couples for whom the time spent
away from the communal residence was inherent in the type of profession, and those whose situation makes it practically impossible for partner and children to come along, such as oilrig workers, truck drivers, travelling salespeople, and navy employees, were also excluded from the study.

We applied several criteria in the construction of our sample to achieve some basic variation in respondents’ characteristics (see Table 1 for an overview of respondent characteristics). We sought a variety in the types of occupation, couples with and without dependent children in the household and different age groups of respondents. The type and setting of the dwelling that functions as the commuter residence was not part of the selection and differentiating criteria so that couples with all kinds of financial budgets and residential solutions could be included.

**Table 1** | Characteristics of commuter couples (n = 30).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age categories of respondents</td>
<td>Under 30 years</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30–40 years</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40–55 years</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55+ years</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent children in family</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation of commuting partner</td>
<td>Research/education</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Politics/government/NGO</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commercial/business</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-employed/independent practitioner</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of commuter residence*</td>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other country (mostly in Europe)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Note: the family home is located in the Netherlands in all 30 cases.

Half the couples who took part in this study commute between two locations within the Netherlands. In most instances, one of the residences is situated in the Randstad area and the other residence outside this concentrated part of the country. The other half of the commuter partnerships have a communal residence in the Netherlands and a commuter residence abroad, mainly in countries surrounding the Netherlands such as the United Kingdom, Belgium, and Germany, but also Switzerland. One couple has a commuter residence in Bolivia. Fifteen couples have dependent children, who live in the communal residence permanently with either the mother (twelve cases) or the father (three cases) while the other parent stays over at the commuter residence during workdays. Most couples who took part in the study are highly skilled and employed in professional or managerial positions.
The selected couples all took part in semi-structured in-depth interviews that were conducted on the basis of a topic list. The interviews looked into experiences of the communal and commuter residence, partnership, family, work, leisure time and other daily activities. Each partner was interviewed individually to allow each respondent to reflect on their experiences from a personal angle (Valentine, 1999). All interviews were carried out by the same interviewer in order to enhance the comparability of the interview material. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 min. All interviews were tape-recorded, with the respondents’ consent, and fully transcribed. Respondents were preferably interviewed in the residential location they use during workdays. Some commuting partners were interviewed at their communal residence or at another location (such as the work location or a restaurant).

3.3.3 Commuter residences and communal residences

We started our initial analysis with looking into the interviews of both partners and their experiences with both residences. The initial analysis, which served as a pilot analysis for this paper, showed that the communal residence was by most commuting partners undisputedly regarded as their primary home, serving as a residential anchor in their home experiences. Furthermore, the pilot analysis made clear that it was the commuting partner who gives meaning to the commuter residence. In most cases, the non-commuting partner has very limited personal experience with the commuter residence. Based on the pilot analysis, this paper concentrates on those respondents who actually experience a dual-residence situation as part of the usual routines, the commuting partners, and on experiences in and around the commuter residences. For understanding the experiences of the commuter residence, it is important, however, to have some basic understanding of the (differences in) characteristics of the commuter residence and the communal residence of the respondents.¹

For most respondents, the communal residence in which they lived before the start of their commuter partnership is one of the two dwellings. Usually, the commuting partner acquires a second residence in which to stay during workdays. For some couples, however, neither dwelling was ever a full-time communal residence for the couple.

If the commuter residences are compared with the communal dwellings, some striking contrasts emerge (see Table 2). The housing tenure, for example, shows that although only 4 of all 30 commuter residences are owner occupied, for the communal residences 23 of all 30 are owner occupied. This difference can be explained by the idea, held by many respondents, that the commuter partnership is of a temporary nature. If one only expects to need a residence for a relatively short period of time, renting often seems the best option (Helderman, Mulder & Van Ham, 2004; Clapham, 2005). The four respondents who stayed in an owner occupied commuter residence pointed out that they chose this type of tenure because it was financially more attractive than renting or because they had not been able to find a suitable rental unit.
Table 2  | Characteristics of commuter residences and communal residences (n = 30).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing tenure communal residence</td>
<td>Owner occupied</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rental</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing tenure commuter residence</td>
<td>Owner occupied</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rental</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwelling type and location communal residence</td>
<td>Single family house (suburban/rural)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Single family apartment (urban)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One/two person apartment (urban)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwelling type commuter residence</td>
<td>Single family (rural)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apartment (urban)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One room (shared dwelling) (urban)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hotel (urban)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stay with family/friend (urban)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commuting partner</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commuting rhythm</td>
<td>Weekends at communal residence</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other (bi-weekly or monthly frequency)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past duration of commuter partnership</td>
<td>0–1 years</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1–5 years</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5–10 years</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10+ years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another contrast is found in the types and settings of the dwellings. In 24 cases, communal residences are single-family dwellings. Eighteen of those are terraced, semi-detached or detached houses in suburban or rural settings and six are single-family units located in inner-city settings. The remaining six communal residences are apartments suitable for two person households located in urban settings. In contrast, nineteen commuter residences are one or two person apartments situated in dense urban settings. Other commuters stay with friends or family, live in lodgings or stay in a hotel, also in urban locations. The high incidence of urban settings is explained by the good accessibility by public transport of urban work locations and by the large availability of small units in urban settings. In only three cases is the commuter residence a single-family dwelling situated in a rural setting (one of these three dwellings is owner occupied). Some commuting partners pointed out that they value specific location qualities of the commuter location. London, for instance, was attractive to some respondents for its metropolitan atmosphere and Switzerland was appreciated for the outdoor...
opportunities the Alps provide. In general, however, it was first and foremost the job location and accessibility that determined the commuter residence location.

When we look at how the commuter residence was obtained, we see that occasionally the employer provides the commuter residence, but in general commuters search autonomously for a place to stay. Some couples have selected the commuter residence together, because it helps them to make the dual-residence situation a shared experience. Just as often, the partner who is going to use the commuter residence searches alone.

Twenty-two couples meet each other every weekend. In general, the commuting partner travels to the communal residence on Thursday or Friday evenings. The return trip to the commuter residence is made on Sunday afternoons or Monday mornings. Eight couples have other commuting rhythms, such as spending every second weekend together or spending one out of several months together (the non-European commuter). Some regularly shorten the period of being apart by making an extra trip to the communal dwelling during weekdays whenever their job allows. Twenty-one commuting partners are male and nine are female. In seven cases, the partner who lives in the communal residence visits the commuter residence regularly, usually about one out of every four to six weekends. In all other cases, the couples spend hardly any time together in the commuter residence. The duration of the commuter partnerships at the time of the interviews ranged between a little under 1 year to more than 10 years.

3.3.4 Method of analysis of the three dimensions

In the analysis, the focus is on the three dimensions through which the meaning of a residence is constructed (material, activity patterns, social). For the purpose of the analysis, we developed a matrix with the levels of experience of the commuter residence in terms of the continuum: space, place, home. A continuum of levels of experience is applied so as to take into account the fact that individual experiences often do not fit neatly into prescribed categories. This situation is visualized in a matrix (see Table 3).

Table 3 | Example of matrix of three dimensions (material, activity patterns, social) and continuum of meanings (space, place, home) for respondent X.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent X</th>
<th>Space</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Material</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dimension</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>patterns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dimension</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dimension</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As part of our analysis, for each respondent a matrix was completed with information retrieved from the interview. On the basis of the experiences the respondent described, the levels of experience of space, place or home was determined for each of the three dimensions. A typology was formulated regarding the meanings attached to the commuter residences through comparison of the matrices generated for each respondent. This typology helps us to identify different types of meaning connected to commuting residences by commuting partners. It is an empirically based typology meant to explore and understand diversity and differences among our respondents; not to derive generalizations.

3.4 Results: three dimensions explored

This section of the paper features the experiences of the commuting partners with the commuter residence. Through the material dimension, the activity patterns dimension, and the social dimension, the levels of experience in terms of space, place, and home that are attached to the commuter residence by the commuting partner are explored.

3.4.1 Material dimension

To realize a commuter partnership, the commuting partner needs a commuter residence: a suitable place to stay during working days. Within the material dimension we paid attention to both practical aspects of the material setting and personalization through material objects. The stories of the respondents showed that these practical aspects of the material dimension, such as the location, the type of residence and practical facilities in the residence, were not key in the meanings attached to the commuter residence. In order to understand the experience of the material dimension, the personalization through material objects is central.

When we look at the personalization, there are six male respondents who view their commuter residence as a space, a functional roof over their heads, during the days they spend at the location near work. These men all stay in hotels or furnished apartments to which they have made no personal changes whatsoever. Mark’s story shows how this functionalist material setting is a form of intentional distancing from the commuter residence and synchronically a way to emphasize that the family residence is the real home. Mark says: “I don’t want to make it too comfortable over here (...) I emphatically want to look upon this dwelling as a spot to put my tired head to rest.”, but he also remarks: “Sometimes, after dinner, when I go to this attic room with a bunk bed - I’m almost fifty years old - then I feel a lot of pity for myself... then I miss the cosiness and the comfort of my family home.”

The other commuting partners, including all nine female commuting partners, did make an effort to personalize their dwellings. These respondents put up decorations and photographs of family members or took superfluous furnishings from their communal residences. There are 13
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respondents for whom the efforts to create a comfortable and personal living environment paid off in an experience of feeling at home in their commuter dwelling. Simon, for example, has a rented a detached house in Switzerland at a scenic location not far from Geneva. After carefully selecting a location and dwelling, he decorated it with furnishings from the communal residence in the Netherlands. He really wanted to create a second home away from home: “We have our own furnishings. It is our second house so to speak. Not a vacation house, a regular house for living in.” Simon’s choice of words in speaking about the commuter residence in terms of ‘we’ shows that he shares this experience with his family. We further look into this shared experience of Simon in the section on the social dimension.

Eleven other respondents who have also consciously personalized their dwelling, remark that after all the effort their commuter residence can still not compete with their communal dwelling in terms comfort and intimacy. To them the material setting of the commuter residence represents an experience of a familiar place, not more than that. A 57-year-old respondent who has large apartments at both the commuter location and the communal location, remarks: “I have many personal items in The Hague ... I collect glass works, I have part of my collection in Brussels, but my real things, those are in The Hague ... the most beautiful glass works are in The Hague” (Kevin). Another example is provided by Irene, who quite recently became a commuting partner after her husband had been the commuter for years. She says: “At first I thought I would stay over here [in the commuter residence] much more ... but gradually more and more things go to Rotterdam ... this weekend I will be taking my flower vases, because the flowers are usually there and not here.”

3.4.2 Activity patterns dimension

The activity patterns dimension looks into the ways in which respondents spend their time while they stay at the location near the workplace. How respondents spend time, for instance on work, their household, and leisure, tells us something about how that location is experienced. Where the respondents spend time, inside their dwelling or outside, gives us information about the meanings attached to this location.

For six male respondents whose activity patterns reflect an experience of space, working late at the office is the major time consumer outside office hours. These respondents reported that working extra hours is an escape. If they had not been in a commuter partnership, they would not make such long hours at work. Not spending time at the residence is a form of intentional distancing from the commuter residence for these respondents. This distancing through activity patterns is also reflected in the minimizing of daily household activities at the commuter residence. These respondents have breakfast at their residence, but do not shop for it at the commuter location. Several respondents reported that they buy their breakfast items during the weekends at the communal residence and bring these things with them in their suitcases. For dinner, these respondents usually have meals that take no, or hardly any, preparation time, such as going out to a restau-
rant, or having microwave dinners, takeaway food or ‘Tupperware’ meals (leftovers from the communal residence provided by their partner). Leisure at the commuter residence is nothing more than watching some television, reading newspapers or an occasional walk. Tom is a 30-year-old bank employee who works in London city and returns to Amsterdam every weekend. He exemplifies this type of activity pattern. Int.: “How many hours do you work on average in a week?” Resp.: “I usually work from eight until seven, well lunch doesn’t comprise of much, I guess at least fifty hours, but usually more than that.” Int.: “And how was that before you started your job in the UK?” Resp.: “Oh… much less. The Netherlands was more like from nine to six. (...) Well, in London I have few engagements in the evenings on weekdays, so there is not a lot to go home to, that makes it easier to stay in late at the office.” (...) Int.: “How do you spend your evenings in London?” Resp.: “Usually I don’t do much, so I go home, then I go to the supermarket, buy something to eat, prepare dinner, hang out in front of the TV and then usually I go to bed quite early.” (...) Int.: “About the grocery shopping...” Resp.: “That depends, because I sometimes have a hot meal at work (...) and in other instances it happens that I stay at work until late and don’t feel like grocery shopping (...) I guess that about twice a week I slide something into the microwave, once a week I get take out food, McDonalds or something like that, and then another day a week something like bread with soup or whatever, just very simple. And if you take into account that I get on the plane on Friday evening, there are four nights a week that you have to come up with something to eat.”

At the other side of the spectrum of meanings attached to the activity patterns, there are seven respondents, mostly women, who have created an experience of home at the commuter residence. Their stories show differentiated activity patterns that are similar to what they were in a single residence situation. They do not work overtime. They cook their own meals, which they eat either alone or with friends. The evenings are regularly filled with outdoor leisure activities such as going to hobby clubs, sporting with co-workers or going out. Fiona is one of these commuting partners; she is a 49-year-old computer expert who works for an insurance company. She shares her apartment with a co-worker, Sandra, who also has a commuter partnership for a few nights a week. Fiona remarks: “I cook every evening. If Sandra is also here, we cook in turns, after consulting with each other. (...) At five o’clock, or a quarter-past five, I go home from work, then I first watch ‘The Bold and the Beautiful’, I’m hooked on the Bold... and I drink a glass of sherry. (...) Then at six, when the Bold is finished, I figure out what I’ll have for dinner. I either have something out of the freezer or I stop at the supermarket when I come back from the sports club, then I take a shower and prepare dinner.”

For 17 respondents the experiences of the activity patterns at the commuter residence result in a place meaning. Among these respondents, we found two sets of activity patterns, which show resemblances with each of the two above mentioned activity patterns of space and home. The difference in meaning attached to the same sort of activity pattern shows that meaning not only relates to the factual behaviour, but also to a persons experience of the behaviour. For 10 of these respondents, their activity patterns were much the same as those of the respondents whose experience of the commuter residence can be categorized as space. These respondents spend
lots of time on working overtime, either at the office or at their commuter dwelling and they minimize household activities and leisure but they rather experience their activity pattern at their commuter residence in terms of place. Theo is an example. He works in a town near London and stays in a hotel during his working days. He makes long hours at work and has dinner and spends his evenings in his hotel. A co-worker from Germany also stays in that hotel. Theo is interviewed at his communal home in Amsterdam. He remarks: “The days at work are much longer then planned. That is also due to the fact that you don’t have your usual routines over there, that makes it easier to make long hours (...) on an average evening I return from work around nine. Then I grab a bite, usually in the hotel, then around ten we have a drink in the bar, then we play some pool until 11 or 12, and then to bed. (...) Yes, the hotel has sort of become home... where you know the employees well. Like your regular pub. Not really fantastic, but still a bit like home. (...) Here in Amsterdam it is really home, even though I also call it home over there. But this is the real home; over there it is a temporary accommodation (...) Now, you actually live here and over there you have a sort of sub-life that is also somewhat pleasurable, well, somewhat pleasurable sounds quite negative, but to do some nice things over there... However, your main life is still over here.”

For the other seven respondents whose stories about their activity pattern in the commuter residence reflect an experience of place, the actual activity pattern is similar to that of the respondents whose activity pattern has been categorized as home. They make time to prepare fresh meals and they also engage in various leisure activities such as sports. However, the attempt to make a home through daily activities does not result in a corresponding meaning of home. An explanation of this lack of feeling at home is that these respondents keep comparing their activity patterns in the commuter partnership situation with what they were used to before, when they were still in a single residence situation. This attitude makes respondents constantly aware that their activities have altered, which leaves them with an experience of a home life that has lost in quality, or that is bifurcated. Peter, for example, works for an electronics company which moved to the other side of the country. His wife and two sons stayed behind in their original family home in the city of Groningen. Near his new workplace, Peter now rents a room in a student house. Peter doesn’t work overtime, he regularly returns to his room at noon to have his lunch there. In the evenings he plays his guitar, which he enjoys doing at the commuter location because his sons and wife aren't there to comment on his music. Sometimes he has dinner or drinks with his flatmates, which he also enjoys. Peter remarks about his experience: “I live in this room with reasonable enjoyment, it is a bit like going back to my student years”, but Peter also says: “let me put it like this, the feeling ever remains that Groningen is my home”. What is striking in all the stories about activity patterns is the cyclical time element of the commuting rhythm, which dictates a significant part of the activity pattern of the commuting partner. The commuting rhythm specifically puts time constraints on leisure activities that require presence on several days in the week. Quite a few respondents reported that it was
almost impossible to become a member of a club, such as a sports team or a choir. These activities often require presence during a weekday, when training or rehearsals take place, and also in the weekends when games and performances are scheduled. What also stands out in the stories is that most commuting partners minimize the time spent on personal care and the household, which shows that they do not regard the commuter residence as a location in which all aspects of home life have to be experienced. A significant number of commuting partners feel that they live in two separate worlds, both of which have their own routines and are subject to severe time constraints. These have to be fitted into the time spent at one location or the other. Irene explains this issue very clearly. She is able to compare her routines as the commuting partner with those of the partner who stays at the communal residence, because she has been in both roles. Her husband used to do the weekly commuting, but now she does. She explains: “Over here I do a minimal amount of grocery shopping, one-person meals, some fruit, some milk. ... I used to cook more. Now you buy things that stay fresh for this week, you know that you’ll have to buy new things next week.”

3.4.3 Social dimension
The social dimension of the experience of the commuter residence looks into the social contacts and networks of respondents at the commuter location. For three respondents, the social dimension reflects a meaning of home, for eleven others a meaning of place and for sixteen respondents a meaning of space. The social dimension makes a distinction between contacts of respondents with family (partner and children) and friendly contacts with co-workers, flatmates, friends, neighbours and other acquaintances. We will first look into the experiences related to family visits (or the lack thereof). We then go into the social experiences connected to friendly contacts at the commuter location.

In about a quarter of all cases does the family regularly visit the commuter residence. These visits are experienced in various ways by the commuting partners. For some, these visits actually lead to an experience of home at the commuter location. Simons’s quote, which was mentioned at the material dimension is a good example. With his choice of words: "We have our own furnishings. It is our second house..." [emphasis by authors], he points to the shared experience of himself and his wife and son at the commuter location. Other respondents reported, however, that having the family over for some of the time makes these respondents miss their family more whenever they are not present in the commuter residence. Kevin’s remarks about this experience are a striking contrast with Simon’s words. Kevin emphasizes the differences between his wife’s attitude and his own, when he says: “...Mary says all the time, she’ll probably say it to you [i.e. the interviewer], she says: ‘We live in Brussels, and We live in The Hague, that is what we’ve been saying from the start, that it should be like that, but it still is more like I live in Brussels, and We live in The Hague, that’s how I feel it. ... Mary comes over to visit me, that’s how it feels”.

In three quarters of all cases the family does not visit the commuter residence on a regular basis. Just a few of these respondents feel at home in the commuter residence despite the absence of their family. Rick, whose wife has a job at the other end of the country and lives there with their two teenage children, points out: “We are both independent people ... I really enjoy the four of us being together, but being on my own is something I enjoy too ... But I am very clearly part of the family.” For most respondents, however, the absence of the family leads to a hampered sense of home. The analysis further made clear that commuting partners with children do not have significantly more problems with being away at the commuter residence than do those who do not have children.

Apart from the family, the social dimension also looks into friendly contacts at the commuter location. Strikingly, two thirds of the respondents show no, or hardly any, initiative in making social contacts at their location near work. They do not want to shift the central focus of their social life away from the communal residence, which they consider their primary home. Some expect a second centre of social ties to compete with their primary social life near the communal residence and want to avoid this complication. Jeffrey, who was interviewed at his communal dwelling, 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 would make you a bit schizophrenic. I have my city over here, most of my friends and family and I play music a lot. If you start building something like that over there, then it will start to compete in other ways too. Then you will start to lead two separate lives, so that’s something you don’t do, but if you say OK, then I’ll only do my work over there, then it’s essentially quite a sober existence.” Others say that investing in a social life does not seem worth the effort. Linear elements of time explain this type of experience. Although the length of their stay at the commuter residence is well above a year already and is expected to continue for a substantial period of time, they view their commuter residence as a temporary arrangement, which they will leave behind in the foreseeable future. Kevin says: “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.” These stories point again to an attitude of intentional distancing. These commuting partners choose more or less consciously to avoid building a home in a social way at the location near work. By viewing their social life at the commuter residence as no more than a familiar place or a functional space, these respondents hope to avoid difficult emotional issues about where their home might be.

Only a third of the respondents do show some initiative in engaging in social activities. They have some personal contacts in sports clubs or volunteer clubs. For some, flatmates have an important social role. None of the respondents reported to have friendly contacts with neighbours at the commuter residence. Most friends at the commuter residence are co-workers. Fiona, who works for an insurance company, reports: “In Meppel I also have three girlfriends; they are co-workers who live over there. I go with them to the cinema, out to dinner, the theatre, to sport activities. We also go on vacation together. And there is also a group of
men from work with whom I regularly go into town on Thursday evenings.” Meeting with friends and co-workers on a regular basis does provide a sense of home to some of these commuting partners but for most, it does not fully compensate for not having the family around; the commuter residence is socially just a familiar place.

To summarize, the analysis of the three dimensions shows some remarkable variation in the meanings that are attached by the respondents to each dimension (see Table 4). The results show that the material dimension is most often used to create a sense of home. The activity patterns are primarily focused on the job and the social dimension is found to be the most difficult way of experiencing a home, mainly due to the absence of family members at this location.

Table 4  | Number of respondents with the experience of space, place or home for each dimension.

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<tr>
<td>Material dimension</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity patterns</td>
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<td>Social dimension</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
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3.5 Meanings connected to commuter residences: a typology

The analysis has demonstrated that the respondents’ experiences of the commuter residences are of a diverse nature. Based on each respondent’s story, experiences ranging in the continuum of space, place, and home can be related to each of the three dimensions and are shown schematically in a matrix. From this analysis, two main categories of experiences at the commuter residence can be distinguished (see Table 5, p. 72 and Table 6, p. 75). In the first category, which consists of three types, respondents have attached the same meaning to every one of the three dimensions. In the second category that distinguishes two types, different meanings are attached to each of the three dimensions. All five types (in total) are further illustrated with the story of a respondent belonging to that particular type.

3.5.1 Consistent meanings across dimensions

Twenty of the thirty respondents can be placed in the first category. Here, the meanings connected to the commuter residence by the respondents are consistently similar for the three dimensions. For a large number of com
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Table 5 | Meanings connected to commuter residence by commuting partners: consistent meanings across all dimensions.

Table 5a Experience of place Meaning of place for all three dimensions (11 respondents).

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Table 5b Experience of home Meaning of home for all three dimensions (3 respondents).

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Table 5c Experience of place Meaning of space for all three dimensions (6 respondents)

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Commuting partners (11 respondents), the stories show a consistent picture of a meaning of a familiar place (Table 5a, Experience of place). For some of these respondents the meaning of place is a positive experience; for others, it is negative. For example, Irene has been living in a commuter partnership for years. Recently, Irene and her partner David changed commuting roles; now Irene lives in a commuter residence in the city that used to locate the couple’s communal residence. Irene selected the commuter apartment they bought on her own, without David’s input. Doing things without her partner is a consequence of this style of living for Irene. Irene has lived in the city and
neighbourhood of the commuter residence for many years, and she does not mind spending weekdays without David around. However, how she actually experiences the commuter residence is not as she had envisioned it. She had hoped that both dwellings would be homes for her: “We now say, OK, Rotterdam is home, and in the meantime this is also home during the week and because of that we’ll both feel a lot better.” But then Irene goes on to describe how gradually more items, like her flower vases, are moved away from the commuter residence to the communal dwelling in Rotterdam. About this process she says: “In the beginning it wasn’t like that at all, I had difficulty with that: I also want to stay here and my job is also here, so I also want to keep my home over here a bit, but now it’s fine by me. … I notice that it’s becoming more practical over here. … In a certain respect I’ve received an extra place for myself … and then the material belongings over here might be mine, but my heart is in Rotterdam. And it doesn’t matter if my things are over there too.” Irene’s story makes clear that, in spite of her initial hopes of experiencing both residences as homes, in reality it does not work that way for her. The communal dwelling that she shares with her partner is her home, while the commuter residence is experienced as a thoroughly familiar place with personal characteristics.

Only three respondents experience the commuter residence as a home for all three dimensions (Table 5b, Experience of home). In each of these cases, the commuter residence is experienced as a full second home, equivalent to the communal home. These commuting partners feel at home in their material setting, created satisfying daily routines, and developed a fulfilling social life. If the partner is not there, that is not felt to be an absence. Simon exemplifies these respondents. During the interview he proudly shows a stack of pictures of his commuter residence, a country house in Switzerland, and says: “I see Switzerland as my second fatherland. I feel at home there.” Simon has a diverse activity pattern and a wide social network. He cooks for himself, does the gardening, goes on outings in the region, and has many local social activities in which his wife and son are also involved. When Simon’s wife is not in Switzerland that does not make Simon feel lonely: “Some people can’t be without each other. A dyad. We don’t have that. You have to maintain your feelings for each other, but to know each and every day exactly what the other is doing, no, that’s not something we choose.”

For six respondents the experiences of the commuter residence must be categorized with the meaning of a functional space for all three dimensions (Table 5c, Experience of space). Intentional distancing explains for this overall meaning of space. These respondents experience the material setting as an instrumental housing necessity; their activity patterns are rather underdeveloped in comparison with those at the communal residence because in their point of view it is not practical to have extended activities in this location. Furthermore, they do not invest in social contacts at this location and their families have not visited the commuter residence more than once. John is an example. He is a 36-year-old engineer whose partner and two small children live in a village in a rural area. John looks at the commuter residence in a purely practical way. He rents a furnished room in the home
of an older couple. He has brought no personal items to his room at all. He has dinner at a company restaurant every evening and often goes back to the office afterwards. John explains: “I like to spend my time over here in an efficient way. ... not too many contacts because I want to concentrate on home. I feel that it would become a bit too confusing otherwise.” He adds: “My life is over there, my work is here, and no more than that. That’s how I feel.”

3.5.2 Varied meanings across dimensions

Ten of the thirty respondents can be assigned to a second category where the experiences of the commuter residence vary across the material, activity patterns, and social dimensions. Based on the stories of these respondents, this category is divided into two types.

In the first combination of meanings, with six respondents, the stories show a distinct shift in the meanings from home, through place to space. When looking at the material dimension, this residence is regarded as a home; from the standpoint of the activity patterns dimension, the experiences move toward the meaning of a place of some importance; experiences in the social dimension shift further away to the other side of the spectrum to a functional space (Table 6a, Shifting meanings). Amy is one of these respondents. She is a politician from the eastern part of the Netherlands who works in The Hague. About the material dimension Amy remarks: “I furnished it myself, partly with things that I got from friends, partly things that I bought new and then some things that we had leftover ourselves. I have made it real cosy, decorated it with lighting and candles, to create a homey feeling.” Amy doesn’t spend a lot of time in her apartment due to the long hours she spends at work. However, after one and a half years of using her apartment she has appropriated it as a familiar and important place: “When I’ve had a tough day at work, I feel like, I enjoy returning to my own flat, closing the door behind me and taking a shower. Having a place for myself that I’ve created.” The social dimension however, leaves Amy with an incomplete experience. The absence of her husband is hard for her at times: “The job is stressful and there are moments that I feel that I really wanted to go home to be able to talk to each other. At such moments I feel like: ‘Am I walking around The Hague on my own, being 45 years old, while I could have been at home with my husband’, that is hard.”

For four respondents, the material dimension and the activity patterns dimension both are classified as home. In contrast, the social dimension is experienced with a meaning of space (Table 6b, Missing the family). The stories of these respondents are highly similar to those of the respondents who attach a consistent meaning of home to the commuter residence (Table 5b). In one respect, however, the stories of these commuting partners are very different. When looking at the social dimension, especially regarding the partner and children, a clear lack of feeling at home comes forward. In that respect the meaning attached to the commuter residence can be typified as an impersonal space. Even though these respondents lead a full homelike life at the commuter residence, it is obviously incomplete to them because their family is not there to share their daily lives. Sue, for example, a university
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researcher, explains: “I feel as if I’ve built a social network here that Freddy is hardly a part of or involved in.” That is something she strongly regrets. She continues: “I find it a pity that you can’t share everything during the weekend. The togetherness of the relationship is grounded in the sharing of things that are important to me, and my research is an important part of my life, so it remains a kind of separateness of living.”

Table 6 | Meanings connected to commuter residence by commuting partners: varied meanings across the dimensions.

Table 6a  Shifting meanings Material (home), activity patterns (place) and social (space), (6 respondents).

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Table 6b  Missing the family Material and activity patterns (home), social (space), (4 respondents)

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3.6 Conclusion and reflection

The aim of this paper was to provide insight into the sense of home that relates to the dual-residence situation of a commuter partnership, and more specifically to the meaning of the commuter residence for the commuting partner. The analysis has shown that there is no unequivocal picture. Meanings attached to the commuter residences vary both among the 30 commuting partners, and for individual commuting partners among the three dimensions of the residence (material, activity patterns, and social) that were analysed. A typology of experiences was established, based on in-depth interviews with 30 commuting partners in the Netherlands. Although this typology cannot be claimed to be exhaustive, it does lead to the following conclusions.
The analysis shows that most commuting partners domesticate their commuter residence to some extent in a material way and through activities in and around this dwelling. The material dimension of the commuter residence is most often used to create a sense of home. This is probably also the easiest way to do so and it has no direct consequences for the social networks and the family at the communal residence. Constructing a sense of home through activities in and around the commuter residence is more complicated. Cyclical elements of time, which characterise the division of time between two residential locations, make it complicated to develop household and leisure rhythms. At the commuter residence, the scope of routines is limited through the absence during weekends or longer periods. For most commuting partners, the development of an experience of home at this residence is then hampered. However, even when there is a full investment in the material dimension and activity patterns dimension of the commuter residence, it turns out that this dwelling still does not automatically become a home. Creating a fulfilling social life is difficult for many commuter partners, not only because of cyclical weekly constraints. The absence of partner and children at the commuter residence is the most important factor explaining this. Remarkably, in most commuter partnerships the family hardly ever visits the commuter residence. For these families, the commuter residence barely exists, which makes it harder for the commuting partner to integrate life at the commuter residence with that at the family dwelling. When couples do regularly spend time together at the commuter residence, this does not automatically lead to feeling at home in this dwelling for every commuting partner. In addition, there is a striking gender-difference in the efforts that the respondents make to create a home away from home in their commuter residence. Most of the commuting women are active in ‘traditional’ female home-making activities and more so than the majority of the commuting men. This is a remarkable finding, especially because in prioritising their occupational careers the commuting women can be categorized as highly emancipated from traditional gender roles (Van der Klis & Mulder, 2008). It would be worth looking further into these seemingly contrasting gender-aspects in future research.

As reported at the start of this paper, Giddens (1991) suggests that, in the age of high modernity, place has lost part of its importance as an external referent for the life span of the individual. Others have added to that suggestion by implying that, whereas the concept of home is traditionally grounded in space, a new frame of experience of home grounded in time is gaining acceptance; home could even be a mobile concept that one could bring along to a set of places. Our findings show, however, that whereas a mobile concept of home might become more common for some people, this applies only to a very limited number of the commuting partners reported on in this paper. A common experience for commuting partners is a sense of living in two separate worlds: the world of work and the world of one’s private life. This distinction indicates that an experience of home is strongly related to
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the personal domain of the private life, whereas the work life is primarily regarded as a functional domain and as such not a determinant for a home experience.

Several factors add to the explanation why commuting partners don’t easily experience their second house, the commuter residence, as a second home. First of all, the grounds for having a second residence give an explanation. In the case of commuter partnerships, the rationale is to facilitate work obligations. In that respect, commuter partners distinguish themselves from ‘sunbirds’ and ‘snowbirds’ who migrate because of personal aspirations. Secondly, the existence and characteristics of the social life are found to be an important factor in turning a house into a home. For commuting partners life at the residence near work is not a priori socially embedded, both due to the absence of social networks, and because the commuting partner spends his or her time there without partner (and children). There is not such a thing as a ‘commuter community’ as is the case with expatriate families who are welcomed to live among (inter)national colleagues, or the case of international migrants who enter into transnational social networks of acquaintances and relatives from their birth country. In addition, commuter partners live per definition without an intimate social network: their partner and children. For most commuting partners, the home is clearly where the heart is, and the heart is in the family dwelling. Thirdly, linear elements of time explain further why the commuter residence is lived through much more as a functional dwelling than as a home. The commuting partners’ sense of home is hampered by expectations about the limited duration of the dual-residence situation. In this respect, they resemble many other ‘mobile’ households, but again the position of commuter partnerships is special because of their status of split-up family. Commuting partners do not want to threaten the value of the communal home and, therefore, maintain an emotional distance from the commuter residence. Fourthly, a time-geographical explanation for a hampered sense of home is found in cyclical routines. The great distances between the commuter residence and the communal residence lead to two separated activity prisms. The two residences are often located in two geographically very distinct environments such as an urban versus a suburban or rural environment. Bridging the gap between these two rather different worlds is difficult for many commuting partners. The experience of an ongoing circle of separation, experience and return is strong at the family dwelling and weak at the commuter residence; likely because the sense of social separation that is dominant when leaving the family dwelling but marginal when departing from the commuter residence.

The review of the literature shows that it is likely that more families will opt for a commuter partnership in the future. Our study suggests that, whereas more families are expected to experience periods of commuter partnerships in the future, the commuter partnership is not likely to become an equal alternative to the nuclear family in the long term. Being away from the togetherness of family life for part of the time in a routine way often leads
to a hampered rootedness in the dwelling near work. For many commuting partners the experience of home is still anchored in the location in which time together with the family is spent, where the material setting is shared by the family, and where the daily activity patterns are part of a collective and continuous experience. The dual-residence situation mostly does not lead to a dual home experience. What’s more, many commuting partners actively narrow the meaning of the commuter residence to a functional space or a familiar place. The commuter residence has significance in the context of the work life and for as long as the commuter partnership lasts.

This study opens up several avenues for further research. More research is required to test our typology on a larger scale. This will be possible when databases become available through which to locate commuter couples in a representative way and when the expected growth of commuter marriages in the Netherlands has taken place. Furthermore, the findings of this study may form a useful starting point for studying other categories of family members who live in separate and various locations, such as children of divorced parents who live with their mother part of the time and with their father another part of the time (Karsten & Mulder, 2007). Finally, comparative research into the home experiences of different categories of people who have two residences or home places can help us mine deeper into the factors that influence experiences of home. Our study provides suggestions for at least three factors that influence experiences of home: the grounds for having two home places, the social embeddedness of life at the both locations, and the impact of linear and cyclical time. Rationales for having multiple residences can be found in the personal sphere (as is the case for retirees who migrate seasonally between sunbelts and snowbelts), or in the functional sphere of work (as is the case for most transnational migrants). The social embeddedness of life at the different home locations is an important factor to analyze. Is life at each location shared with or without intimate family members, and is there a wider social community one belongs to at each location (as is the case in many transnational and expatriate communities)? Linear elements of time, the time horizons for being in a dual-residence situation can vary greatly between different categories of people with multiple residences. Cyclical time elements, the time-geographical distribution between both home places, impacts the experiences of home in several ways. This includes the material setting and geographical characteristics of both locations and the distribution of time and activity patterns over both places (for instance: weekly, seasonal or occasional returns). Broadening the research along these different lines will foster our insight into the meaning of home in situations of split-up and multi-residence households.

Notes
1. For our analysis of the experiences of the commuting partner with the commuter residence, we formulated three criteria to be able to distinguish between the communal residence and the commuter residence and to establish which person is the commuting partner. Some
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Couples fit to all three criteria, for other couples 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 contrast with the commuter residence, where they did not. The second criterion states that the communal residence is the family residence; the children live there or this residence is deliberately referred to 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) exclusively by the commuting partner. The third criterion requires the communal residence to be the place in which most of the time together is spent.

2. The interviews have been rendered anonymous to protect the privacy of the respondents.

References


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