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The Impacts of Remote Work on Residential Space: A Review on Relocation, Multilocality, and Spatial Inequality

Riku Reunamäki [1], **Veronique Van Acker** [2,3], **and Olle Järv** [1,4]

[1] Department of Geosciences and Geography, University of Helsinki, Finland
[2] Urban Development and Mobility Department, Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER), Luxembourg
[3] Department of Geography, Ghent University, Belgium
[4] Department of Geography, University of Tartu, Estonia

Correspondence: Riku Reunamäki (riku.reunamaki@helsinki.fi)

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Abstract

Remote work has emerged as one of the more consequential transformations in contemporary society, with far-reaching implications that extend beyond the organisation of work itself. One of its most profound, yet still insufficiently understood, consequences concerns residential space. By redefining the traditional spatial coupling between workplace and home, remote work offers many individuals greater freedom in choosing where to live, thereby having the potential to reshape residential location decisions. At the same time, remote work does not necessarily lead to permanent relocation; instead, it may encourage more flexible and fragmented residential strategies such as multilocal living—living and spending time in more than one dwelling. However, since remote work is not possible in every occupation, it can also potentially exacerbate socio-spatial inequalities, both temporary and permanent, in cities and rural regions. In this systematic literature review, based on 33 articles, we examine the impacts of remote work on residential space and its implications for spatial inequality. First, we provide a meta-analysis of where, when, and how the impacts of remote work on residential space have been studied over the past decade, focusing on three literature streams: residential relocation, multilocal living, and spatial inequality. We then summarise the main findings regarding these impacts, and through synthesising the existing literature, highlight issues that are currently missing from the three research streams. Finally, we suggest avenues for future research aimed at addressing the existing knowledge gaps at the nexus between remote work and residential space, which clearly remains understudied to date.

Keywords

multilocal living; remote work; residential relocation; residential space; spatial inequality; systematic literature review

1. Introduction

Remote work has emerged as one of the more consequential transformations in contemporary society, with far-reaching implications beyond the organisation of work itself. Accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, remote work is now widely regarded as a defining element of "the future of work" (e.g., Malhotra, 2021; Vuchkovski et al., 2023). Remote work arrangements (RWAs) offer flexibility in terms of location, timing, and frequency of work, thus allowing employees to operate outside conventional office settings for at least some of their working hours (Spreitzer et al., 2017). One of the most profound, yet still insufficiently understood, consequences of this flexibility concerns residential space—where people choose to live, whether they relocate, and how many places they inhabit as part of their everyday lives.

By redefining the traditional spatial coupling between workplace and home, remote work offers many individuals greater freedom in choosing where they live, when and where they work, and how they organise their daily lives (Pitkänen et al., 2020; Randall et al., 2022). Recent studies show that around 25% of all working days in the US are done remotely (Barrero et al., 2023), while in the EU, approximately 23% of the labour force works remotely at least occasionally (Taskinen, 2023). This growing prevalence of RWAs has the potential to reshape residential location decisions, enabling some workers to relocate to more affordable, spacious, or otherwise desirable neighbourhoods, including suburban, peri-urban, or rural areas (Stefaniec et al., 2022; Tan et al., 2023). At the same time, remote work does not necessarily lead to permanent relocation; instead, it may encourage more flexible and fragmented residential strategies.

One such strategy is multilocal living, defined as living and spending time in more than one dwelling (Randall et al., 2022). As remote work alters when and where work is performed, it can facilitate the maintenance of multiple residences for different purposes, such as combining urban employment with rural living, leisure-oriented second homes, or short-term city accommodation. While multilocal living is common in the Nordic countries (Müller, 2021), it is also increasingly recognised as a global phenomenon: 15% of households in the EU (Wind et al., 2020), 13% in the US (H.-S. Choi et al., 2014), and 20% of urban households in China (Huang et al., 2020) own multiple properties.

However, since RWAs are not an option in every occupation, they can potentially exacerbate socio-spatial inequalities, both temporary and permanent, in cities and rural regions. While residential relocation and multilocal living due to RWAs can provide opportunities for rural municipalities with a shrinking and aging population, an influx of temporary or permanent remote workers with diverse social backgrounds and lifestyles may increase socio-spatial inequalities within these municipalities and create social tensions between residents (Di Marino et al., 2023; Kiviaho & Toivonen, 2023; Schmidt-Thomé & Lilius, 2023). In cities, not everyone can afford a second home from which to work remotely or to relocate to more desirable suburban neighbourhoods, even if their jobs could be performed remotely. These economic disparities can amplify neighbourhood segregation and even lead to the "platformisation" of housing, including digital nomad communities taking over desirable urban locations from locals due to rent increases (Gil et al., 2023).

Despite long-standing research traditions on remote working (e.g., Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Nilles, 1975), residential relocation (e.g., Clark & Onaka, 1983; Rossi, 1955), spatial inequalities (e.g., Harvey, 1973), and a sharp increase in both remote work research and multilocality research since the pandemic (Figure 1), there

seems to be limited emphasis on how RWAs affect residential space. Studies have mostly focused on the social, economic, and sustainability implications of RWAs within the travel behaviour, work–life balance, office downsizing, and organisational culture contexts.

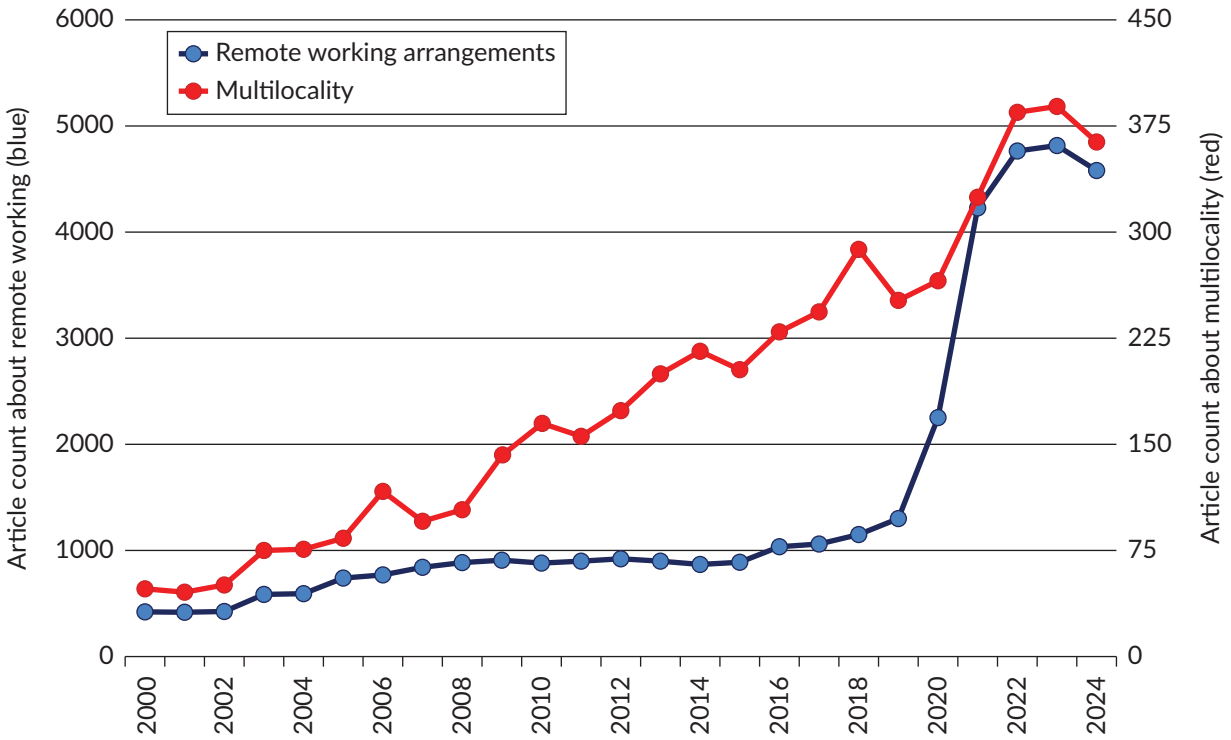

Figure 1. Number of published articles matching keyword searches for remote working arrangements (blue line) and multilocal living (red line) in the Scopus database (2000–2024).

In this article, we take stock of the existing literature and aim to provide a systematic overview of the impacts of remote work on residential space. Therefore, our first objective was to examine how the impacts of remote work on residential space have been empirically studied from three perspectives: residential relocation, multilocal living, and spatial inequality. We focused on when, where, and how the impacts of remote work have been examined, who has been studied, and the methods used for data collection and analysis. Our second objective was to map potential knowledge gaps—areas that have not yet been empirically studied—and propose avenues for future research on mitigating the gap at the nexus between remote work and residential space.

2. Methodology

2.1. Literature Search Strategy

2.1.1. Source Selection

For purposes of clarity, consistency, and reproducibility, we chose only one database for our article search, deeming Scopus the best option given that, compared to Web of Science, Scopus covers more scholarly journals from the social sciences, and approximately 99% of the journals indexed in Web of Science are

listed in Scopus (Singh et al., 2021). Google Scholar, as a crawler-based semantic search engine as opposed to bibliographic databases (such as Scopus), "does not support many of the features required for systematic searches" (Gusenbauer & Haddaway, 2020, p. 211), which is why we did not consider it to be appropriate for our study.

2.1.2. Literature Identification

We used three search queries, which consisted of two components: RWAs and their synonyms and impact categories. The former was the same for all three search queries and was used to scope our results based on the mode of work, whereas the latter was unique to each search query and was used to scope our results based on the effects we wanted to investigate. Thus, our search queries were formulated as:

(RWA keyword set) AND (IMPACT keyword set)

We used three impact categories: residential relocation, multilocal living, and spatial inequality. We jointly developed the keywords for RWAs and each impact category and then tested and refined them based on preliminary searches to achieve the optimal sets of keywords for our purposes (see the final keyword queries in the Supplementary File, Appendix 1).

We focused on two time periods: the post-Covid period (2020–2024) and the immediate pre-Covid period (2015–2019). Considering the recent impact of other societal developments in addition to the pandemic, such as technological advancement and digitalisation, we deemed it appropriate to limit the pre-Covid period to five years.

2.2. Article Selection Process

2.2.1. Initial Screening

We performed searches from the Scopus database using the three separate search queries on January 10, 2025. Our queries produced a total of 424 articles, from which we removed seven duplicates and one corrigendum, resulting in an initial set of 416 articles. We then manually screened whether each article was relevant or irrelevant for our review, excluding 301 articles as not relevant based on their abstracts (Figure 2).

2.2.2. Final Selection

After performing this initial screening, we used a five-phase selection process (Figure 2) to identify the final set of articles following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) Statement (Page et al., 2021). After excluding those that were published before 2015 ($n = 10$), those for which we had no access to full text ($n = 11$), and those that were not in English ($n = 8$), we first included 84 articles in the systematic review. After reading the full text of these articles, we excluded 21 as not empirical and 32 as irrelevant based on the full text. During the process of compiling our final set of articles, we noticed that two articles showed up in two separate impact categories. One was ultimately excluded from both categories due to not being empirical, whereas the other was included in one category as relevant but excluded from another

as not relevant. As a result, we ended up with a final set of 33 articles included in our systematic literature review (Figure 2). The full list of reviewed articles is in Supplementary File, Appendix 2.

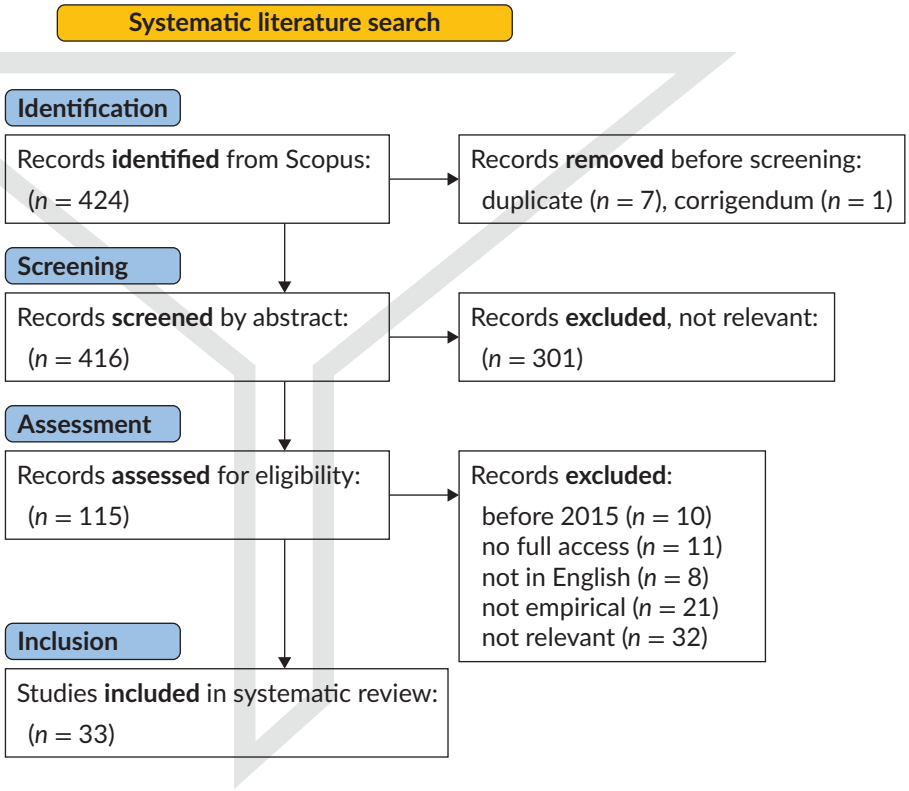

Figure 2. The systematic literature search process of this study.

3. Results

3.1. Meta-Analysis

Of the 33 articles reviewed, almost all were published during or after Covid-19, with a peak of 14 studies published in 2023 (Figure 3). Only two studies, both focusing on residential relocation, were published pre-pandemic. Regarding the timing of data collection in these studies, most (n = 22) employ data collected amid the Covid crisis (2020–2021), whereas data for 13 studies were collected wholly or partly before 2020 and for eight studies after 2021. Compared to the overall research trends (see Figure 1), the impacts of RWAs on residential space are clearly less addressed in remote work research.

The articles were published in journals across six broad research fields (Figure 3). They most frequently appeared in transport and travel behaviour journals (n = 8), primarily focusing on residential relocation, and in regional studies and planning journals (n = 6), which mainly addressed the multilocal living perspective. Interestingly, studies exploring residential relocation and spatial inequality were also published in economics journals (n = 5). Other articles were published in journals focusing on spatial and geographical research, and urban and sustainability issues.

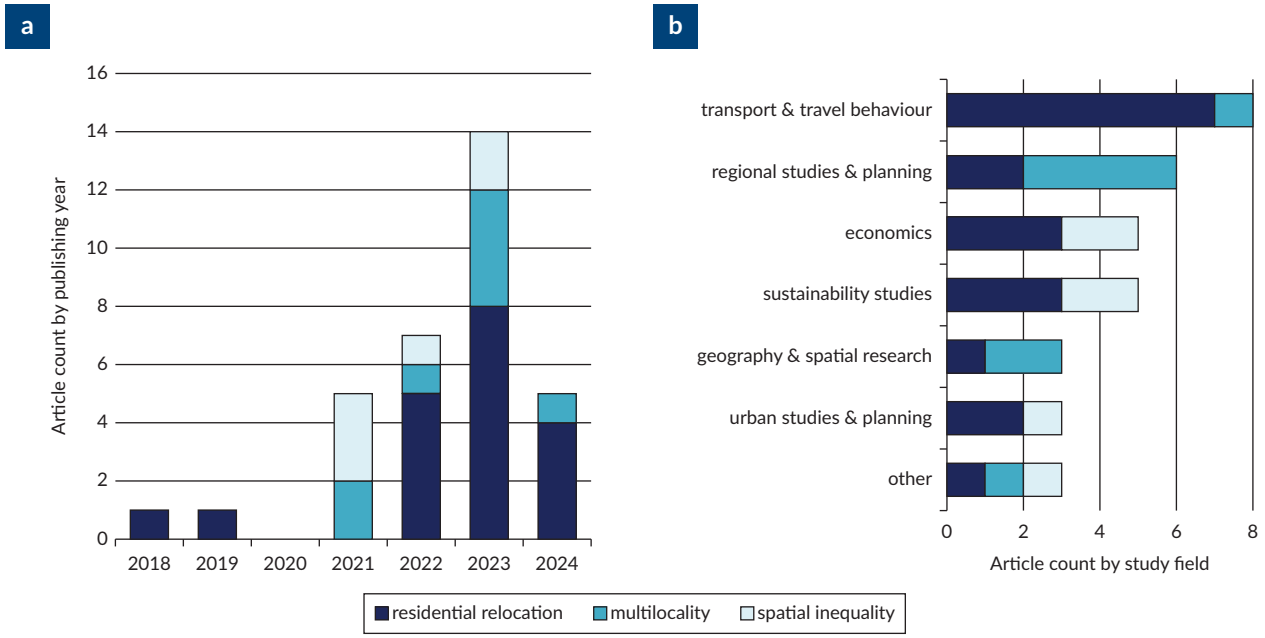

Figure 3. Articles reviewed by publishing year (A) and journal field (B).

From a geographical distribution perspective (Figure 4), most studies (n = 21) explored remote work impacts in the European context, although the US is the country with the highest number of studies (n = 6). Within Europe, four studies discuss RWAs in Germany, while six studies come from the Nordic countries. Only three studies have an international scope, with Braesemann et al. (2022) employing a global dataset, Burchell et al. (2021) utilising a survey conducted across EU28 member countries, and Garde (2021) comparing Germany and Italy. All other studies (n = 30) focus on a single country.

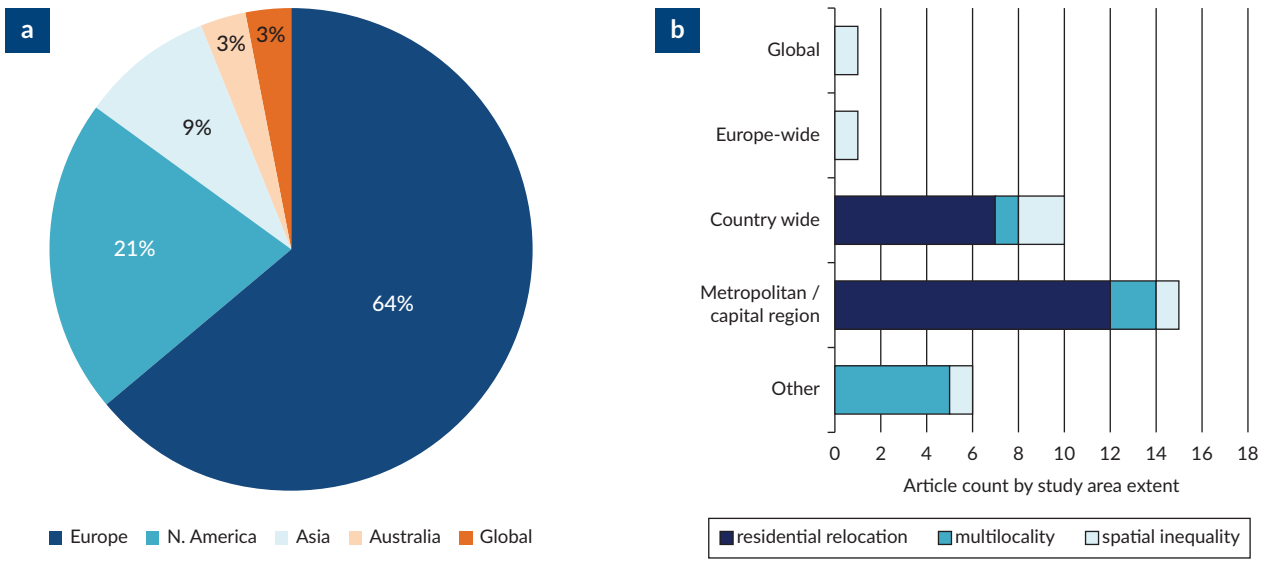

Figure 4. Articles reviewed by study area regarding the studied continent (A) and the extent of the studied region (B).

Regarding the geographical extent (Figure 4), 15 studies focused only on metropolitan or capital regions, and the vast majority of these (n = 12) were from the residential relocation category. Ten studies covered the whole study country, whereas six focused on rural regions and small cities—these were primarily investigating multilocal living. Only two had a larger scale: the global study by Braesemann et al. (2022) and the Europe-wide study by Burchell et al. (2021).

Two-thirds of the studies (n = 23) examined employees, with only five including all employees and the rest (n = 17) focusing on specific employee subgroups (Figure 5). Of these 17 studies, 13 had only one inclusion criterion: locational (work location, owning a second home, having moved), employment type (full-time, part-time, with or without RWA), or sector (ICT, white-collar, knowledge workers), with locational criteria the most often used. Five studies examined the whole population, and five other studies examined RWA impacts on residential space either by studying municipality statistics, public transit ridership, or real estate markets, or interviewing local authorities and coworking space managers.

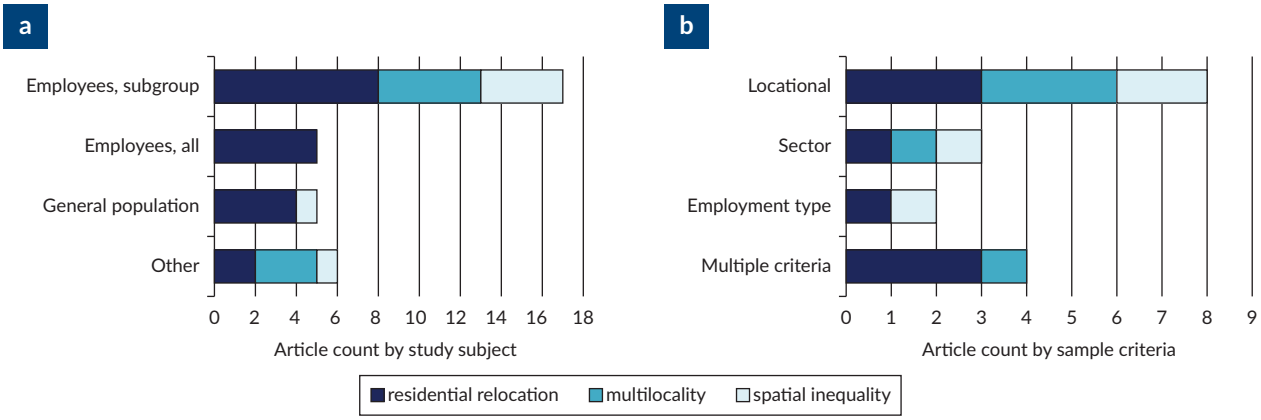

Figure 5. Articles reviewed by study subject (A) and the sample selection criteria for employee-based studies (n = 17) examining specific subgroups (B).

A clear majority of the studies (n = 24) used a quantitative approach, with the rest using either a qualitative approach (n = 5) or a mixed methodology (n = 7). Most of such studies (n = 7) examined multilocal living. Slightly more than half of the studies (n = 18) relied on one data source, which was usually a quantitative survey, whereas the rest combined multiple sources (Figure 6). The survey was the data collection method used most often, with 21 studies employing one. Eight studies used interviews and seven relied on some sort of transactional data (e.g., public transport use, real estate prices, and relocation events). Country-level register and census data and other types of databases were less used, as were various (stated preference) experiments.

Regarding the sample size in the quantitative studies, those using census or register data or other databases include all people: either the entire population or all employed persons. For survey studies, the variation was very large, ranging from 95 to 62,868 respondents, with a median sample size of 877. This variation is due to a few country-wide and Europe-wide studies with over 15,000 respondents; 12 studies had a sample size below 1,000.

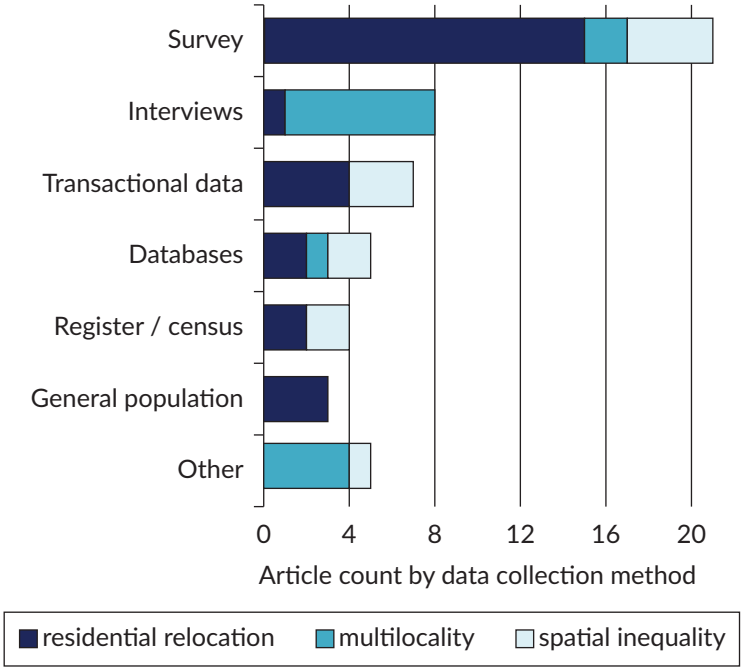

Figure 6. Articles reviewed by data collection method; articles with multiple sources are counted several times.

3.2. Findings on Residential Relocation

Our final selection of studies on RWAs and residential relocation included 19 articles, most of which referred to the situation during or shortly after the Covid-19 pandemic (2020–2022). During Covid-19, several studies reported how people moved away from urban areas and that this was partly due to the increase in remote work (e.g., Al-Akioui & Monzon, 2023; Rohit Kavikondala et al., 2022). Findings like this create the impression that RWAs indeed result in residential relocations away from urban areas. This is further corroborated by choice experiments in which respondents are presented with different RWA scenarios and asked whether they would prompt them to relocate (e.g., H.-Y. Choi, 2022). However, this proposed "urban exodus" deserves a more nuanced examination.

First, few studies (e.g., Al-Akioui & Monzon, 2023; Rohit Kavikondala et al., 2022) reported on actual moves during Covid-19. Instead, most empirical studies focused on the intention or the willingness to relocate because of remote work during the pandemic. Using data from an online survey in Ireland, Stefaniec et al. (2022) found that up to 42.5% of the white-collar respondents who could work remotely would consider moving. Tan et al. (2023) reached similar conclusions based on their online survey of tech workers in Silicon Valley, where almost half expressed an interest in relocating, and the majority (64%) cited remote work as a key factor. At first glance, the impact of RWAs on residential relocation seems significant, but there may still be a discrepancy between intentions and actual behaviour. Moreover, these studies reported only with descriptive statistics and merely an association between remote work and the intention to relocate, without further elaborating on the (causal) relationships between the two.

Second, although there might be signs that employees may have already moved away from their workplaces because of RWAs during Covid-19 or may do so in the future, many seem to prefer remaining within the same metropolitan region as before. For example, using data from U-Haul, the largest rental fleet for do-it-yourself

moving in North America, Rohit Kavikondala et al. (2022) found that, during the pandemic, most moves from cities like Austin, Chicago, New York, and San Diego stayed within their respective state. While metropolitan areas in the US are generally larger, similar trends were observed during Covid-19 in Madrid (Al-Akioui & Monzon, 2023), Istanbul (Paköz & Kaya, 2024), and Tokyo (Sharifi & Lee, 2024). Moreover, Paköz and Kaya (2024) also found that full-time remote workers during the pandemic were more willing to leave the city, while hybrid remote workers—who combine remote work with commuting to the workplace—were more willing to move to nearby regions without leaving the city.

Third, relocation studies during the pandemic often appeared to be driven by a need for extra space, including extra workspace, because of the increase in remote work—this was especially the case among those previously living in multi-family housing. However, access to a garden, proximity to nature, and quietness were important factors as well. Such location factors seem to have become more important to remote workers post-pandemic, with proximity to the workplace becoming less important (Sharifi & Lee, 2024; Stachura & Jagiełło-Kowalczyk, 2023; Thulin et al., 2023; Wolday & Böcker, 2023). Moreover, residential satisfaction and residential attachment might be important mediators in the link between remote work and the intention to relocate (Van Acker et al., 2024).

Based on these insights, simulation studies have suggested that the reduced need for commuting due to remote work may lead to an "outward relocation" trend away from central urban areas, even post-pandemic. Brueckner et al. (2023) and Brueckner and Sayantani (2023) observed how this could result in a decrease in housing prices and rents in high-productivity US regions where jobs are located. Moser et al. (2022) also observed a gradual yet discontinuous decay in additional residential demand from the core of Munich city to the fringes as the number of days working from home increased. This suggests a spatial preference for specific areas in the region, mainly secondary cities offering urban qualities while being more affordable compared to the main city of Munich. Also, these locations are easily accessible by public transport, as employees want to stay within an acceptable commuting distance from the conventional workplace. This shows again how proximity to a workplace has become less important to remote workers, but accessibility remains important to a certain extent, as they still need to commute to the workplace from time to time. This finding becomes even more important considering current debates about a return to the office. Remote workers may therefore still decide to move away from workplaces or cities in post-pandemic times, favouring locations that are accessible within a commutable distance or travel time from their workplace.

While most studies point towards a move away from city centres and workplaces to more suburban locations during the pandemic, a few studies found the opposite or found no clear pattern. For example, based on interviews with office workers in Sweden, Thulin et al. (2023) mostly found outward relocations, but also a few inward relocations nearer the workplace or city centre, mainly due to having experienced the burden of long-distance commuting during the pandemic. Shakib et al. (2024) found, based on a stated preference survey among residents in Greater Toronto, that RWAs tend to increase the utility of the current residence, but substantial heterogeneity exists among respondents, indicating that the impact of RWAs on the willingness to relocate varies.

Finally, some studies question the direction of causality in the relationship between RWAs and residential location choices. While the studies mentioned above assume that RWAs encourage residential relocation, some studies research the opposite relationship, namely, how the decision to work remotely is influenced by

where one lives. Studies like de Abreu e Silva (2022) have found that the willingness to work remotely and remote work frequency are indeed higher among those who already live further away from their workplace in suburban or rural locations and who have longer commuting distances or times. Interestingly, this debate about the direction of causality between remote work and residential location choices was already ongoing before the pandemic (Böhnen & Kuhnimhof, 2024; Ravalet & Rérat, 2019). Similarly, de Vos et al. (2018) found that remote work—even before the pandemic—was already associated with average commutes that are 5% longer.

3.3. Findings on Multilocal Living

We included eight studies in our final sample of articles about RWAs and multilocal living. One group of studies found that employees' multilocal living arrangements were not their first preference but rather they were a necessity based on their circumstances, made possible by RWAs. For example, Garde (2021) found diverse motivations for multilocal living: Some employees appreciated the social and environmental aspects of living in the countryside but could not find job opportunities there, leading them to stay at hotels or affordable rentals when working in the city at the main office. Others were in long-distance relationships, with their partner living and working in a different region, and the couples alternated living at each other's residences, typically on a weekly or fortnightly basis. The main reason for these arrangements was again a lack of job opportunities (near the partner's residence).

Similarly, J. Li and Xu (2023) investigated "dual-city dwelling" within a Chinese megaregion. They found that "job opportunities and career development are the primary reasons people make mobile-work and dual-city living arrangements" (p. 743), adding that the threat of unemployment and the need to provide for their families motivates (especially) parents to engage in multilocal living and working. These issues were echoed by Ciccarelli et al. (2025), who surveyed users of coworking spaces, shared communal workspaces which enable workplace-based multilocality, across Italy. According to them, multilocal living is sometimes a result of "forced flexibility," whereby employees may "find themselves compelled to adopt a multilocal lifestyle, for instance, to maintain family and other strong social ties" (Ciccarelli et al., 2025, p. 7). Their survey showed that multilocal living was negatively correlated with work–life balance, contradicting the more widespread discourse suggesting that RWAs allow for freedom, autonomy, and residential flexibility.

Another group of studies proposes that multilocal work can contribute to revitalising "shrinking cities" and rural municipalities with declining job opportunities and aging populations. These studies were conducted mostly in the Nordic context, where owning or renting a summer cottage in a rural area is popular. The integration of work into these leisure spaces has been on the rise, and this trend was particularly pronounced during Covid-19. For example, Di Marino et al. (2023) found that during the pandemic, summer cottages in Norway were used for 70–90 days per year compared to 40–50 days pre-pandemic, indicating a preference to work from there for longer periods.

Schmidt-Thomé and Lilius (2023) found that a local municipal government in Finland viewed multilocality as a potential solution to demographic challenges. Efforts were made to accommodate multilocals and integrate them into the community, reflecting hopes for leveraging remote work for local development. Similarly, Di Marino et al. (2023) suggest coworking spaces are beneficial for smaller cities and rural areas, because they attract second-home owners seeking better work–life balance, closer contact with nature, tighter communities, and more outdoor activities than what major cities can provide for them. Kiviaho and

Toivonen (2023) suggest that growing RWAs and multilocal living trends could offer opportunities for economic and social revitalisation in declining urban areas.

However, there are potential problems that need to be addressed in case a growing number of remote workers choose to move to smaller municipalities or stay in their summer cottages for extensive periods of time, including an increasing burden on the IT infrastructure, which is often not built for heavy use (Di Marino et al., 2023). Flipo et al. (2022), taking a more socially critical perspective, assessed the impacts of rural coworking spaces in France. The authors questioned the long-term demographic and sociological effects, pointing out the transient nature of multilocals' engagement with rural areas. They concluded that urban multilocals seemingly seeking a "simpler" and slower lifestyle in a rural area closer to nature may wish to do so only on a short-term basis, instead of a lasting change in attitudes towards rural living (Flipo et al., 2022).

Finally, Bürgin et al. (2021) studied the use of second homes as a strategic resource for certain work tasks. According to their findings, a "getaway" to the mountains provided knowledge workers with an opportunity for more focused and undistracted research and background work, and a chance to recharge mentally through nature activities, whereas working in the central workplace was reserved for teamwork and interaction with colleagues. In contrast to some previous studies, which have suggested that working remotely from peripheral regions fosters creative thinking, Bürgin et al. (2021) found that knowledge workers used the "peace and quiet" of a second home in the Swiss Alps more as a place for catching up on accumulated work tasks rather than for creative work.

As the opportunities for remote work have proliferated, multilocal living arrangements are also becoming more common. On the one hand, job opportunities are increasingly concentrated in large metropolitan areas, and on the other hand, companies expand their recruiting efforts geographically to find and hire the best employees (Garde, 2021). While there may be some potential for multilocal living and working to slow down urban agglomeration, the nature and magnitude of the impacts are still unclear. Accordingly, most of the articles on multilocal living examined the urban-rural divide in some form. These studies conclude that RWAs and multilocal living can help employees stay connected with their home regions (Ciccarelli et al., 2025), slow down population decline in rural areas (Di Marino et al., 2023), enable families to raise children in a more child-friendly environment (Schmidt-Thomé & Lilius, 2023), and provide welcome breaks from the hectic city life to work closer to nature (Bürgin et al., 2021). However, multilocal living can also increase strain on rural infrastructure and create tensions between locals and "part-time residents" who may use public services and resources without contributing taxes to the community (Di Marino et al., 2023; Flipo et al., 2022).

3.4. Findings on Spatial Inequality

By adopting a more flexible interpretation in selecting relevant studies on the impacts of remote work on spatial inequality in residential space, we found six relevant articles. A study by Braesemann et al. (2022), focusing specifically on digital online platform workers at a global scale, found that remote jobs are becoming more concentrated in larger cities, and rural regions are less attractive. This suggests that the existing concentration of human capital, ICTs, and urban opportunities pulls more remote workers and further increases spatial inequality between metropolitan and rural regions and between developed and developing countries. Similarly, Irlacher and Koch (2021) argue that remote work is drawn more to existing

urban centres, which offer greater opportunities, skills, and capital. This pull effect appears to be stronger than price differentials that might attract remote work to regions with lower living costs. Their claims are based on a study of employees in Germany, which found a clear positive relationship between working from home and average income levels at the regional level. Regions in eastern Germany tend to underperform, indicating that RWAs may exacerbate urban-rural imbalances within countries. These studies rely on data before 2020 and represent the pre-Covid era.

In contrast, a study conducted during the pandemic by Howard et al. (2023) examined how the short- and long-run effects of remote work on the US housing markets affected regional differences from 2020 until mid-2022. Their model predictions, based on housing supply and rental prices, suggest that people moved to more rural areas where housing costs were lower due to RWA opportunities, and not only due to temporary pandemic-related factors. In the long run, their predictions indicate that as RWA opportunities increase, people move away from high-density and high-price areas (like city centres) and the most expensive metropolitan areas toward lower-density, lower-price areas, including suburbs and rural regions. Similarly, a mixed-method study by Åberg and Tondelli (2021) conducted during Covid-19 in a rural region in Sweden argues that the pandemic generally increased interest in green spaces and rural living. The study found that the main motivations for relocation were quality of life and an existing second home in the countryside. While permanent and temporary in-migration to rural areas were seen primarily as positive developments by locals, they can cause both social and spatial inequality within the local community. From the spatial inequality perspective, local (younger) people might not afford increased property prices driven by in-migration, forcing them to move away to nearby cities with more affordable housing, thus contributing to spatial segregation by age groups.

Burchell et al. (2021), focusing on urban employees in 28 European countries, revealed gender inequality regarding the location of work: Women are more restricted to only work at the employer's premises (69%) compared to men (46%). For women, the potential to work elsewhere primarily means working from home, while men have more diverse and complex spatiotemporal patterns in their work locations. The study also found a clear regional difference: Nordic countries are markedly more flexible with (remote) working locations than other European countries. Finally, Owen et al. (2023) showed how RWAs and other neighbourhood factors affect public transport ridership in Chicago, and how its spatial variation can be seen as an indication of increasing urban inequalities.

However, none of the studies specifically focused on how residential relocation or temporary multilocal living due to RWAs affects spatial inequality regarding population composition at the neighbourhood and city levels.

4. Discussion and Future Outlook

One of the most important outcomes of this review is the fact that among thousands of studies focusing on remote work (Figure 1), only a handful of articles have focused on the impacts of RWAs on residential space (Figure 3). Unsurprisingly, most of these studies focus on residential relocation, whereas aspects of multilocal living and especially spatial inequality seem to have been neglected so far. From a societal viewpoint, this may significantly influence settlement patterns, urban and regional development, and social cohesion. Next, we discuss the knowledge gaps identified during the review process and propose ways forward in mitigating these gaps in future research.

4.1. Mapped Knowledge Gaps: What Is Missing?

4.1.1. Meta-Analysis

We identified several knowledge gaps based on our meta-analysis. First, the vast majority of the studies we identified were conducted in either Europe or North America, so we still know little about RWA impacts on residential space in other parts of the world, even though remote work is a global phenomenon (albeit less prominent outside Europe and North America; see Aksoy et al., 2025). Second, existing studies primarily focus on single metropolitan regions rather than covering entire countries, and more importantly, the country-comparative perspective based on a common methodology is almost entirely missing—only two studies examined two or more countries.

Third, many studies investigating employees focus only on certain employee subgroups, such as knowledge workers or full-time employees. This excludes a broader comparative view on how RWAs impact residential space based on employment sector and type, as well as the overall impact on society. Fourth, regarding research domains, the impacts of RWAs on residential space are not extensively discussed within the fields of urban studies, demography, and population research. Having fewer articles published in fields such as urban studies and urban planning reflects a clear research gap in understanding how spatial inequality in residential space (i.e., residential segregation) is shaped by residential relocation due to RWAs.

Fifth, methodologically speaking, there has been a notable lack of qualitative research, especially within the categories of residential relocation and spatial inequality. In contrast, studies on multilocal living predominantly use qualitative methods and lack quantitative research. Surprisingly, current quantitative research relies heavily on survey data, whereas the potential of national register databases as well as promising big data sources (see, e.g., Müürisepp et al., 2022; Willberg et al., 2021) seems to be overlooked. Further, we see a clear need for innovative mixed methods approaches in future research.

4.1.2. Residential Relocation

The understanding of how RWAs influence employees' residential location choices has expanded since the pandemic, yet significant gaps remain. First, existing evidence suggests remote work is associated with moving away from the workplace, but it remains unclear whether this also implies a move away from cities. Most studies do not clearly specify how far remote workers are willing to relocate or to which types of spatial environments. Consequently, "moving away" is often implicitly assumed to mean moving from urban to suburban or rural areas. However, the heterogeneity of findings suggests this assumption may be too strong. Given that some employers ask remote workers to remain within a reasonable commuting distance from their conventional workplaces (as documented by Šmite et al., 2023) or increasingly request a return to the office, it is becoming increasingly important to better understand how far remote workers wish to relocate and to what types of environment. While commuting distance as a factor in location choice may have diminished in importance, it has likely not disappeared entirely, with "proximity" potentially being replaced by "accessibility."

Second, this also calls for more research on the importance of remote work as a relocation decision factor against other considerations like housing characteristics (e.g., size, cost, type) and neighbourhood attributes

(e.g., proximity to workplace, public transport, natural spaces). Stated preference experiments, like in Shakib et al. (2024) or Sharifi and Lee (2024), could shed light on these dynamics. Additionally, most empirical studies focus on the intention to relocate and how this is influenced by RWAs, but offer no insights into actual relocation decisions. In-depth interviews (e.g., Thulin et al., 2023) or surveys with clients of moving companies (e.g., Rohit Kavikondala et al., 2022) or real estate developers who are in contact with people considering moving can be useful for this purpose.

Third, the causality between remote work and residential choices remains unclear. It is uncertain whether remote work drives changes in residential location or if the choice of residence influences the extent of remote work. This requires more research based on longitudinal data, as used by de Vos et al. (2018) or Ravalet and Rérat (2019).

4.1.3. Multilocal Living

The literature recognises that RWAs make multilocal living possible, but there is uncertainty regarding individual and regional outcomes. First, although RWAs and multilocal living hold potential for reducing the need for families to relocate to larger cities and enabling them to live in smaller communities despite a lack of local job opportunities (Schmidt-Thomé & Lilius, 2023), studies like those by Garde (2021) and Ciccarelli et al. (2025) contradict the mainstream RWA narrative of increased freedom and flexibility and suggest that multilocality is often more a necessity than a deliberate choice. Where and for whom this is the case, and what can be done about it, needs more research attention.

Second, there are knowledge gaps concerning whether remote work and multilocal living can revitalise rural municipalities and how. Studies like those by Kiviaho and Toivonen (2023) and Schmidt-Thomé and Lilius (2023) have employed future-oriented qualitative methods to explore the hopes and doubts of locals and decision-makers, but complementing quantitative and longitudinal studies is needed to find out what the long-term impacts of RWAs and multilocal living are on the development of rural areas and peripheral cities.

Third, RWAs encourage more people to work from their second homes for extended periods (Di Marino et al., 2023; Kiviaho & Toivonen, 2023). One question, especially in the Nordic summer cottage context (see Müller, 2021), is how RWAs are transforming rural second homes from places of leisure and relaxation into places for mixing work and holiday use. Although Bürgin et al. (2021) provided interesting insights on the strategic use of a peripheral holiday home for work, they relied on only six individuals, leaving room for further studies on the interplay of different places for work and multiple homes.

4.1.4. Spatial Inequality

There is limited (indirect) knowledge about how the increasing adoption of RWAs influences residential relocation and multilocal living, and its subsequent effects on societal structures, particularly concerning spatial segregation and social inequality. This issue stems largely from the structural inequalities linked to the potential to work remotely, which vary by job type and industry (H. Li & Wei, 2023), as well as by country, due to national RWA policies (Luca et al., 2025). Thus, it raises critical questions about how RWA-induced residential relocations are reshaping population compositions from the neighbourhood level to a global scale.

Despite the significance of these questions, none of the studies reviewed specifically addresses these issues. Certainly, similarly to Howard et al. (2023), economists have started to estimate the impact of RWAs on residential real-estate property and rental markets since the Covid-19 pandemic (e.g., Althoff et al., 2022), but their focus is solely on economic aspects and not on social implications: how it affects the social fabric of neighbourhoods and how it potentially fosters spatial inequalities and segregation in cities. Regarding multilocal living, we lack understanding of how temporary living in second homes for certain population groups affects the social fabric in areas where primary homes are left empty for weeks and months, and the social dynamics in areas where second homes are occupied by temporary residents.

A few discursive articles (not included in the review) touch on potential changes in urban spaces and spatial inequality, offering predictions for future developments in residential space. For example, Florida et al. (2023) predict only minor long-term impacts of RWAs on urban fabric and settlement structure, arguing that employees with high RWA potential still want urban amenities and opportunities in attractive metropolitan cities. They further predict that if densely populated urban centres lose population, people will relocate to nearby suburbs and small towns, and medium-sized cities and remote rural areas will continue to lose economic attractiveness and residents. These predictions are supported by two of the empirical studies we reviewed, conducted on global and regional scales, respectively (Braesemann et al., 2022; Irlacher & Koch, 2021). In contrast, initial studies on spatial inequality conducted during Covid-19 indicate significant structural changes in people's daily lives and society (H. Li & Wei, 2023; Müürisepp et al., 2023), although these studies do not examine the role of RWAs. These somewhat conflicting results underscore the need for more comprehensive research that delves into the implications of remote work for spatial inequalities in residential space at neighbourhood, city, regional, and global levels.

4.2. Synthesis and Avenues for Future Research

Remote work is here to stay, and it has enormous impacts on where people live and how they go about their daily lives. Our review of the existing research on the impacts of remote work on residential space shows that the flexibility offered by RWAs regarding work locations sometimes enables residential relocation, multilocal living, and greater work–life balance. Additionally, RWAs can and will also significantly affect socio-spatial inequalities and potentially contribute to segregation, making them highly relevant for urban and regional planning and policy.

The review revealed that the impact of remote work on residential space has largely been overlooked, especially in the urban research context. Most importantly, the existing literature is primarily focused on Europe and North America, is often case-specific, and tends to concentrate on only certain population sub-groups; thus, one must exercise caution in drawing any universal conclusions on the topic based on the current literature. Additionally, the underlying economic, social, and cultural mechanisms by which remote work impacts residential space remain unclear and require further research.

Above, we have addressed several aspects aimed at mitigating the existing knowledge gaps in understanding the impacts of RWAs on residential space. We now highlight four avenues for further research that can provide new insights and contribute to the discourse on RWAs and residential space.

First, we urge scholars in the social sciences to better acknowledge the impacts of RWAs on the social and spatial functioning of society. RWAs affect more than daily practices, health and well-being, organisational changes, job relocations, and office downsizing. They also alter socio-spatial structure and the urban-rural nexus, which can have long-term impacts on residential location decisions, multilocal living arrangements, and spatial inequalities in residential space. It is essential that scholars pay more attention to these impacts.

Second, almost all empirical studies were cross-sectional or compared changes over two consecutive years, which captured short-term changes related to the social disruptions caused by the pandemic. However, the knowledge gaps we identified in all three studied perspectives clearly require more longitudinal studies to understand the relationships between RWAs and residential space better, to not only see beyond the Covid-19 disruption but also to enable a more detailed examination of the pre-Covid period to distinguish long-term trends.

Third, a more diverse methodological toolbox is needed, especially to capture the missing longitudinal perspective. For example, qualitative research could employ innovative remote or hybrid ethnographic approaches (e.g., Reunamäki, 2025) or study employees' biographies, whereas quantitative research could leverage the potential of national register databases and census data. In particular, national registers enable researchers to link individual information (such as place of residence, education, and income) with employment information (such as location, job type, and sector) at the micro-level annually to reveal residential and work relocation linked with the remotability of jobs over several years or even decades. Many countries (e.g., the Nordic and Baltic countries) maintain such national register databases, but to date, this information remains underexamined.

Finally, it is surprising that no big data sources (e.g., mobile phone and social media data) have been utilised in this research field at all, especially given their widespread use in academia for understanding societal processes, including capturing daily activity locations (e.g., Poorthuis et al., 2024), dynamic population presence (Willberg et al., 2021), and spatial inequality (Müürisepp et al., 2025). For instance, studies based on mobile phone data from operators during the pandemic revealed how the spatial segregation increased between socioeconomic and ethnic groups regarding their daily use of urban space (Müürisepp et al., 2023), as well as patterns of individuals with access to second homes escaping larger cities for less dense rural areas (Willberg et al., 2021). Similarly, data from Facebook indicated that people stayed in their homes and avoided dense urban centres (Rowe et al., 2023). These promising novel data sources capturing dynamic population presence and mobility flows, combined with conventional data, could shed some light on the impacts of RWAs on residential space, especially regarding multilocal living.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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ChatGPT was used solely for language polishing. All outputs generated were critically reviewed, revised, and approved by the authors.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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About the Authors

Riku Reunamäki is a postdoctoral researcher in the Digital Geography Lab at the University of Helsinki. He uses qualitative methods, including interviews and ethnographic research, to study how remote work shapes the organisation, management, performance, and experience of work.

Veronique Van Acker is a research scientist at LISER, studying travel behaviour and how it relates to activity patterns, life-course decisions, well-being, and digital-physical interactions. She coordinates the Horizon Europe project WinWin4WorkLife, which examines the social, economic, and spatial impacts of remote work.

Olle Järv is a university researcher in the Digital Geography Lab at the University of Helsinki, studying how big data can be used to examine people's spatial mobilities, and how this can be used to understand social processes and phenomena, such as segregation, border regions, multilocality, and transnational lifestyle.