

Students at KIT: About a Quarter Lives a Multi-local Life

KIT Survey Reveals: About 25 Percent of the Students Have a Second Place Outside of Karlsruhe Where They Spend Most of Their Life



At the beginning of their studies in particular, many students live a multi-local life. (Photo: Monika Müller-Gmelin)

Whoever has at least two residences or spends life at more than one place lives a multi-local life. As the modern transport network allows for quick and inexpensive travels over large distances, multi-local lives today are more widespread than ever. Examples are long-distance commuters with an accessory dwelling unit at their place of work or retirees with a holiday house in green surroundings. For the first time, geographer Caroline Kramer has now studied multi-locality at KIT. According to her study, a quarter of the students lives a multi-local life.

More than 9400 employees and 24,000 students of KIT largely influence a big city like Karlsruhe with its about 300,000 inhabitants. "The presence and absence of this group is reflected by the cityscape and has a temporal rhythm. When many students return home to their parents during the time between the terms, a district close to the campus, such as the Oststadt, looks completely different from what it does during the semester," Caroline Kramer of the Institute of Geography and Geoecology (IfGG) says.

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“When persons regularly spend their everyday life and longer times at more than one place, it is referred to as a multi-local way of life. This residential multi-locality is found in all parts of the population - working persons, who live in a smaller accessory dwelling at their remote place of work and return home to their families on the weekends only, wealthy retirees, who spend the winter in the sunny south, the so-called snowbirds, and young students, who live at two places, the residence of their parents and the place of their university,” the Professor explains.

As early as in the 15th century, students already traveled from the University of Heidelberg to their homes in Worms, Speyer or Mainz to visit their parents. But these travels by foot, horse, or carriage took days and much money had to be paid for the travel to the next larger place. Consequently, multi-local living and life was restricted to the direct environment of the place of studies. The situation is completely different nowadays: The well-developed transportation network allows for fast and inexpensive traveling to the remotest areas of Germany and, hence, promotes multi-local life of students.

But to what an extent do the students of KIT lead a multi-local life and how does this way of life that influences the cityscape change with time? Caroline Kramer asked more than 1,600 students of KIT in an online survey. On the basis of the answers, she has now published an extended article.

About one quarter of the students answered that they do not spend the time between the terms at Karlsruhe, but mainly at the far away residence of the parents. Consequently, they lead a multi-local life. These figures are in accordance with the information on the place of residence: About 25 percent of the students are registered to have a secondary residence in Karlsruhe only. Of these multi-local students, more than half live in flat-sharing communities in Karlsruhe. 25 percent each live at a dormitory or alone in their own flat. Compared to the remaining mono-locals, i.e. resident students, multi-local students frequently live in communities and dormitories.

“When grouping the students asked according to the semesters of their studies, an interesting phenomenon is found. Whereas about 40 percent of the students in the first and second terms pass the time between the terms at their parents’, this multi-local proportion decreases constantly to 16 percent for students of semesters 9 and higher,” Caroline Kramer says. Up to the 9th semester, the share of students living in dormitories decreases considerably, whereas the proportion of students living in communities or together with a partner increases.

“All of these results show that young people try to get settled and prefer a mono-local way of life. At first, young students in Karlsruhe still maintain very close contacts to relatives and friends at the place they come from and spend much time there. In the course of their studies, they build a new social network in Karlsruhe and, maybe, get to know a partner. Visits of their parents decrease and they become real citizens of Karlsruhe. This continuous separation from their parents’ home makes them leave the dormitory and enter a community or share a flat with a partner.”

However, this does not mean that multi-local students consider Karlsruhe their “place of work” at the beginning of their studies only. On the contrary: They are very active in sports clubs of the region of Karlsruhe, in the cultural sector, or in university groups of KIT. Hence, also multi-local students contribute to a vibrant city life.

Another remarkable result of the study consists in the fact that virtual social networks, such as Facebook, play an important role for maintaining remote contacts, but are not as important as personal contacts, telephone calls or short messages in the closer social surroundings. In the everyday student life, real contacts are complemented by virtual networks, rather than replaced.

So far, little has been known about the extent and forms of residential multi-locality of students at other locations of universities. The study on Karlsruhe, hence, is of pilot character.

Source: “*Multilokalität als Kennzeichen des akademischen Lebens: eine empirische Studie unter Studierenden und Mitarbeiter/inne/n des Karlsruher Instituts für Technologie (KIT)*“, (*Multi-locality as a characteristic of academic life: an empirical study covering students and employees of Karlsruhe Institute of Technology*), Caroline Kramer. Published in 2015 in: „*Mobil und doppelt sesshaft: Studien zur residenziellen Multilokalität*“ / (*University of Vienna, Department of Geography and Regional Research*).

The Human Geography Group headed by Caroline Kramer among others focuses on the consequences of increasing residential multi-locality. Their empirical analyses are the basis of spatial planning and the solution of space-related conflicts.

Further information on the research conducted by Caroline Kramer can be found at http://www.pkm.kit.edu/kit_experten_kramer.php (in German only).

KIT possesses extensive scientific competences for research into, development, and integrated planning of the city of the future in all major aspects. Scientists of five KIT Centers – Climate and Environment; Energy; Mobility Systems; Humans and Technology; Informations, Systems, Technologies – work on studies and the sustainable design of urban spaces from their disciplines’ perspective and in an inter- and transdisciplinary manner.

Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) is a public corporation pursuing the tasks of a Baden-Wuerttemberg state university and of a national research center of the Helmholtz Association. The KIT mission combines the three core tasks of research, higher education, and innovation. With about 9,400 employees and 24,500 students, KIT is one of the big institutions of research and higher education in natural sciences and engineering in Europe.

Since 2010, the KIT has been certified as a family-friendly university.

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