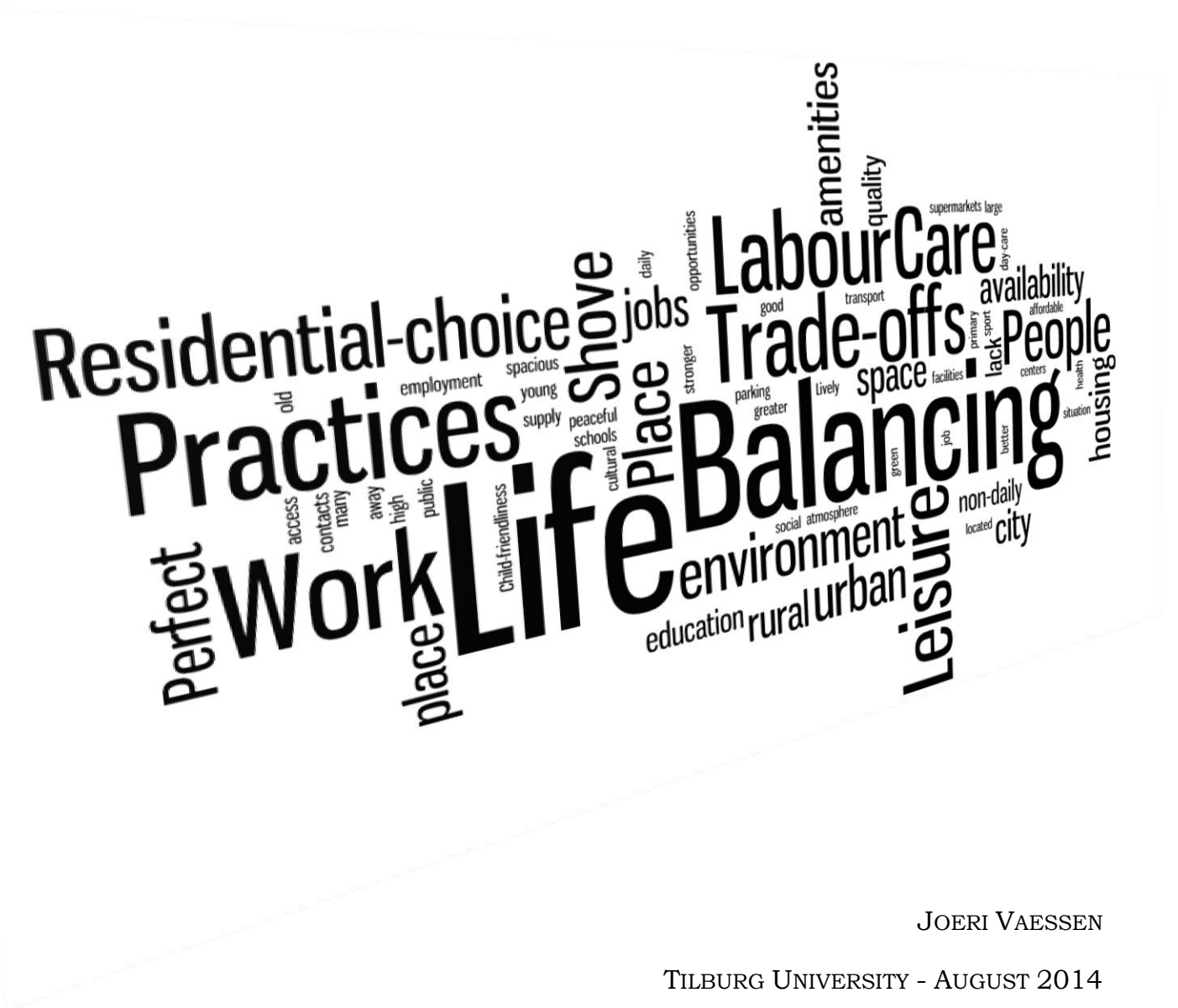


# THE STAY-OR-MOVE RESIDENTIAL DECISION

A LIFELONG BALANCING



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# Abstract

One of the major difficulties regarding the realistic interpretation of previous work on residential choice-making is the narrowed focus on aspects that play a role in people's residential decisions. Rather than investigating residential choice-making as an absolute 'choice moment', this study focuses on the connection between aspects in life that need to be balanced with one another. Based on the social practice perspective of Shove et al. (2012) this study aims to shed new light on the way a 'choice' for residence is made, where it fully explores the complex relation between crucial life stages, social practices, and the choice of residence.

Through the performance of qualitative in-depth interviews it was believed that not all practices are equally important for every person, but that this is strongly depending on the relative importance of that activity in the specific life course. Portraying the three social practices of labour, care and leisure as an interactive balancing during the total life course, how transitions between life stages change the relative importance given to these practices, and how this is reflected in the preference for a type of residential environment, is the value of this study.

As it is believed that a change in one's practice priorities enables a change in one's residential preferences, the knowledge gained from this thesis may be beneficial for local or national policy makers, by adapting strategies in order to influence existing practices or change them towards strategies that increasingly meet the goals and type of life people aspire to. This adjusted approach to policy making should therefore lead to an improvement in the ability to attract a particular group of people to a country, province, municipality, or city, in order to stimulate the competitive advantage of that place.

**Keywords:** Residential choice-making - Social practices - Life stages - Residential decision - Life cycle - Labour, care & leisure - Sustainable policy making

# Executive summary

The idea that the success and prosperity of a place largely depends on the ability of that place to attract and retain a specific group of people is gaining foothold worldwide. It opens an academic debate, namely on how to attract or retain such a specific group of people. In order to influence one's residential choice, it is crucial to know how residential decisions are made. And although residential choice-making gained an essential position in literature during the last decades, the study of residential-choice making is still far away from reaching its point of saturation. One of the main difficulties is linked with the narrowed focus on aspects that play a role in making a residential decision.

In order to overcome the idea of treating aspects separately, the social practice perspective of Shove et al. (2012) is used to investigate the practices that play a role in residential choice-making in an integrated way. The particular life stage one is in appears to be crucial in determining the relative importance that is given to practices, and therefore this research seeks to bridge the existing gaps in literature by incorporating the role of a certain life stage in the balancing between practices, in its overall relation with the residential choice. As the aim of this dissertation was to generate a deeper understanding of the role a particular life stage has in the trade-offs that people make between social practices of labour, care and leisure, in order to understand which impact these trade-offs have on their choice of residence, this research is structured by the following main research question:

*What is the relative importance of the social practices of labour, care and leisure in residential choice-making and how does this differ per particular life stage?*

Theories of the life cycle (Duvall, 1957), residential environments (Feijten et al., 2008) and residential choice-making were combined with the social practice perspective of Shove et al. (2012) in order to provide a conceptual model for this research. This conceptual model created a dynamic perspective on the process of residential choice-making and aimed for a complete view on all aspects that play a role in making a residential decision. By the performance of qualitative in-depth interviews data was gathered. In total, fifteen interviews were held with people out of three crucial life stages. These were divided in an unequal way, respectively six retired people, five young family members, and four singles, representing a total of 32 observations due to the

reconstruction possibility of earlier life stages by people out of the second and third life stage.

In answering the main research question, the findings of this study show that indeed there exists a complex relation between life stages, social practices, and the preference for a type of residential environment. A change in one's practice priorities, influenced by the life stage, enables a change in one's residential preference. When looking closer to the first life stage, that of *singles*, the challenge lies in finding a balance between the practice of labour and the practice of leisure. As labour has priority, but needs to be balanced with their need for leisure and cultural amenities in a lively atmosphere, their residential choice is characterized by a preference for cities, referred to as an urban environment. When moving to the *young family* stage, the time devoted to the practice of care increases extremely and the preference for a short commuting time increases equally, something which affects the practice of labour. The practice of leisure becomes less related with the availability of leisure amenities, but more with the intangibles of a place. Generally, people in this life stage have less free time to spend in a leisurely way, so for them it is in particular this lively atmosphere that is directly related with their sociability, as for them it turns places into social meeting places. Their need to balance the emerging focus for care-related amenities with both their work and the access to this lively atmosphere is reflected in their choice for a sub-urban environment. When moving to the last life stage, that one of *retired people*, the practice of care and the practice of leisure become clearly more important than the labour-related activities in life. The results of this study show that sociability holds an important role within those practices, something which is reflected in their diverse choice for a residential environment. Anticipating on the health situation or loss of their partner, they prefer to live in a smaller and safer type of housing located in a lively urban environment because of its access to daily needed (care) amenities, and sociability benefits in order to compensate for the silence of solitude. This result underlines the importance of the role an urban environment holds in the sociability of people in the retired life stage.

Beyond these findings, other conclusions can be drawn based on the results of this study. During the conversations with respondents it turned out that many of them consider their residential choice as a *natural transition*, as the indicated that they find it difficult to view their residential choice as a real 'choice'. They often argue that it is something that is formed by the course of life, which depends so much on coincidences. Besides, the results show that residential choice-making is *multi-leveled and largely based on implicit choices*. During the interviews the respondents answered the questions 'Why do you live where you live?' mostly with a short bunch of words, and during the

passage of the interview they seemed to discover new reasons why they actually live where they live. And as expected, it is *the change in a life stage that triggers a need for progress*. In the responses of people it becomes clear that (1) the characteristics of the current type of housing form the trigger to take the next step, or (2) the characteristics of the residential environment. Another remarkable result for this study is linked with *the perception of a residential environment*. A differentiation was made in three types of environments, however this research enabled the researcher to observe that respondents experience their own environment very differently than how one would expect according to the characteristics that belong to the environment. This different perception of one's own residential environment can explain why some results are different than expected. Lastly, this study showed that *commuting time is an important factor* in residential choice-making. Commuting time holds an even greater role than expected on forehand, as many respondents showed in their answers that they made trade-offs between practices on the layer of commuting time.

Based on the outcomes of this research, recommendations for further research and society can be made. It would be interesting for further research to look closer to time-space paths, and how these develop along the entire life cycle. As people indicate that all time they have left is categorized as free time, it would be interesting to investigate how the balance per life stage is in leisure and non-leisurely spend free time. Another inevitable issue is the significant role that sociability holds in residential choice-making. Is sociability really the decisive factor that gives meaning to those social practices, and in this way largely determines one's residential choice? But also the crucial role of commuting time in residential choice-making and the role residential characteristics hold deserve further exploration. Lastly, an issue that arises from this research is the fact that the group patterns described in the conclusion, and which are visualized in a final model, cannot be generalized. It would be interesting to test the outcomes of this research by the use of a quantitative approach, in that it may confirm the conclusions on the relative importance that is given towards social practices per life stage, and how this is reflected in the preference for a residential environment.

Beyond these scientific recommendations, the outcomes of this study can be especially beneficial for local or national policy makers in the working field, since contributing to the academic debate on residential choice-making can benefit the urban policy processes. In the desire of regions and cities to exercise control on the places where people live, the results of this study can be used by policy makers in adapting their strategies on residential preferences per life stage, in order to meet the goals and type of life people in that particular life stage aspire to.

# Preface

*“No single individual can motivate others.  
He can only create conditions for others to be self motivated.”*

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*Taylor et al., 2008*

When I started writing my dissertation for the pre-Master program in Strategic Business Management & Marketing last college year, this quote by Taylor et al. motivated me to do research about the motivation of humans. I discovered that year what motivation was, both personally and as an academic topic. Besides, I discovered how to enjoy doing academic research. It made me decide to directly start a Master, the multidisciplinary Master in Leisure Studies at Tilburg University.

One year later, I proudly present to you my Master's thesis. For now, my final piece of student-work. A piece of work that is about residential choice-making. A topic that came on my track because of an inspiring presentation held by, who later would become my supervisor, Nienke van Boom MSc. I got aware of the fact that residential choice-making is not just an abstract theoretical concept, but something that is a lifelong balancing for everyone in our environment. In this thesis I aimed to explore the role of essential life stages in the trade-offs that people make between social practices of labour, care and leisure, as this would help to understand which impact these trade-offs have on the choice of residence. If you are dazzling right now, relax, no panic. There are more than 70 pages to help you on track and which will hopefully provide you with new insights.

After one year of emerging in my research theme, doing interviews across The Netherlands, transcribing all the data and formulating my conclusions, I can fully declare that I enjoyed doing it. And I will quote some sentences which I found in an online column written by my supervisor, as it perfectly fits with my research experience: “I have no regrets so far. Does that mean that it has been a smooth process? No, it hasn't. But does it bring me the amount of positive energy to deal with the setbacks? Yes, it does.”

I especially enjoyed doing the interviews with respondents out of different life stages. I would like to thank those people, as they were willing to give me a very personal insight in their diverse stories about why they live where they live. They gave me an insight in choices they made along their life path, something that I really appreciate and are grateful for. Besides, I would like to give a special thanks to my supervisor. Hopefully she knows, but I truly experienced the supervision of Nienke as very personal, flexible, and incredibly effective.

This research felt as a great opportunity to broaden my academic knowledge in the field of residential choice-making and to develop my own professional skills. Hopefully this thesis will expand your knowledge and give you some inspiring insights, may that be as a student, lecturer, researcher or professional out of the work field.

I hope my joy of doing this research is reflected in the work in front of you.

Tilburg University, August 2014

Joeri Vaessen



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# Introduction

*“Imagine life as a game in which you are juggling some five balls in the air. You name them Work, Family, Health, Friends and Spirit, and you are keeping all of these in the air. You will soon understand that Work is a rubber ball. If you drop it, it will bounce back. But the other four balls (Family, Health, Friends and Spirit) are made of glass. If you drop one of these, they will irrevocably scuffed, marked, nicked, damaged or even shattered. They will never be the same. You must understand that and strive for balance in your life.”*

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*30-second speech by Bryan Dyson, 2010, Former CEO of Coca Cola*

Keeping all the balls in the air. Balancing between practices in life, as time devoted to one practice is simply not spent on another. Mastering the competition between practices, in finding the perfect balance for you as an individual, might be one of the greatest challenges in life. While finding this balance, the residential choice is perhaps one of the most fundamental decisions. Every person makes the decision to stay or move in his or her life. Some people settle down where they were born and grew up, or very near to it, while others see no boundaries and see the total globe as their potential home. Characteristics that play a role in the residential choice are very diverse, which makes it a complex topic. Some people stay their entire life at the place where they are born, or grew up, while others relocate for a certain atmosphere, a new job, their partner, friends, family or leisure activities. This creates a fundamental difference in the lives of people. When looking at someone's life, the issue of relocating may depend for a great extent on the life career and particular life stage he or she is in. How does the residential choice changes during the entire life cycle? How does residential choice-making differ for singles than for young families, or for retired people and singles? The lifelong balancing between staying in or moving to a place, in order to master the competition between practices, is certainly worth exploring.

# 1 Situational context of the research

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The first chapter of this thesis aims to give the reader an introduction to the topic. It starts with the rationale, where the problem discussion takes place and the broad field of residential choice-making is narrowed down towards a specific study and main research question. This lays the foundation for the entire thesis and will direct the reader to the overall research aim, followed by a discussion on both the scientific and societal relevance of the study. Finally, an overview of the structure of the entire thesis is given.

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## **1.1 The rationale of the dissertation: problem definition**

Although residential choice-making gained an essential position in literature during the last decades, the study of residential-choice making is still far away from reaching its point of saturation. This, because there is still a need to assemble all the evidence necessary to disentangle the characteristics that drive the stay-or-move residential decision of people during different life stages.

Research began by studying and identifying aspects that characterize and influence residential choice-making. It was subsequently noted that within our contemporary society, one of the most important characteristics that drive the residential choice-making of people within urban regions is access to labour. In line, Van Ommeren, Reitveld and Nijkamp (1997) and Waddell (1993) noted that residential choice-making is a part of people's larger strategy of job search. Renkow and Hoover (2000) suggest that people are more likely to relocate into metropolitan areas if they are faced with the possibility of shorter commuting time to work. However, other studies (Storper & Manville, 2006; Roberts, 2006) show that people frequently give priority to other characteristics than job opportunities when balancing residential choice-making, as they indicate that there is more in life than work.

Take for example the care which people need in their daily life: The daily amenities that relate to a person's needs (Storper & Manville, 2006) such as supermarkets, schools, and centers for day-care. A place which offers these facilities is more attractive than a place which lacks in the availability of these daily needed

amenities. But also the time devoted on household work and childcare is an influential aspect in the residential choice-making, as time devoted to these two aspects extremely differs per life stage.

Another important characteristic in the residential choice-making is given by the studies on leisure. In the work of Roberts (2006) it was noted that people build long-term leisure careers, and that leisure in later life stages is influenced by whatever people have done or learnt earlier in their life. Moreover, literature indicates that the availability of nature and leisure amenities holds an important role in reasons to relocate. Think for example of the presence of environmental amenities, clean air, scenic views, and preserved natural habitat (Wales; Rouwendal & Meijer; Gawande et al.; Hornsten & Fredman; Tyrvaainen, all in Kim et al., 2005). But mainly recreation opportunities, including access to parks and open space, and culture are of great importance (Colwell et al.; Greenberg & Lewis, in Kim et al., 2005). In addition, other characteristics such as the atmosphere of the living place, neighbourhood preferences, type and pricing of housing, and open space are important factors in the residential choice-making (Kim et al., 2005).

Finally, a characteristic that is often taken into account in work on residential choice-making is the role of social networks. People built long-term social relationships, and these social relationships can have a great impact on residential choice-making during later life stages. According to Martin-Brelot et al. (2010), living close to your family and friends belongs to the top five reasons why people live in a specific city. What people have done with and learnt from their social network during their earlier life, influences reasons to stay or move in residential choice-making. The contact with social relations is not only maintained during leisure time, or during care for children by parents in a family context, but also in connection with work. The research of Pareja-Eastaway et al. (2010) showed for example a connection between labour and social networks, as this study indicated that not only the family relations are of great importance, but also the professional social network is highly important in residential choice-making. Therefore, sociability can be regarded as an aspect that characterizes and influences residential choice-making on many levels.

These characteristics give an indication of the complexity of the choice for residence, and shows that this 'decision' is driven by many factors. However, it is

important to emphasize that residential choice-making should not be seen as a one-moment decision. As mentioned, earlier studies provided important characteristics that hold a role in residential choice-making, and paid attention to different aspects that are found important for different contexts, specific life styles or particular life stages. However, people's job opportunities, daily care, social networks, housing tastes and leisure activities fluctuate over time during their entire life cycle. According to research from Punpuing and Ross (2001) and Ewert and Prskawetz (2002), life cycle constraints and preferences for a particular lifestyle affect the residential choice-making. Depending on the particular life stage a person is in, different trade-offs are made between characteristics that influence the residential choice-making. For example, students might prefer to live near their social networks, whereas families with children might pursue their residential choice on having a direct access to the natural environment, as they believe that a high-quality environment is very important for their children. In contrast, dual careers couples without children might prefer to give priority to a lower commuting time to work and a lively cultural atmosphere, and therefore base their residential choice on convenience and fast access to respectively labour and leisure.

The characteristics of labour, care and leisure are some of the possible explanations why people choose to stay in or move to a particular place, but since so many factors might play a role, there is no conclusive answer yet on how residential choices of people are made, and, of even more importance, why they are made in this specific way. The shortcoming of previous research that is done on residential choice-making is that it treats labour, care and leisure separately, even though these factors are likely connected in chains of practices (as referred to by Collins, 2004) that closely interact with each other and form trade-offs with one another, particularly if examined during the total life cycle context. Verbeek and Mommaas (2008, p. 634) describe social practices as "routine-driven, everyday activities situated in time and space and shared by groups of people as part of their everyday life". Rather than being a one-moment decision, it are these everyday routine based activities, bundled in practices, that influence our residential choice.

In order to generate new insights in the dynamics between the practices that play a role in residential choice-making, in particular during crucial stages in the lives of people, the main research question is as follows:

*What is the relative importance of the social practices of labour, care and leisure in residential choice-making and how does this differ per particular life stage?*

In order to answer this proposed research question, this study will combine existing theories regarding residential choice-making with the work written on the dynamics of social practices by Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012). The work of Shove et al. (2012) is used in order to overcome the idea of treating aspects of labour, care and leisure separately, but rather in an integrated way by seeing them as bundles of practices that need to be balanced in relation to each other. However, for the use of this study, the work of Shove et al. (2012) will not only be used to investigate a routine-driven everyday activity, as how a social practice was described by Verbeek and Mommaas (2008), but also as a way to investigate how the set of labour, care and leisure practices connect, interact, and compete in making a decision to stay in or move to a particular place during different life stages.

## **1.2 Aim of the research**

As a consequence of the presented problem discussion above, this research seeks to bridge the existing gaps in literature by incorporating the role of a certain life stage in the balancing between labour, care and leisure practices, in its relation with the residential choice. Different characteristics might play a role in these practices, and the particular life stage one is in appears to be crucial in determining the relative importance of these particular characteristics per practice. As the overall goal of this dissertation shall be to generate a deeper understanding of the dynamics between the practices that play a role in residential choice-making, in particular during crucial stages in the lives of people, this research aims to:

*Investigate the role of a particular life stage in the trade-offs that people make between social practices of labour, care and leisure, in order to understand which impact these trade-offs have on their choice of residence.*

An assessment of the balancing between practices in people's choice of residence (per particular life stage) will add new insights for the academic discussion concerning residential choice-making and therefore will be at the centre of this dissertation.

### **1.3 Relevance of the study**

One of the major difficulties regarding the realistic interpretation of previous work related to the topic of residential choice-making, is the narrowed focus on factors that play a role in residential decisions: Whether residential choice-making is the sum of several factors and can be regarded as a one-moment decision. To this end, this study focuses not only on factors that play a role in residential choice-making, but more on the connection between these aspects in bundles of practices that need to be balanced with one another. Much research has been done, but most of it in a way neglecting this important interaction between practices, which results in a complex residential decision that can change over time. Therefore, within the scope of this study, it is examined how trade-offs between practices of labour, care and leisure are made.

More specifically, a second important contribution is to be found in the specific attention to the entire life cycle context. The influence of the life-path has so far been underexposed in research on the choice for a residential environment, especially in relation to the practice perspective. An attempt is made to gain a deeper understanding of the relation between residential choice-making and the relative importance of practices per particular stage in the total life cycle, as the balance between different practices may change over time. By studying the dynamics between these practices, which are characterized by many individual factors, and by comparing the differences in trade-offs made within various life stages, this thesis adds also in a different way to the general literature available on residential choice-making.

For this reasons, the relevance of this study can be seen as two-fold. First, the study is particularly relevant from a scientifically point of view, as the perspective of seeing residential choice-making as the result of different trade-offs between practices, for as far as could have been ascertained during the thesis period, not has been investigated before. By generating a deeper understanding of its relationship with residential choice-making, this study attempts to extend the literature related to residential choice-making, but also in relation to the specific life cycle context. Although today a large body of literature describes topics related to residential choice-making, through making this change in perspective and deeper



link with life stages, this research may contribute to the knowledge development and in turn the ongoing academic debate on how to attract or retain people to a certain area.

This brings us to the second important relevance of this study, which is to be found in societal relevance. The knowledge gained from this study can be regarded as relevant for society, since contributing to the academic debate on how to attract or retain people, may also benefit the urban policy processes. Despite the desire of regions and cities to attract high human capital to stimulate the growth to success, and the attempt to exercise control on the places where people in a particular life stage live, people often tend to lack well-formed opinions about places that are the most or least likely for them to consider. Their impressions of regions and cities are often limited (Yankelovich, 2006). This lack of definition, as described by Yankelovich (2006), creates opportunities for regions, cities and communities to brand themselves with positive imagery and messages for people in a particular life stage. By understanding as a policy maker that aspects of a practice are not isolated or a pure individual choice, but rather part of larger chains, it becomes possible for them to have a hand in shaping the elements that form a practice and expose the relations between practices. Or, as Shove et al. (2012) concluded in their work on social practices, it becomes possible for policy makers to intervene in the elements of the system of daily life. It is the practice entity -the socially embedded underpinning of behavior- which forms a better target for sustainable policy making.

In this way, the knowledge gained from this thesis may be beneficial for local or national policy makers, by adapting strategies in order to influence existing practices -by making them more sustainable- or change them towards strategies that increasingly meet the goals and type of life people aspire to. This adjusted approach to policy making should therefore lead to an improvement in the ability to attract a particular group of people to a country, province, municipality, or city, in order to stimulate the competitive advantage of that place and strengthen the path to a sustainable success.

#### **1.4 Structure of the entire thesis**

This thesis is structured in six chapters. The first chapter gives the reader a description of the importance of the topic of residential choice-making, suggests for whom the results of this research might be of relevance, and presents the rationale. This is where the problem discussion takes place, which narrows down the broad topic of residential choice-making towards a more concrete study related with social practices and essential life stages. Finally, this rationale will direct the reader to the research aim. Chapter two contains a summary of the studied literature, where previous research and relevant theories in the field of residential choice-making in general, and more specific related to practices, different life stages, and residential environments, are discussed. This chapter ends with a theoretical framework and its justification, which forms the basis for the three research questions. Next, the research methodology is developed. This third chapter is based on the own research activities and explains the methodology used during the dissertation. Chapter four presents the results of the performed research activities during the fieldwork and gives the reader an integrated analysis of findings on the qualitative research data. These results form the input for chapter five. The goal of this chapter is to reach the research aim, by confronting the results with the knowledge gained from chapter two. It should help to answer the three research questions, and in this way the main question. After the conclusion, the final chapter presents different recommendations towards local and national policy makers. Beyond that, this chapter incorporates a theoretical contribution to the academic discussion in this field and ends with recommendations for possible further research and a reflection on the entire research process.

## 2 Theoretical perspective and framework

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The second chapter of this thesis will present an overview of previous research done in the field of residential choice-making in general, and more specifically related to practices and different life stages. It will introduce the development of an appropriate research framework around the previously mentioned research aim, where discussions, relevant theories and concepts will be critically discussed and finally narrowed down towards a conceptual model. This model and its justification will form the basis for the three research questions, which serve as the input for the methodology section and data collection.

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### **2.1 Residential choice-making**

As a start of the literature study, it is crucial to get a deeper understanding of what residential choice-making actually is and what it includes. It is an extensively studied subject in literature, ranging from the work of Doling (1976) who studied already three decades ago residential choice behavior in relation to the family life cycle, to the work on residential environment choices over the life-course by Feijten et al. (2008) and the major and well-known work of Florida (2002) on the Creative Class and its residential decision. Overall, when studying the available literature, it becomes clear that different factors are involved in the residential choice-making, and that studies tend to focus on only one or a few aspects of the complete residential choice-making story. For example, studies tend to focus on either the personal characteristics related to residential choice-making, or on the contextual influences on the residential choice. Besides, the methodological way in which residential choice-making is investigated differs per research.

An important feature in residential choice-making is the residential environment. The types of residential environment can be categorized in (1) urban areas, (2) suburban areas and (3) rural areas (Feijten et al., 2008). Each of the various environments has its own specific characteristics and offers different advantages and disadvantages. These environments will be further explained in paragraph 2.5. Important to note here is that moves between these types of residential environment

are often triggered and conditioned by transitions (also referred to as careers) in the life-course, particularly by the labour and household career (Mulders, in Feijten et al., 2008).

When reviewing factors that influence residential choice-making, Feijten et al. (2008) point out that individual factors such as age, partnership status, work status and education are important. In addition to these individual factors, contextual aspects such as commuting time to work, atmosphere, housing costs, characteristics of the type of housing and the location are of importance (Kim, Pagliara & Preston, 2005). Due to this divided examination of factors that influence the choice of residence, no dynamic perspective is provided in both studies. This is in line with the perspective of Verbeek and Mommaas (2008), who argue that integrating both individual and contextual factors provides a comprehensive image of factors that play a role, for this study related with residential choice-making. A research that emphasizes this combination of factors is the work of Storper and Manville (2006). They describe residential choice-making as on one hand depending on variations in the preferences per particular life career, and on the other hand the differences that exist between the places. These location based differences relate to the availability in amenities, infrastructure and atmosphere. Therefore, they conclude that the residential choice is not merely based on “the presence of any particular bundle of amenities”, but in addition related with “the ability of places to provide access to whatever preferences people may have” (Storper & Manville, 2006, p. 1255).

This perspective shows, that residential choice-making cannot be seen as a merely one-moment decision, where only one or a few factors play a role, but that residential choice-making is about a dynamic combination of, and a balance between, different kind of careers that relate to both individual characteristics and preferences, and to contextual factors.

Rather than investigating residential choice-making as the real ‘choice moment’, as a specific location, or as the type of housing, it is this (mis)match between the contextual type of residential environment and the activities that shape everyday life which is of interest for this study. As one residential context might be more suitable for activities that shape someone’s daily life than the other, not every residential environment might provide a match with the particular stage in life. It

are these activities that determine which environment is best suitable. As not all activities are equally important for every person, these activities are balanced with one another. In this way, trade-offs between activities that shape daily life are made, depending on the relative importance of that activity in the specific life stage someone is in. Therefore, it is of great importance to change the perspective and see activities in a dynamic way. For this particular reason, it might be useful to introduce the practice perspective.

## **2.2 The social practice perspective**

In residential choice-making, a combination of factors come together that lead to a particular behavior, translated in ‘choosing’ a place of residence. But to what extent can we actually speak of choosing a place to live? Is there really something as an absolute choice moment, where things are compared and a choice is simply made based on the sum of individual reasons? Or is one’s behavior of ‘choosing’ a place of residence a deeper process, which goes beyond individual factors? As Shove et al. (2012) describe in their work *The dynamics of social practice: Everyday Life and how it Changes*, individual’s behavior is primarily expressed in the social practices one engages in. As they reason, many practices hold in our contemporary society, and they change over time. The essence of Shove’s work is that “rather than being the expression of an individual’s values and attitudes, behavior is the observable expression of social phenomenon.” (Sustainable Practices Research Group, 2013, p. 5).

According to Shove et al. (2012), social practices involve the active integration of different elements. As Shove et al. suggest, any practice is a constitute of three types of elements, namely (1) materials, objects, and infrastructures, (2) forms of competence/skills and know-how, and (3) images and meanings. These are represented by the three colored bolls in figure 1 on the next page. These three types need to be integrated in a dynamic way and as Shove et al. (2012) add, each time a practice takes place, the three different elements are brought together. It is only possible to have a practice unless all the three elements are available. Practices can be expressed in different ways; it all depends on the specific configuration of the three types of elements.

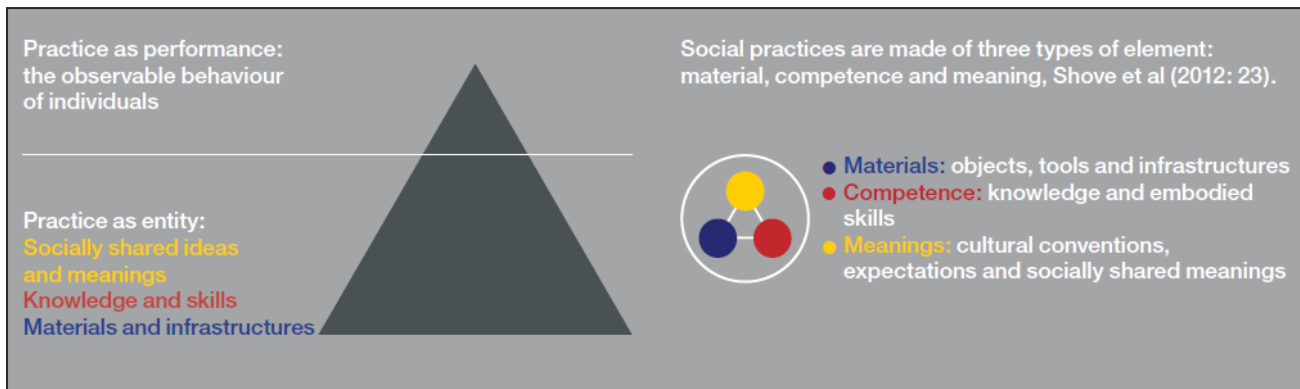


Figure 1: The elements of a social practice. From Sustainable Practices Research Group (2013).

It becomes clear that ‘choosing’ a place of residence should not be regarded as a one-moment decision based on an individual choice, but rather on both the interaction and relative importance of both individual and contextual factors that are related with these elements.

As not all factors are equally important for every person, mainly due to transitions in practices, factors are balanced with one another. According to Shove et al. (2012), these transitions in practices reflect changes in the composition of elements, and how these are integrated. Moreover, Shove et al. emphasize that these changes are collective. Therefore, the changing importance attributed to each of these three elements makes an individual continually seek for the perfect balance between practices.

Within these practices it is especially this last type of element, meanings (i.e., cultural conventions, expectations and socially shared meanings), that mostly changes over the life course and therefore changes the importance that is given to a practice. As the meaning of a practice changes, the priority given to that practice also increases or decreases. In turn, trade-offs between different practices are made, depending on the personal importance at that moment in time, where the result of the relative importance given to a particular practice influences one’s residential preference. Literature indicates that some individual factors cluster in practices, which makes it possible to determine which practices are most important and should be taken into account during residential choice-making. On the other hand, it also shows which practices might be less influential, depending on the specific situation and related needs of a person.

## **2.3 Three essential practice domains**

The perspective of social practices helps to see how different practices interact in making a decision to stay in or move to a particular place. As not all practices are equally important for everyone and in every situation, relative importance is given to practices. During residential choice-making, work is often seen as one of the most important practices driving people's residential choice-making (Waddell, 1993). Therefore, the *practice of labour* is seen as one of the main domains influencing residential decisions. However, as Richard Florida states in his major work on the creative class, "jobs are not the whole story" (Florida, 2012, p.185). When deciding where to live, people balance the practice of labour with several other practices in their lives, for example with the availability of daily amenities (Stroper & Manville, 2006) and the time devoted to raising children and the household, translated in the second main practice: the *practice of care*. Besides, other considerations should be taken into account, such as the long-term leisure career and availability of leisure amenities. Therefore, the *practice of leisure* is considered as a third main practice. Lastly, the influence of social relationships relates with relationships one has build up with family, friends and colleagues during their entire life (Martin-Brelot et al., 2010). These three different practices, namely (1) labour, (2) care, (3) leisure, and the overall influence of social relationships, are discussed in more detail below.

### **2.3.1 The practice of labour**

Studies about moves between different types of residential environments often indicate that people are triggered and conditioned by changes in the careers in the life course (Mulders, in Feijten et al., 2008). The labour career is one of the most important triggers, as often residential choice-making is examined as a part of people's larger strategy in their search for job opportunities (Waddell, 1993; Van Ommeren et al., 1997; Feijten et al., 2008). According to several studies conducted in different fields (Kim, Horner et al., 2005; Kim, Pagliara et al., 2005; Prashker et al., 2008, and Marlet, 2009), the access or proximity to jobs and the job opportunities are among the most important residential choice-making reasons. The availability of employment is for many people the main reason to move to another place, especially for young people, as they are more focused on their career. Besides, people in this life stage, as we will see later, tend to be more flexible (Gottlieb & Joseph, 2006).

Moreover, not only the job opportunities, but also the job related infrastructure (i.e., the accessibility of a location) and the quality of that infrastructure affects the way people perceive the attractiveness of a particular area (Visser & Van Dam, 2006). As these authors state, people tend to prefer a job which is easy to reach from where they live, and where the infrastructure between their workplace and home is of an acceptable quality. In addition, Storper and Manville (2006) and Marlet (2009) recognize the importance of infrastructure and job opportunities in the residential choice-making.

However, despite of the recognized importance of job opportunities and access to the job in residential choice-making, people frequently prioritize other practices besides their job as being of importance.

### **2.3.2 The practice of care**

According to different studies (Storper & Manville, 2006; Prashker et al., 2008) the availability of and access to amenities is a crucial factor in residential choice-making. Several typologies of amenities can be found, which make a division in (1) daily amenities and (2) non-daily amenities. These daily amenities are related with the practice of care, as these include factors which people need in their daily life. These daily amenities are related with facilities a place has to offer (Storper & Manville, 2006). An area which has sufficient facilities that relate to a person's needs, for example supermarkets, schools and centers for day-care, is more attractive than a place which lacks these daily amenities. In addition, daily amenities are referred to by Prashker et al. (2008) as practical characteristics that are important in residential choice-making. Take for example the high quality of education, or supermarkets, as mentioned by Prashker et al. These practical characteristics may fulfill the need of having access to good facilities in a place.

Besides the availability of daily amenities, the practice of care is also related with daily care duties such as household work and childcare. If the first child is born, the care practice for the parents explodes in a sense that more time than ever is devoted on care. As the Social and Cultural Planning Office (2006) describes in their report on how Dutch people spend their time, people between 20 and 65 years spend an average of fifteen hours a week on household work, and nearly five hours a week are devoted to the care of their children. This average of five hours childcare



per week also includes Dutch people without children and empty-nesters, which means that the real amount of childcare time spend by people is even higher (Social and Cultural Planning Office, 2006). Next, the researchers indicate in the report that for parents of young children the care time that is needed to raise a child has increased between 2000 and 2005. Both men and women became more active in this respect. For fathers, the increase in care time is a trend that is noticeable since 1990, whereas for mothers the increase is new, after a quite stable period. As is the case for household work, also the care of children is still mainly a task that rests on the shoulders of women (Social and Cultural Planning Office, 2006).

It should be noted here that the presence of particular amenities (Prashker et al., 2008) and the time that is devoted to childcare (Social and Cultural Planning Office, 2006) might not be influential for people in all life stages. Depending on the life stage one is in, and the household composition that goes along with that life stage, the need for certain daily amenities and the time devoted to care will totally change.

### **2.3.3 The practice of leisure**

As described in the practice of care, the availability of and access to amenities is a crucial factor in residential decisions making (Storper & Manville, 2006; Prashker et al., 2008). Also the availability of daily leisure amenities holds an important role in reasons to relocate. On a more general level, the presence of environmental amenities, such as clean air, scenic views, and preserved natural habitats (Wales; Rouwendal & Meijer; Gawande et al.; Hornsten & Fredman; Tyrvaiven, all in Kim et al., 2005) can influence residential choice-making. But more specifically, the recreation and sport opportunities in these natural environments, including access to parks and open space, are of great importance (Colwell et al.; Greenberg & Lewis, in Kim et al., 2005).

Besides these daily amenities, non-daily amenities also relate to the field of leisure, as they can be seen as leisure or cultural amenities. These include consumption, culture, sports, and recreation. Think for example of leisure and cultural entertainment in the form of retail, theatres, museums, cinemas, restaurants, and festivals. The non-daily amenities also compromise the intangibles of a place that are related with the perceived quality and atmosphere of that specific place. This can create neighbourhood preferences, and influences the type and pricing of local

housing (Kim et al., 2005). Moreover, these amenities might even be of greater importance in relation with residential choice-making than the more practical daily needed leisure amenities. In the perspective of both Martin-Brelot et al. (2010) and Florida (2002), a lively cultural scene and a great diversity in leisure and cultural entertainment can serve as an attraction amenity for young creative people. The presence of these leisurely and cultural amenities positively affects the decision of young creative people to move to a certain area or city (Florida, 2002). Therefore, depending on the life stage a person is in, these non-daily amenities can be very influential, as they create a particular image for a place, which every person perceives differently. The intangible aspects contribute to the idea of being a place with a good quality of life or not. Therefore, especially these non-daily amenities should certainly be taken into account during residential choice-making.

#### **2.3.4 The influence of sociability**

Social relationships that are build up through different life stages are an important factor that should be taken into account for different practices that influence residential choice-making. Martin-Brelot et al. (2010) concluded in their study (of creative professionals) that living close to family and friends are topped as respectively number two and four in reasons of people to live in a specific residential space. In addition, Pareja-Eastaway et al. (2010) argued that besides someone's profession, both professional and personal networks are highly important in residential decision making. Locations where people have formed both a professional and/or personal network are more attractive to live, as creating a new network of the same strength asks for a great investment. Therefore, the social network of a person, either personally or professionally, should be taken into account as an important aspect that can influence all practices in residential choice-making.

#### **2.4 The role of a life stage**

As indicated before, moves between types of residential environment are often triggered and conditioned by careers in the life-course (Mulders, in Feijten et al., 2008). Life events (e.g., enrolment in higher education, change in job, getting a partner or the birth of a child) go along with a raft of consequences. According to Feijten et al. (2008), life events imply or stimulate residential mobility, affect needs

and preferences for a residential environment, influence the resources needed to occupy the desired housing, and impose restrictions on the search area for a dwelling.

In addition, previous life experience has been identified as another predictor in the choice of residential location by different researchers (see Feijten et al., 2008). Factors that are build up through this previous life experience (e.g., having friends or family, owning a house, having a job, having lived in a place for years) may change the awareness of and attitudes towards the type of residential environment one prefers.

These careers in the life-course and previous life experience are reflected in the life stage a person is in. Depending on a particular life stage, the priority given to a practice might change. And, as time devoted to one practice is simply not spent on another one, practices are in competition with one another (Shove et al., 2012). As the life stage one is in holds such a crucial role in the way trade-offs between practices are made, it is important to go deeper into the concept of the life cycle.

According to Zimmermann (1982), there is not only one temporal dimension in life, but several, reflected in the entire life cycle. The concept of life cycle refers to variations in the behavior during the entire life-span (Zimmermann, 1982). Changes or events in life influence someone's behavior, and can enable a change in the life stage one is in. "The concept of life cycle can be applied to the transformation (maturation, generation, and decline) of any living organism or organization." (O'Rand & Krecker, in Beamish, Goss & Emmel, 2001).

The life cycle concept is an often used approach in a variety of research fields, for example economics, marketing, geography and urban studies (Oppermann, 1995). The life cycle concept has mostly been viewed in the context of the family life cycle, which is associated with changes in the family structure (Zimmermann, 1982). It is used as a concept to group and explain the influences of age, household composition and the presence of children. In this way, the concept focuses on differences in individuals' behavior at varying stages of their (family) life (Beamish, Goss & Emmel, 2001). Since the middle of the twentieth century, several researchers attempt to identify stages that people go through during their entire life. This resulted in several models, all giving other priorities to the stages before

marriage, after retirement, and the role of different aged children within the family house.

The work of Duvall (1957) is an often referred indicator in literature for the different life stages within the family life cycle. Duvall (1957) describes the family life cycle in eight different stages. These can be found in table 1 below.

Specific life stage in family life	Specific characteristics
Single Stage	Aged under 35, no children
Couple Stage	Married, no children
Childbearing Family Stage	Married, birth of the first child
Pre-school Family Stage	Married, young children
School-age Family Stage	Married, older children
Launching Family Stage	Married, oldest child has left home
Middle-age Families Stage	Head over 45, no children at home, empty nest
Aging Families Stage	From retirement to death

Table 1: Different life stages within the family life cycle. Adapted from Duvall (1957).

Since the stages in the family life cycle are presenting normative expectations towards a family life, housing choices often parallel with this cycle (Doling, 1976; Beamish, Goss & Emmel, 2001). However, due to an increasing complexity of household and living arrangements, and new patterns that exist within our contemporary society, this former taken linear approach to family development may not be effective anymore. Patterns in our contemporary society that influence these traditional life stages are for example; singles, delayed marriage, co-habitation, divorce, remarriage, blended families, multigenerational families, and same-sex unions (Beamish, Goss & Emmel, 2001). These new stages have many implications for residential location choices.

Already three decades ago, Doling (1976) investigated residential choice behavior in relation to the family life cycle. In more recent research (Baccaini, 1997; Ewert & Prskawetz, 2002; Punpuing & Ross, 2001) the findings of Doling (1976) are confirmed, as this work shows that due to fluctuating housing tastes and accessibility needs to work and family during people's entire life cycle, the type of life stage a person is in plays an essential role in decisions of residential location

choice. Shimitz and Brett (2001) add that besides the accessibility to work and family, also the needs towards surroundings differ per life stage.

Despite of the somewhat outdated view on the family life cycle by Duvall (1957), this division in life stages still holds in our society today, in a sense that it is possible to make a rough separation between (1) single (referred to as the single stage by Duvall (1957)), (2) young family (reflected in different family stages by Duvall (1957)), and (3) retirement (the aging family stage as described by Duvall (1957)). These three essential life stages incorporate important changes or events in life, that influence someone's participation in practices and therefore the behavior. This variation in behavior can enable a change in the priority that is given to the practices of labour, care, or leisure.

For the first crucial life stage, that of singles without children, recent studies (Feijten et al., 2008; Pareja-Eastaway et al., 2010) indicate that younger people are more mobile, and therefore more likely to move than people in a later life stage. In addition, younger aged people tend to be more flexible and independent, compared to people in a later life stage, something that is reflected in the fact that younger people are more likely to rent an apartment, rather than to buy a house (Beamish, Goss & Emmel, 2001; Ærø, 2006). As these researchers argue, becoming a homeowner by having the financial resources to buy a house, is often an expectation that comes at a later life stage. Moreover, Speare and Goldscheider (1987) stated that this group of younger people also tend to go through more key life-altering events, compared to people in later life stages, and that these events are crucial moments for people. These moments influence the stay-or-move residential decision. In line with this freedom in mobility and preference to rent a place, people in this life stage are more aware of the need for job search. Job opportunities are often given priority, as the need for starting a work career is high. This is reflected in the priority that is often given to the labour practice.

When comparing this first crucial life stage, that of singles, with the second crucial life stage of people living together and forming a family, other practices and influences are given priority. Sociability is for example one of the main issues that should be taken into account for different life stages. Whereas younger people without children prefer to live near their social networks, and therefore give priority to social relationships, families with children might pursue their residential choice

on having a direct access to the natural environment, as they believe that a high-quality environment is very important for their children (Feijten et al., 2008). In contrast, families with children might prefer to live near their social network for support and guidance, for example for taking care of children by grandparents when the father and mother are at work.

In addition, a partner has a crucial influence on an individual (Martin-Brelot et al., 2010). In particular, the job of that partner is considered as an important reason to choose for a specific place to live (Martin-Brelot et al., 2010; Pethe et al., 2010). Feijten et al. (2008) argued in their study that following a partner to his or her childhood region, or birth place, is also something that should be taken into account as an important influence on residential choice making. Besides the option to follow a partner's job, maybe even more important is the dialog that takes place with the partner concerning the decision to stay or move. However, people built long-term social relationships, and these social relationships can have a great impact on residential choice-making during later life stages. According to Martin-Brelot et al. (2010), living close to your family and friends belongs to the top five reasons why people live in a specific city. What people have done with and learnt from their social network during their life, influences reasons to stay or move.

Younger people without children might prefer to give priority to a lower commuting time, and therefore base their residential choice on convenience and good access to the job, as this often has their main focus. Pareja-Eastaway et al. (2010) showed a connection between labour and social networks, as their work indicated that not only the family relations are of great importance, but also the professional social network is highly important in residential choice-making. Therefore, social relationships should certainly be taken into account for the crucial life stage of younger people without children.

Another important practice that should be considered for different life stages in relation with residential choice-making, is the practice of leisure. In the work of Roberts (2006) it was noted that people build long-term leisure careers, and that leisure in later life stages is influenced by whatever people have done or learnt earlier in their life. Moreover, the availability of leisure amenities holds an important role in reasons to relocate. Where singles tend to prefer more diversity in amenities, older people are more in search for routines. Think for example of the

presence of environmental amenities and clean air, as being very important for both the life stages of people living together and forming a family and the stage of children leave the home or people going with retirement. On the other hand, leisure and cultural related amenities are found as of great importance for singles, but also for people who retire (Colwell et al.; Greenberg & Lewis, in Kim et al., 2005). The atmosphere of the living place, neighbourhood preferences, type and pricing of housing, culture, and open space are important characteristics in the residential choice-making (Kim et al., 2005).

## **2.5 The relation to residential environments in The Netherlands**

Feijten et al. (2008) argued that it is possible to differentiate types of residential environments which all give priority to different things and therefore are suitable to meet different kind of trade-offs per life stage. These researchers make a division into (1) urban areas, (2) sub-urban areas and (3) rural areas. Cities, suburbs and rural areas each have their specific characteristics.

Firstly, they describe that Dutch urban areas (referred to as cities) are often lively, have a large supply of institutions of higher education and offer a lot of (high-skilled) jobs. The urban areas also offer a greater diversity in amenities. The offer of cultural and leisure amenities (e.g., museums, theatres, cinemas, restaurants and pubs) is broader than that of other areas. In addition, cities tend to have a greater availability of (affordable) housing than suburbs and rural areas have (Dieleman & Mulder, in Feijten et al., 2008). Finally, these urban areas are characterized by high quality access to public transport.

Next, the characteristics of sub-urban areas are quite different. Historically, these areas have come due to the search by city-dwellers for places to live with higher housing quality compared to the city (Feijten et al., 2008). Now, these areas in The Netherlands are mostly associated with child-friendliness and have a generally good quality of housing. Other characteristics for these areas are gardens, green space, a spacious environment and many parking space compared to the urban area. The facilities that are offered in these areas are typically related to the needs of families, for example childcare, supermarkets, sport facilities and primary schools (Feijten et al., 2008). This mix of facilities ensures ease of access for the needs of all household members.

Last, rural areas in The Netherlands are seen as the more peripheral parts of the country, located outside the cities (Heins, in Feijten et al., 2008). In contrast with life in urban and sub-urban areas, these rural areas offer more space and are more peaceful. The health and housing situations are generally better than in the other areas, and social contacts are on average stronger. On the other hand, they lack access to facilities, as these areas are located further away from amenity rich areas. They are also located further away from employment and education (Feijten et al., 2008). The attitudes of most people living in rural areas are more traditional than those of people in urban areas (SCP, in Feijten et al., 2008).

The decision for a specific type of area strongly depends on the importance of careers in the life-course and the previous life experiences, which are reflected in the life stage of a person. Depending on that particular life stage, the priority given to a practice will change.

## **2.6 Conceptual model and its justification**

Residential choice-making should not be seen as a one-moment decision. People's job opportunities, housing tastes, need for daily amenities, social networks, and leisure activities fluctuate during their total life cycle. According to research from Ewert and Prskawetz (2002) and Punpuing and Ross (2001), life cycle constraints and preferences for particular characteristics effect the residential choice-making. Depending on the particular life stage of a person, the relative importance of a particular practice in daily life changes. In this way, different trade-offs are made between practices that influence the decision to stay in or move to a place.

In the theoretical perspective presented above, the three practices of labour, care and leisure are discussed as the essential practices that shape daily life. The shortcoming of previous research that is done concerning residential choice-making is that it treats labour, care and leisure separately, even though these practices are likely connected in chains that form trade-offs with one another. Particularly if examined during the total life cycle context, it becomes clear that life stages incorporate important changes or events that influence someone's behavior. This variation in behavior can enable a change in the priority that is given to one of the practices, and therefore influences the match between the type of life and



residential context. In this way, the type of residential environment that suits best with a particular life stage depends on the engagement in essential practices.

Below, the reader can find an overview of the important concepts described in the theoretical perspective. This overview serves as the input for the conceptual model, which is presented afterwards.

Overview of the important concepts based on the literature study				
Duvall's (1957) work on the family life cycle		Inferences based on the literature study		
Type of stage in family life	Characteristics	Life stage	Practice priority	Residential environment
Single Stage	Aged under 35, no children	Younger people without children  <b>Single</b>	Mobile, flexible, independent, more likely to rent, diverse life, in need for a job, live close to social networks, prefer lower commuting time, in need for leisure and cultural amenities, convenience focused  <b>Labour and leisure</b>	<b>Urban areas</b>
Childbearing Family Stage & Pre-school Family Stage	Married, birth of the first child  Married, young children	People living together and forming a family  <b>Young family</b>	Immobile, less likely to move, more likely to buy a house, need for daily amenities, prefer a natural environment  <b>Care and labour</b>	<b>Sub-urban areas</b>
Aging Families Stage	From retirement to death	People go with retirement  <b>Retired</b>	Flexible, independent, live close to social networks, in need for leisure and cultural amenities  <b>Leisure and care</b>	<b>Rural areas and urban areas</b>

Table 2: Overview of the important concepts based on the literature study.

On this page, a conceptual model is created in order to visualize how the position in a particular life stage influences the trade-offs between the practices of labour, care and leisure. The relative importance given to these practices, depending on the life stage of a person, leads to consequences for the type of residential environment that suits best with the particular phase in life.

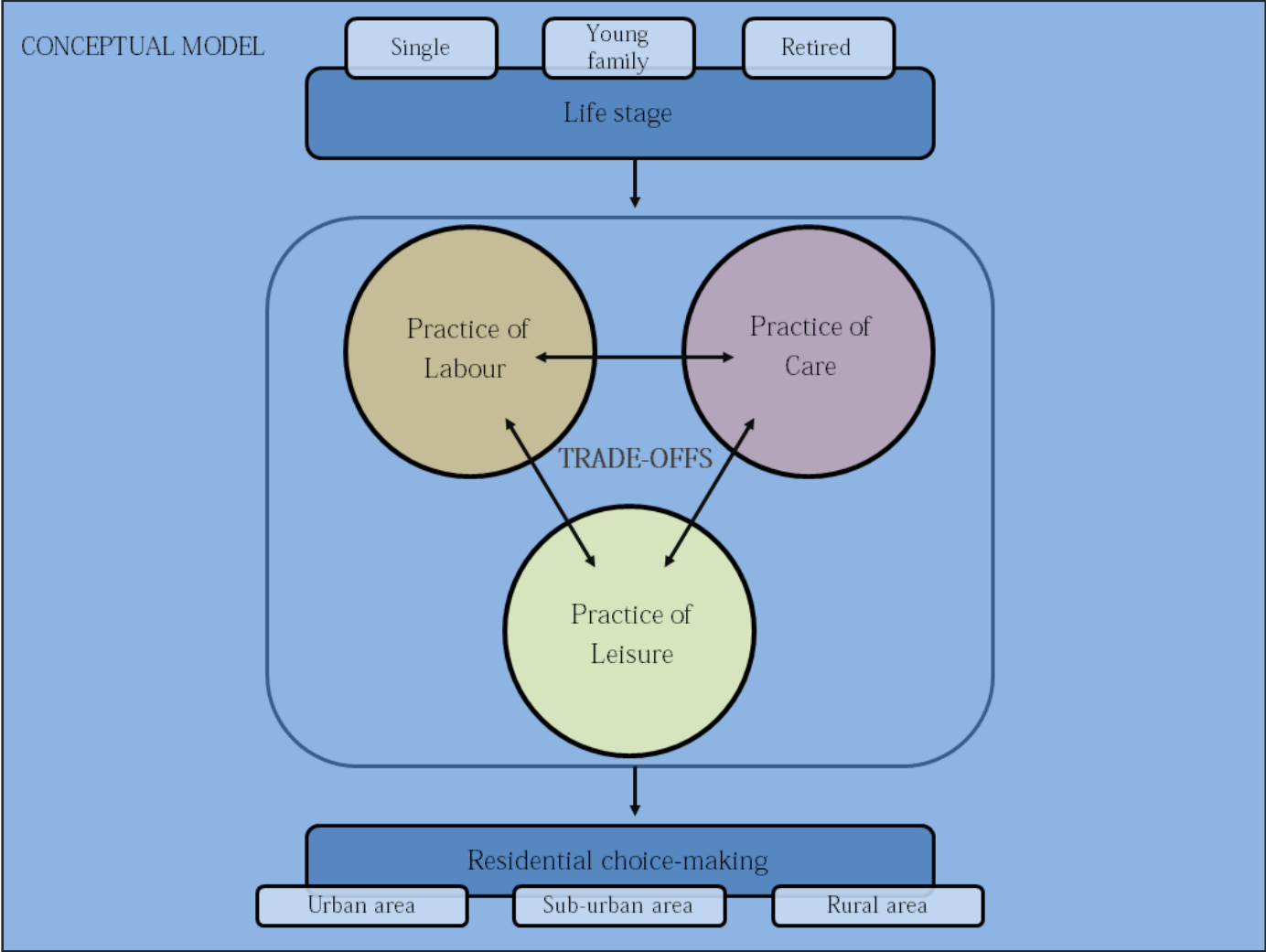


Figure 2: Conceptual model.

**2.7 Resulting research questions**

In order to be able to achieve the research aim, the main research question is specified into three research questions. They are based on the conceptual model presented above, and all represent valuable and feasible steps in order to answer the proposed main research question. The main research question that was formulated in chapter 1 was:

*What is the relative importance of the social practices of labour, care and leisure in residential choice-making and how does this differ per particular life stage?*

All the three research questions investigate a particular part of the main research question. The first research question investigates the three social practices of labour, care and leisure for three crucial life stages taken from the entire life cycle. The three essential life stages, namely (1) single, (2) young family, and (3) retired people show a clear practice engagement as these stages include crucial life events. Therefore, the first research question is:

*RQ 1      How do the three social practices of labour, care and leisure appear per particular life stage?*

After the exploration of the three social practices per particular life stage, the need arises to investigate the trade-offs that are made between practices, and particularly how these trade-offs differ per life stage. For this reasons, the second research question must be:

*RQ 2      How are the three social practices balanced on their relative importance per particular life stage?*

Finally, the insights that are gained in the different trade-offs that are made between these three practices, depending on the particular life stage of that person, serve as an input for the third research question. This last question investigates the consequences of the trade-offs that are made, in particular for the type of environment that is chosen in residential choice-making.

Therefore, the third research question appears to be:

*RQ 3      How do these trade-offs between social practices relate to a preference for a type of residential environment?*

This last research question is important to be researched as it bridges between the competition in practices -in finding the perfect balance- and the fundamental decisions that are made in residential choice-making.

# 3 Methodology

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The third chapter of this thesis presents the research methodology used during this study. First, the research design will be presented. Within this research design, a reflection on the methodological philosophies takes place, which is closely linked with the selected research approach. Accordingly, the data collecting techniques, sampling method and an operationalisation of the central concepts is presented. In this last paragraph, the vital concepts and terms will be transferred from their very general definition into concrete variables for this dissertation only. This informs the reader about the basic underlying assumptions of the dissertation. Finally, an explanation on the data analysis will be presented.

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## **3.1 Research design**

The research design presented below encompasses the methodology for this thesis. This paragraph will feature a reflection on the methodological philosophies. Next, it will go deeper into the research approach and research design for this thesis.

### **3.1.1 Methodological philosophies**

According to Bryman and Bell (2007), perceptions, beliefs and assumptions of the researcher always have a certain influence on the way the research is conducted, as these preferences are likely to shape the research design. Therefore, it is always important to consider and discuss different research paradigms and matters of ontology and epistemology.

Despite the discussion in literature between these philosophical issues, the methodological distinction mostly focuses on the differentiation between quantitative research, which is generally associated with the philosophical traditions of positivism, and qualitative research, which is related to the post-positivist philosophy (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Furthermore, as Bryman and Bell (2007) argue, interpretivism is a term given to a contrasting epistemology to positivism. It lays the emphasis on interpreting the meanings and actions of actors according to their own subjective framework of reference. According to the same

authors, the interpretivist epistemology is focused on understanding behavior, rather than predicting it.

Due to the character of this research, this thesis was designed and conducted according to the epistemology approach, which is strongly related with an interpretivism character.

### **3.1.2 Research approach**

According to Bryman and Bell (2007), one of the first things that should be decided, is whether a deductive or inductive approach is most suitable for the research. As they explain, deduction stands for testing theories and hypotheses, and induction stands for building up a theory. Besides, a combination between these two is possible (Bryman & Bell, 2007). For the case of this thesis, a deductive approach seemed the most suitable choice as the focus is clearly on testing the relative importance of three practices in residential choice-making.

The next that had been decided, is whether a qualitative or quantitative research design is most suitable. First, the qualitative approach is based on transforming observations into written words. This is in contrast with the quantitative approach, which focuses on numbers (Bryman & Bell, 2007). As the aim for this research is on detailed explanations of people's underlying reasons concerning trade-offs that are made in a certain way and how this has affected their choice of residence, it was crucial to gain more insights into their actual way of thinking and behavior. Therefore, conducting a qualitative research seemed to be the most appropriate design to use for this research.

Moreover, Ritchie (2003) and Bryman and Bell (2007) argue that qualitative research is a good way to investigate complex social phenomena of which not only a deeper understanding is required, but also an exploration is needed. As the proposed main research question has a both explanatory and exploratory character, using a qualitative research design might enable deeper insight into the trade-offs that are made between practices and how these depend on a persons' specific life stage.

Furthermore, the qualitative approach tends to be related with small-scale studies, as it is easier to gain a deeper understanding of the research area with a small amount of participants (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In literature, qualitative research is associated with a holistic perspective, the possibility to make inferences as a researcher, and an open research design which gives more possibilities to make changes during the research (Bryman & Bell, 2007). As there was, due to feasibility reasons, a relatively short period of time available to collect qualitative data that investigated the role of life stage preferences on residential choices, this study used a cross-sectional design. However, as only gathering a limited amount of qualitative data might lead to limitations concerning the validity of findings (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007), it is wise to be aware of the reliability of the sample. This is discussed later in this chapter.

In conclusion, the qualitative design that is used for this research searches for clarity concerning people's underlying reasons to behave in a certain way. As visualized in the proposed conceptual model in chapter two, the deductive approach that is taken should test the dynamics between the practices of labour, care and leisure, were it relates the relative importance that is given to these social practices in the choice for a specific type of residential environment, with the particular life stage preferences.

### **3.2 Data collecting techniques**

Based on the discussions, theories and concepts that were found in literature, inferences are made that serve as the input for the choice in data collection.

For the primary qualitative data collection, an in-depth interview technique had been chosen as the most appropriate option. The aim of the in-depth interviews was to gain deeper insights in the role of a particular life stage in the relative importance that people give to the social practices of labour, care and leisure, in order to understand which impact the trade-offs between them have on their choice of residence. By using in-depth interviews, respondents had the possibility to express their opinions, values and actual behaviour related with the different trade-offs they made between practices of labour, care and leisure. Their explanation of trade-offs between practices helped to understand its relation with life stages and their residential choice-making.

Another advantage of in-depth interviews is concerned with the interpretation of the data. As Ritchie and Lewis (2003) describe, credibility can be an issue in qualitative research. However, he argues that if a researcher uses in-depth interviews to generate data, the findings do not only rely on his interpretation, due to the fact that it lets the participants convey their own meanings and interpretations through deeper explanations.

Bryman and Bell (2007) explain that semi-structured interviews are a profound way to combine structure with flexibility during an interview. For these type of interviews, several main topics and questions were defined on forehand, but the researcher still had the flexibility to adapt his (follow-up) questions according to the conversation itself. On one hand, by choosing the main topics and questions in advance, this type of interview provided a certain structure that was needed to compare the gathered data. In this way, all respondents were confronted with the same kind of questions and the answers are therefore better comparable. On the other hand, since semi-structured interviews also have a flexible character, they enabled the researcher to keep the interview in the right direction and create the possibility to adjust the conversation to topics that emerged during the in-depth interviews.

To structure the interviews, an interview guide was composed in order to ensure that every interview had the same outline. The interview existed of several open questions which were all incorporated in different categories of the interview guide. This interview guide was pre-tested among two respondent during a pilot, in order to check the clearness, duration and order in questions. Small adjustments to the interview guide were made after these two pilots. The final interview guide can be consulted in Appendix I.

Finally, in order to increase the willingness among participants to cooperate with this research, it was decided to conduct the interviews at a location and time completely to the choice of the respondent and to create a very open and informal atmosphere during the interviews. In the opinion of the researcher, this would also increase the quality of the data, as respondents might feel more comfortable in their own environment and therefore are more willing to share deeper insights with the researcher.

### **3.3 Sampling method and selection of respondents**

As Miles and Huberman (1994) argue, the sampling of qualitative data is a very important aspect in the research. The collection of samples often involves a small sample, and samples tend to be purposive rather than random. Furthermore, the amount of respondents that is selected is strongly affected by time and money.

For this study, the unit of analysis can be described as reconstructing residential choice-making for different life stages. Therefore, the units of observation are people out of three crucial life stages, namely (1) singles, (2) young families and (3) retired people. This study was limited to these three life stages, as according to the literature study people in these three essential stages tend to go through more key life-altering events compared with other stages. These events are crucial moments in the lives of people that influence the stay-or-move residential decision.

Since it was not possible for the researcher to draw the sample randomly, the sampling method can be qualified as a non-probability sample. For this reason, a so called purposive sample was used. This means that “units are chosen because they have particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and puzzles.” (Ritchie & Lewis, p.78). As mentioned before, rather than investigating residential choice-making as the real ‘choice moment’, as a specific location, or as the type of housing, it is the (mis)match between the contextual type of residential environment and the practices that shape everyday life which is of interest for this study. As one residential context might be more suitable for practices that shape someone’s daily life than the other, not every residential environment might provide a match with the particular stage in life. For this reason, respondents out of each of the three crucial life stages were selected in order to represent that particular life stage.

This caused a difference in the number of respondents and the number of observations, as respondents in the second and third selected life stage have the opportunity to reflect on the (mis)match with their residential environment(s) chosen in an earlier life stage. However, generation differences should be taken into account here. It is this particular reason why it was decided to frame the sample with respondents who fit the characteristics of an essential life stage at this moment in time, and to not only select respondents out of the third life stage.



As the purpose of this research phase is to gain deeper insights in and justify the information that was found in literature, and because of the limited time available, first a criterion of at least twelve respondents (n=12) had been set, depending on the saturation at that moment. During the process of data collection, it was decided to increase the number of respondents to a minimum of fifteen (n=15), as this felt necessary to increase the quality of the data, due to the diversity in stories given by the interviewed respondents, and to equalize the gender differences. This minimum of fifteen respondents is divided in an unequal way, respectively six retired people, five young family members, and four singles, representing a total of 32 observations due to the reconstruction of earlier life stages by people out of the second and third life stage. An overview of the sample for this study can be found in Appendix II.

In order to acquire this aimed sample, respondents were approached by the snowball method described by Bryman and Bell (2007). This method uses the network of respondents in order to find new respondents that would fit the criteria of the sample (e.g., life stage, social class). These used criteria are mentioned in table 3, which can be found in the next paragraph. By using these criteria, it was aimed to minimize the variation within groups and to create a sample as specific as possible. Therefore, the researcher asked respondents if they had ideas about who would be willing to participate in this research, preferably someone who had approximately the same characteristics as he or she had. This allowed the researcher to go beyond his strong ties and get in contact with new respondents that otherwise could not have been reached. In order to create a starting point for this snowball method, the network of the researcher himself was used. For this particular reason, the taken sample could also be indicated as a convenience sample, since the researcher used respondents that are easy to reach. It should be noted that in order to reach the best possible objectivity for this study, none of the respondents that are approached have a strong personal relation with the researcher. A visualization of the acquaintance of respondents for this study including their underlying relations can be conducted in Appendix II.

Lastly, it is important to note that since this study is of a qualitative nature and the sample of respondents is relatively small and as specific as possible, the focus of this study was not on generalization of the research findings for the whole population. The influence of three particular life stages on residential choice-

making is investigated, and therefore the results of this study are of an explorative character and for this specific context only.

### **3.4 Operationalisation of central concepts**

Within this paragraph of the methodology section, the vital concepts and terms corresponding with (1) the three essential life stages, (2) the social practices of labour, care and leisure, and (3) residential choice-making, are transferred from their very general definition in the conceptual model towards concrete variables for the use of this thesis only. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that this operationalisation of terms is not only for the concern of the reader, but also for the researcher, as these definitions were used as measurable indicators or categories during the qualitative data collection.

As the first research question investigates the three social practices for three crucial life stages taken from the entire life cycle, it was crucial to define these three life stages in a more specific way.

In literature, the work of Duvall (1957) is an often referred indicator for the different life stages within the family life cycle. Duvall (1957) describes the family life cycle in eight different stages, and since the stages in the family life cycle are presenting normative expectations towards a family life, housing choices often parallel with this cycle (Doling, 1976; Beamish, Goss & Emmel, 2001). In spite of the fact that this former taken linear approach may not be totally effective anymore in our contemporary society due to an increasing complexity in household and living arrangements, the general division in life stages still holds in a sense that it is possible to make a rough separation in three essential life stages. These three life stages are (1) single, (2) young family and (3) retired. These three crucial life stages incorporate important changes or events in life that influence someone's participation in practices and therefore the behavior of that person. This variation in behavior can enable a change in the priority that is given to the practices of labour, care, or leisure, and therefore influence the residential decision. Criteria for the selection of each life stage can be found on the next page in table 3.

Operationalisation of the three crucial life stages		
Single	Young family	Retired
Young (under 30 years)	Living together with partner (for more than two years)	Partner or single
No partner	Birth of the first child (within the last five years)	Children have left the house
No children	Middle class	No job
Middle class		Middle class

Table 3: Operational definitions for the three crucial life stages.

After the exploration of the three crucial life stages, the need aroused to operationalize the three practices of labour, care and leisure. These can be found in table 4 below.

Operationalisation of the three social practices		
Practice of Labour	Practice of Care	Practice of Leisure
Characterized by job opportunities	Characterized by the availability of care amenities	Characterized by the availability of leisure amenities
Employment possibilities	Supermarkets	Urban atmosphere
Accessibility to the job	Schools and centers for day- care	Cultural amenities/entertainment
Proximity to the job	Childcare	Sociability related to friends
Diversity of job offer	Household work	
Sociability related to work	Sociability related to family	

Table 4: Operational definitions for the three social practices.

Finally, the insights that are gained in the different trade-offs that are made between these three practices serve as an input for the consequences on the residential decision. Feijten et al. (2008) argued that it is possible to differentiate types of residential environments, which all give priority to different things and therefore are suitable to meet different kind of trade-offs per life stage. Therefore, three types of residential environments were operationalized below. These can be found on the next page in table 5.

Operationalisation of the three residential environments	
Type of area	Specific characteristics
Urban areas	Lively atmosphere, large supply of education, more job opportunities, diverse offer in non-daily amenities, greater availability of (affordable) housing, high quality access to public transport
Sub-urban areas	Child-friendliness, good quality of housing, green space, a spacious environment, many parking space, primary schools, day-care centers, sport facilities, supermarkets
Rural areas	More space, peaceful, better health and housing situation, stronger social contacts, lack availability of daily amenities, lack availability of cultural non-daily amenities, located further away from employment and education

Table 5: Operational definitions for the three residential environments.

### 3.5 Data analysis

During the data collection all the in-depth interviews have been recorded by using a digital voice-recorder. According to Bryman and Bell (2007), it is important to completely transcribe the recorded interviews in order to make the collected data verifiable, but also to prevent loss of information. Besides, it allows the researcher to make a more thorough examination of the things mentioned by the respondents (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Therefore, the recorded interviews were fully transcribed using the F4 transcription software. In addition, during the interviews notes were made by the researcher to structure the interview, to create first linkages between given answers, and to register the non-verbal reactions of the respondents.

After the transcription, the data was analyzed in order to answer the specific research questions. In order to analyze the gathered data, the collected information first needed to be reduced, structured, arranged and simplified. This was done by the use of coding. According to Gibbs (2007, p.31) coding can be seen as “The process of identifying passages -in the field of notes or interviews- that exemplify certain thematic ideas and giving them a label - the code”. Due to the fact that the categories (and underlying items) for this study had already been identified, but categories that emerges during the interviews also should be included, open coding was used in order to include all relevant information.

For this particular reason, the gathered data was first analyzed roughly in order to identify the key concepts. These key concepts relate to the items that were defined on forehand or to items that emerged during the interviews. Consequently, the key concepts were labeled with a code, which are put into a data matrix. In this way, the data which refers to similar concepts is grouped together, which made it easier to expose similarities and dissimilarities between the answers of the respondents. Within this data matrix, the rows represent the items and the columns represent the respondents. An example of the data matrix is provided below in table 6.

According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003), a data matrix allows the researcher to analyze the relationships between the different concepts. It makes it easier to compare the information provided by the respondents, and can be used to find consensus, contradictions, generalities, and exceptions (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Miles and Huberman (1994) agree with this statement, and add that the data matrix enables the researcher to draw conclusions from the data in a more systematic, organized and controllable way.

Data matrix				
Categories	Items	Respondent #1	Respondent #2	Respondent #3
(1) Participation in social practices	Item 1.1 <i>Labour</i>	Opinions and quotes of respondent 1	Opinions and quotes of respondent 2	Opinions and quotes of respondent 3
	Item 1.2 <i>Care</i>	Opinions and quotes of respondent 1	Opinions and quotes of respondent 2	Opinions and quotes of respondent 3
	Item 1.3 <i>Leisure</i>	Opinions and quotes of respondent 1	Opinions and quotes of respondent 2	Opinions and quotes of respondent 3
(2) Relative importance of practices per LS	Item 2.1 <i>Priorities</i>	Opinions and quotes of respondent 1	Opinions and quotes of respondent 2	Opinions and quotes of respondent 3
(3) Relation with the residential choice	Item 3.1 <i>Type of residential environment</i>	Opinions and quotes of respondent 1	Opinions and quotes of respondent 2	Opinions and quotes of respondent 3

Table 6: Example of the data matrix.

## 4 Results

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The fourth chapter of this thesis presents the qualitative data collected for this study. The results will be discussed and compared with the expectations based on the conceptual model presented in chapter two. To be as clear as possible for the reader, the results will be presented in an integrated way while on the other hand the structure of the research questions will be followed in rough lines. In the appendices an overview of the respondents is presented. This provides the reader with a short overview of the life stage characteristics per respondent and the underlying relations between the respondents.

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### 4.1 The idea of residential choice-making

The research focused on the relative importance of social practices in residential choice-making and specifically that transition that takes place when your life moves from one life stage to another. The respondents in this study had all been selected based on their specific life stage; as a single, young family member, or retired person. During the interviews with the respondents the conversation was held on the level of their current life stage, including a total reconstruction of their residential choice-making during the earlier life stage(s) they have been through.

The results of this study show that for most people their residential choice-making is experienced as a natural choice along their life path. The stories of the respondents show that the change in a life stage, as experienced as a natural transition, is expressed in the need for a change in the residential characteristics or the residential environment. Thus, the change in one's life stage is reflected in the change of one's residential choice.

Charley (50 years, Gulpen), who lives in a sub-urban environment in the south of The Netherlands, stated:

*“I think that it is difficult to treat your residential choice as a real choice. It is something that is formed by the course of your life. I think that your residential choice is something that depends so much on coincidences.”*

The statement made by Charley perfectly shows the organic character of residential choice-making that is recognized by some many respondents. Overall, they experience their residential choice as being a, sometimes obvious and logic, consequence of developments and choices they make along their life path. For example Racheles (24 years, Baarle-Hertog) described her residential choice as something that depends on these individual coincidences:

*“Okay, in some way you choose the place where you live, but if you ask me, it is pure coincidence. It are the things that come on your path that eventually decide where you live. If I would have found a job in Breda after graduation, I probably would still live there.”*

In contrast, some respondents do indicate that they have made a conscious residential choice that suited their specific life stage, while on the other hand most of the respondents indicated that they did not really ‘choose’ their residential environment, but rather saw it as something that was influenced by the path of life. Overall, it was noted that the residential choice was accompanied by a need to go to a next stage. Ginger (64 years, Made) who lived her whole life in the same province, described the following when reconstructing the choices made during her young family life stage:

*“We decided that it was time to take the next step in our life. We had a small apartment and this made that we wanted to take that next step. So.. Then you decide what is most important; is it close to your job, is it a bigger house, do the kids have a child-friendly area with enough freedom and space, are there plenty facilities and is it close to a big city? That is what we found in this place. Here is everything.”*

As is reflected in this quote, the study shows that residential choice-making is multi-leveled and largely based on implicit choices. During the interviews the respondents answered the questions ‘Why do you live where you live?’ mostly with a short bunch of words, or just one or two sentences. During the passage of the interview, respondents seemed to discover new reasons why they actually live where they live. Also this indicated that in first instance most of the respondents see the process of residential choice-making as a obvious or logic choice, while during the interview they become aware of the complexity and different layers of their residential choice.

Therefore, it turned out that in case of this study people indicate that they feel the need to go to a next step, to seek progress and be ready for a new stage. It is the change in a life stage that triggers this need. Despite the similarities in the responses, people differ in their immediate reasons why they feel this need to take a next step. For some respondents this need is reflected in the characteristics of the current type of housing that trigger them to take that next step, as they indicate that they would like to live in a more spacious house, in a house with a more spacious backyard, or the opposite when becoming older. For others it are the characteristics of the residential environment that form the trigger, as they indicate that they would like to live in a more lively, green or familiar environment. However, the results of this study show that for most people the changing life stage, as experienced as a natural transition, is expressed in the need for a change in the residential characteristics and/or the residential environment.

For this particular reason, the next paragraphs focus on the relative importance of social practices in residential choice-making and specifically that transition that takes place when your life moves from one life stage to another.

## **4.2 Life stage transitions**

The literature study began by studying and identifying aspects that characterize and influence residential choice-making, later linked with the perspective of social practices. It was subsequently noted that within our contemporary society the most important social practices that drive the residential choice-making of people are linked with labour, care and leisure. The results of this study show a link between the relative importance of practices and the particular life stage of a person. The relative importance given to these three practices changes over the life course, and these changes are best observable during a life stage transition. Despite of individual factors that disturb the relative importance for the three main practices in your life and therefore change the individual life path that ultimately determines a person's residential choice, there are recognizable group patterns noticeable. As the answers of the respondents expose recognizable patterns in residential choice-making, this paragraph explains these group patterns within the three main practices of labour, care and leisure, per essential life stage.



#### 4.2.1 Relative importance of practices in the single life stage

##### Ø Labour

When looking at the social practice of labour, it shall be quite unsurprisingly for most readers that jobs turned out to be very important in the residential choice for people in the single life stage. The results showed that moves between different types of residential environments are often triggered by labour, as residential choice-making is part of a single's search for job opportunities. However, during this study it turned out that it is not the case for all singles to adapt their choice of residence totally to their workplace. All respondents out of the single life stage indicated that they are not willing to move almost anywhere in order to get their preferred job, which means a job that fits with their interests and offers an acceptable salary. When combining their job search with their residential choice, they all made a connection with leisure in a broad sense, for example the availability of facilities, their social contacts, nature and/or hobbies. These factors are balanced with the search for a job, as is illustrated in the answer given by Cees (19 years, Breda) when he was asked if he expects that his residential choice will follow his workplace:

*“Mm, for me that is a difficult one. I know that many people follow their job these days and they do not really care where they find a job, as long as they have one, they are satisfied. Look for example to my sector. There are many jobs in the province of Groningen, in the gas industry, but.. I just do not see myself living there. In those areas there is nothing except your work.”*

The answer given by Cees is not something that stands on its own, as all respondents that are currently in the single life stage indicated that there is more in life than work, mainly related to the practice of leisure. This is further explained in the leisure practice for singles.

However, unsurprisingly all singles referred to the Randstad-area as being the region with the most opportunities in their sector. Only a few respondents indicated that they would actually consider moving there. Most of the times, reasons not to move were related with the current housing prices, the availability of housing, their build up social contacts, the lively atmosphere, and the lack of a green environment. More remarkably, some respondents argued that they had the feeling that the chance of getting a job in this attractive region is equal to other places, as

everyone focuses on the jobs available in this area. Therefore, the actual chance as a single starter of getting a job in this region might become equal to the chances one has in other places.

Overall, the given answers by most of the respondents indicated that finding a job has priority in the single life stage in a sense that this stage is the most frequent aligned by the search for a job. Therefore, the practice of labour is very important in their residential choice-making. However, it is important to stress that at the same time respondents explain that the other practices in their life are not totally subordinate to having their ideal preferred job. For example the social contacts are balanced with the individual job search, as is reflected in this comment made by Rachelles (24 years, Baarle-Hertog):

*“Because of all the times we moved when I was young, I never had the chance to really settle somewhere. [...]. After my graduation, I moved to Baarle-Hertog because of my social contacts. Almost all my friends live here, so that made me decide to settle here. I know that, because of this choice, I limit myself in the opportunities for finding my preferred job in the theatre industry. But anyway, I would not have enjoyed moving to a big city like Amsterdam, even though most of the production/theatre world is located in that region.”*

As respondents indicate that they regard residential choice-making as a natural transition, it is quite interesting to mention that respondents say that they have the feeling that they are not always able to freely choose where to live. As the majority of single respondents in this study showed, they have the feeling that they are sometimes limited in their residential choice. Partly, this feeling is related to individual coincidences, but on the other hand respondents also indicate that they have the feeling that there are financial/socio-economic constraints. Within this last type of limitations, Loes (24 years, Haarlem), who lives and works as a young starter in Haarlem, stated:

*“Mm, as a starter I have the idea that you are pushed in a particular corner, as your chances on the housing market are limited. You do not have a great salary yet and the region of Haarlem/Amsterdam is a very expensive region to live. [...]. You need to live in this region because of the career opportunities as a starter, but the housing prices are sky high.”*

Moreover, the results show that younger people without children do not have strong preferences when it comes to an acceptable commuting time. In line with the theory, they seem to base their residential choice on convenience and good access to the job. But, on the other hand they are accepting to commute longer, since labour has priority. When asked if respondents could indicate their maximum acceptable commuting time per work day, the answers were really diverse. All the answers were within a range of fifteen minutes to 1,5 hour one way, but most respondents mentioned that they would prefer to live within a hour commuting time to their work so that they remain to have some free time. Generally, singles indicate that they are willing to travel further if compared to respondents in the family life stage. However, it depends to a great extent on the type of job. Respondents in the single life stage explain that if they could not find their preferred job in the region where they live, or a higher salary is offered elsewhere, they are willing to expand their commuting time. Besides, especially for singles, the current economic situation gives strength to the idea that one should be open to find a job, and therefore should be willing to travel far in case the preferred job is offered in another city or region than the one he or she is living. They indicate that they have the feeling that this open attitude is something that is expected from them. Roos (24 years, Arnhem), who is single and has a job in the tour operating industry, explained:

*“When I started to work here in Arnhem I first commuted every day to work from Rosmalen, but after three weeks, the more than three hours travelling time became too much for me. There was nothing else in life than work, travel, eating and sleeping. That was the reasons why I decided to move to Arnhem; to have a shorter commute time. [...]. The funny thing is, that I find my commute too short at this moment, as it is just five minutes by bike. But to answer your question, it made me discover that one hour each way is the maximum commuting time for me.”*

As the quote from Roos shows, a contradiction in commuting time was ascertained. On one hand single respondents indicate that the commuting time to their daily work should not be too long, while on the other hand they do accept and even appreciate some travel time to work. This is something that holds for both the single and young family respondents, as will be further explained during the labour practice of young families. Mainly singles emphasize that they think that parents have played a major role in the way they look to commuting time and changing your

residential environment for school or work. To be open for these things is something which most respondents have inherited from home, in a sense that the open attitude of parents to these things influences the attitude of their children towards commuting time and changing your residential environment for school or work.

Besides the practice of labour, the influence of sociability is one of the main issues that should be taken into account for singles. Respondents indicated that they prefer to live near their social networks, and therefore give priority to social relationships. Besides their private social relations, the answers of the respondents showed a link between labour and their social networks, as also the professional social network is highly important in residential choice-making. Roos (24 years, Arnhem) indicated:

*“In Arnhem I do not have that much friends or family, so every weekend I commute to other cities to visit my parents, friends, or to practice my hobbies. So, in Arnhem I am quite alone, except all the colleagues from my work which I see now and then. For me, Arnhem is linked with work, as a place where I work five days a week and see my colleagues during free-time.”*

Lastly, the results concerning the practice of labour in the single life stage showed, in accordance with the theory that young people are more flexible to move, that all single respondents moved in their recent past. Moreover, they also indicated that they expect to move in the nearby future. This aspect of a temporary residential choice was reflected in all the interviews with singles, as almost no respondent had made a final choice for residence. Besides, the age or gender did not seem to have any influence on this aspect of temporary residential choice.

#### Ø **Care**

For the first crucial life stage the respondents indicated that the practice of care was relatively less important than other practices in their life, and therefore they spend less time to this practice. As young singles have no partner or children, and therefore are less limited, the results show that they are more mobile, and in this way more likely to move than people in a later life stage. As mentioned, singles tend to be more flexible and independent, compared to people in a later life stage. Respondents indicated that this flexibility influences their stay-or-move residential decision. As rather than care, leisure and job opportunities are often given priority, and the need for starting a work career is high in this particular life stage, priority is often given to other practices.

## Ø Leisure

The third main practice that is questioned among the respondents is the social practice of leisure. It was expected that, in relation with their residential choice, mainly single people by themselves would mention leisure or cultural amenities as decisive factors compared to other practices. The results out of the interviews showed that this was not the case for this study. However, when asking deeper questions about the way in which they use their free time, it turned out that for singles the practice of leisure is a social practice that is largely related with the use of and access to (leisure) amenities, their social contacts, and specific lifestyle. Therefore, the results for this study indicated that leisure largely influences a single's residential choice, but in an indirect way.

Most singles indicated that they enjoy leisure or cultural amenities in an urban environment. They mainly value the presence of or proximity to leisure and cultural amenities such as retail shops, bars, cafes and restaurants, while for example cinemas, theatres, or sport facilities were less frequently mentioned. In their free time, they enjoy the availability of these facilities, and use them frequently, as was indicated by Loes (24 years, Haarlem):

*“Haarlem has so many things to offer. I enjoy all the choice in bars and restaurants, but also all the small shops that are here. The inner city still has many of those small shops you know, that are not owned by a chain. That gives the city a special atmosphere. In my free time, for example after work, I like to do some shopping or go out for a dinner with friends. And even beyond Haarlem, you are within fifteen minutes by train in Amsterdam with all its entertainment.”*

Although they value these amenities, just one single respondent indicated that these leisure or cultural amenities were directly decisive in her residential choice. On the other hand, singles indicate that when combining their job search with their residential choice, they all make a connection with leisure in a broad sense, for example the availability of facilities, their social contacts, nature and/or hobbies. During the same interview with Loes (24 years, Haarlem), she stated:

*“If the company where I work now would fire me, finding a job would have priority. But, I think I would not leave Haarlem. Last year I started my new hobby here, I made new friends, and I like the access to Amsterdam and the beach. In addition to the reduced position on the labour market, I would also not*

*think about going back to Hellevoetsluis [where she lived during her childhood] as it became now too rural for me, with a lack in facilities and entertainment.”*

As the quote shows, leisurely factors are balanced with the search for a job. Besides, all of the single respondents mentioned the leisure and cultural amenities in being important for the liveliness and atmosphere of an urban place; the environments they prefer when they meet their social contacts, as for example is reflected in the earlier presented quote by Loes.

Singles stated that it is not really the need to live in the urban environment itself that matters, but rather the access to this type of environment that influences one's residential choice. Although respondents out of the single life stage indicated that they feel a need to live near an urban environment as being a desirable area because of its leisure and cultural scene, in general, leisure and cultural amenities themselves did not seem to be the crucial factor to specifically choose for a particular city to live. This, because single respondents believe that they are able to find similar leisure amenities in other places. Cees (19 years, Breda) lives since a few months together with his girlfriend in Breda, because he started to study in Delft and his girlfriend in Eindhoven. Although he is now no single anymore, he was interviewed because at the moment of the interview he was just going through that crucial transition of being a single towards living together with his girlfriend. This led to the situation where they have a shared leisure practice, but a different study-practice. He indicated that they mainly chose Breda as a place to live because of the fair average commuting time for both. When being questioned if there are, besides this geographical minded basis, also other reasons why he lives in the historical inner-city of Breda, he stated:

*“On city-level I do not really have that. [...]. There is not something specific that attaches me to Breda. Really, I would not bother to live in another medium-sized city. I like the atmosphere and the leisure facilities, I enjoy them being available here, but for my feeling that is the same for every city with roughly 100.000 inhabitants. And of course some cities have more liveliness and atmosphere than others, but I do not think that will be decisive for my choice where to live.”*

Maybe that is the reason why non-daily leisure amenities hardly ever came up as being directly influential on the residential choice, without asking a specific related question about the practices of leisure. In this perspective they are, just as the daily

amenities like supermarkets, seen as an additional benefit and not as a main reason to choose for a specific place to live. They are, just as respondents indicated for access to public transport, parking space, and roads, determining factors why to choose for specific location within a region or city, but not decisive for a specific region or city itself. Cees continued his argumentation:

*“Yes. [...]. But that is on another level; if you chose a city, where do you live within that city? If you live in the suburbs of a city everything is still far away compared to living nearby the city center. And the latter is important for me now. If you live in a city, then I also would like to live close to facilities, on a biking-distance, so that you can bike easily to the cinema in the evening, to the supermarket if you need something, those kind of things.”*

Besides the daily amenities and the leisure or cultural amenities, the intangibles in a city or region are already mentioned earlier. The intangibles of a place are related to the perceived quality and atmosphere of that specific place, and this was something that was emphasized by respondents out of the single life stage. This lively atmosphere is often related to specific neighbourhood preferences, which indeed hold an important role in the residential choice making for both singles and young families, as will be described later. Type and price of housing is mainly mentioned by singles and is something that is considered as very important by singles in their residential choice-making. For example Loes (24 years, Haarlem), who mentioned in an earlier quote that she has the feeling of being pushed in a particular corner as a starter, due to financial/socio-economic constraints, described her neighbourhood preferences and the type and prices of housing in the region as follows:

*“I was very lucky with the place I found. It is small, but it has a perfect location in the city centre. I like the center of Haarlem because it has that historical atmosphere, that vibe. [...]. I know that when I should live half an hour driving further, that housing prices would be lower or I would get a more spacious apartment for the same money, but nevertheless I prefer to live in Haarlem because of that good atmosphere.”*

Thus, overall it became clear that for singles the practice of labour is relatively the most important. As the practice of care is less important in this flexible life stage, labour is in particular balanced with the practice of leisure, may that be through the use or access to daily amenities and the leisure or cultural amenities, or

through the intangibles of a place. In relation to the choice to live in a particular region of city, these intangibles are frequently found of even greater importance than the more practical leisure amenities, as they are believed to be replaceable. Respondents indicated that they are attracted by places which they consider as places with a good quality of life, a comfortable atmosphere, or the right vibe, something which is personal and relative of course. Therefore, these intangibles should certainly be seen as an important factor that influences residential choice-making in the first essential life stage, despite of its personal character.

#### **4.2.2 Relative importance of practices in the young family life stage**

##### **∅ Labour**

During the transition from the single life stage towards the young family life stage, the practices of labour becomes increasingly intertwined with the practice of care. During this transition, the individual job search is challenged by the role of a partner and/or children, as respondents acknowledge that from the moment they have a partner the preferences of the partner really becomes one of the decisive factors in where you choose to live. According to the theory, young families residential choices are expected to be oriented towards family-suitable environments with facilities such as schools, safety and more spacious housing, which indeed was confirmed by the results of this research. Moreover, respondents mentioned that in their single life stage they mostly rented an apartment, while when starting a family the idea of buying a house became an option. This also affected their labour opportunities as their flexibility decreased and interest in care-related amenities increased.

Besides, it is interesting to mention that the results of this life stage showed that the daily commuting time to and from work is balanced with the practice of care, which is in contrast with the single life stage where commuting time is balanced with the practice of leisure. Whereas single people without children indicated that they are accepting to have a commuting time of one hour or longer per single trip, since labour has their main focus and commuting time is therefore only balanced with the practice of leisure, young family members prefer to have a much shorter commuting time of approximately 30 minutes. Therefore, they limit themselves more in their place of residence. Not only by respondents out of the single life stage



such as Roos, but also for example by Ginny (33 years, Made) out of the young family life stage, a contradiction in commuting time was ascertained:

*“I do not prefer to travel too long for work, say approximately 30 minutes one way, since I have to take care of our child and also would like to have some free time in the evening. Though I do appreciate some commuting time. It gives you the possibility to unload from and switch between work and private, or prepare when you go to work.”*

So, on one hand respondents indicate that the commuting time to their daily work should not be too long, while on the other hand they do appreciate some travel time to work. This holds for both the single and young family respondents, but mainly young family members emphasize the possibility to unload from work and switch between work- and private life. Even more remarkable in this quote by Ginny is her statement about the increased time that is devoted to the care practice in this life stage, and how she balances this on the layer of commuting time. As the practice of care becomes more important, the preference for a short commuting time increases, something which affects the practice of labour, and may benefit the practice of leisure. This will be discussed below.

#### Ø **Care**

In accordance with the theory that people frequently give priority to other characteristics than job opportunities when choosing their place of residence in the family life stage, the respondents in this research almost all referred to the need of living in or nearby a sub-urban environment within the preferred region they had chosen. Mostly, this was due to the access to daily amenities that relate to a person’s needs such as supermarkets, a choice in schools, sport facilities, and retail shops. As the respondents indicated, a place which offers these amenities is more attractive than a place which lacks in the availability of these daily needed amenities. When getting children, the increasing interest in this life stage for care-related amenities is reflected in the residential choice-making. Peter (67 year, Hellevoetsluis) who moved during his single life stage and early-days relationship three times for his job, explained his family life stage like this:

*“Yes, we rented an apartment in Hellevoetsluis, but when we got our first child we decided that we did not want to raise our children in an apartment like that. We wanted a green environment for them, with freedom to play with other kids. So, we decided to buy a house in Hellevoet. Then you really invest you know [...]”*

*and your children make friends in this area and go to school in this area. We decided to stay in Hellevoet, mainly for our children.”*

This orientation towards a family-suitable environment by young families is even further emphasized in the next quote out of the interview with Geoffrey (38 years, Made), who is father since two years now:

*“If we did not got a child [...]. I think we also preferred to live in a city center. When you have no children, other things are important in your life. You rearrange your life and I think I would prefer to live in a lively and busy city center. Yes. [...]. One of the main reason why we decided to build our house here, is because of.. [...]. That is always in a new quarter, many children are born here every year. That is something that is really nice for the children when they become some older.”*

In spite of the need of living in or nearby a sub-urban environment within the preferred region as a young family, the results showed that the preference to ‘live in or nearby a sub-urban environment’ is interpreted differently, as people experience their own environment very differently than how one would expect according to the characteristics that belong to the environment.

For example Sandy (41 years, Nijswiller), who lives in a rural environment, indicated:

*“Yes, of course this village lacks in facilities. But the reality is that both of us are working, we both have a car and the commuting time to an area full of daily needed facilities is very short. Just in twenty minutes we are in Maastricht or Aachen, full of shops and restaurants. Above all, I enjoy those moments when I have free time or vacation and sit in my green garden. Then I truly do not miss the facilities.”*

According to the characteristics that belong to Sandy’s residential environment, she lives in the perfect example of a rural environment. However, it feels to her as she lives very central. It shows that an environment can be experienced very differently and that commuting time towards an urban environment is relative. This holds not only for living in a rural environment and having the feeling of living very central, but also the other way around. For example Kenny (40 years, Breda), who lives in the Ginneken-quarter in the historical city center of Breda, indicates:

*“True, I live in the busy center of Breda, but for me it feels like I live in a very quiet place. I am quicker in the Mastbos forest than I am in the shopping streets of Breda. Like I said [about the Ginneken-quarter], it feels like a village within a city. In that respect, this environment offers me the best of both; freedom and nature, but also nearby daily facilities and entertainment.”*

Also later on in the interview, he emphasizes his view on the rural-style location of their current residential environment. It shows that an environment can be experienced very differently, something that for most of the respondents in this research was strongly related with the acceptable commuting time to their work or an urban environment that offers the needed daily (care) amenities. As indicated before, young family members prefer a shorter commuting time than singles due to the increased time that is devoted to the care practice.

In addition to singles, families with children indicated that they pursue their residential choice on having a direct access to a green and safe environment, as they believe that a high-quality environment is very important for their children. In addition, families with children indicated that they prefer to live near their social contacts. This mainly for support and guidance, for example for taking care of children by grandparents when the parents are at work.

#### Ø **Leisure**

In spite of the fact that most of the respondents did not regard the availability of leisure amenities as a direct influence on their residential choice, both singles and young families regarded the proximity to a lively urban environment with its leisure and cultural amenities as crucial in deciding where to live. So, it is not really the need to live in the urban environment itself that matters, but more the access to this type of environment that influences one's residential choice. Geoffrey (38 years, Made) stated:

*“True, we are looking for that lively atmosphere and all those facilities such as hotels, restaurants, bars, and theatre. But we also like the quietness, safety and nature here in Made. It is just fifteen minutes by car to Breda and there we can find all those facilities we enjoy, besides all the things Made in itself has to offer already. Nevertheless, what I want to say is that I think we have the best of both.”*

Most young family members indicated that they enjoy leisure or cultural amenities in an urban environment. They mainly value the presence of or proximity to leisure and cultural amenities such as retail shops, restaurants, theatres, and cinemas, while for example bars, cafes, or sport facilities were less frequently mentioned compared to singles. Although they value these amenities, just one young family member indicated that these leisure or cultural amenities are directly important in his residential choice. However, all of the young family members mentioned them in being important for the liveliness and atmosphere of a place; the environments they prefer when they meet their social contacts. Therefore, for young families the practice of leisure turned out to be a social practice that is largely related with meeting their social contacts and enjoying a lively atmosphere, and not so much with the particular visit or consumption that takes at leisure or cultural amenities. This is emphasized in a quote out of the same interview with Geoffrey:

*“As I mentioned earlier, we are looking for all those facilities. In particular, it are not those facilities we are looking for, but more the lively atmosphere that goes along with the presence of those facilities. For example that new Irish Pub that opened a few months ago in town: I really enjoy being there as it becomes a social meeting place for people, a place where stories are shared and people see each other in the weekend.”*

Also Ginny (33 years, Made) prioritizes meeting her social contacts in a urban atmosphere over the consumption of leisure or cultural amenities in this environment:

*“As I live in a rural environment, I find the availability of amenities and entertainment very important, but it is in particular that cozy atmosphere I am looking for. After work or in the weekend we sometimes like to visit our friends, and most of the times we meet in the city center of Made or Breda. It helps you to get loose of daily routines.”*

So, not only for singles, but in particular for young families it are those intangibles of a place that are important in their residential decision. Although young family members value these leisure or cultural amenities, it is in particular the atmosphere that goes along with these amenities that makes a place so attractive. For them, this lively atmosphere is directly related with the sociability of people, as it turns places into social meeting places where people have a professional and/or

personal network. These places are more attractive to live, as creating new networks asks for great investments.

Besides these intangibles of a place that hold an important role in the residential choice-making of young families, this study also showed that the way in which leisure time is spend is different for young families compared with singles. Where both are enjoying leisure or cultural amenities in an urban environment, respondents out of the young family life stage indicated that they have less leisure time than before and that the available time they have is spend more indoors with their child or family.

Thus, overall it became clear that for young families the practice of care is relatively the most important. As a match has to be found between the preferences of both partners and more time per day is devoted to the care of children (and for this reasons a lower commuting time is preferred), the practice of labour is heavily affected. As young family members value leisure or cultural amenities mainly because of the function as social meeting places, the practice of leisure holds an important role in the sociability of this life stage. So, on one hand they are looking for the characteristics of a care-related environment, while on the other hand they still value different characteristics of an urban environment. This balancing between practices in their search for the best of both environments is reflected in a different residential choice, as will be described later.

#### **4.2.3 Relative importance of practices in the retired life stage**

##### **∅ Labour**

When comparing this third crucial life stage, that of retired people, with the life stage of singles and people living together and forming a family, other practices are given priority. Within this third essential life stage, the practice of labour is relatively less important since people are retired. However, respondents who are now in the retired life stage provided remarkable insights on the practice of labour during the reconstruction of their residential choice-making in their single life stage. When reflecting on their single stage, most of them mentioned that for them finding a job had full priority in such a way that they totally adjusted their residential choice to their work. Sander (71 years, Vliermaal), who had his own company but had different leading positions in the paper print/magazine-business before, said:

*“When I was single, work had priority. I found it very important that I liked my job, as I said before [he changed jobs because of the search for a new challenge, despite the fact that the salary was lower and he had to move for his new job]. And I know, there are many people that do not want to [move] and therefore their job will always stay the same. Hé.. But you know, it is often the case that if you leave and change your environment, that you also open more opportunities. That is a fact. You cannot see that separate from each other.”*

This seems to be in contrast with the findings presented on respondents that are now in the single life stage, as their answers indicated that work is very important in their life stage, but that it is not the case for all singles to adapt their choice of residence totally to the workplace. As they said, they are not willing to move almost anywhere in order to get their preferred job, as they balance their job search with other important things in life. Due to generation differences, the relative importance given to work became different for people that are now in the single life stage.

As stated before, during the interviews the respondents answered the questions ‘Why do you live where you live?’ mostly with a short bunch of words, or just one or two sentences. This was especially the case among retired people, probably because one of the main reasons to live somewhere, namely work, became relatively less important. During the passage of the interview, retired respondents seemed to discover new reasons why they actually live where they live. This indicated that in first instance most of the respondents see the process of residential choice-making as a simple or logic choice, while during the interview they become aware of the complexity of their choice for a particular residential environment, especially now they have no job anymore and therefore are free to choose a place of residence. This increasing flexibility and independence that belongs to this life stage was recognized by some, for example Sander (71 years, Vliermaal), who started the interview by saying that if he would be really honest the only reason why he moved to Belgium was a purely financial reason, later stated:

*“Indeed, besides the financial aspect, we also moved to Belgium since we retired. We had no job anymore, so no reason to stay. We looked for a spacious and comfortable house that was located in nature, since we love freedom and a natural environment.”*

On the other hand, even though the increase in flexibility, some respondents did not experience it this way due to other factors such as the current housing market or personal relationship with a place, for example Vlinder (60 years, Nijswiller):

*“Now I am retired, I do not have the feeling that we are totally free to choose where to live. Okay, my husband still works, but even when he will be retired in three years, we still have a bond with this area and we have to sell our house.”*

Then she continues with a more personal reason why she decides to stay:

*“It is a place full of memories. [...]. Now and then we think about what we will do when we are both retired, and we look for example for an apartment in a busy city center. But most of the times, if we have compared everything, we conclude that it is no improvement compared with what we have now.”*

This attitude of both Sander and Vlinder towards the choice for a residential environment shows the stratification in residential choice-making. During the interview, respondents became aware of the different layers they go through when choosing a place of residence that suits with their life stage and therefore showed that residential choice-making is largely based on implicit choices. This, in combination with the earlier described perspective of seeing residential choice-making as a natural transition, shows that residential choice-making feels as a evolutionary path you walk. It are logical paths with coincidences on the way. Besides singles and young families, also retired respondents indicate that individual coincidences that come along lead to a change in the relative importance that is given to a particular practice and in this way influences the residential choice.

#### ∅ **Care**

When comparing this third crucial life stage with the life stage of young families, the care practice plays a different role. As children have left the home, other care-activities are given priority. Whereas first families with children preferred to live near their social network for support and guidance and decided to live in an environment with care-related amenities, now they have the flexibility to move. On the other hand, retired people indicate that as being a grandparent they prefer to live near their social network for taking care of children. Ginger (64 years, Made) recognizes this need:

*“I have two daughters and one already lives far away. My other daughter lives also in Made, something that I really appreciate. Two years ago they got their first child and once a week I take care of her. It is convenient for them, since they both work, but it is also nice for me to spend some time with her every week.”*

Moreover, retired people indicate that they prefer to live near their friends and family, so that they can visit them frequently. Therefore, sociability holds an important role within the care practice of retired people.

In addition, the partner still has a crucial influence on the residential choice. Where during the young family stage respondents indicated that mainly the job of the partner is considered as an important reason to choose for a specific place to live, during the transition towards the retired life stage the health situation of the partner becomes important. Most of the retired people indicate that they would like to live where they live as long as they are together with their partner, but if the time comes that the partner passes away, they indicate that they definitely would change their residential characteristics and residential environment. Saar (65 years, Vliermaal) explained it in this way:

*“We tried to sell the house, but that did not work out in the current housing market. So, we decided to stay. On one hand we fully enjoy living here, so it was fine to stay. On the other hand, there comes a time that we need to move to a smaller house or apartment. [...]. Because, if something would happen with him, I just do not see myself living here. It is too big for one person and the location is very remote.”*

Her quote shows that the idea of a possible death of her partner triggers the need to move, both because the need to change her residential characteristics and her residential environment. This is further emphasized at the end of the interview with Vlinder (60 years, Nijswiller), who lives in a rural environment in the south of The Netherlands:

*“If I would be alone my residential choice is clear: Right in the city center in an apartment, short-distance to amenities, in the middle of a lively place. I enjoy living here because we are still together, but if I would be a widow I would definitely move. I would feel the need to live in a lively city centre, I think to*



*compensate for the silence of solitude. This house is too big if you are alone, it is too silent to be here alone.”*

Especially the ‘compensation for the silence of solitude’ by moving to another environment is remarkable in this quote, as it underlines the importance of sociability in the retired life stage.

#### Ø **Leisure**

For retired people, the practice of leisure turned out to be a social practice that is largely related with their social contacts and need for amenities. In contrast with the fact that most singles and young family respondents regarded the proximity to a lively urban environment with its leisure and cultural amenities as crucial in deciding where to live, retired people indicated that they prefer to live in these environments, mainly from the moment they become a widow(er). So, it is not the proximity to, but the need to live in the urban environment itself that matters, as this could be compensation for the silence of solitude as explained before.

Thus, the retired life stage is mainly characterized by the changes in the practice of care and leisure, as labour holds no role anymore. Depending on the health situation of the partner, people are (not so) likely to move to an urban environment, as they anticipate on the deteriorating health or loss of their partner. In this way, sociability becomes a decisive reason to move to a different environment.

### **4.3 Trade-off consequences for the type of residential environment**

The results per essential life stage presented above made clear that ‘choosing’ a place of residence should not be regarded as a one-moment decision based on an individual choice, but rather on the interaction and relative importance of practices. As not all practices are equally important for every person, mainly due to transitions in life stages, tensions emerge and practices are in conflict with one another. The changing meaning attributed to each of these practices makes an individual continually seek for the perfect life balance, as he or she aims to balance these conflicting practices with each other. In this way, trade-offs between practices are made where the result of the relative importance given to a particular practice leads to a preference for a residential environment. So, what happens when people are moving from one life stage to the other in terms of trade-offs between social practices? That will be explained in the paragraphs below.

### 4.3.1 Transition between the single and young family life stage

When looking closer to the single life stage, this study showed that singles are mobile, flexible, more likely to rent an apartment, give priority in finding a suitable job, live close to their social networks, are accepting a longer commuting time, and are in need to live close to leisure and cultural amenities.

In their life stage, the practices of labour and leisure are the two main practices that are in conflict. It turned out that it is not the case for all singles to adapt their choice of residence totally to their workplace, as all respondents out of the single life stage indicated that they are not willing to move almost anywhere in order to get their preferred job. When combining their job search with their residential choice, they all made a connection with leisure in a broad sense, for example the availability of facilities, their social contacts, a lively atmosphere, nature and/or hobbies. These leisure related factors are balanced with the search for a job and reflected in their preference for an urban environment. The challenge to find a balance between the labour and leisure practice as a single is illustrated in the answer given by Cees (19 years, Breda) when he was asked if he expects that his residential choice will follow his workplace:

*“Like I mentioned earlier, some areas I just do not see myself living. I know that in the USA for example some employees have the system of working three months in an area that is completely isolated from everything, and then having one total month off from work. I think that system has some advantages, but for me personally that would not work out. Work is not everything, as seeing your girlfriend, friends and family is also important, despite of the fact that these days finding a job might have priority for most people.”*

The search for this balance is also stressed in this response of Loes (24 years, Haarlem):

*“Well, I moved to Haarlem because I graduated last year and I did my final internship for a niche tour operator in Haarlem. They offered me a job afterwards, so that is one reason why I stayed in Haarlem. But it is also this lively atmosphere that is different [compared to the village she lived before] that makes me stay. It suits with my new life stage, as being a young working starter. I have to say that I am looking for a new apartment as, now I have a full-time job, this one really becomes too small. But I do not want to leave this*

*area as it is perfectly located between Amsterdam and the beach and besides offers many career opportunities for the near future.”*

The answers given by Cees and Loes is not something that stands on its own, as all respondents that are currently in the single life stage indicated that there is more in life than work.

When moving from the single to the young family life stage, this study showed that young family members are affected in their labour opportunities as their flexibility and mobility decreases, they are less likely to move, prefer a lower commuting time, have to deal with a partner's job, are more likely to buy a house, prefer a safe and natural environment, and focus their residential choice on care-related amenities.

In this life stage, the practices of labour and care become increasingly intertwined. It turned out that young family members in this research almost all referred to the need of living in or nearby a sub-urban environment within the preferred region they had chosen. So, this life stage enables a change in the type of environment, but not that much in the region. Mostly, a sub-urban environment was chosen due to the access to daily (care-related) amenities in combination with characteristics of a rural environment such as safety and (natural) space. This orientation towards a family-suitable environment is conflicting with the practices of labour and leisure. The trade-offs that are made in this life stage are best illustrated by the stories of Ginny and Sandy. Sandy (41 years, Nijswiller), who is mother since a few years now:

*“Yes, I know my husband would prefer to live in a big city, for example Aachen, because of all the shops and restaurants. Just the idea that you can go out in the evening just for a good coffee or beer, without driving to a city, parking your car.. [..]. But I believe that it is good for our child to live the first years of her life in a small village, where kids can play outside, where there is enough nature and less criminality. We decided to buy a house in Nijswiller because it is located between bigger villages and some cities, but still has the residential-benefits of a small village.”*

Ginny (33 years, Made), who lives in a rural environment, indicated:

*“Yes, on one hand we are looking for that lively atmosphere and all those facilities, but on the other hand we cherish that quietness and freedom that we*

*have now. That mix, that is what we are looking for. [...]. Something that we cannot afford in say for example the city centre of Breda, but something we did find in the place where we live now.”*

It is quite interesting to see that mainly people out of this life stage interpreted their residential environment very differently than how one would expect according to the characteristics that belong to the environment, as they all have the idea of ‘living in or nearby a sub-urban environment’. People experience their own environment very differently. This was not only indicated in an earlier presented quote by Sandy, but also by Kenny (40 years, Breda), who lives in the Ginneken-quarter in the historical city center of Breda:

*“True, I live in the busy center of Breda, but for me it feels like I live in a very quiet place. I am quicker in the Mastbos forest than I am in the shopping streets of Breda. Like I said [about the Ginneken-quarter], it feels like a village within a city. In that respect, this environment offers me the best of both; freedom and nature, but also nearby daily facilities and entertainment.”*

It shows how people in this life stage deal with the trade-offs they have to make between the practice of care on one hand, and the practices of labour and leisure on the other hand, which is reflected in the choice for their residential environment. As a paradox, they indicated for example that they did not regard the availability of leisure amenities as a direct influence on their residential choice, but on the other hand they regarded the proximity to a lively urban environment with its leisure and cultural amenities as crucial in deciding where to live. In the most ideal scenario, they would love to live in a very lively urban environment, while having the benefits of the care-related sub-urban environment, such as safety and (natural) space. But due to financial limitations, this is often not possible. Therefore, in finding their perfect life balance, it sometimes seems as they rationalize their choice for a sub-urban environment.

#### **4.3.2 Transition between the young family and retired life stage**

When moving from the young family to the retired life stage, this study showed that for people in this stage an environment with many (leisure) facilities becomes more attractive, sociability plays a crucial role, they are more flexible as they have no job, but dependent and anticipate on the health-situation of their partner.

In this life stage, sociability holds an important role within the care and leisure practice, and this is reflected in their diverse residential choice. The health situation of their partner has a crucial influence on the residential choice, as they mostly prefer to live together in their 'old' house, mainly situated in rural or sub-urban environments. As a young family, they decided to buy or build a house in these environments as they believed that these environments were good for the development of their children. After the children left the house and they became a so called empty-nester, they often decided (as long as they are together and their health situation allows them) to stay, as they enjoy the environment or characteristics of the type of housing. At that moment, the attachment to their environment and residential characteristics is high, and therefore they are not so likely to move. However, they indicate that they definitely would change their residential characteristics and residential environment if they would become a widow(er). At that stage, a smaller type of housing located in a lively urban environment is preferred. These tensions are illustrated in a quote from Vlinder (60 years, Nijswiller), who now lives in a rural environment:

*“If I would be alone my residential choice is clear: Right in the city center in an apartment, short-distance to amenities, in the middle of a lively place. I enjoy living here because we are still together, but if I would be a widow I would definitely move. I would have the need to live in a lively city centre, I think to compensate for the silence of solitude. This house is too big if you are alone, it is too silent to be here alone.”*

Also Ginger (64 years, Made) is attached to her current house and environment, but indicates that she would anticipate on a deteriorating health situation of her partner:

*“Without my husband, I would not stay in this house. We really enjoy living here, and we also have a strong bond with this house as we developed it ourselves when we got children, but now and then it becomes too large for us. [...]. If I think about where to go if I would move, I would definitely choose for a small apartment in a city. The city offers you more when you are alone, as there are many things to do and things are close by.”*

Some short moments later in the interview, she continues:

*“And, another reason why we stay in this house, is related to our two daughters. As long as we live in this house, they really come 'home' when they*

*visit us, as they lived since their birth in this house. As soon as we move, that feeling of coming 'home' is gone. Besides, if my daughter visits me [the youngest one that lives in the province of Limburg], this house offers enough space to stay during the total weekend. Sometimes I even do not have the feeling that they are at home. In an apartment that would definitely change."*

It shows that in first instance retired people are not so likely to move, as they are attached to their environment and/or the characteristics of their house. In addition, the last quote of Ginger and an earlier presented quote of Vlinder show that retired people are emotionally attached to their house, as it hosts many memories. However, the results show that retired people anticipate on the changing health situation or loss of their partner, by moving to another residential environment that mostly goes together with a change in the type of housing. This is due to two reasons, which are related to the practice of care and the practice of leisure. First, the proximity to facilities is found important, as they become less vital and therefore prefer to live close to daily needed (care) amenities. But especially the second reasons, the 'compensation for the silence of solitude' by moving to an urban environment with its (leisure) amenities, mostly referred to as a city, is remarkable. It underlines the importance of sociability in the retired life stage.

# 5 Conclusion

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The final chapter of this thesis starts with presenting the conclusions on the conducted research. The conclusions answering the three research questions will be discussed. Beyond that, this chapter incorporates a theoretical discussion, in order to answer the proposed main research question and reach the research aim. Next, a reflection on the entire research process is given, and the chapter ends with recommendations for possible further research and towards the working field.

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## 5.1 Conclusion on the results

All the three research questions investigated a particular part of the proposed main research question in chapter two. The first research question was concerned with a description of the three social practices for the three crucial life stages, in relation to residential choice-making (*RQ1: How do the three social practices of labour, care and leisure appear per particular life stage?*). The second research question investigated how a transition in a life stage leads to a change in the relative importance that is given to these three social practices (*RQ2: How are the three social practices balanced on their relative importance per particular life stage?*). Since the questions were concrete, but the answers turned out to be less straightforward, the answers to these two research questions will be answered in an integrated way below, followed by the answer on the third research question.

**This study showed that singles are mobile, flexible, more likely to rent an apartment, give priority in finding a suitable job but in balance with other practices, live close to their social networks, are accepting a longer commuting time, and are in need to live close to leisure and cultural amenities.**

When looking to the first stage, it shall be quite unsurprisingly that the social practice of labour turned out to be very important in the residential choice for people in *the single life stage*. The results presented earlier showed that during your life moves between different types of residential environments often are triggered by labour, something which especially counts for singles, as residential choice-making is part of their search for job opportunities. Therefore, when looking for a new residential environment, they also move out of their current region, something

which is in contrast with the findings on young families. Beyond that, the results of this study showed that (for this generation of singles) it is not the case for all to adapt their choice of residence totally to their (potential) workplace, as all respondents out of the single life stage indicated that they are not willing to move almost anywhere in order to get their preferred job. In their argumentation, all singles made a link with the practice of leisure in a broad sense, for example meeting their social contacts in a lively atmosphere, nature and/or hobby possibilities. But, especially the need to live close to leisure and cultural amenities was striking. These are the factors that are balanced with the search for a job during this essential life stage. Therefore, it may be concluded that other practices in their life are not totally subordinate to having their ideal preferred job. As the practice of care is relatively less important, trade-offs take place between the practice of labour and the practice of leisure, for example on the layer of commuting time. As almost all time not spend at work is time that can be spend in a leisurely way, they are accepting a longer commuting time. It also turned out that the residential choice-making of singles is marked by the idea that the actual chance as a starter of getting a job in the preferred Randstad-area, might be equal to the chances one has in other places. Lastly, the results concerning the practice of labour in the single life stage showed, in accordance with the theory that young people are more flexible and prone to move, that all single respondents moved in their recent past. Moreover, they also indicated that they expect to move in the nearby future. This aspect of a temporary residential choice was reflected in all the interviews with singles.

**This study showed that young families are affected in their labour opportunities as their flexibility and mobility decreases, they are less likely to move, prefer a lower commuting time, have to deal with a partner's job, are more likely to buy a house, prefer a safe and natural environment for the kids, generally focus their residential choice on care-related amenities, but still prefer access to a lively (leisure related) environment to meet their social contacts.**

As showed in the results, it may be concluded that in *the young family life stage*, the practice of labour becomes increasingly intertwined with the practice of care. In the transition from single to young family member, the individual job search becomes even more challenged, as respondents acknowledge that from the moment they have a partner the preferences of the partner really become one of the decisive factors in where they choose to live (and therefore work). In line with the theory, the



results of this study confirmed that young families residential choices are oriented towards family-suitable environments, which stand for characteristics such as a diversity in schools, safety, a green environment, and a more spacious type of housing. The family members in this research almost all referred to the need of living in or nearby an environment with access to daily amenities that relate to a person's needs (such as supermarkets and retail shops). When getting children, the increasing interest in this life stage for care-related amenities is reflected in their residential choice-making. Nevertheless, they aim to balance this need for care-related amenities with their own preference of having a fast access to a lively (leisure related) environment, where they meet their social contacts in the little free time they have.

**This study showed that retired people are more flexible as they have no job, but are (emotionally) attached to their residential environment and housing characteristics, therefore they are not so likely to move, but anticipating on the health situation or loss of their partner, an environment with many (leisure) facilities becomes more attractive, as sociability plays a crucial role in this stage.**

When looking at the last essential life stage, it shall be quite unsurprisingly that the social practice of labour turned out to be barely important in the residential choice for people in *the retired life stage*. In contrast, the care practice plays an important role, but in a different way than for young families. As children have left the home, retired people have the flexibility to move. On the other hand, they indicate that as being a grandparent they prefer to live near their social network for taking care of children. Besides, they are emotionally attached to their house and therefore are less likely to change their residential environment. However, the most important conclusion regarding the influence of social practices on the residential choice of retired people, is that the practice of leisure turned out to be a social practice that is largely related with their social contacts and need for amenities. The results showed that especially the health-situation or loss of the partner has a crucial influence on their residential choice, as they anticipate on this factor. Since most of the retired people indicated that they would like to live where they live as long as they are together with their partner, but if the time comes that the partner passes away they would definitely move to live in a lively environment, this research emphasizes the role which an environment can have in countering the silence of solitude.

The third research questions investigated the consequences of the trade-offs that are made, and how this is balanced in the choice for a particular type of environment in residential choice-making (*RQ3: How do these trade-offs between social practices relate to a preference for a type of residential environment?*).

As not all practices are equally important for every person, mainly due to transitions in life stages, tensions emerge and practices are in conflict with one another. The changing meaning attributed to each of these practices makes an individual continually seek for the perfect life balance, as he or she aims to balance these conflicting practices with each other. In this way, trade-offs between practices are made where the result of the relative importance given to a particular practice leads to a preference for a residential environment.

**This study showed that for singles the challenge is to balance between the practice of labour and the practice of leisure, mainly on the layer of commuting time, something which is reflected in their preference for an urban environment.**

For *the single life stage*, the challenge is to balance between the practice of labour and the practice of leisure. These are the two main practices that are in conflict, as the practice of care has barely no role in their residential choice. It turned out that it is not the case for all singles to adapt their choice of residence totally to their workplace, as all respondents out of the single life stage indicated that they are not willing to move almost anywhere in order to get their preferred job. When combining their job search with their residential choice, they all made a connection with the practice of leisure. Mainly the availability of leisure or cultural facilities, but also their social contacts, a lively atmosphere, nature and/or hobbies; all these things were balanced in their residential choice with the practice of labour. As for singles almost all time not spend at work is time that can be spend in a leisurely way, they are accepting a longer commuting time. For singles, this balancing between practices is reflected in their preference for an urban environment.

**This study showed that for young families the challenge is to balance between the practice of care on one side, and the practices of labour and leisure on the other side, something which is reflected in their choice for a sub-urban environment.**

When the transition takes place from the single to *the young family life stage*, the practices of labour becomes increasingly intertwined with the practice of care. As young family members are affected in their labour opportunities (as their flexibility

and mobility decreases because of the partner's job and birth of a child), their main challenge is to balance labour with the emerging need to focus their residential choice on care-related amenities. Therefore, it turned out that young family members are in need of living in or nearby a sub-urban environment within the preferred region they had chosen. This, partly due to their job, which they balance with the access to daily (care-related) amenities, but also due to the characteristics of a rural environment in balance with the access to a lively environment. As will be discussed further in the next paragraph, it is quite interesting to see that mainly people out of this life stage interpreted their residential environment very differently than how one would expect according to the characteristics that belong to the environment, as they all had the idea of 'living in or nearby a sub-urban environment'. It shows how people in this life stage deal with the trade-offs they have to make between the practice of care on one hand, and the practices of labour (and leisure) on the other hand. As a paradox, the results on young families show that they did not regard the availability of leisure amenities as a direct influence on their residential choice, but on the other hand they regarded the proximity to a lively urban environment with its leisure and cultural amenities as crucial in deciding where to live, since they prefer to meet their social contacts in these type of environments. In the most ideal scenario, they would prefer to live in a lively urban environment, while having the benefits of the care-related sub-urban/rural environment, such as safety and (natural) space. But, due to financial limitations, this is often not possible. Therefore, in finding their perfect life balance, it sometimes seems as they rationalize their choice for a sub-urban environment.

**This study showed that for retired people sociability holds an important role within the care and leisure practices, something which is reflected in their diverse residential choices.**

For the life stage of *retired people*, the practice of care and the practice of leisure are clearly more important than the labour-related activities in life. The research showed that sociability holds an important role within the care and leisure practice, and this is reflected in their diverse residential choices. From the results it may be concluded that the health situation of their partner has a crucial influence on the residential choice, as they mostly prefer to live together in their 'old' house, mainly situated in rural or sub-urban environments. As a young family, they decided to buy or build a house in these environments as they believed that these environments are good for the development of their children. After the children left

the house and they became a so called empty-nester, they often decided to stay, as they enjoy the environment and/or characteristics of the type of housing. However, the results showed that retired people definitely would change their residential characteristics and residential environment if they would become a widow(er). Anticipating on the health situation or loss of their partner, they prefer to live in a smaller type of housing located in a lively urban environment because of its increased safety, access to daily needed amenities, and sociability benefits in order to compensate for the silence of solitude. This underlines the importance of the role an urban environment has in the retired life stage.

## **5.2 Conclusion on the theoretical discussion**

The aim of this study was to get a better understanding of the role a particular life stage has in the trade-offs that people make between social practices, in order to understand which impact these trade-offs have on their choice of residence. Therefore, the proposed main research question in the first chapter of this thesis was:

*What is the relative importance of the social practices of labour, care and leisure in residential choice-making and how does this differ per particular life stage?*

In order to answer this question, this research focused on the transitions that take place when your life moves from one life stage to the other, specifically in terms of trade-offs between the social practices of labour, care and leisure. First of all, it is striking to conclude how diverse residential patterns are. The results showed that depending on the individual choices one makes in life, a residential pattern can be disturbed or followed. Despite of those individual factors that change the relative importance for practices in one's life and therefore change the individual life path that ultimately determines a person's residential choice, there are recognizable group patterns noticeable. These insights are translated into a new model, in an attempt to reach the research aim. The focus of this new model lies on the changing relative importance of social practices in the choice for a residential environment, as it visualizes how trade-offs between labour, care and leisure are made during life stage transitions, and how this results in a preference for a type of residential environment. This new model can be found in figure 3 on the next page.

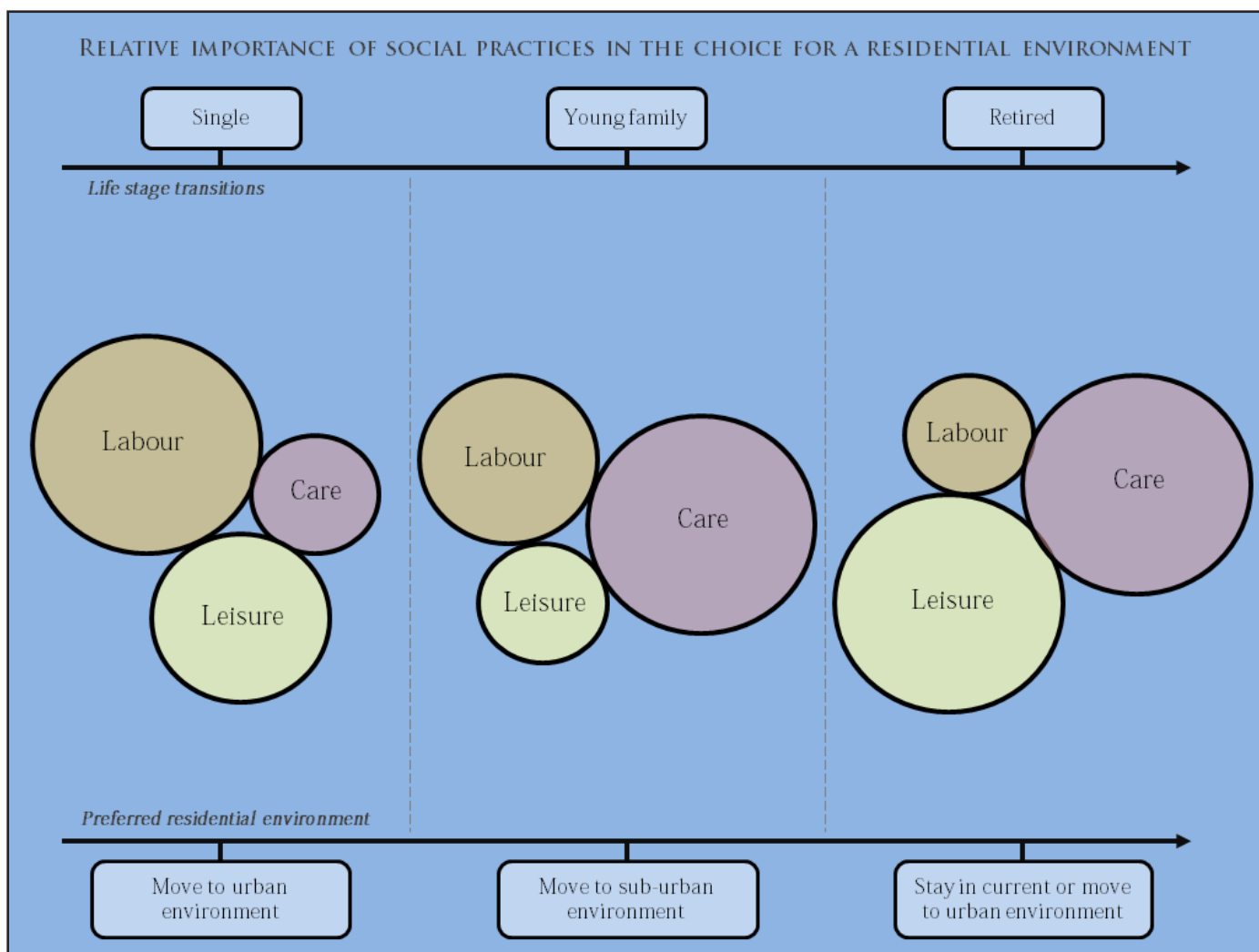


Figure 3: Relative importance of social practices in the choice for a residential environment.

Based on the social practice perspective of Shove et al. (2012), this study provided a quite dynamic picture, as it showed that not all practices are equally important for every person in every life stage. Portraying the three social practices of labour, care and leisure as an interactive balancing during the total life course, thus what happens when moving from one life stage to another in terms of trade-offs between these three practices, resulted in a clear conclusion on the priority that is given to certain practices.

Reflected in the presented model, a change in one's practice priorities enables a change in one's residential preference. The upper line in the model shows the life stage transitions, whereas the lower line explains the changing preferred residential

environment. The enlargement or reduction of the relative size of the practices shows the changing importance attributed to each of these practices per life stage.

As can be seen in the model, for the life stage of singles the challenge lies in finding a balance between the practice of labour and the practice of leisure. As labour has priority, but needs to be balanced with their need for leisure and cultural amenities in a lively atmosphere, their residential choice is characterized by a preference for cities, referred to as an urban environment. When moving to the young family stage, the time devoted to the practice of care increases extremely and the preference for a short commuting time increases equally, something which affects the practice of labour, although it stays important. The practice of leisure becomes less related with the availability of leisure amenities, but more with the intangibles of a place. Generally, people in this life stage have less free time to spend in a leisurely way, so for them it is in particular this lively atmosphere (rather than the leisure and cultural amenities themselves) that is directly related with their sociability, as it turns places into social meeting places. Their need to balance the emerging focus for care-related amenities with both their work and the access to this lively atmosphere is reflected in their choice for a sub-urban environment. When moving to the life stage of retired people, the practice of care and the practice of leisure become clearly more important than the labour-related activities in life. The results of this study showed that sociability holds an important role within those practices, something which is reflected in their choice for an urban environment when the time is right. This is stressed later in the fourth conclusion of this paragraph.

Beyond the presentation of this new model, other conclusions can be drawn based on the results of this study.

Firstly, it turned out that many respondents consider their residential choice as a *natural transition*. Respondents indicated that they find it difficult to view their residential choice as a real 'choice'. According to them, it is something that is formed by the course of one's life, which depends so much on coincidences. This is in line with the individual characteristics described in literature by Feijten et al. (2008). Recognized by so many respondents, it is the organic character of residential choice-making that they experience as a sometimes obvious and logic consequence of developments and choices they make along their life path.

Secondly, and different than expected, the results of this study showed that residential choice-making is *multi-leveled and largely based on implicit choices*. During the interviews the respondents answered the questions ‘Why do you live where you live?’ mostly with a short bunch of words. During the passage of the interview, they seemed to discover new reasons why they actually live where they live, and in this way became aware of the complexity and different layers of their residential choice.

Third, it turned out that in case of this study people indicated that they feel the need to go to a next step, to seek progress and be ready for a new stage in their residential decision. As expected, based on the studied literature of Mulders (in Feijten et al., 2008), it is *the change in a life stage that triggers this need for progress*. When looking to the responses of people, it becomes possible to conclude that this need is two-fold, namely: (1) the characteristics of the current type of housing are the trigger to take the next step, or (2) the characteristics of the residential environment are the trigger. Therefore, it became clear that the change in a life stage is indeed, as expected, expressed in the need for a change in the residential characteristics and/or the residential environment.

Another remarkable result for this study is linked with *the perception of a residential environment*. Based on the differentiation in (1) urban areas, (2) sub-urban areas, and (3) rural areas, made by Feijten et al. (2008), this study used these three types of residential environments to find out which environment is best suitable to meet the relative importance in social practices per particular life stage. As it turned out, singles prefer to live in an urban environment, referred to as cities. Young families would love to live in a very lively urban environment, but are confronted with their emerging focus for care-related amenities and aspects such as safety and (natural) space, which they find in a sub-urban environment. In finding their perfect life balance, it sometimes seemed as they rationalize their choice for this type of environment. Finally, a striking finding, and different than expected, is related with the diverse choice for a residential environment by retired people. Anticipating on the health situation or loss of their partner, they prefer to live in a smaller and safer type of housing located in a lively urban environment because of its access to daily needed (care) amenities, and sociability benefits in order to compensate for the silence of solitude. This result underlines the importance of the role an urban environment holds in the sociability of people in the retired life stage.

However, despite of this categorization in these three strict residential environments, this research enabled the researcher to observe that respondents experience their own environment very differently than how one would expect according to the characteristics that belong to the environment. Frequently, according to the characteristics that belong to someone's residential environment, he or she may live in one of these three categories, but perceives his or her residential environment in a totally different way. Respondents that live in a rural village (that lacks every amenity) can have the feeling of living very central, because of the relative short commuting time towards an urban environment. This also holds the other way around, as people that live in a busy city-quarter may have the feeling of living in 'a peaceful village within a city'. This different perception of one's own residential environment can explain why some results are different than expected.

Lastly, this study showed, partly in line with the literature by Renkow and Hoover (2000), that *commuting time is an important factor* in residential choice-making. In addition, this study showed that commuting time may hold an even greater role than expected, as many single and young family respondents showed in their answers that they made trade-offs between the practices of labour, care and leisure, on the layer of commuting time. Especially the singles showed that in order to reduce their commuting time, work is adapted to their place of residence, or exactly the other way around. In contrast, singles are also indicating that they accept a longer commuting time since labour has priority. Especially for singles, the current economic situation gives strength to the idea that one should be open to finding a job, and therefore should accept a long commuting time in case the preferred job is offered in another city or region than the one he or she is currently living. Regarding the acceptable commuting time, young family members showed a contradiction. On one hand they indicated that the commuting time to their daily work should not be too long as time devoted to labour and commute, is time that cannot be devoted to the care of their children. On the other hand, they do appreciate to have some commuting time to work, so that they have the possibility to unload from work and switch between work- and private life.



### **5.3 Reflection on the entire research process**

For this research, one of the most important aspects that requires reflection is the use of specific theories to study the relation between life stages, social practices, and the residential choice-making. The chosen social practice perspective of Shove et al. (2012) helped to structure the research and offered many advantages. It turned out to be very useful for this type of study, in that it allowed to study the (mis)match between the type of residential environment and the practices that shape everyday life, rather than investigating residential choice-making as an absolute 'choice moment', as a specific location, or as the type of housing. This provided a quite dynamic picture, as it showed that not all practices are equally important for every person, but that this is depending on the relative importance of that activity in the specific life course. Portraying the three social practices of labour, care and leisure as an interactive balancing during the total life course, how transitions between life stages change the relative importance given to these practices, and how this is reflected in the preference for a type of residential environment, is the real value of this study. This is something which, as described in the first chapter, had not been done before to this extent. The results of this study showed how layered a 'choice' for residence is. The use of this qualitative approach brought to the attention that residential choice-making exists of many factors that all interact with each other and lead per life stage, but also per individual, to very specific trade-offs. These trade-offs became apparent by including the social practice approach, thus showing that the use of this theory has been very useful. This is something that could not have done different than through this chosen qualitative approach.

However, the use of this theory brought also some disadvantages. The theory of Shove et al. (2012) made the researcher decide to make a selection in three main social practices in life, as Shove et al. (2012) focuses on everyday life practices which consist of the three elements of meaning, materials and competence. This seemed to broad for the researcher, and therefore less relevant for the study on residential choice-making, since a 'choice' for residence is something which a person only makes occasionally along his or her entire life course. Besides, one could argue to which extent the elements of meaning, materials and competence are attached to residential choice-making (and therefore are used in this research). As the residential stories of the respondents were so divers, it was sometimes difficult

to decide how answers would fit in the structure which the social practices perspective offered. This made the social practice approach sometimes linger in a sort of choice-making approach. More or less the same holds for the used theory of Feijten et al. (2008), which helped to categorize the different types of residential environment in three main areas. As described in the previous paragraph it became clear that people interpret their residential environment very differently than how one would expect according to the characteristics that belong to the environment, which made it hard to distinguish environments and to compare and link these preferences with life stages. Of course, these are points that will be discussed in the next paragraph.

Another inevitable issue in this study that requires further reflection is the role of sociability. During the literature study different information was found concerning the social network of a person, either personally or professionally, and how this can influence residential choice-making. During the entire research process, it remained the question if enough information was studied concerning this topic. Could sociability be treated as a separate social practice besides the other three, as an intrinsic component of the other practices, or as a source that determines all the other activities in life? Is sociability really the decisive factor that gives meaning to all other social practices? During the starting phase of this research it was decided to include the role of sociability as an important aspect that can influence all practices in residential choice-making, but it remained a difficult one. Overall, sociability plays a more significant role than was expected on forehand, and therefore it will obviously come back in the recommendations for possible further research.

Next, an aspect that requires further reflection is the used sample and approach for this study. It was striking to conclude how diverse residential patterns are. As aimed, the results of this study showed a link between a person's residential choice, the relative importance of social practices, and the particular life stage of a person. Despite of the individual factors that disturb the relative importance, there were recognizable group patterns noticeable in the presented data. However, because of all these diverse individual factors, it was harder than expected to discover these group patterns. The first goal was to interview twelve respondents, later adjusted to fifteen. In addition, it was decided to include a residential reconstruction of respondents out of the second and third life stage during the interviews, which

increased the number of observations extremely. This, in combination with an adjustment in the amount of interviews per particular life stage, enhanced the possibility to present valuable results per life stage. Moreover, the uncertainty about the amount of information gathered is not only due to time limitations, but perhaps even more related with the organic character of residential choice-making that is recognized by some many respondents. Overall, they experienced their residential choice as being a, sometimes obvious and logic, consequence of developments along their life path. Something which is true of course. During the interviews they became aware of the complexity, the multi-leveled character of residential choices, and all the implicit choices they have made when it comes to their choice for residence. The stories are so diverse, which made it not possible to explore this topic in another way then by conducting long qualitative in-depth conversations with respondents in their own setting, as it is this personal approach that led to these deeper insights on residential choice-making. Also this is of course a point that will be discussed in the next paragraph, in which recommendations for possible further research and towards the working field will be presented.

#### **5.4 Recommendations for possible further research and the working field**

Based on the outcomes of this research, both scientific and societal recommendations will be presented below. The scientific recommendations will be discussed first, which are mostly related to possibilities for further research.

Today, a large body of literature describes topics related to residential choice-making. So, it is fair to question how this study could contribute to this academic field. This study is particularly relevant from a scientifically point of view, as the perspective of seeing residential choice-making as the result of different trade-offs between social practices, for as far as could have been ascertained during the thesis period, not had been investigated before. Portraying three social practices as an interactive balancing during the total life course, and going beyond these absolute life stages by looking deeper into the transitions that take place between them, is what forms the scientific value of this study.

However, as described in the previous paragraph, during this study new topics came up that ask for a deeper investigation. The first recommendation for possible further research is related with the available time people have for activities in a day.

During this study, the focus was on three main practices that fill the available time in a day. Depending on the specific life stage one is in, a relative importance is given to these practices, something which changes during life stage transitions. An issue that came up during this study is that people argue that they fill their day with different activities, and that time that remains is seen as 'free time'. It would be interesting for further research to look closer to time-space paths, and how these develop along the entire life cycle. As people indicate that all time they have left is categorized as free time, it would be interesting to investigate how the balance per life stage is in leisure and non-leisurely spend free time. What is real leisure time? For some people this may be the time that remains after sleep, work and travel, while for others social obligations and shopping with their partner is also experienced as non-leisure. Therefore, a recommendation for further research is concerned with the way in which leisure time is experienced differently per life stage.

Secondly, this study showed that sociability plays a more significant role in residential choice-making than was expected on forehand. What is exactly the influence of one's social network on residential choice-making? During the entire research process, it remained the question if sociability could be seen as an intrinsic component of all the other practices, or more as a source that determines all the other activities in life. Is sociability really the decisive factor that gives meaning to those social practices, and in this way largely determines one's residential choice? Anyway, the taken approach for this study made clear that it is worthwhile to place the role of sociability more central in further research, as this may open a fully new approach to residential choice-making.

Next, an inevitable issue that arises from this study is the crucial role of commuting time in residential choice-making. As this study showed that commuting time may hold an even greater role than already expected, as many single and young family respondents showed in their answers that they made trade-offs between the practices of labour, care and leisure, on the layer of commuting time, this topic certainly needs further investigation. For example the contradiction that was ascertained in the young family life stage, as they indicated that they would like to have a short commuting time, but also not too short, to have the possibility to unload from work and switch between work- and private life. Or the factors that influence the maximum acceptable commuting time per life stage. How do people

perceive and value their commuting time? That might be of relevance for further research.

Fourthly, this study showed that the change in one's life stage is expressed in the need for a change in the residential characteristics and/or the residential environment. Because of the focus of this study, the choice for a type of residential environment has comparatively received the most attention. Despite of the fact that these residential aspects are intertwined and therefore closely related with each other, further research on residential characteristics may emphasize the role which a type of housing plays in residential choice-making. Respondents in this study indicated that they had the feeling 'to be ready for the next step' and 'to the seek progress'. Further research may explore the role a type of housing has in this recognized need.

Lastly, an inevitable issue that arises from this research is the fact that the group patterns described in the conclusion, and which are visualized in figure 3, cannot be generalized. Since this research is qualitative of nature, the results are based on a limited amount of respondents. As this research did not aim to present generalizable conclusions, but rather was focused on getting a deeper understanding of residential choice-making, this is not of direct influence on the value of this study. However, it would be interesting to test the outcomes of this research by the use of a quantitative approach. This may confirm the conclusions on the relative importance that is given towards social practices per life stage, and how this is reflected in the preference for a residential environment.

Beyond these scientific recommendations, the outcomes of this study gave input to societal recommendations which can be especially beneficial for local or national policy makers in the working field. These will be discussed below.

The knowledge gained from this study can be regarded as relevant for society, since contributing to the academic debate on residential choice-making, may also benefit the urban policy processes. As Yankelovich (2006) described, people often tend to lack well-formed opinions about places that are the most or least likely for them to consider in their residential decision. As regions and cities desire to exercise control on the places where people in a particular life stage live (for example the wish of a city to attract high human capital, in order to stimulate the growth to success),

these limited impressions can be turned into an opportunity by policy makers. As this study showed how practices are balanced depending on their relative importance per life stage, policy makers can adapt their strategies on residential preferences per life stage, in order to meet the goals and type of life people in that particular life stage aspire to. Furthermore, by using the perspective as a policy that choosing a place of residence is not an isolated or pure individual choice, but rather the result of trade-offs that are made between practices that are found important in a particular life stage, it becomes possible to influence the social behavior of people. As aimed, this might form a better target for sustainable policy making.

This adjusted approach to policy making should therefore lead to an improvement in the ability to attract or retain a particular group of people to a country, province, municipality, or city, in order to stimulate the competitive advantage of that place and strengthen the path to a sustainable success.

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# I Interview guide

Below the reader can find the Dutch interview guide that is used during all the in-depth interviews.

Titel interview:                   Reconstructing residential choice-making for three essential life stages

*Instructies voor de interviewer zijn schuin gedrukt, de tekst die letterlijk opgelezen moet worden staat dikgedrukt.*

## Interviewhandleiding

*In te vullen door de interviewer:*

### Administratieve gegevens

Interviewnummer: .....	Naam interviewer: .....
Begin interview: .....	Einde interview: .....
Naam respondent: .....	Locatie interview: .....
Datum interview: .....	

### Introductie

*Lees (of paraphraseer) de algemene introductie bij aanvang van het interview hardop voor:*

**Goedemorgen/middag/avond, mijn naam is Joeri Vaessen. Fijn dat u tijd vrij heeft kunnen maken voor dit interview. Ik ben student aan Tilburg University. Hier ben ik bezig met het behalen van mijn Master graad, ingevuld door het volgen van de Master in Leisure Studies. Voor deze Master schrijf ik een afstudeerscriptie waarbij ik een kwalitatief onderzoek uitvoer naar de rol van levensfasen in de ‘keuze’ voor een type woonomgeving.**

**Tijdens deze fase van mijn onderzoek zou ik graag meer inzicht krijgen in het relatieve belang van verschillende activiteiten uit uw dagelijks leven, en naar de invloed hiervan op uw woonkeuze. Het gaat dan om activiteiten die gerelateerd zijn met uw werk, zorg, vrije tijd en sociale contacten. Ik ben nieuwsgierig naar uw mening over deze onderwerpen, en met name de invloed van deze onderwerpen op uw woonkeuze zijn erg interessant voor mijn onderzoek.**

**Aan de hand van deze reconstructie van uw woonkeuze wil ik een beter beeld krijgen van de eerder genoemde onderwerpen en hoop ik mijn onderzoek zo goed mogelijk aan te laten sluiten bij de toenemende vraag uit het werkveld naar inzicht over woonkeuzes van specifieke doelgroepen.**

**Dit gesprek zal ongeveer 45 minuten duren en is volkomen anoniem. Dit houdt in dat alle informatie die tijdens het interview aan bod komt vertrouwelijk wordt behandeld en dat uw naam nergens zal worden**

**gepubliceerd. U kunt er dus op vertrouwen dat geen enkele informatie die u geeft, door wie dan ook in verband kan worden gebracht met u. Verder zal ik tijdens dit interview aantekeningen maken. Dit doe ik om de structuur van het interview te behouden. Ook kan ik op deze manier makkelijker terugvallen op eerder besproken onderwerpen. Ik wil u hierbij toestemming vragen om het gesprek op te nemen, zodat de gegevens op een later moment herbeluisterd kunnen worden. Bent u het daar mee eens? Heeft u op dit moment misschien nog vragen voor we aan het interview beginnen?**

**Dan zou ik graag willen beginnen met het interview.**

*Interviewer: Zet de recorder aan en LEES OP/PARAFRASEER*

Introductie en gegevens respondent

**Kunt u mij eerst iets over uzelf vertellen? Denk hierbij aan uw leeftijd, opleiding, woonplaats, etc.?**

*Checklist voor de interviewer*

Geslacht respondent (*te bepalen door interviewer*):                      Man/Vrouw

Leeftijd respondent:  
.....

Burgerlijke staat respondent:  
.....

Belangrijkste dagelijkse bezigheid:  
.....

Educatie respondent:  
.....

Kinderen:  
.....

Koop of huurwoning:  
.....

Levensfase respondent (*te bepalen door interviewer*):  
.....

*Het is belangrijk dat, door middel van doorvragen, onderstaande subtopics aan bod komen in het antwoord van de respondent.*

*Subtopics: leeftijd, functie, educatieve achtergrond, burgerlijke staat, eventuele kinderen, belangrijkste dagelijkse bezigheid, type woning.*

*Interviewer: LEES OP/PARAFRASEER*

Topic 1: Woonkeuze

**Zoals ik in de introductie aangaf zou ik graag meer willen weten over de woonkeuze in uw leven.**

**Als u kijkt waar u nu woont, waarom woont u dan hier?**

*Alternatieve formulering: Wat is de reden dat u hier nu woont?*

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*Het is belangrijk dat, door middel van doorvragen, onderstaande subtopics aan bod komen in het antwoord van de respondent.*

*Subtopics: partner, children, atmosphere, supply of education, job opportunities, offer in non-daily amenities, availability of (affordable) housing, access to public transport, commuting time, child-friendliness, quality of housing, green space environment, parking space, primary schools, day-care centers, sport facilities, supermarkets, health situation, strong or weak social contacts, availability of daily amenities.*

*Interviewer: Vat antwoorden kort samen voor verificatie*

Overgang naar Topic 2

*Interviewer: LEES OP/PARAFRASEER*

**Zojuist hebben we het gehad over de redenen waarom u woont waar u woont. Hierbij zijn meerdere dingen naar boven gekomen. Nu zou ik graag dieper willen ingaan op die dagelijkse activiteiten, de dingen die uw leven op dit moment vormgeven, en de verbanden hiertussen.**

Topic 2: Deelname aan sociale praktijken

**Ik zou graag willen weten welke afwegingen u maakt tussen activiteiten in uw dagelijks leven.**

**U gaf al aan dat X op dit moment belangrijk voor u is. Zou u mij kunnen vertellen wat nog meer op dit moment in uw leven prioriteit heeft?**

*Alternatieve formulering: Waar gaat, naast X, naar uw mening op een gemiddelde dag het grootste deel van uw tijd naartoe?*

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Het is belangrijk dat, door middel van doorvragen, onderstaande subtopics aan bod komen in het antwoord van de respondent.

Subtopics: **Labour** (employment possibilities, accessibility to the job, proximity to the job, diversity of job offer, sociability) **Care** (availability of amenities such as supermarkets, schools, centers for day-care and childcare, household work and sociability) **Leisure** (urban atmosphere, availability of cultural amenities/entertainment, sociability).

**Ik zou graag willen weten of u het idee heeft dat de activiteiten die u belangrijk vindt in uw leven overeenkomen met de omgeving waar u woont.**

**Zou u mij kunnen vertellen of u denkt dat er een juiste match is tussen uw woonomgeving en de activiteiten waarin u nu voornamelijk participeert?**

*Alternatieve formulering: Denkt u in een juiste omgeving te wonen om uw leven goed te kunnen leiden, kijkende naar de belangrijkste bezigheden?*

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*Interviewer: Vat antwoorden kort samen voor verificatie*

Overgang naar Topic 3 (afhankelijk van levensfase resp., anders overgang naar einde van het interview).

*Interviewer: LEES OP/PARAFRASEER*

**We hebben de afwegingen tussen en het belang van activiteiten uit uw dagelijks leven besproken. Tot slot zou ik graag de woonkeuzes gedurende eerdere fasen in uw leven willen reconstrueren.**

Topic 3: Type woonomgeving gedurende eerdere levensfasen

**Zoals ik in de introductie aangaf zou ik graag meer willen weten over de specifieke fase in uw leven, maar kijk ik ook naar twee andere levensfasen, namelijk die van singles en jonge families.**

**Als u terugblijkt op deze fase(n) in uw leven in relatie met uw woonkeuze, waar denkt u dan aan?**

*Alternatieve formulering: Hoe zou u zelf de woonkeuze in deze periode uit uw leven beschrijven?*

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Het is belangrijk dat, door middel van doorvragen, onderstaande informatie aan bod komt in het antwoord van de respondent.

*Informatie: Bekijk hoe demografische transitie destijds hebben ingewerkt op een verandering van de onderlinge verbanden/afwegingen tussen de praktijken van labour, care and leisure, zoals omschreven bij topic 2.*

*Interviewer: Vat antwoorden kort samen voor verificatie*

**Met deze laatste vraag zijn wij aan het einde gekomen van het interview. Wilt u nog iets toevoegen aan hetgeen u gezegd heeft of heeft u nog op- of aanmerkingen naar aanleiding van het interview? Wat vond u zelf van het interview? Ik wil u bedanken voor uw medewerking. Mochten er nog onduidelijkheden, opmerkingen of toch nog vragen zijn, dan kunt u altijd contact met mij opnemen. Vindt u het fijn om een kopie van het onderzoeksrapport te krijgen? Dan stuur ik die tegen het einde van aankomende zomer naar uw op per mail. Dan wil ik u nogmaals bedanken en wens ik u nog een fijne dag.**

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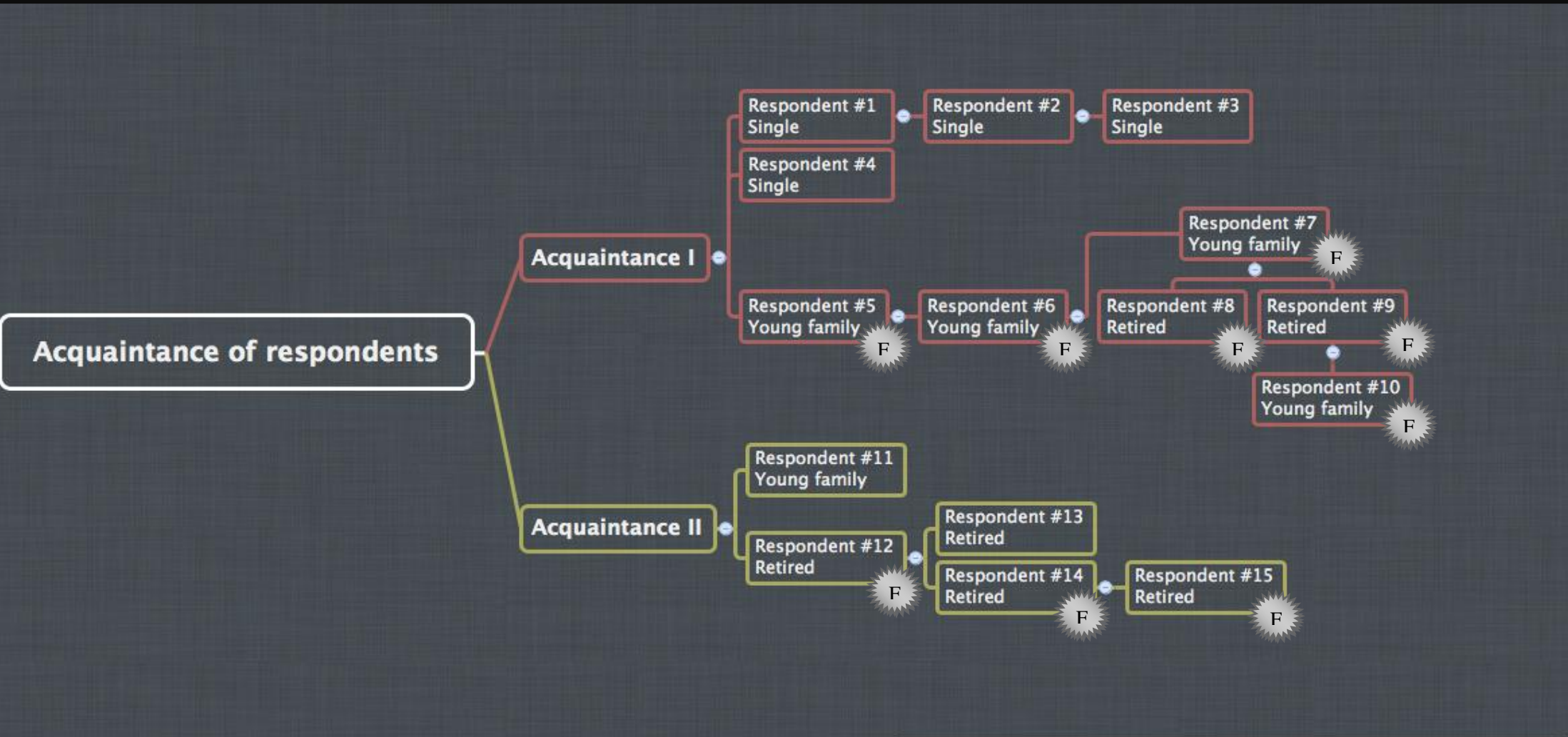
03/2014

## II Overview sample and underlying relations

Below the reader can find an overview of the sample for this study. The final sample for this study existed of fifteen respondents. In order to ensure their anonymity, all names of the respondents are altered into an alias. Gender is kept constant, and due to a structure in the altered names it is still possible for the researcher to derive from which life stage and which specific respondent a quotation is used.

Overview sample						
N	M/F	Residential place	Life stage	Age	Children	Alias
#1	F	Haarlem	Single	24	-	Loes
#2	F	Baarle-Hertog (BE)	Single	24	-	Rachelles
#3	F	Arnhem	Single	24	-	Roos
#4	M	Breda	Single	19	-	Cees
#5	M	Gulpen	Young family	50	3	Charley
#6	M	Made	Young family	38	1	Geoffrey
#7	F	Made	Young family	33	1	Ginny
#8	M	Made	Retired	63	2	Ger
#9	F	Made	Retired	64	2	Ginger
#10	M	Breda	Young family	40	2	Kenny
#11	F	Nijswiller	Young family	41	1	Sandy
#12	F	Nijswiller	Retired	60	1	Vlinder
#13	M	Hellevoetsluis	Retired	67	2	Peter
#14	F	Vliermaal (BE)	Retired	65	2	Saar
#15	M	Vliermaal (BE)	Retired	71	1	Sander

The visualization below gives the reader an idea of the acquaintance of respondents for this study including their underlying relations. It shows how respondents have been contacted via two main acquaintances and how the snowball-sampling has proceeded. Per red or green colored acquaintance, the respondents labeled with the grey 'F'-sign are relatives.



This map displays the procedure of the snowball sampling by a visualization of the connections between the fifteen respondents. As can be seen, the sample consists of respectively six, five, and four respondents per life stage.



# III Introduction mail for respondents

## **The stay-or-move residential decision**

### **A lifelong balancing**

Beste (naam respondent),

Zoals je misschien weet ben ik sinds kort bezig met het afstuderen van mijn Master in Leisure Studies aan Tilburg University. Om mijn graad te behalen schrijf ik een scriptie in opdracht van de universiteit. Sinds het begin van 2014 ben ik bezig met de opzet van een kwalitatief onderzoek, waarbij de rol van verschillende levensfasen in de 'keuze' voor een type woonomgeving centraal staat. "Waarom woon je waar je woont?", dat is de centrale vraag. De eerste drie hoofdstukken van de scriptie zijn inmiddels compleet en daarmee kan de fase van data collectie van start gaan.

Tijdens deze fase van mijn onderzoek zou ik graag een beter beeld krijgen in het relatieve belang van verschillende activiteiten uit iemands dagelijks leven en naar de invloed hiervan op de woonkeuze. Het gaat dan bijvoorbeeld om activiteiten die gerelateerd zijn met iemands werk, zorg, vrije tijd en sociale contacten. Ik ben nieuwsgierig naar meningen over deze onderwerpen. Met name de invloed van deze onderwerpen op de woonkeuze zijn erg interessant voor mijn onderzoek.

En dat brengt mij bij jou! Ik onderzoek drie verschillende levensfasen, namelijk die van (1) singles, (2) jonge gezinnen en (3) gepensioneerden. Aan de hand van een reconstructie van je woonkeuze wil ik een beter beeld krijgen van de eerder genoemde onderwerpen en hoop ik mijn onderzoek zo goed mogelijk aan te laten sluiten bij de toenemende vraag uit het werkveld naar inzichten over woonkeuzes van specifieke doelgroepen.

Zou jij een gesprek met mij willen hebben (in het Nederlands) over dit onderwerp? Het gesprek zal ongeveer drie kwartier duren en is volkomen anoniem. De komende zes weken (tot circa 25/04/14) heb ik ruimte om dit gesprek te houden. Als je mee wilt werken kom ik uiteraard bij jou langs op een dag en tijdstip die jou het beste schikt.

Graag hoor ik van je of je mij zou willen helpen met mijn onderzoek! Als je vragen hebt over het onderwerp, de type vragen, anonimiteit, óf alvast een datum wilt prikken, dan kun je natuurlijk altijd contact met mij opnemen!

Alvast duizend maal dank.

Groet,

Joeri Vaessen

*Student MSc. in Leisure Studies*