Home(s), Mobility Patterns, and Identifications of Multi-local Sofia Residents

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This study focuses on Bulgarians who, due to factors such as work flexibilization and the COVID-19 pandemic, live in two (or more) places, exploring how their lifestyle notions and cultural interests shape the way they manage their social worlds and everyday lives. The aim of the research is to identify the respondents' characteristic patterns of dwelling, perceptions of home(s), and the relationship between these and their local and other territorial identifications.

▪ **Keywords**: notions of home, multi-locality, local identification, European identity, social ties, Bulgaria

Raziskava obravnava Bolgare, ki zaradi dejavnikov, kot sta fleksibilizacija dela in pandemija covida-19, živijo v dveh (ali več) krajih, ter razkriva, kako njihov življenjski slog in kulturni interesi oblikujejo upravljanje njihovih družbenih svetov in vsakdanjega življenja. Analiza opredeljuje značilne vzorce bivanja sogovornikov, njihovo dojemanje doma (domov) ter razmerje med njimi in njihovimi lokalnimi in drugimi teritorialnimi identifikacijami.

▪ **Ključne besede**: pomen doma, multilokal-nost, lokalna identifikacija, evropska identiteta, družbene vezi, Bolgarija

Introduction

Intensive rural-urban migration began in Bulgaria during the Socialist period (1944–1989), when villages near cities were populated with people who commuted to work in industry or other urban professional spheres. Urban-rural migration also occurred during those years and became particularly intensive in the 1970s and 1980s, when many urbanized villagers (often those of retirement age) built country houses (in Bulgarian: *vila*) to preserve their contact with nature or grow their own vegetables and fruits. They would spend weekends and holidays in these country houses, i.e., their second homes in their villages of origin or other houses near their urban homes (see Bokova, 2009: 11; Krasteva-Blagoeva, 2009: 25–26).

Later, from 2000 onwards, there was again a growing number of Bulgarians migrating or moving to villages (see website of National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria[1]). This trend was largely influenced by the containment measures imposed in Bulgaria due to the COVID-19 pandemic that began in the spring of 2020 (Pileva, Markov, 2021: 547; Gavrailov, 2022: 143). Many people bought properties in villages in order to spend

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[1]   https://www.nsi.bg/en (accessed 15.2.2023).

weekends, holidays, and times of crisis there. Others resettled for the lockdown periods in their previously acquired country homes, commuting to the city for shopping, health services, work, etc.

The focus of this study is on Bulgarians who usually live in two (or more) places in accordance with their lifestyle notions and cultural interests. It explores respondents' perceptions of their primary and secondary homes, their movement patterns (including mobility restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic), the ways they maintain their social ties when living multi-locally, and their self-identification in local, European, or other territorial terms.

The following study is an attempt to fill some of the research gaps in Bulgarian studies on the topic. The conception and meaning of house and home are rarely the focus of humanities and social science research in Bulgaria (Azarova, 2012; Bachvarova, 2012; Daynov, 2012; Popova, 2012, etc.). Studies on second homes and multiple dwellings are likewise not a very common subject (see Bokova, 2009; Krasteva-Blagoeva, 2009, 2012; Periklieva, 2022; Pileva, 2022; Pileva et al., 2023). By contrast, international literature on the home goes back a long way, offering important insights from various countries in the world regarding the origin and nature of second homes, their development, meaning, the patterns of living in and movement to them, the experience sought by their owners and others, etc. (see Wolfe, 1966; Coppock, 1977; Godbey, Bevins, 1987; Perkins, Thorns, 2001, 2006; Williams, McIntyre, 2001; Leonard et al., 2004; Müller, 2007; Duchêne-Lacroix, Maeder, 2013; Samanani, Lenhard, 2023; etc.).

Methodology and theoretical framework

The empirical data was gathered between February and March 2023. Semi-structured interviews with 10 multi-locals were conducted during this period. Most of the in-person interviews took place in one of the respondents' homes. Other respondents were interviewed online via Zoom meetings or responded to the researcher's questions asynchronously in a Viber chat. The collected data were reviewed through content analysis and enriched with quantitative information acquired from the framework of National Censuses or other national representative surveys. In all, two men and eight women of Bulgarian ethnic origin in the age range of 38–65 years were interviewed. Two of the respondents are of retirement age, so they do not have to commute to work. The others are of working age and have jobs in the capital. Two respondents are divorced and eight are married. All of them have children (of kindergarten, school, or student age), and two of them also have grandchildren who travel with them or visit their parents' homes.[2] The respondents

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[2]   In the cases of the divorced respondents, the secondary homes, visited also by their children and grandchildren, are not property of their ex-husbands.
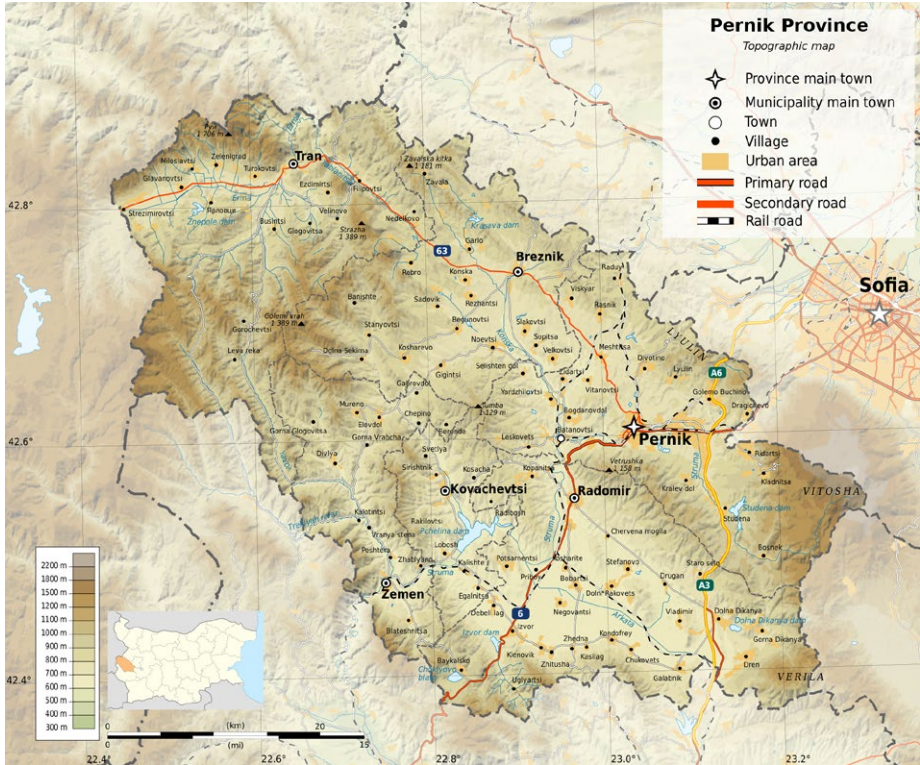
Map 1: Topographic map of the Pernik Province, Bulgaria. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bulgaria_Pernik_Province_topographic_map.svg (author: Ikonart, created: 29.8.2014; license: CC BY-SA 4.0)

of working age that have their workplace in Sofia could be categorized as belonging to the urban middle class. Recently, even more so after the COVID-19 pandemic, second homes – particularly the purchase of second homes – became economically unattainable for them and other average people due to increasing prices of housing and building materials compared to wages. People very often prefer to renovate their grandparents' countryside properties and use them as a country house. Thus, all interviewees, except for two respondents, have inherited their second homes; as a result, they did not have to spend much money on construction but just on refurbishing their houses. Their primary homes are in Sofia, and their second residences – except in the case of one family and a person who is now single (divorced) – are situated in villages or small cities in the region of Pernik (Zemen, Vranya Stena, Gabrov Dol, Odranitsa).[3] The Pernik province is situated southwest of the Sofia province. Both regions are part of Western Bulgaria.

Houses as physical structures are essential for human existence, providing protection and security. The notion of home "emphasizes the subjective sense of being rooted

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[3] The village of Odranitsa is not marked on the map.

within the world" (Samanani, Lenhard, 2023: 2). Homes are "spatial anchor points of the life world" (Weichhart, 2009: 5) to which people can return and where they can carry on domestic activities free and undisturbed by the public climate. They are "key places of experience and identity" (Shurmer-Smith, Hannam, 1994: 32) where people can interact with family, friends, and relatives. They are also places – relatives' and other people's homes – where social and territorial attachments are developed as a consequence of regular visits.[4] In those cases, as well as among families possessing, visiting, or residing in two or more places, we observe a multi-local way of life in which the single places become "islands of an archipelago" (Duchêne-Lacroix, 2011).

The Bulgarian word for home, *dom*, is of Indo-European origin and has similar meanings in other languages. Depending on the historical time and the Bulgarian context, it can refer to a fireside, "house, shelter, accommodation, home, building, household, kin, homeland" (Daynov, 2012). In English, home can also mean "bricks and mortar, kinship, tradition, contentment, regional loyalty, duty, community, nationalism, return, aspiration" (Shurmer-Smith, Hannam, 1994: 30). Home is a space for the co-existence of family members and relatives who may belong to one, two or three generations, who have the right to possess it and the responsibility to manage it in accordance with their modern preferences and social rights (Popova, 2012).

Historically, until the beginning of the Socialist regime, for most Bulgarians, home meant a dwelling in a village (Nonchev, 2021).[5] These homes were often built by the owner or with the help of relatives and friends. They were places where people felt safe, comfortable, and able to express their individual identities. In the 1950s, however, more than half of the rural population was forced to move to cities and to live there in sheds, hostels, communal apartments, and apartment buildings. This led to a blurring of the idea of home as a house constructed by kinfolk or a neighborhood community (Daynov, 2012). In response, in the 1970s and even as late as the 1990s, some Bulgarians began to build country houses (ibid.) in extra-urban areas or in villages close to cities. Others returned to villages in the 1990s in order to establish private individual farms (Shishmanova, 2014: 93) after the passage of the Ownership and Use of Farmland Act of 1991, a phenomenon described as the "so-called 'optimistic mythology'"[6] (Kozhuharova-Zhivkova, 1996: 19–21; Periklieva, 2022: 91).

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[4] Attachment to a place is a multidimensional concept related to the individual, "a strong, long-lasting affective and identity bond that people develop in relation to a specific place" (Bernardo, Palma-Oliveira, 2013 in Sarman, Czarnecki, 2020: 211). It includes "bonds between people and place based on affection (emotion, feeling), cognition (thought, knowledge, belief), and practice (action, behaviour)" (Gustafson, 2006: 19).

[5] Statistical data show that in 1920, 80 % of the Bulgarian population lived in villages. A century later, in 2021, there were 1,838,441 such dwellers or 27 % of a total Bulgarian population of 6,838,937. https://infostat.nsi.bg/infostat/pages/reports/result.jsf?x_2=1868 (accessed 15.2.2023)

[6] Here, "optimistic mythology" is defined as the assumed massive urban-rural migration in Bulgaria of people who, after the abolition of state-cooperative ownership in agriculture, chose to return to live in the village. Even in the 1990s there had been evidence of an increasing urban-rural migration, shortly after which most people returned to the city in search of a better and easier sustenance (see Kozhuharova-Zhivkova, 1996: 48–49).

The owners of second homes can be divided into two groups regarding the cultivation of gardens. The first group includes (the above-mentioned) first – or second – generation rural-urban migrants who used to live in villages before the collectivization of agriculture and intensified industrialization in the 1950s (Kalinova, Baeva, 2002: 105). They are now renovating or building new homes on their inherited or acquired land. These individuals are typically of pre-retirement or retirement age and miss life in the village. They may cultivate farmland to reconnect with nature or earn money from agricultural production. The second group – to which most of the respondents belong – has increased in the last 10-13 years.[7] It includes people who grew up in the city and had some (or no) experience of living in a village (most often during their childhood), who now prefer living in a natural eco-friendly environment and have chosen to build or renovate a home in a rural area. These individuals are typically working-age people (young families without children or with small children): IT specialists, designers, authors, translators, online teachers, owners of small family businesses, or other people who can work from home. They may be interested in an eco-friendly lifestyle or simply enjoy the beauty and calmness of nature. Regardless of the group they belong to, these individuals try to create a comfortable life in both their primary and secondary homes. Significant in this regard for the developing of a sense of home are also material objects – especially kitchen and other furniture, domestic appliances, knickknacks, etc. – that are often present and used in both homes. Thus, in some cases, the second home may become not just a secondary or additional dwelling but a summer version of the primary home.

Following the definition of other researchers, the 'home' is seen in the present study as a set of everyday practices and daily routines with social interaction (Samanani, Lenhard, 2023: 9). Homes are "the major site of family social relations and kinship interaction, a place to carry out the everyday routines of family life" (Werner, 1988; Goldscheider, Waite, 1991; Winstanley, 2001), as a place where interpersonal relationships are developed and maintained. In this regard, a 'primary' home is "the house or apartment in which household members reside for much of the time in the course of their daily lives, largely dictated by employment and family commitments" (Perkins, Thorns, 2006: 67). The 'second home' is a property (such as a house, cottage, cabin, or condominium) that is located in a rural or extra-urban setting and is used more or less sporadically by a household for recreation or other activities which may sometimes include work and employment (Coppock, 1977: 3; Perkins, Thorns, 2006: 68; Lewicka, 2011). In this context, multi-local living is defined as "the practice of living in several habitual places at least once a year" (Duchêne-Lacroix, 2014).

The sense of belonging through identification plays an important role in how a person perceives a property as a home. According to Weichhart (1990), humans have a natural need to identify themselves in a spatial way, and this identification provides

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[7] See Mitev, 2019; Slavova, 2019: 41.

continuity and safety. As territorial beings (Soja, 1971: 19–20), people need to feel connected to a place and often refer to houses, gardens, and neighborhoods as 'home'. However, these places are not perceived as fixed constructions but as constantly changing mental states, reflecting the experiences of everyday life of the people who live there. Ina-Maria Greverus refers to people's natural need to live in a space and to identify with a given territory. She argues that this is how humans construct their "human territoriality" (Greverus, 1972).

People construct their territorial identity on the basis of interpersonal relations, a sense of belonging to and social acceptance by the local community, and the adoption of cultural norms and behavior patterns. These community cultural practices, which are shared perceptions of how people routinely behave in a culture (Frese, 2015: 1327), construct a kind of open system designed by the experiences and the everyday life of people (Roemhild, 1998: 17). This system plays a central role in maintaining and strengthening personal self-images. People identify culturally and socially at different levels. Celebrations of holidays provide opportunities for social identifications in the framework of the family or the neighborhood and are (more or less) local in character. Regional identification is observed when people use a specific regional dialect to communicate or observe regional holiday traditions (rituals, cuisine, etc.). Regarding national identity – in cases, for example, of international sporting events – people compete as representatives of their nation and are carriers of national identity. Due to the ability to feel connected with others on the local, regional, national, and international (European, cosmopolitan) levels, people construct (and deconstruct) identifications at different levels through their feelings of belonging to local communities, nation-states, etc., leading in some cases to a multi-level territorial identification (see Berg, 2017: 23–24).[8]

In the context of multi-local living, people may identify with more than one place, more than one home, regardless of the distance between them. Lawler (1992) indicates two possibilities regarding the strength of identification with different places. The first possibility is that identification will be "strongest towards the lowest, or closest, level – for example, one's home town, gradually weakening with distance" (Berg, 2017: 25). The second possibility is that the strength of identification depends on which levels "possess the resources and power to provide for a citizen's wellbeing. Thus, individuals are expected to feel most strongly attached to a higher level, such as a state, if it is responsible for their wellbeing" (Berg, 2017: 25). The sociologist Heiner Treinen points out the emotional aspect of place-relatedness (*Ortsbezogenheit*), arguing that this feeling is determined by and closely connected with the established social relationships in that local community (relatives, friends, acquaintances) (Treinen, 1965: 69).[9]

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[8]   In this regard, it is possible for a person to feel unattached, to feel that they belong to a local community, a state, to the European community, or to have a feeling of belonging to all levels equally.

[9]   Despite an abundance of relevant literature on the topic within the fields of ethnology and anthropology, the concepts of the above cited geographical authors are chosen as they best express the author's perspective.

Social networks provide channels for the dissemination of messages, ideas, resources, knowledge, and information (Crossley et al., 2015: 3). In the time of modern high technology, personal (but also group) social networks with whom one communicates include persons contacted face-to-face in everyday life (at home, at work, in the place of residence), by telephone, or, increasingly, via online interaction channels such as Facebook, Viber, Google, and WhatsApp. The respondents' social networks are relevant to the purpose of this research insofar as they can influence one's perceptions of home, sense of belonging, and attachment to a given place.

Home(s), patterns of movement, identification(s)

Most of the respondents in this study define home in social terms, as a place where family members can balance their lives and feel togetherness:

> *I can't easily say where my home is. I love Sofia because I grew up there, went to school, have worked and lived there for many years. Now I live here. I think I feel at home in both places; but, when I settle down in one place, I soon miss the other and feel like I should go back there again. Currently, though, I think I feel at ease here because my ailing daughter feels very well here, and that makes me content, too.* (Matanova, 2023h)

> *My hometown of Breznik is my home because I grew up there, my parents are there, and the house where I lived during childhood is there. It's one thing to live somewhere where you could be asked to leave at any moment. When I'm in Breznik, I feel like I'm home. In Sofia, I feel lonelier because I don't have any relatives there. They're far away, and I can't react immediately in an emergency situation.* (Matanova, 2023c)

> *I experience it as a home because my closest people are there.* (Matanova, 2023d)

> *My home is where my family is.* (Matanova, 2023f)

> *I think of it as my husband's parents' house. We have the second floor of the house there. In Sofia, I definitely don't have a place to identify with as we don't own property there.* (Matanova, 2023b, female)

One respondent's definition of home as a place where she could be herself corresponds to the statement that "remoteness and immersion in nature promotes a sense

of escape from these modern systems and restores feelings of self-reliance and control over one's own schedule" (Williams, Patten, 2006: 37): *"My home is the house in Vranya Stena, where I can relax and 'recharge my batteries' so that I can go back to Sofia, where at times I feel totally exhausted"* (Matanova, 2023e).

The definition of a home as primary or secondary is sometimes determined by the respondents' social engagements, responsibilities, and plans:

> *We try to spend more time in Viden village so that we can be close to my mother and father.* […] *We feel good there, and that is where we feel most at ease. We relax there.* (Matanova, 2023b, male)

> *It's a very difficult question. We've decided to live primarily in Sofia during the next ten years until our children graduate from school.* (Matanova, 2023g)

> *Now that I am retired, my primary home is in the village. In previous years, I had to go back to Sofia at the beginning of the school year. I had a lot of work as an associate professor at the university and had to stay in Sofia. After my professional commitments were reduced, I started spending more time in the village and only drove to Sofia on the days when I had lectures.* (Matanova, 2023a)

In other cases, the most relevant feature for the personal definition of home is the feeling of comfort:

> *My home in Viden is the 'mothership'. We feel best there, even though my parents live on the first floor and sometimes it's more difficult.* (Matanova, 2023b, male)

> *When I return to the house in Gabrov Dol, I do many more things because it's calmer there and more isolated.* […] *And when people come over it's a holiday, wonderful. In Sofia it's more stressful, and in the village it's a pleasure.* (Matanova, 2023a)

> *The house in Odranitsa village is my second home, a hundred percent. I like to decorate, and I like that I can design the apartment one way, and the village house another way, so that I appreciate both. In Odranitsa, my challenge is to make the old look cool.* (Matanova, 2023g)

According to Perkins and Thorns (2006), some people very clearly distinguish between their primary and second homes. They spend a great deal of time in their primary

home and prefer, when possible, to go to their isolated second home for the weekend or for longer periods in the summer: "*My place is here in the village of Vranya Stena, not in Sofia. My home is the house in the hills of the village. I think that is because there are no people there and it is very quiet*" (Matanova, 2023e).

The evident motive in this case is the feeling of 'mental cleansing' provided by an escape to the alternative place (Williams, Patten, 2006: 36), the notion of a simpler life, somehow different from life in the primary home. Thus, rural life can be seen as a response to the disadvantages of urban living, as a search for a site where "life is lived differently", or as an "escape from modern life ... to seek refuge in nature" (Williams, Kaltenborn, 1999: 222; Sarman, Czarnecki, 2020: 209).

Others prefer that their second home should have many of the comforts of their primary home[10] and, if possible, be located in a more urban-like setting: i.e., a place where many people have second homes. Examples of the third type of preference – people who use their homes to combine recreation with work and have a television set and internet there – can be found in the answers of some respondents: *"We have a house in a village with good internet coverage and all the basic facilities we need for normal living there. We use it as a country house – as a place for rest through work therapy"* (Matanova, 2023g). *"I associate my second home with rest. I work, but physically. I do some house work, garden work"* (Matanova, 2023d).

Multi-local living gives the opportunity "to feel 'at home' in more than one place" (Quinn, 2004). Primary and second homes can complement and reinforce one another (McIntyre et al., 2006), as shown by the respondents in this study. They integrate their life-worlds in both homes through family traditions, shared experiences, and meanings linked to both places. This enriches their lives by giving them opportunities to visit two locations (like islands in an archipelago). This is probably due to the fact that second homes provide "aspects or dimensions of lifestyle that are not offered in the primary home or 'ordinary' life" (Bjerke et al., 2006: 88).

For example, one respondent said:

> *I would say that a man could have more [than one] homes, in the town and in the village.* (Matanova, 2023g)

Another respondent shared:

> *I feel rather enriched that I have a place where I can disappear, where I can hide myself from the majority of people and be with those who are my dearest ones.* (Matanova, 2023e)

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[10] In fact, as other researchers point out, "almost everything associated with the primary home today can be found in the second home" (Sarman, Czarnecki, 2020: 210).

Other respondents said they combine their lives in both homes. They live predominantly in one place but also spend time in the other. This allows them to stay connected with their family and friends in both places:

> *I rather combine them. I live predominantly in Sofia and stay in Breznik for shorter periods. But I don't feel divided. […] I have my family and friends there, but I also have my friends and fellow students here.* (Matanova, 2023c)

> *In Sofia I have the feeling of a working environment. I experience my second home as a rest from professional strains. In other words, each of the places gives me a special feeling.* (Matanova, 2023d)

> *Certainly, I feel enriched living in two places. It's somewhat a question of character and inner structure of life. I don't live badly in Sofia, but my heart is there, in the village. I find it difficult to always travel from one place to the other, because I waste a lot of time driving.* (Matanova, 2023a)

These examples confirm the observations of other researchers that relationships between residents and their homes are "significantly influenced by the circumstances of the individuals and households involved" (Perkins, Thorns, 2006: 68).

Second homes provide a place for family togetherness and regular gatherings. Individual family members' activities are not so segmented and spatially dispersed as life in the main location of residence. This helps them to preserve festive traditions and to thereby transmit cultural knowledge and cultural knowing, especially when people of several generations celebrate together. Thus, following Bourdieu (see Atkinson, 2016), houses are "important sites for learning embodied habits and internalising specific values" (Samanani, Lenhard, 2023: 9). Sometimes such collective celebrations help these people to "forge a shared commitment to a place in what for many is otherwise experienced as rootless modern life" (Williams, Patten, 2006: 40).

> *I go there to spend holidays with my relatives. I was there for Christmas and New Year's Eve. I go there for Easter. […] When possible we travel also for the town holiday as well.* (Matanova, 2023d)

> *I like the folk traditions. I visit different events connected with the local culture and traditions: exhibitions, town holidays, events with traditional singing and dances. I go there because I feel connected culturally with the region.* (Matanova, 2023c)

Multi-local living can provide a sense of continuity of identity as well as a sense of place through cultural and territorial identification with an emotional home. This is evident in the case of the respondent who inherited a house from his grandfather and, wishing to preserve family memories, promised not to sell it: *"Before Grandpa passed away, he said to me, man-to-man, 'If you can't come, sell it so it doesn't fall into ruin'. He had invested his whole life in it, and I promised him that I would take care of it and maintain it for as long as I could"* (Matanova, 2023f). Since his grandfather's death, he (together with his family) has spent weekends, holidays, and vacations there and has maintained and upgraded the property with necessary modern utilities (internet, additional small upgrades, etc.).

If we refer to the mobility patterns of the interviewed multi-locals, they include commuting between the places where they live. They are determined by their individual and family needs and not by their economic income, as none of the respondents mentioned that they had difficulties in commuting because of low income or lack of money.

Multi-local people often belong to the group of in-betweeners who, regardless of their individual specificities, have in common "the maintenance of multi-layered, evolving and sustainable connection over time with the urban environment" (Pileva et al., 2023) and the rural setting. In the present study, all the respondents are not everyday commuters, meaning that most of them live predominantly in one of the places and (by using their own vehicles) drive to the other for shopping, healthcare, work, etc. In contrast to the retired respondents, who prefer to spend more time at one of their places, the working-age multi-local interviewees commute more often between the places.

> *In Gabrov Dol there is a shop but only for durable goods. I drive to Breznik 12 km away to shop once a week.* (Matanova, 2023c)

> *The biggest problem is that you can't buy any food in the village because there's no shop there. And you have to bring everything with you. So, not only is it stressful to pack up your clothes and bring them back, but you also have to clean the apartment and the fridge. And then, three days later, before you leave you have to clean another house and another fridge.* (Matanova, 2023g)

The drive time between the two homes can vary depending on the location. In some cases, it can be as short as 15 minutes, but in others it can be as long as 90 minutes, or even longer in winter conditions. This can be difficult, especially for families with small children, as there are often no educational institutions in rural areas: *"The biggest problem is the school. We can work at a distance but there's no school for the children here. The nearest one is 30 km away. In winter it is hard to drive so far every day, having in mind the roads in this region in Bulgaria"* (Matanova, 2023f).

Multi-locality requires the well-planned organization of more than one household and good management of each household member's duties. It can also be a matter of self-organization and control, as one respondent noted:

> *In general, I get nervous about the chaos of not knowing where you live, always being with your suitcases and this switching of realities. They are two different realities. I get tired of travelling. In Sofia my job requires me to look decent and like a businesswoman. And in the village, I am very different. The problem is that I actually like both but I'd prefer the transition to be smoother.* (Matanova, 2023g)

All family respondents mentioned that they help each other with raising the children, but not in traditional male and female roles. For example, one respondent said:

> *As I often say, that place has saved my marriage because it has made me realize that the rural life teaches us what in the past was considered a woman's and a man's role, which generally incites me to rebel, because men can also wash the dishes, given that we both work during the week. However, when we are in the village, I am very thankful that I am not the one to chop wood or weld with a gas torch. I want to wash dishes and cook.* (Matanova, 2023g)

Respondents also share that they see the capital city as a place for recreation. They are glad to be able to visit cultural events in Sofia: *"Regarding culture, when I lived predominantly in my now second home, I often came to Sofia to visit an exhibition, a concert, a children's entertainment center, etc."* (Matanova, 2023c). However, with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, many things changed. Urban entertainments continued in a virtual setting (in the form of online concerts, literary evenings, virtual cinema rooms, etc.), and many people moved to their second homes for the early months of the pandemic. A respondent shared: *"I escaped from Sofia the first day, when crossing points were set up"* (Matanova, 2023a).

Schools continued functioning in online form, through virtual lessons. This aggravated the fulfilment of the daily tasks of mothers who, besides being housewives, also had to help their children with schooling. On the other hand, living in their rural homes, they were able to go outside in the yard or for a walk in nature. They only drove to Sofia for work, to obtain documents, or for other tasks:

> *The beginning of the pandemic found us here, and we lived for three months with our best man [marriage witness] here. And we lived very well. It's then that we realized what it's like to live outside the city not*

just for the weekends. Of course there were difficulties, we worked from a home office. We saw life from a different point of view and we all decided that we wouldn't return to live in Sofia. Unfortunately, we still live there predominantly. When the measures changed, the children had to go back to school and we moved back to Sofia again. (Matanova, 2023f)

Another respondent shared:

We planned to go to our second home and, accidentally, we took our cat with us and had to stay there for two months. For many the pandemic was a time of fear, but for us it was a great time. We were all together, among relatives. We kept our mother far from the virus and went shopping for her, and we were with her during that difficult period.[11] […] *For me, it was an unexpected two-month vacation.* (Matanova, 2023d)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, second homes and holiday homes became primary homes, alternative workplaces, and a means of escape from the difficulties of urban living under the pandemic restrictions (Gallent, 2020). However, one respondent shared that she had continued to be a commuter even then:

It was always the same: Sofia – Zemen, Zemen – Sofia. […] *The first two-three months [the national lockdown period], I would drive very often between the places as I had to work there and as my mother has an illness for which she had to have constant medical examinations there. And she insisted on living in Zemen because the apartment makes her feel like she's in a match box. I got permission from the doctor so that I could drive her for chemotherapies to Sofia and back to Zemen.* (Matanova, 2023e)

In other words, especially in a crisis, multi-local dwellers organize their lifestyle in a way that enables them to make the most of both locations by combining work commitments with raising children. They use all the benefits and amenities of the urban environment and enjoy the tranquility and freedom provided by the rural space.

Multi-local people's social networks include relatives, friends, neighbors, acquaintances in all their residential locations. Owing to modern technology and the means for fast communication, interaction with people happens not only face-to-face but also online. All respondents, regardless of their age and current place of residence, manage to communicate with members of their social networks by using mobile devices and

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[11] The father of the respondent had died shortly before the beginning of the pandemic.

online platforms enabling them, even during the pandemic and the imposed social distancing, to stay in contact with relatives, colleagues, classmates living elsewhere:

> *When I'm at the primary home, I call my classmates and friends who live in the secondary place and vice versa; when I'm there, I call the others who live in Sofia.* (Matanova, 2023d)

> *I stay in contact with my friends at the other place. Telephones are made to connect people. For example, our neighbours here, when they depart from Sofia, call and ask us if we need anything as we have no shops here in the village.* (Matanova, 2023h)

> *During the pandemic I used group video-chats to talk with friends in Sofia.* (Matanova, 2023c)

All the multi-locals mention there is at least one other person like them in their network:

> *Yes, I have a friend living in two places. We talk a lot because our current way of life is similar. We both have similar location problems – now you are here, then you are there. We call each other and she often visits me, because she has a jeep and can drive on the worse but shorter road between hers and my village.* (Matanova, 2023a)

> *Yes, definitely. We share the experience. In the summer we very often visit friends at their second residences, or we get together at home.* (Matanova, 2023h)

> *We don't have many friends who are multi-locals. Actually, we know only each other's families.* (Matanova, 2023b, female)

Collaboration between neighbours is typically very important in Bulgarian society. Men used to help one another build houses, provide wood for the winter, and even distill *rakiya* (the traditional Bulgarian brandy). Nowadays, in urban and rural settings alike, it is common to have impromptu visits between neighbors for a cup of coffee during the day or a glass of *rakiya* or a bottle of beer in the evening. Neighbors often keep an eye on each other's houses while owners are away, and, in some cases, they even look after their neighbors' animals:

> *When we leave for Sofia, our cats go to our neighbors' cats in the yard. When our neighbors call us, the first thing they say is "First, you should*

know that all your cats are alive." This weekend we're going there because one of the cats, named Shotko, was run over by a car and now its leg is injured. (Matanova, 2023g)

Interactions between local and multi-local people take place at the store (if there is one) and at village or town fairs:

Every first Saturday of September they have a village fair, with organized music in the centre and visits to the houses. Every house gathers all the kinfolk living in Sofia, in Pernik or other places. And my neighbors invite me and my family to celebrate with them. (Matanova, 2023a)

Our family is part of the group of fair organizers. Now the fair takes place in the clearing in front of the monastery. Other locals help us too. In 2021 it was the best event of the year organized there: the weather was good, an orchestra played music, the food was tasty, the children played in the open air. (Matanova, 2023g)

The notion of dwelling is an inextricably bound triad of home, place, and identity. Through the experience of dwelling, a person develops over time a rooted sense of place and identity, a feeling of being "at home" and "in place" (McIntyre et al., 2006: 313–314). Hence, multi-locals can feel that they belong locally to more than one place. However, the place of living determines to a great extent their local identification (with the place) only if they have spent a longer period of time there, if it is their place of birth or a place connected with childhood memories:

I don't feel like I belong regionally to Sofia, neither to Kazanlak where we have our second home. I feel like a Sofia dweller, as I've spent my first 18 years here. (Matanova, 2023b, female)

When I came in 1991 it was a great stress for me that I might be robbed. But after that I got accustomed, and now I feel very well here. (Matanova, 2023d)

Even after six years spent in Sofia I don't feel like a Sofia dweller at all but rather that I am residing for a short time there. I hope that I'll return to Breznik one day. (Matanova, 2023c)

The following cited respondent feels she belongs to her native town, and she sees her local identity as a component of her regional identity:

I was born and grew up in Breznik in Graovo district. Now I feel I am of Graovo origin. It is a kind of rootedness that you cannot change. I like the dialect, the traditions, the rural gatherings of the kind there were in past times, the regional traditional costumes. (Matanova, 2023c)

Many of the respondents were born and grew up in Sofia, but in their answers they often share that they are Sofia dwellers in a cultural aspect or by their birthplace:

I'm a Sofia citizen since I was born [there]. In this sense, I would say that from quite a cultural perspective, since I can't escape from that, because it's a question of mentality, inner culture. I feel well there. And I like interacting with the people there. (Matanova, 2023a)

Some of them prefer not to identify with the capital city:

Although I was born in Sofia, I have never felt like a Sofia dweller because of the tendency of many incomers who say 'I'm a native-born citizen of Sofia.' I was born there because my parents lived there as a consequence of urbanization in the previous century. Half of my kin is from Radomir region, the other half from Tran region. (Matanova, 2023e)

I am a villager. Even though I was born in Sofia I prefer to be a Sofia citizen who became a villager and not vice versa… Lately, I prefer not to be a Sofia dweller, because Sofia has now nothing in common with the time of my childhood. (Matanova, 2023f)

I felt like a Sofia dweller many years ago. I liked Sofia. It was New York in Bulgaria. I was interested in the cultural life of the capital. Now, with two small children, it's impossible. […] Yes, I am a Sofia dweller because I was born here, but I'm not happy with the city. Actually, for me now, it's just traffic jams and air pollution. (Matanova, 2023g)

The respondents' European identity was explored through their opinion about the Europeanness of the capital. In their answers they mentioned different aspects:

In my opinion Sofia is definitely a European city […]. *It gives you everything: high culture, popular culture, everything you need. Hence, living in Sofia gives me the sense of being European.* (Matanova, 2023d)

I do not know what Europeanness includes. 'European' is a very broad concept. There are the new and the traditional European values... I like being a Bulgarian because – we had better not talk more about that – Bulgaria comes far before Europe. (Matanova, 2023f)

It's a European city because there are cultural events – concerts, theatres, bookstores, different clubs and communities for every guild. […] In comparison to other European capitals, it's a quiet one. We are at the periphery and it rescues us from many bad things which typical European capitals have. From a cultural and historical perspective, Bulgaria has always been a part of Europe, and that is why I feel European. For me it's a great fortune that we are part of the West and part of the East. (Matanova, 2023a)

The respondents' identification with different levels of identity – local, regional, national, and European – can vary depending on their personal experiences and perspectives. Some respondents said that they felt their European identity most strongly when they were outside of Europe, while others said that they did not feel European at all:

By European, some people understand a high standard, cleanliness and economic development. For us, though, it is completely, a hundred percent, a culturally European city. And we discover our European identity and belonging to the European tribe out in Africa. When you have been among non-Europeans, you then recognize your European identity very easily. (Matanova, 2023b, male)

Having been outside of Europe, you see that you are a product of Europe. (Matanova, 2023b, female)

I graduated in European studies and I have always felt European. As a student I was in a brigade in the US and, speaking in all sincerity, I felt European there the most, and was recognized and indicated as European. I think I feel East European. (Matanova, 2023g)

I don't feel European because I live in Bulgaria. I don't want to feel European because I don't share the contemporary European moral values, and don't like the contemporary European way of living. (Matanova, 2023e)

No, I do not feel European. For me it's just a label that differentiates people and makes them European or Balkan. I feel like a normal person of the Earth. (Matanova, 2023c)

The latter two quotes suggest that their identities are more closely aligned with their local or national identity than with their European identity – or they do not identify with any particular group or label and instead feel a sense of belonging to the world as a whole.

All the examples show that people's identities are complex and can be influenced by a variety of factors, such as their personal experiences, their education, and their cultural background. It is important to keep this in mind when considering how people move, interact, and identify at different levels with the world around them. Regarding their multi-local way of living and relationship with locally living persons, these could be summarized so that regardless of the category they belong to – the one of the newcomers or the one of descendants of local people – they are all welcome by most of the local inhabitants of these rural places who are glad to have co-dwellers at their places of living whom they could rely on for help when needed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research suggests that multi-local people of the region studied are urban or ex-urban dwellers, and their mobility patterns depend on their current life stage, family status, work commitments, and flexibility of employment.

Their sense of home is not fixed to a single location but is influenced by their personal specificities and their social, cultural, or territorial attachment to places. It is not the distance between locations but their individual character that determines their local identification at one or more levels. Furthermore, the power and resources of the place influence the strength and type of their attachment to one or more places. The research confirmed that people's identifications, constructions, and perceptions of home are influenced to a great extent by their current place of residence, the length of stay in a place, and their social relationships. From the author's (etic) point of view, they are carriers of multi-level identities resulting from their multi-local living since most of them expressed a sense of local, regional, and European identity. However, no one described themselves as such a carrier from their own (emic) point of view. Thus, they cannot be explicitly categorized as carriers of a multi-level identity.

The concept of multi-locality makes it possible to see primary and second residences as linked spaces that, together, constitute a home and a continuum of experience (Perkins, Thorns, 2006: 81) in which people's homes are not just physical places but also social and cultural spaces that are constantly evolving. The reality for many multi-local respondents is that their second homes are not simply a retreat from the pressure of modern urban life. Instead, they are often used as a base for work, leisure, and social interaction. Regarding the correlation of home, multi-locality living and local identification, it could be said that they have a "multi-centered lifestyle where work, home and play are separated in time and place, and meanings and identity are structured around

not one but several places, and the associated circulations among them" (McIntyre et al., 2006: 314). In this way, they construct multi-local identities according to their feeling of home based on the perceived convenience and the established social relationships in the local communities.

Acknowledgements

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Dom(ovi), vzorci mobilnosti in identifikacija(e): multilokalni prebivalci Sofije

Od časa socializma (1944–1989) veliko Bolgarov ob koncih tedna in v poletnih mesecih živi med mesti in vasmi. Pogosto so lastniki podeželskih hiš (*vila*) ali drugih sekundarnih bivališč v domačih vaseh (Bokova, 2009; Krasteva-Blagoeva, 2012). V zadnjih letih se je število posameznikov, parov in družin, ki v Bolgariji živijo na več lokacijah, povečalo zaradi številnih dejavnikov, kot so fleksibilizacija dela, izboljšana prometna infrastruktura in pandemija covid-19. Raziskava obravnava Bolgare, ki živijo v dveh ali več krajih (eden od njih je glavno mesto Sofija) in preučuje, kako ti posamezniki upravljajo svoje družbene svetove in vsakdanje življenje. Empirični podatki so bili zbrani s polstrukturiranimi sinhronimi intervjuji na spletu ali v osebnem stiku ter asinhronimi pogovori v klepetalnicah. Intervjuji so razkrivali vzorce vsakdanjega življenja in bivanja sogovornikov, njihovo dojemanje doma, njihove lokalne in evropske identifikacije ter načine, kako upravljajo svoje družbene vezi. Raziskava je pokazala, da občutek doma pri sogovornikih ni vezan na eno samo lokacijo, temveč nanj vplivajo

njihove osebne posebnosti ter družbena, kulturna ali teritorialna navezanost na kraje. Te identifikacije in dojemanje doma so v veliki meri odvisne od trenutnega kraja bivanja, dolžine bivanja v tem kraju in družbenih razmerij. Koncept multilokalnosti omogoča, da na primarna in sekundarna bivališča gledamo kot na povezane prostore, ki skupaj tvorijo dom in povezanost izkušenj (Perkins, Thorns, 2006: 81), ko domovi ljudi niso le fizični kraji, temveč tudi družbeni in kulturni prostori, ki se nenehno razvijajo. Razprava osvetljuje koncept doma (domov) za ljudi, ki živijo v več krajih, ter razmerje med multilokalnostjo in teritorialno identifikacijo.