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Spatial Mobility, Family Dynamics, and Housing Transitions

Michael Wagner · Clara H. Mulder

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Abstract This paper summarizes theoretical approaches and empirical research on the links between partnership and family dynamics on the one hand and spatial mobility and housing transitions on the other. Spatial mobility includes residential relocations and commuting. We consider three types of partnerships—living apart together, unmarried and married co-residential unions—and the transitions between them. We also consider separations and the death of a partner. Moreover, we pay attention to childbirth and its consequences for relocation decisions and housing. We differentiate spatial mobility according to distance and direction; housing transitions are considered mainly with respect to changes in ownership status and housing quality (e.g. size of the accommodation). In line with the adjustment perspective on spatial mobility, this paper demonstrates that spatial mobility is a means for individuals and households to adjust their housing situation and their place of residence to requirements of a changing household size and composition as well as to demands of the labor market. At the same time, spatial mobility seems to be more than a mere adjustment process of individuals or households: it is also a determinant of life course changes.

Keywords Residential mobility · Commuting · Partnership · Family · Life course · Housing

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Räumliche Mobilität, Familiendynamik und Wohnen

Zusammenfassung Dieser Artikel beschäftigt sich mit theoretischen Ansätzen und empirischen Befunden zu den Interdependenzen zwischen Partnerschaft und Familiendynamik einerseits und räumlicher Mobilität und dem Wohnverlauf andererseits. Räumliche Mobilität schließt dabei Wohnungswechsel und Pendelmobilität ein. Wir betrachten drei Partnerschaftstypen, *living apart together*, nichteheliches und eheliches Zusammenleben sowie die Übergänge zwischen diesen Lebensformen; ebenfalls beziehen wir die Trennung von Partnerschaften sowie den Tod eines Partners mit ein. Schließlich befassen wir uns mit der Geburt von Kindern und ihren Folgen für Mobilitätsentscheidungen und Wohnsituation. Bei der räumlichen Mobilität unterscheiden wir Distanz und Richtung. Im Hinblick auf den Wohnverlauf richten wir unser Augenmerk vor allem auf Veränderungen des Eigentümerstatus und der Wohnqualität (z. B. die Wohnungsgröße). In Übereinstimmung mit einer theoretischen Perspektive, die räumliche Mobilität als Anpassungsprozess ansieht, stellen wir fest, dass räumliche Mobilität ein Mittel für Individuen und Haushalte ist, ihre Wohnsituation und ihren Wohnort an die Erfordernisse einer sich verändernden Haushaltsgröße und -struktur sowie an die Erfordernisse des Arbeitsmarktes anzupassen. Gleichzeitig ist räumliche Mobilität aber mehr als ein bloßer Anpassungsprozess von Individuen und Haushalten: Sie ist auch eine Determinante von Veränderungen im Lebenslauf.

Schlüsselwörter Wohnmobilität · Pendelmobilität · Partnerschaft · Familie · Lebensverlauf · Wohnen

1 Introduction¹

One of the first studies on the links between family dynamics, housing and residential mobility that is still cited by many scholars is Rossi's "Why families move" published in 1955 (Rossi 1955). Rossi linked the occurrence of family events with the decision to move and where to move. A key finding of Rossi's study was that moving is a means for households to acquire an adequate housing situation to accommodate to a changing family or household structure. He found that space and tenure status in particular are most critical aspects of the housing situation: Families who live in large units and own a home are less in need to accommodate to a change of the composition of the family; in such families family events are less likely to evoke residential mobility (Rossi 1955, p. 227). Whereas Rossi's statement represents the classical adjustment perspective that considers residential moves to be dependent on events in

¹The research for this paper is part of the project 'Partner relationships, residential relocations and housing in the life course' (PartnerLife). Principal investigators: Clara H. Mulder (University of Groningen), Michael Wagner (University of Cologne) and Hill Kulu (University of Liverpool). Partnerlife is supported by a grant from the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO, grant no. 464-13-148), the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, grant no. WA1502/6-1) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC, grant no. ES/L01663X/1) in the Open Research Area Plus scheme.

the partnership and family domains, research since the 1980s started to extend this dependence to an interdependence perspective.

In 1990, about 35 years after Rossi's study was published, Courgeau stated in a review article: "There has been little research, however, on the extent to which migration is linked to family life cycle and career" (Courgeau 1990, p. 220). Courgeau started to fill this research gap by the implementation of the life course perspective, which requires a new type of data and new statistical methods. In the 1980s, several studies have been launched that initiated a breakthrough because they provided data bases that allowed a detailed analysis of life course events and of their interdependence, e.g. between residential relocations and family events in the life course. Prominent studies of that time were the German Life History Study (Mayer 2008) or the French survey "Biographie familiale, professionnelle et migratoire" (Courgeau 1985; Duchêne 1985). Also in the Netherlands, the 1980s CBS Housing Demand Surveys enabled researchers—even though they provided only very limited retrospective data—to examine the impact of life course factors on residential relocations (Mulder and Hooimeijer 1995).

These life course studies initiated a number of theoretical, methodological and statistical innovations that improved our understanding of how family dynamics, residential relocations and housing are interrelated. Our *theoretical understanding* has been advanced by the life course approach combined with decisions or behavioral theories (Huinink and Kohli 2014). The life course approach widens the research focus as it directs the attention to the timing of events as opposed to individual states, and to the whole time-span from birth to death as opposed to certain age groups. The analysis of partnership and family dynamics in general and of partnerships and families in early and late life became a focus of research interest. Why and where people move is not only triggered by the occurrence of life course events but it is also dependent on the preceding life course and anticipated future life events. *Methodological innovations* could be achieved because more and more longitudinal data became available in many countries, which allows comparative analyses. Rossi already highlighted in the preface of the second edition of "Why people move" the advantages of prospective longitudinal studies (Rossi 1980). Indeed, research of the last decade benefited very much from the availability of representative longitudinal data. Despite a long and very fruitful tradition to examine retrospective residence history data (Wagner 1990), the advantage of panel studies is not only the exact assessment of life events but also the inclusion of subjective variables which cannot be measured retrospectively in a reliable way. There are also a number of longitudinal studies that have a multi-actor design or are household-based. This means that not only one anchor person is interviewed but other family members, too, such as partners or children. In Europe, the British Household Panel Survey, the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study, the German Family Panel and the German Socio-Economic Panel Study are excellent examples of a multi-actor design. The application of *new statistical techniques* in the social sciences helped to disentangle causal relationships between life course events and a precise calculation of effect sizes, such as (multilevel) event history methods, multi-process models or sequence analysis.

In this article, we aim to provide some insight into theoretical conceptualizations and empirical results of recent research in the field of family dynamics, housing and

residential relocations. We consider two types of spatial mobility, namely residential relocations and commuting. We include commuting because it is likely to become more and more an alternative to residential relocations. People who do not perform residential relocations are not necessarily immobile. The key topics of this review include the investigation of: (1) interdependencies of residential relocations with new living arrangements, like living apart together (LAT) partnerships and co-residential partnerships, and with partnership and family dynamics in later life, such as divorce and widowhood; (2) housing transitions as a determinant and consequence of family events and residential relocations and (3) the associations between partnership or family dynamics and commuting.

We do not review research on the macro consequences of residential relocations for regions and areas, such as consequences for urbanization (Gerber 2011) or on local housing markets (Dieleman 2001; Pendakur and Young 2013). Moreover, we only include a small number of studies on commuting, namely those that link commuting with fertility or partnership stability. Lastly, we disregard research on international migration because the issue of ethnic differences in family dynamics is far beyond the scope of this paper. Our review complements an earlier review by Mulder (2013) that focused on the links between family dynamics and housing, but not specifically on housing transitions and residential relocations.

2 Definitions

2.1 Family dynamics

Rossi (1955) used the concept of the family life cycle to refer to a sequence of family life events that is strongly regulated by social norms. As life courses became less standardized and as a consequence of the deinstitutionalization of marriage, the family life cycle concept became obsolete. Instead, the term family dynamics refers to the sequence of partnership and family events that occur during the life course without assuming that there is a normative sequence of events that is widely prevalent in society. Such events are the formation and dissolution of partnerships, such as the start of a co-residential union or marriage and separation or divorce; the birth of children, and children leaving the parental home. These event sequences are embedded in the dynamic interplay of events in other life domains, among which we focus on the housing career and the sequence of residential relocations. Partnerships can be described according to quality and the partners' living arrangement. Living arrangements are characterized by certain types of institutionalization, such as living unmarried or married in a co-residential union. The partners' living arrangement also has a spatial dimension, as the partners may share or not share the same housing or household. The vast majority of studies in the field of family dynamics concentrate on the analysis of single transitions or state changes, like the transition from being unmarried to married or being childless to becoming a parent. Few studies model a whole sequence of three or more family events.

2.2 Housing and housing career

“Housing” is a multidimensional concept and scholars distinguish different housing aspects. In the preface of the second edition of Rossi’s study, published in 1980, he discusses the so-called “housing bundle” which is a set of housing characteristics, such as the physical structure (e.g. design, size), the costs, the surrounding local environment and neighborhood, and the symbolic meaning attached to the dwelling by others. He argues that the most important housing characteristic to understand mobility is housing tenure. Indeed, homeownership is not only the largest single investment people make, but also has many consequences for partnership, family development and even the life course of children (Boehm and Schlottmann 1999). The housing situation can also be described according to space, quality, safety and security and flexibility (Mulder 2013) or according to the type of housing (Feijten and van Ham 2007).

In a neutral sense, housing careers describe the trajectory of housing situations of a particular duration across the life course. The notion career also highlights that the housing situation provides a social status to the household members. Different housing situations can be rank-ordered according to price or quality and transitions between them constitute an up- or downgrading (e.g. Morrow-Jones and Wenning 2005). Clark et al. (2003) use the US Panel Study of Income Dynamics and using sequence analysis they demonstrate that in most cases housing careers have a relatively simple structure and show a socially upward trend.

2.3 Residential relocations

Residential relocations are a specific type of spatial mobility. Besides residential relocations, spatial mobility also comprises recurrent movements, like commuting between the place of residence and the workplace. We define residential relocation as a change of address for the primary place of residence (Lersch 2014a; Mulder and Hooimeijer 1999). Residential relocations can be described in different ways. First, they can be defined at different levels of aggregation. At the macro-level relocations are considered as a characteristic of regions or areas. At the meso-level residential relocations are conceptualized as moves of households. If the unit of analysis is the household, moving and staying are outcomes of a collective decision process. At the micro-level residential relocation is an action performed by individuals, with household characteristics being attributed to individuals.

A second dimension to distinguish different types of relocations is the distance of the move. Moves over short distances, which do not cross the boundaries of the daily activity space and are within a commuting distance, are denoted as *residential mobility*, whereas moves over longer distances are denoted as *migration* (Mulder and Hooimeijer 1999). The distance can be measured in kilometers or in travel time between the place of origin and the place of destination. Alternatively, short distance moves are often defined as intra-regional moves, whereas long distance moves are moves that cross regional boundaries and often involve a change of the local labor market. Short- and long-distance moves have been shown to be associated with different individual and household characteristics: short-distance moves tend to be related to

family and housing whereas long-distance moves are mostly related to work and education (e.g. Mulder and Hooimeijer 1999; Pendakur and Young 2013).

Third, residential relocations vary according to their direction. Often the places of origin and destination are categorized into cities of different sizes, suburbs or rural areas (Feijten and van Ham 2007). A similar categorization differentiates regions according to their population density. Also the analysis of return relocations that are directed to the region of origin helps to understand relocation patterns over the life course. For example, it is quite likely that individuals return to the region where they grew up because of persisting social ties to family members or friends that are still living there. A lack of social ties at the place of origin might also explain why a high mobility during childhood increases the likelihood of residential relocations in adulthood (Wagner 1989).

Fourth, residential relocations are not only part of a spatial but also a temporal process (Roseman 1971). The latter does not only refer to household members' time needed for decision and information-gathering processes. It also means that next to studying whether people move or where they move, it is also of interest to investigate when and how often they move. Looking at residential relocations as time-dependent individual movements through space leads to the concept of the residential career (or history) with the chronological age as time scale. This perspective is most important if one links residential relocations to events in other life domains, such as events in the partnership or the family life course.

2.4 Commuting

In contrast to residential relocation rates, commuting as a type of spatial mobility increased during the last decades (for an overview see Nisic and Abraham 2015, p. 681 ff.; Rüger et al. 2011; Pfaff 2012). If only one partner in dual career couples may profit from residential relocation or if families are confronted with high moving costs, commuting can serve as an alternative or substitute to residential relocation (e.g. Kalter 1994; Vandenbrande 2006; Abraham and Schönholzer 2012). Commuting is usually defined as the (daily or weekly) travel between the main place of residence and the working place. As nearly every employed person is a commuter, often certain threshold values are established, e.g. a travel time of at least 2 h per day (Limmer and Schneider 2008), 1 h one way (Kley 2012), or a distance of 30 km (Sandow 2014) or 50 km (Kalter 1994) one way. In Europe (EU25), most common are daily commuting times between 16 and 30 min (Vandenbrande 2006, p. 61). A study on the effects of commuting on life satisfaction in Germany revealed that for the majority of the employees the commuting distances are below 50 km, but mean distances increased from 1998 to 2009 for the majority of the employees (Pfaff 2014).

3 Interdependencies between partnership or family events, residential relocations and housing: theoretical perspectives

Why is it likely that family events affect the propensity or the need for a residential relocation? Apart from the trivial fact that some family events involve residential

relocations qua definition, like leaving home, the establishment of a co-residential union or the separation of a partnership, changes in household composition affect the likelihood of a relocation. Rossi (1955) was among the first scholars who related family events to residential mobility and housing and who applied survey methods to investigate residential mobility. Rossi assumed a simple model of a family life cycle. He characterized stages of the family life cycle by the age of the household members and changes in household size. He found that both variables are associated with the likelihood that household members want to move. Rossi concludes: “The findings of this study indicate the major function of mobility to be the process by which families adjust their housing to the housing needs that are generated by the shifts in family composition that accompany life cycle changes” (Rossi 1955, p. 9). This statement is in line with the more general conceptualization that residential mobility is an “instrumental goal” for generating wellbeing (Huinink et al. 2014, p. 3; Willekens 1991). But the main conclusion from Rossi’s statement is that family events are likely to induce residential mobility and a change of the housing situation. Some types of housing are better suited for families than others—Feijten and Mulder (2002) argue that families prefer ‘long-stay’ housing (single-family homes and owner-occupied homes).

Whereas Rossi’s approach represents the *adjustment perspective*, the *interdependency perspective* underlines that there are reciprocal relationships between family events, residential relocations and housing transitions. We distinguish a number of theoretical approaches to better understand the causal mechanism underlying these interdependencies.

The *life course approach* is likely to be the most commonly used theoretical approach to understand the relationship between family dynamics, housing career and residential relocations (Mulder and Hooimeijer 1999). There is a number of excellent reviews of this approach (e.g. Clark 2013; Huinink and Kohli 2014; Kulu and Milewski 2007). Huinink and Kohli (2014) summarize the principles of this approach as follows: Life courses are embedded in a multi-level structure—the societal level, a level of social relationships and individual development. They are characterized by a multidimensional structure of interrelated life domains. Life events are not only time-dependent but also interdependent. Life events occur in an age-related regular manner, insofar as the life course approach a very appropriate way to understand the age profile of spatial mobility (Bernard et al. 2014). Another feature of the life course approach that is also reflected in spatial mobility research (Coulter et al. 2013) is expressed by the notion of “linked lives”. This notion highlights that spatial mobility is related to other life course events and to the lives of others. Insofar one can argue that the life course approach emphasizes interdependencies or relationality between spatial mobility on the one hand, and life events or lives of other household or network members on the other.

As the life course approach is not a theory that explains behavior, representatives of the life course approach agree that it has to be complemented by a *decision or behavioral theory* at the micro-level. A useful procedure is to model spatial mobility as a decision process. This decision process can be structured by distinguishing different stages. Already Rossi (1955, p. 65 ff.) investigated the relationship between reported inclinations toward mobility and the actual mobility behavior. Another pos-

sibility is to distinguish between “considering”, “planning” and “realizing” spatial mobility (Huinink and Kohli 2014; Kalter 1997; Kley 2011). At the micro-level, individual actions and decisions aim to produce subjective well-being. This line of thinking opens a linkage between the objective structure of the life course and rational choice theories that focus on individual preferences, resources and the subjective evaluation of action opportunities. For a better understanding how household members decide whether to move or not and how they realize a particular housing situation the subjective expected utility theory (SEU) can be applied (Kalter 1997). Individuals evaluate their options and select the option that has the highest subjective utility. As individuals cannot fully anticipate all life changes that follow from their decision to stay or to move, *spatial mobility may have also unforeseen or unplanned consequences for family life or the housing situation*. Thus it is plausible that individuals who are more willing to take risks are also more likely to move between regions (Jaeger et al. 2010). Whereas macro factors affect the set of action alternatives or the opportunity structure (e.g. housing or labor markets), life course events are likely to affect the housing preferences, subjective place utilities and the considering or planning a residential relocation. In this way the life course approach can be combined with SEU theory (Kley 2011).

Typically, moving decisions are household decisions. If all household members would profit from a move the decision process can be modeled easily. However, household members frequently differ in their interests or preferences regarding relocations (Coulter et al. 2012). If the household moves although one partner does not prefer this move this partner is called a tied mover. If no move is undertaken although one partner prefers to move we have the case of a tied stayer (see Cooke 2013 for an overview). In such cases, bargaining theory provides an adequate theoretical framework. Household members have to bargain about the decision to change their place of residence and about the possible arrangements after the move. Bargaining is directed to the allocation of resources among household members, such as material (e.g. household income) and immaterial (e.g. love, emotional care) resources (Abraham et al. 2010). Relative bargaining power results from household members’ outside options. These options constitute a threat point: *a bargaining partner can threaten to leave the partnership if the other partner does not accept what he or she demands*.

A further mechanism that might be responsible for an effect of residential mobility on partnerships is that *residential relocations can be considered as stressful life events*. They require adaptation to a new environment, they are accompanied by a loss of social ties and residential relocations over long distances are often undertaken for the benefit of one partner, whereas the other partner may experience occupational disadvantages (see Boyle et al. 2008). Residential relocations that are undertaken to move into homeownership can also be accompanied by a lot of personal strain. Buying a home is often the largest financial transaction in the life course. Planning the construction of an own home which is sometimes realized in a self-made manner can also be stressful. Residential relocations per se, tied staying or moving and living in an adequate or substandard housing situation are likely to generate social stress (Boyle et al. 2008). For example, the notions of room stress or crowding usually refer to a housing situation where “a household’s need of space is not met by the available space in the dwelling” (Lersch 2014a, p. 49). Following social stress

theory stress exhausts coping resources, includes psychological stress and may result in social conflicts and unfavorable conflict behavior (Aneshensel 1992; Voydanoff and Kelly 1984). Even if residential relocations that improve the housing situation can also reduce stress e.g. due to crowding, it is likely that there are spill-over effects of residential relocations per se and of the housing situation on the quality of partnerships. This may lead to partnership conflicts and dissatisfaction, which, in turn, might destabilize the partnership.

However, one has to consider that the transition to homeownership is a special type of a residential relocation that can be seen as an investment increasing the capital of a partnership. As this capital becomes widely worthless in case of a separation, especially if the home is owned by both partners, the *transition to homeownership has a positive impact on partnership stability* (Brüderl and Kalter 2001).

As is the case with residential relocations, also commuting is likely to affect partnerships positively or negatively. Although commuting has positive effects on income (Pfaff 2014), it involves also financial and psychic costs and is time consuming (Stutzer and Frey 2008). This might have a negative effect on the quality of partnerships and family relations. But it has been argued that job-related commuting or living apart together could also positively affect partnerships as it might stimulate partnerships or strengthen the partners' sense of autonomy (Feldhaus and Schlegel 2013).

A further mechanism that is responsible for an impact of residential relocations on family events results from the fact that residential relocations change the social context of a household (e.g., moving from urban to rural areas). If one assumes that partner or marriage markets and opportunity structures to rear children are location-specific, residential relocations and even commuting over long distances can have an impact on partnership and family events. Huinink and Wagner (1989) developed a detailed theoretical scheme that includes a taxonomy of hypotheses on the effects of regional contexts and residential relocations on the birth of children (see also Hervitz 1985; Kulu and Washbrook 2014). The theoretical scheme encompasses a taxonomy of hypotheses that accounts for (regional) contextual effects, the social selectivity of residential relocations and adaptation processes of movers in the region of destination. For example, the adaptation thesis argues that people accommodate to the current regional opportunities, whereas the socialization thesis states that movers keep their behavioral pattern they realized in the region of origin also after the move (see also Feijten et al. 2008). A context selection takes place if the mover behaves in the region of origin in a way that is similar to the stayer in the region of destination. In addition, it is possible to include return relocations—moves to a place or a region where one lived before.

4 Spatial mobility, family events and housing transitions: empirical findings

In the following, we report the findings of recent empirical research on the interdependencies between spatial mobility, family events and housing transitions. The chapter is organized according to the order of the main events in the course of partnerships and families. We start with the event of leaving home, we then switch to

living apart together relationships and the transition of these relationships to co-residential unions. We continue with the events of marriage and childbirth and end with divorce and widowhood.

4.1 Leaving the parental home

In connection with other life course events, such as marriage and entry into the labor market, leaving home has traditionally been a marker of the transition to adulthood. Although the transition to adulthood has become more diverse (see Pailhé et al. 2014), leaving home is still a necessary and one of the most important steps towards a more self-determined life. In many Western countries residence norms for marriage partners prescribe neolocality which means that marriage partners should not live with their families of origin but should establish their own household. As a consequence, any obstacles to leaving home are likely to promote living apart together relationships and to postpone co-residential unions. Leaving home at early ages will promote an early co-residential union.

In principle, leaving home is a repeatable event. People may leave the parental home, for example for college, vocational training, a military or a civil service, and may return to the parental home afterwards, for example to a high-quality parental home that offers enough privacy (Mulder and Clark 2002). It is also known that adult children are more likely to return to the parental home if their union broke up compared to those in stable relationships (Feijten and van Ham 2010; Smits et al. 2010). Stone et al. (2014) demonstrate that in Great Britain single mothers often rely on the welfare state for support after a union dissolution, whereas single fathers are more likely to get support from their parents by returning home. Moreover, leaving home and the formation of an own household is not the same. It may be that those who leave for a service or education live in some kind of institution. Therefore leaving home and the formation of an own household might be different events.

One of the first studies investigating leaving home was published by Hill and Hill (1976) who used data from the Michigan Panel Study of Income Dynamics which was launched in the year 1968. Since then a nearly unmanageable number of studies have been conducted to investigate the social and spatial patterns of leaving home (for an overview see Mulder 2009). As leaving the parental home is a step that most people experience, it is particularly interesting to study the timing of leaving home. This has been the focus of many studies, and changes through time and country differences are well documented. Billari and Liefbroer (2010) demonstrate with data from the European Social Survey that from the birth cohorts 1930–1979 the median age at leaving home changed only very slightly. In southern Europe, young adults leave the parental home at later ages, whereas in Northern Europe and in the Netherlands leaving home occurs much earlier in the life course. Analyzing data from the Fertility and Family Surveys for 16 European countries, Billari et al. (2001) revealed that for the cohorts born around 1960 the age of leaving home varies considerably across European countries. The authors demonstrate that men in France, Slovenia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland leave home the earliest (median between age 20.2 and 21.5); in Hungary, Italy, Poland and Spain they leave home the latest (median between age 24.8 and 26.7). Women leave home very early in

Finland, France, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland (median age between age 18.6 and 19.8) and latest in Belgium, Italy, Poland, Portugal and Spain (median age between 21.5 and 23.6). In a further article on nest-leaving patterns in Europe, Aassve et al. (2002) follow up the question whether this pattern can be explained by the influence of different welfare regimes. They find that employment and income are important predictors of the nest-leaving behavior and that the effects of these predictors vary with the welfare regime (for the role of own income and parental income in leaving home see also Iacovou 2010).

Many studies concur in the result that the timing of nest-leaving strongly depends on the timing of other life course events. The most relevant events are partnership formation and marriage, the end of educational or vocational training and entry into the labor market. But compared to entry into the labor market, the establishment of a co-residential union is an event that requires leaving home to a much greater extent. Therefore, any factors that increase the costs of leaving home contribute to a postponement to establish a co-residence with a marital or non-marital partner. High costs of leaving home are likely to be experienced by young adults with few own financial resources who cannot afford to rent an apartment, those with strong local ties and those enjoying a comfortable housing situation in the parental home (see also Sect. 4.2). It seems obvious that there is a strong interdependence between leaving home and the formation of a co-residential union.

Even though young adults have to move out if they want to live with a partner as couple and nuclear families have to maintain their own household, many children settle down not far away from the parental home. A German study that used the data from the Socioeconomic Panel revealed that leaving the parental home is typically not a long-distance move as the median distance is 9.5 km (Leopold et al. 2011). Likewise, Mulder and Clark (2000) found that the vast majority of young people in the United States who left the parental home remained within the state. Factors leading to a long-distance move are higher educational level of the respondent, fathers' higher educational level, and living in rural areas.

Several empirical findings show that leaving home and housing quality are interrelated. The better the housing quality of the parental home, the more children postpone leaving home (Mulder and Clark 2002). For example, the higher the density in the parental household, the earlier children leave; if the parents are homeowners, children leave the parental household later (Wagner 1989). A number of studies address leaving the parental home to live alone versus to live with a partner (Buck and Scott 1993; Mulder and Clark 2000; Mulder et al. 2002), or the formation of co-residential partnerships from the parental home versus from independent living (Mulder et al. 2006). Those who live with a partner after leaving home are more likely to become homeowners immediately after leaving compared to those who leave home to live without a partner (Clark and Mulder 2000; Mulder 2003; Mulder and Hooimeijer 2002).

Children leaving home also affect the lives of the parents. If the last child of the parents leaves home the parental home becomes an "empty nest" which in turn may improve the housing situation of the parents as they have more room. An often neglected consequence of children's leaving home is the increased divorce risk of parents (Klein and Rapp 2010).

4.2 Living apart together relationships

The term “living apart together” has been introduced 1978 in an article in the *Haagse Post* by the Dutch journalist Michel Berkiel (Asendorpf 2008, p 750). LAT partnerships (or LAT relationships) are usually defined as intimate relationships between unmarried partners who live in separate households but identify themselves as part of a couple. The latter, it has been argued, distinguishes a LAT relationship from a dating relationship (Duncan and Phillips 2011). LAT relationships are sometimes referred to as non-residential partnerships (Strohm et al. 2009, p 178), dating partnerships (Meggiolaro 2010) or bilocal relationships (Dorbritz and Naderi 2012).

Although most co-residential partnerships and marriages are preceded by a living apart together relationship, this type of partnership has been ignored for decades in research on partnership formation (Liefbroer et al. 2015). It only became “visible” in research since representative social surveys started to collect data on the prevalence of this type of partnership. LAT partnerships are very heterogeneous so that we can distinguish a number of different types: First, the LAT partnership of younger adults that have not cohabited before, with living apart together as a stage in the union-formation process (Liefbroer et al. 2015). Second, the living apart together of those who have been divorced or widowed (see de Jong Gierveld 2004). Third, the living apart together of those who are married or prefer living in a co-residential union but are “forced” to establish a long-distance partnership because of the requirements of the labor market or the educational system. These LAT partnerships are similar but not equal to so-called commuter partnerships in which couples regard themselves as living together although one partner lives away for work part of the time (Van der Klis and Mulder 2008). Fourth, there are partners with a strong preference for independence or autonomy who prefer a LAT partnership to a co-residential union.

In the US, data from the General Social Surveys 1996 and 1998 revealed that 7% of women and 6% of men aged 23–70 years were living apart together (Strohm et al. 2009). Asendorpf (2008) analyzed the German Socioeconomic Panel 1992–2006; he included respondents with German nationality and aged 18 years and older and found that 8.5% of the respondents in 1992 and 10.9% of the respondents in 2006 reported that they were living in a LAT relationship. If one considers only respondents in a partnership, 11.6% were in LAT relationships in 1992 and 14.9% in 2006.

Preliminary empirical results for Germany show that the likelihood of a transition from a LAT relationship to a co-residential union is greater among people in their twenties than in their thirties and is positively associated with the quality of the relationship and the wish to constitute a family (Wagner and Mulder 2014). The commuting distance between the two households indicates costs of moving to maintain the partnership but also (at least for one partner) the costs of a residential relocation if a co-residential union would be established. This commuting distance, however, did not predict the likelihood that the two partners move together. It seems that partners were likely to move together if their partnership became more institutionalized, e.g. if they introduced their partner to others. But much more important is the wish of the partners to have children or to marry. It could be assumed that partners with few economic resources are more dependent or in need of a common household with their partner because this would save money. But the amount of partner’s resources did

not seem to play an important role in the constitution of a co-residential partnership. The impact of financial resources on moving together might be stronger in housing markets where it is especially expensive to rent a home or where there is a housing shortage. In this situation, many young adults (e.g. in Eastern Europe) postpone leaving the parental home or stay in a LAT instead of a co-residential union (Sobotka and Toulemon 2008; Tai et al. 2014).

When two partners living apart decide to move together there are two possibilities: One partner moves in with the other or both partners move. However, not much is known about who moves when a co-residential union is established. Brandén and Haandrikman (2013) used Swedish register data (PLACE database, University of Uppsala) including data on residential locations and relocations. Their sample was restricted to married partners with a common child in 2008 who were traced back for up to 15 years. It was found that women are more likely to move in than men. This gender effect was hardly explained from a large number of potential intervening factors. Obviously, age makes a difference because the younger partner is more likely to move in, but the age effect disappeared after accounting for the strength of local ties (e.g. past spatial mobility) and family ties (e.g. close distance to parents or living in the parental home). Moreover, the study shows that family members living close by are a barrier for moving. Another finding of this Swedish study is that at the start of a co-residence women move over longer distances than men (46 versus 36 km). Again, age variables account at least partly for this gender difference. In Germany, there are some indications that the partner with fewer resources moves in, but the results are not very robust (Wagner and Mulder 2014).

4.3 Marriage

The interdependencies between marriage and residential relocation are complex. Studies revealed that it is necessary to differentiate between short-term and long-term effects of marriage on relocations on the one hand and between short- and long-distance relocations on the other. Most importantly, one has to distinguish between marital status and the event of getting married.

Life course studies launched in the 1980s have already shown that married people are less mobile than unmarried (Courgeau 1985; Wagner 1989, p. 141). But at the time of marriage, residential relocation is likely (Mulder and Wagner 1993; Wagner 1989, p. 143; Clark 2013) with women being more mobile than men. This means that women more often move into the accommodation of their husband than the other way around (Mulder and Wagner 1993). These findings underline Rossi's view that residential relocations are an adjustment to the requirements resulting from events in the domain of the family. Residential relocations linked to marriage are mostly of a short distance (Wagner 1989; Mulder and Wagner 1993). Using German life course data, Mulder and Wagner (1993) aimed to separate the effects of getting married and being married on residential relocation. They estimated a log-linear model and confirmed the age-distance-hypothesis, namely that synchronizations between marrying and residential relocations over short distances account for the age- and sex specificity of such moves. Jang et al. (2014) also modeled the joint processes of marriage and relocations. They used the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979–2008

from the US and conducted a multi-process model. They found that marriage had a positive short-term impact on migration, but no effects in the long run. They could not detect any effects of migration on marriage.

However, the adjustment does not fully account for the relationship between family events and residential relocations. First, an adjustment may be impeded by socio-structural factors that prevent individuals from leaving the parental home or to establish a co-residential union (see Sect. 4.1 and 4.2). Second, one has to consider that to some extent residential relocations influence the chance to find a suitable partner to marry. Several studies suggest the existence of local partner or marriage markets (for Germany see Stauder 2011). As far as partner markets differ by socio-structural factors, such as age or education, we can assume that spatial mobility between partner markets affects the opportunities to find an adequate partner for singles or an alternative partner for persons living in a partnership. As there are still unsolved challenges in modeling meeting and mating rates in different partner markets separately for movers and stayers our empirical knowledge about these processes is scarce (Klein 2015).

One might presume that for some men and women—especially in more rural areas—the transition to an owner-occupied home is a precondition for marrying and the start of a family (see also next section). Many studies have shown that there is a strong link between marriage and the transition to homeownership (e.g. Mulder and Wagner 1998; Holland 2012). The income of the male and female partner seems to be equally important and positively related to becoming a homeowner (Blaauboer 2010). Being married facilitates obtaining mortgages (Angelini et al. 2013). In Sweden, the association between marriage and homeownership declined over time (Lauster and Fransson 2006; see also Smits and Mulder 2008 for the Netherlands).

4.4 Births

The birth of children, residential relocations and housing are strongly interrelated. In line with the adjustment perspective, the birth of a child affects the demand for better housing. In anticipation of childbirth the housing situation can be accommodated to the changing requirements (Feijten and Mulder 2002; Michielin and Mulder 2008). While around the birth of a child housing space is increased (Lersch 2014b), the likelihood of a residential relocation decreases after a child is born (Wagner 1989; Clark 2013). But obviously, for some people such an adjustment of the housing situation to the needs of a family is not feasible. The chance to realize this kind of adjustment depends on the financial resources of the household. As Lersch (2014b) showed, low income makes it more difficult to accommodate the housing situation to childbirth. Simon and Tamura (2009) demonstrate for the US and the years from 1940 to 2000 that the price of living space is negatively related to the level of fertility. This effect is weak, but significant. Job security and partnership stability are preconditions for family formation, and the same can be said for housing security. For example, a key finding of Vignoli et al. (2013) is that in Italy subjective housing security influences women's fertility intentions. Kulu and Milewski (2007) argue that the feelings of stress that are sometimes associated with residential relocations might result in a weaker intention to have a child.

Kulu and Steele (2013) examined the interdependence of childbirth and housing transitions. They used Finnish register data and estimated multi-level event history and simultaneous equation models. These models not only allow for a precise estimation of the degree of interdependence between the two life events but also to control for unobserved heterogeneity due to factors that affect both childbirth and housing transitions. Their findings strengthen the interdependence perspective. Their study revealed that there is indeed such unobserved heterogeneity: Women who are likely to have children are also more likely to undertake a residential relocation. The birth of a child increases the likelihood of moving to a new home and vice versa: moving to a single-family house leads to an increase in the number of children in a family. The authors assume that family orientation might be an unmeasured factor that affects both childbirth and housing decisions.

Many studies have shown that fertility levels differ across regions. A common finding is that fertility levels decrease with degree of urbanization—city size or address density. To some extent these different regional fertility levels exist because residential relocations seem to affect childbirth. Empirical results by Huinink and Wagner (1989) suggest that people who move from a more rural area to a large city show a low propensity to start a family. However, if they move back to a rural area the likelihood of childbirth increases. This is in line with a hypothesis that states that fertility behavior is a consequence of socialization in the region of origin. Women with a large city as their region of origin are also likely to start a family if they move to a rural region. This points to a delay of childbirth until an urban-rural move can be realized. Such mobility behavior can be interpreted as selective residential relocation or as an adaptation to specific regional opportunity structures. Based on official birth statistics and data from the British Household Panel Survey, Kulu and Washbrook (2014) argued that in Britain urban-rural fertility differentials are better explained by contextual effects than by population composition or selective residential relocations.

The study by Huinink and Feldhaus (2012) is one of the very few that investigated the interdependence between commuting and fertility. The authors used the data from the German “Panel Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics” to investigate fertility intentions and estimated a number of probit models. One important finding is that commuting does not affect the fertility intention of women. But women who are commuting are more likely to be childless and less likely to be pregnant (see also Rüger et al. 2011). The positive association between long-distance commuting and childlessness for women is also reported by Meil (2010). It seems that commuting leads to a postponement of family formation. This is confirmed by findings of the European study “Job Mobilities and Family Lives in Europe—Modern Mobile Living and its Relations to Quality of Life” (see the summary of Hofmeister and Schneider 2010). A positive association between long-distance commuting and childlessness corresponds with the finding that commuting distance and commuting time of mothers are smaller than of childless women. For men, the presence of children does not affect commuting distance or time (Turner and Niemeier 1997).

In accordance with the findings on the relationship between marriage and residential relocations, Wagner and Mulder (2000) showed for West Germany that at the time of first childbirth, the transition rate to homeownership slightly increased. Kulu and Vikat (2007) demonstrated with longitudinal data from Finland that couples’ fer-

tility was higher if they were living in single-family houses compared to couples in apartments. The study also revealed that different fertility levels by housing type resulted from selective moves. For Sweden, Ström (2010) found a greater likelihood of having a first birth among those living in larger homes.

4.5 Separation and divorce

The dissolution of a union is typically associated with the separation of the common household which implies residential relocation for at least one partner. An early study by Booth and Amato (1993) analyzes the effect of union dissolution on residential mobility. They used panel data from a US telephone survey of 2033 married people below age 55, which started in 1980. The panel study had three waves and ended after an 8-year period. 1439 individuals were observed over the whole time period. One of the main findings was that compared to couples who were still together the divorced were more likely to change residence. Feijten and van Ham (2007, 2013) also point to the special characteristics of residential relocations that are a consequence of a separation. Often these relocations are urgent, financially and spatially restricted. They show that the separated move more often compared to steady singles and those in a first co-residential partnership. Because divorced women with children are often in need of support it is likely that they move near to the parents' place of residence. Mulder and Wagner (2012) show that the likelihood of a move after divorce is significantly reduced if the parents live close by (see also Mulder and Malmberg 2011).

The consequences of union dissolution for the housing career and who moves out have been studied by Feijten and Van Ham (2010) for the UK and Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen (2008) for Denmark. Feijten and Van Ham (2010) demonstrate that those who divorce experience a larger drop in housing quality than those who split up from cohabitation (see also Booth and Amato 1993). In Denmark, in a third of all union dissolutions both partners move out. If only one partner moves out, it is more often the female than the male partner (Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen 2008). Divorce frequently leads to downward mobility on the housing ladder. Dewilde (2008) shows for 12 European countries that divorce strongly enhances the exit out of homeownership. Moreover, divorce also reduces the likelihood of homeownership in later life, especially when the housing market is strained and mortgage credits are expensive (Dewilde and Stier 2014). Lersch and Vidal (2014) show that separation is negatively associated with homeownership; ownership rates do increase again after separation but do not reach the level of ownership rates among people in their first marriage. This pattern is more pronounced in Germany than in Britain. Herbers et al. (2014) also found that the likelihood of leaving homeownership was increased after a couple separated.

Although these findings are in line with the adjustment perspective, some empirical results point to the interdependence between union dissolution and spatial mobility. A number of studies investigate whether spatial mobility of couples affect their dissolution risk. Boyle et al. (2008) showed that a first long-distance move of a couple did not influence the dissolution propensity and a first residential move lowers the dissolution propensity. However, two or more moves, especially over long distances, increased the dissolution risk. A Swedish study by Sandow (2014) demonstrated that

long-distance commuting negatively affected relationship stability. Especially long-distance commuting of men on a temporarily basis of less than 5 years was associated with a higher separation risk. For women, long-distance commuting for a period of 5 years or more decreased the separation risk. Sandow assumes that customizing and selection effects could help to explain the findings. Obviously, there are couples who are able to successfully adapt their private life to a working situation that involves living away from the partner part of the time. These couples may be less reluctant to separate. But there are also couples who would have separated anyway or who ran into severe partnership problems because of the strain imposed by commuting. A German panel study by Kley (2012) conducted in a West German and an East German medium sized town revealed that commuting did not affect the likelihood of separation in general. However, for employed women in East Germany long-distance commuting led to a decrease in partnership stability.

Housing affects the stability of partnerships and homeownership is a strong barrier to residential mobility. Many studies show that homeowners are less likely to separate or divorce than couples living in a rented accommodation (see for Germany Wagner and Weiß 2003). From a theoretical perspective one may distinguish three mechanisms by which housing may have an impact on families' well-being (Bratt 2002): physical attributes and availability of housing (e.g. good quality and safety), relationship of housing to occupant (e.g. crowding, affordability, housing tenure) and neighborhood conditions (e.g. good quality and safety). Bratt's review concentrated on the first and second mechanisms. With respect to these mechanisms studies demonstrated that housing is related to family well-being. For example, there are studies from the US or Great Britain showing that poor housing quality may lead to health problems of the residents. Families suffer if they are living in overcrowded accommodation or have to spend a very high proportion of their income on housing costs. However, as Bratt notes, it is difficult to isolate the effects of housing conditions and to disentangle housing conditions from socioeconomic characteristics of the residents. It is also not clear from previous research whether housing affects relationship quality and stability directly or indirectly, via the individual well-being of the residents.

4.6 Widowhood

It is clear that changes in marital status are frequently accompanied by residential relocations. Only in the past few years, however, research attention has begun to include also the residential relocations and housing situation of widows and widowers. Chevan (1995) used data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics to investigate residential mobility before and after the transition to widowhood. He showed that becoming widowed triggered residential mobility especially in the first year. This peak was preceded by a gradual increase in residential mobility, likely related to the health status of the partner, and followed by a gradual decline. Duration of residence, homeownership and excess space decrease the mobility of widows and widowers, whereas disabled widows and widowers, those with a high educational level or living in a single-family unit are more mobile. A French study by Bonnet et al. (2010) also revealed that widowhood increased the likelihood of residential relocation, especially at older ages. After the move widows tended to live closer to their relatives. After age

80 less than 10% of the widows co-resided with a partner or children. Concurrently, the proportion of widows living in institutions strongly increased. Recent widows are more likely to switch from homeownership to a rented apartment, from a large dwelling to a smaller one and to move to larger municipalities. As Van der Pers et al. (2014) showed for the Netherlands, widowed people were indeed less likely to move if their children lived nearby. Also Herbers et al. (2014) found evidence that in the Netherlands widowhood impacts the likelihood of moving out of homeownership for many years. The latter findings are in line with the results of Vignoli et al. (2014) which show that elderly people living alone are less likely to be homeowners. In Sweden, widowed people were found to be more likely to move from a house to an apartment than from a house to another house (Abramsson and Andersson 2012). It is quite safe to conclude that insofar as widowhood and residential relocations are related to each other, relocations are a means to adjust the housing situation to the new and partnership status.

5 Discussion

Rossi showed already in the 1950s that the life domains of spatial mobility, housing and family are closely linked. After Rossi's contribution, the progress in the research field that links these life domains has mainly been related to acquiring more knowledge of the details and dynamics of these links. This progress has been facilitated by the availability of appropriate data, the application of sophisticated methods and by a movement of the research beyond the "classical" family life cycle, including new living arrangements and union dissolution. Furthermore, research has started to investigate the repercussions of spatial mobility on the family life course: it has been shown that housing transitions and residential relocations are not only of an adaptive character, even though household changes are often the "prime drivers" of residential relocations.

The research reviewed in this paper first and foremost demonstrates that the two types of spatial mobility that were discussed—residential relocations and commuting—are means for individuals and households to adjust their housing situation and their place of residence to requirements of a changing household size and composition as well as to demands of the educational system and the labor market. One might call this position which is clearly supported by empirical research the *adjustment perspective* on spatial mobility.

The adjustment perspective is in line with the life course approach arguing that certain life events trigger residential relocations. Typically, these events are transitions in the course of partnership and family developments, they range from the transition from a LAT relationship to a co-residential union until transitions such as getting separated, divorced or becoming a widower or widow. Some of these transitions mark the start of a period of relative immobility. Especially the married and parents of younger children are less mobile. This immobility is even more pronounced if they are living in an owner-occupied home. These findings underline the importance of a distinction between a transition in the partnership or family life course and the

status after having made this transition when one tries to understand the occurrence of residential relocations.

However, spatial mobility seems to be more than a pure adjustment process of individuals or households. First, one has to acknowledge that some people cannot adjust their housing situation to the needs of a family because of a lack of financial resources or strong local ties. Second, there are some empirical studies showing that spatial mobility may have an independent impact on partnerships and family formation. These consequences of spatial mobility may be sometimes unintended or undesirable: they are side effects which may occur under certain conditions. This perspective argues that *spatial mobility is a determinant of changes in the domains of partnership and family*. Studies that investigate this hypothesis include residential relocations between different regions, such as large cities and more rural areas, and job-related commuting. In the case of residential relocations, the underlying mechanisms are related to different opportunity structures that might promote or hinder individuals to start a family. In the case of commuting, the underlying mechanisms are more directed to individual properties, such as psychological stress or strains. Even though studies did not always find a clear-cut empirical evidence that commuting has an impact on partnership stability, it is likely that this may be the case under certain conditions. Whether there is such an impact probably depends at least on the commuting distance, gender, and the length of the period a person has been commuting (e.g. in terms of months or years).

There are a number of shortcomings in the research thus far on spatial mobility, family dynamics and housing transitions. The life-course approach mainly concentrates on interdependencies between life events and residential relocations at the individual level. But these interdependencies are likely to depend on decisions that are made by all adult household members together. Even though research on family migration (Cooke 2008) has shown that household members often do not equally profit from residential relocations, it is still not well understood how decision processes among all household members whether to move or not and where to move proceed. Scholars of the life-course approach should make more effort to take the notion of “linked lives” into account. Moving decisions result from social interaction, are dependent on local social ties and the moving decisions of others.

Although stage decision models have already been proposed, very few studies model decision processes at all. The mechanism through which family events lead to a move could be that they affect the evaluation of the housing situation which could then induce a search for better housing. The realization of the intention to move depends on the resources of the household and the housing opportunities provided by the housing market. Disregarding the fact that it is not very well known which properties of destination regions are relevant for the decision processes, it is also important to analyze the circumstances that hinder households to realize their housing needs by means of spatial mobility.

Interdependencies between life-course events are hard to quantify and to interpret. Even if there is strong evidence that family events and residential relocations affect each other, most studies concentrate on one causal direction in the link between the two factors and it is difficult to ascertain the relative strength of the two causal links.

The life course approach to investigate residential relocations furthermore suffers from a neglect of the old and very old. This is also a problem because of lack of data on older people and their residence decisions. The collection of life course data that span 70, 80 or 90 years requires extensive practical efforts, and family events become rare in old age (with the exception of widowhood). Due to possible health restrictions, the housing situation is a very important life sphere for the elderly.

Finally, whereas many studies examine the causes and consequences of residential mobility at the individual or the household level, not many focus on the changes of regions and neighborhoods that are a result of selective residential mobility. For example, as suggested by Bonnet et al. (2010) or Yu and Liu (2007), increasing divorce rates and the residential choices and differentiated housing careers of the separated will impact the housing market and will lead to a decrease in average household size and an increase in the number of households.

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