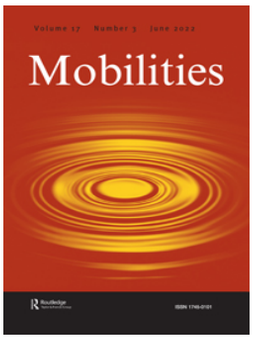

Mobilities

ISSN: 1745-0101 (Print) 1745-011X (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rmob20

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To cite this article: Sabina Maslova (2022) Housing for highly mobile transnational professionals: evolving forms of housing practices in Moscow and London, Mobilities, 17:3, 415-431, DOI: 10.1080/17450101.2021.1967096

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2021.1967096

Published online: 13 Sep 2021.

MOBILITIES
2022, VOL. 17, NO. 3, 415–431
https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2021.1967096

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Housing for highly mobile transnational professionals: evolving forms of housing practices in Moscow and London

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ABSTRACT

Most housing forms and living arrangements in contemporary cities are designed for settled populations, and housing markets poorly address the needs of mobile population groups. This paper explores the housing forms and living arrangements which emerge from the conditions of temporality and mobility and are practised by the middle-income group of high-skilled transnational professionals. The study is based on 65 semi-structured interviews with migrants from Western countries in Moscow and London. Three inter-related factors of highly mobile living are found to shape the particular housing demands of this migrant group. Firstly, the need for economic flexibility determines the preference for sharing options rather than for individual renting. Secondly, the travelling pattern of their jobs imposes time-related housing limitations, and their life-course stage may require flexibility. Thirdly, this migrant group expresses requirements for physical and functional comfort of housing, as well as access to amenities and a sense of community, despite their detached lifestyles. However, although most of these housing needs are known in the literature, they have not yet been examined in relation to the mobile living of transnational professionals, and this paper illuminates this research gap.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 9 September 2020
Accepted 22 July 2021

KEYWORDS
House sharing; flexible housing; living arrangements; high-skilled migrants; Moscow; London

Introduction

A major part of the world's population live localised lives: employment, public and private services, and housing are designed, in essence, for settled and residentially stable people. However, recent decades are characterised by a considerable expansion of transnational work, the diversification of highly mobile lifestyles, and temporary and precarious job contracts (e.g. Urry and Elliott 2010; Castles, De Haas, and Miller 2013). In this regard, more attention needs to be drawn to the effects of human mobility in destination cities, and, in particular, to how highly mobile lifestyles and transnational living modify traditional housing forms and living arrangements.

The question of how housing and home may adapt to societal changes has been on the agendas of architects, planners and researchers since the early twentieth century, and a number of studies discussed the adaptations of housing both in terms of architectural form and housing design (Schneider and Till 2005; Støa 2012), and in terms of household and living arrangements (Jarvis 2011; Clark, Tuffin, and Frewin et al. 2017). In these studies, the drivers of such changes in European cities cover a variety of societal topics: ageing population; prolongation and precarity of student lives; postponed or cancelled life cycle decisions (i.e. marriage, childbirth); and the reduced role of nuclear families. However, housing has been almost entirely overlooked in transnational migration and mobility studies (see Grundström 2018, and other studies focusing on multi-local dwelling; Hilti

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2009; Gorman-Murray and Bissell 2018). Meanwhile, transnational migration is one of the key factors altering urban lifestyles and housing demands, especially in global cities, yet only a handful of studies on migrant housing have considered highly skilled and mobile transnational migrants (White and Hurdley 2003; Plöger 2017; Eskelä 2018). Additionally, the profile of skilled transnational migrants has been shifting across social classes and income levels towards a growing group of 'middling transnationals' (Conradson and Latham 2005; Scott 2006; Polson 2016), who have different housing constraints when compared to transnational elites (Amit 2007).

The paper examines the demand-side influence of highly mobile professionals on local housing systems by focusing on two destination cities that represent contrasting examples of globalism, migrant integration and housing market development – namely, London and Moscow. Specifically, the qualitative study explores housing arrangements that arise from the conditions of temporality and transnationalism of migrants' lifestyles.

The paper is organised into four main parts. The first part provides a theoretical framework around highly mobile lifestyles and transnational living, and reviews the housing literature on adaptations and modifications in housing designs in the light of societal changes. The findings are presented in two parts: the first sets out the context of transnational professionals' highly mobile lifestyles in Moscow and London, while the second turns to their housing practices and living arrangements. It shows how housing demands and uses by this migrant group diverge from traditional middle-class housing practices as a result of mobile living arrangements. The final section provides a discussion of the factors driving these household and living arrangements and, subsequently, concludes with the relevance of high-skilled transnational migrants in changing the housing systems of global cities.

Highly mobile living and flexible housing forms

Mobile lifestyles and transnational living

A number of studies in recent years have theorised notions of mobility, movement, flow and flux of skilled migrants from different perspectives (Amit 2007; Yeoh and Willis 2013; Polson 2016), yet transnational living in this literature is largely narrowed down to a few common research strands. These include transnational migrants' economic contributions (Beaverstock and Hall 2012), the effects of transnational commitments on family life and childcare (Hardill 2004; Zvonkovic, Solomon, and Humble et al. 2005; Van der Klis 2008), and networking and integration issues (e.g. Scott 2004; Ryan and Mulholland 2014; Vanhellemont 2015). Based on the frequency and duration of periods that migrants spend abroad, this literature refers to liquid, circular and commuting mobility, transient migration and FIFO (fly-in/fly-out) lifestyles or LDC (long-distance commuting).[1] Additionally, the impact of globalisation on work means that overseas secondments are gradually becoming formalised as an anticipated part of career training (Jones 2008; Cuzzocrea and Cairns 2020). In this context, many studies place the emphasis on job-related mobility (Limmer and Schneider 2008; Reuschke 2010) rather than on transnational migration for economic reasons.

Meanwhile, the transnational migration literature offers evidence on how mobility enhances the lives of migrants of various social classes and how it leads to a growing group of transnational middle-class professionals (Conradson and Latham 2005; Polson 2016). This approach stands out from classical studies on transnationalism (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992; Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt 1999; Vertovec 2009) that speak about either 'elite' transnationalism and privileged migration or place low-income migrants into the frequently used category of 'transnationalism from below' (Smith and Guarnizo 1998). In contrast, Strüver (2005) points out that middling transnationalism is just an *ordinary* transnationalism. Following this line, Scott (2006, 1105) claims that transnational mobility has become 'a "normal" middle-class activity'. Although historically migration of middle-class doctors, writers, teachers and other professional migrants is not new and was practised by people since the second half of the twentieth century, the technological

advancements and increasingly affordable air travel, as well as expansion of global corporate structures and legal institutional frameworks that govern their work in terms of visas and international agreements enabling mobility within and for large corporations, have made this migrant group grow increasingly in recent decades (Jones 2008; Urry and Elliott 2010). As Favell, Feldblum, and Smith (2006, 2) explain, the high-skilled transnational migrants now include 'mid-level and clerical employees, ambitious or adventurous upwardly mobile middle-classes, migrants from a range of intermediate developing states, and many more it would be hard to describe as "elites"'. Different from transnational elites in terms of income and professional levels, this middling group of transnational professionals encounter more constraints in everyday living and have different lifestyles.

Within the studies investigating the residential perspective of highly mobile living, there are a number of studies that focus on multi-locality (Rolshoven 2007; Hilti 2009; Reuschke 2010).[2] Multi-local living is generally understood as 'a way of organising everyday life in and between different homes' (Hilti 2009, 145). As a characteristic of transnational living, it implies that people have more than one place of residence, and at some, relatively regular, intervals they live (and work) in these different places. Thus, housing relations materialise simultaneously in several, sometimes rather distant, contexts as an outcome, on the one hand, of individuals' housing expectations and resources, and of local housing market supply and regulations, on the other. In extreme cases, multi-local living may take the perspective of 'dwelling-on-the-move' (Grundström 2018).

Studies on flexible housing forms and uses

Societal changes cause notable modifications in the housing sector over time. A number of factors, including demographic changes, internal dynamics of households, financial considerations and personal opportunities, reinforce the significance of adaptability in housing. Since the 1920s, scholarly debate around adaptable housing has emerged as an approach towards meeting contemporary challenges in the housing sector. Within this debate, the housing literature recognises two general approaches: the first being to alter the physical structure of a building or a dwelling, and the second refers to modification of its uses. From an architectural point of view, adaptable housing covers both spatial and functional alterations in housing design (Friedman 2002; Schneider and Till 2005; Støa 2012). The literature on adaptable housing recognises 'designed flexibility' as 'a more sensible way of designing buildings that may cope with changes' (Støa 2012, 51). For example, it can include multi-functionality, i.e. the possibility of changing use over time as well as different simultaneous uses; or flexible design in a form of leaving space for personalised interpretation by users. Among the challenges to be adopted by housing design and construction, Schneider and Till (2005) recognised changing family size and structure, ageing and disability over the life course, the increasing share of single-person households, and changing lifestyles.

Along with that, a flexible approach to housing can be attributed to 'non-traditional' household and living arrangements, which usually materialise in various forms of house-sharing. These forms emerge when existing housing stock does not match the needs of particular population groups. As housing production is traditionally aimed at standard household types (i.e. nuclear families), the needs of people with diverging life-courses or lifestyles need to be accommodated by other living arrangements. For example, in the case of a lack of affordable housing for single young adults or students, the old housing stock, comprising large apartments with large rooms, a separate kitchen and big corridors (the reality in many European cities) fits the changed population needs by means of house-sharing (for the case of Milan, see Caramellino and Zanfi 2015; Bricocoli and Sabatinelli 2016). This is a common practice among students (Humphrey, McCarthy, and Braithwaite et al. 1997) and economically restrained young adults receiving housing benefits (Kemp and Rugg 1998). However, in recent decades, house-sharing has also become one of the housing solutions for young professionals (Heath and Kenyon 2001; Heath and Cleaver 2003; Mackie 2016). Furthermore, often as a result of job-imposed mobility, people are increasingly in need of 'being able to afford "light"

housing solutions in different places at the same time rather than one single "hard" solution such as home ownership' (Bricocoli and Sabatinelli 2016, 189). In this respect, flexible employment and mobile work may intensify this trend in the future (Meerwarth et al. 2009). However, along with 'non-traditional' housing practices created by shortages in housing markets, economic constraints or practical utility for residents, adapted housing forms and uses can also be an outcome of personal preferences, tastes, values and ideological motivations of residents: for example, such forms as 'living together' (Barthes 2013) or contractual communities (e.g. coliving, co-housing and gated communities; Moroni 2014; Chiodelli 2015). Temporary housing solutions like Airbnb may also serve as an intermediate option between long-term rent or ownership of a house and a hotel (Jefferson-Jones 2015).

Another call for adaptations in housing is determined by the position in the life course. Economic dependency on the family in childhood, transition to adolescence, being single or constructing and deconstructing family units, raising children, old age – all these circumstances create different housing needs. For instance, the housing needs of elderly people compel them to seek out more accessible and flexible housing options rather than traditional ones (Hwang, Cummings, and Sixsmith et al. 2011; Mackenzie, Curryer, and Byles 2014). A similar effect applies to housing for disabled people, who have highly specific requirements for their living environment (Bitner and Franz 2011).

Table 1 summarises the approaches to flexibility in housing. As can be seen, housing adaptations are largely related to a limited number of users, and flexible housing designs are almost exclusively connected to the needs of particular population groups, e.g. elderly people, students, people with disabilities and, to a lesser extent, young graduates. Solutions include architectural adaptations and flexibility on the one hand, and different approaches to housing uses on the other. Mobility may also trigger alterations in housing forms and uses. Although only a few studies have considered housing for high-skilled international professionals (Plöger 2017), there are barely any studies that address the flexibility of housing forms and living arrangements in respect to mobile workers or transnational migrants.

In addition, being a 'complex social object', housing is involved in the construction of identity (Caramellino 2015, 18) and transnational living reflects the complex relations of high-skilled migrants to their construction of 'home' (on the importance of 'meaning of home' in housing adaptations, see Heywood 2005). Nowicka (2007) appraises home as 'a set of relationships to both people and things', identifying how mobile individuals relate to local populations and infrastructure, including housing. She demonstrated that the complex spatial organisation of transnationalism resulted in highly mobile individuals finding it difficult to define their home geographically.

Method and study contexts

Methodologically, the paper presents a qualitative study investigating the phenomenon in two contrasting cases, Moscow and London. It explores the housing practices of high-skilled transnational migrants in London – a city with a long history and high concentration of skilled and mobile professionals in the context of 'super-diversity' (Vertovec 2009); and Moscow – a city with a considerably smaller share of expatriate professionals that had increased in the post-Soviet period (Maslova and Chiodelli 2018). A long and diverse history of transnational migration to London, and its status as an alpha-global city with a post-colonial past and thriving economy, have been drawing economic migrants from all over the world. At the time of the 2011 Census, 37% of London's residents were born outside of the UK, placing London among the European cities with the highest proportion of immigrants. In contrast, Moscow's path towards a global city began relatively recently with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the subsequent inflow of Western experts facilitating the transition to a market economy. Moscow's share in non-CIS international immigrants is insubstantial within the overall number of residents (less than 1%), and immigrants are commonly favoured by privileged status. Furthermore, London has a highly-priced, contested and polarised

Table 1. Systematising the scholarship on adaptable housing forms and uses.

	Scale	Forms of flexibility	Main users commonly mentioned in the literature
Architecturally designed adaptability of housing forms	Building area and neighbourhood	Flexible area plans and structures that allow individual variations; Multi-purpose common premises; Varied composition of apartments; Contractual communities (gated communities, cohousing etc.).	Families of different size and structure; Single-person households; Elderly people; Disabled people (Støa 2012; Friedman 2002; Schneider and Till 2005).
	Dwelling unit	Universal designs; Multi-functional rooms; Adaptability by means of moving elements; Extension of a dwelling by making use of secondary space/adding new space.	Families of different size and structure; Elderly people (Danziger and Chaudhury 2009; Houben 2001) Disabled people (Bitner and Franz 2011, Friedman 2002; Schneider and Till 2005).
Flexibility in housing uses and living arrangements	Building area and neighbourhood	Contractual communities (gated communities, cohousing etc.); Airbnbs.	Intentional communities (Jarvis 2011); Tourists (Veijola and Falin 2016) Super-rich and elites (Pow 2011; Woods 2013).
	Dwelling unit	House-sharing; 'Living apart together'; Short-term rentals.	Students (Humphrey, McCarthy, and Braithwaite et al. 1997); Young adults (Heath and Kenyon 2001); Elderly.

housing market, with a growing and economically diverse population, and most immigrants (especially, recent immigrants) are accommodated in private rental housing. The average rent in London was 1,596 GBP (pcm) in 2020, which was double the national average (Hometrack 2020). However, London's rental market has a more extensive and diverse supply compared to Moscow, which offers relatively scant housing for rent, particularly in the city's central areas, owing to a recent history of a state-regulated housing system. Housing in Moscow is considered unaffordable compared to other Russian cities with rental prices of 40,000 RUB on average and around 90,000–130,000 RUB (pcm) for Western-style apartments (Justlanded 2020). Some international employers arrange accommodation for the expatriated professionals or provide a stipend to cover rental expenses (Maslova and Chiodelli 2018).

The housing practices that are central in this paper are not typically captured by official statistics. Moreover, given the high levels of mobility of high-skilled transnational professionals, there is no substantial quantitative data available for the analysis of their housing and settlement. Hence, a qualitative approach of this study is better suited to explore housing practices of highly mobile professionals.

In-depth interviews and participant observation in migrant locations were carried out in Moscow and London during two periods of fieldwork in 2017–18. The paper relies on 65 semi-structured interviews with highly skilled migrant professionals residing in Moscow and London (33 and 32 interviews respectively). The selection of the participants determined by the research goals was based on three criteria: (1) economic nature of their migration; (2) highly skilled educational or work background; (3) residence in the destination city of over six months. The participants were recruited through snowballing of personal contacts and Facebook. The respondents had various professional profiles: analysts, entrepreneurs, consultants, editors, lawyers, designers, and language teachers. In both cases, the informants came from various Western countries, including European locations (UK,

France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Greece, Cyprus, Switzerland, Hungary, Russia, Sweden), the US, Australia and Canada. The age of the participants varied from 26 to 42 years in London and from 24 to 52 in Moscow. Most of the respondents belonged to the life-course stage without children and about half were single (13 in London, 15 in Moscow) that allowed highly mobile living. In few cases of couples with children (3 in London, 6 in Moscow), one partner (interviewed) maintained high levels of international mobility while the other had more settled living.

The interviews lasted from 30 to 90 minutes, were recorded, transcribed, translated into English and depersonalised. The outlined interview topics examined the patterns and frequency of international mobility to explore the mobile nature of migrants' transnational living. Following the research focus, the questions revolved around housing choices, aspirations and satisfaction of migrants, and living arrangements and perceptions of local housing systems. The interviews also covered architectural and construction details of houses, alongside motivations for individuals' residential mobility, and their future residential plans.

Expatriates' transnational lives and work

The study findings about the transnational living and housing practices of high-skilled professional migrants in London and Moscow are presented in this and subsequent sections: first, in a description of highly mobile lifestyles and their features as experienced by the participants; and secondly in an examination of the housing and living arrangements of highly mobile professionals in the two cities.

The study findings suggest that the migration of transnational high-skilled professionals is more accurately described as movement, or intermittent mobility across borders, that involves the maintenance of transnational connections and commitments as its essential part. It also shows that, owing to international career pathways and mobile employment that keeps individuals living for some periods away from the primary domestic residence, migrant lifestyles are largely impacted by the regular crossing of national borders and immersion in transnational contexts.

The interviews showed that the lives of many were highly contingent on regular international visits to carry out transnational connections with family and friends and as a part of job-related mobility. It was particularly relevant to expatriated families and transient migrants who referred to their living in Moscow as a temporary life stage caused by career needs or a preference for nomadic lifestyles, and noted they intend to leave after 1–4 years. One representative of this group, Maurice (French, age 50, lives in Moscow) had to travel to subordinate countries on a weekly basis, and regularly to the company's headquarters in Paris, in his role as head of a regional division of an international energy company, although he and his family technically lived in Moscow.

Similarly, the high-skilled immigrants interviewed in London led predominantly transnational lifestyles. The findings suggest that the mobile work of many consulting professionals in London is dependent on international travel, and thus they are bound to lead FIFO lifestyles. A good illustration of this frequent practice is a story of Peter (Cypriot, age 26, lives in London), a technology consultant based in London. He spends four days every week – from Monday to Thursday – in Copenhagen 'to be at the customer's site as often as required'; on Fridays he attends a weekly meeting in his London office or works from home; and stays in London for the weekends. When asked about the possibility of relocating to Copenhagen, he observed that: 'Everyone in my company travels. Everyone does what I do, to some extent: they are based in London or anywhere else and then they travel to and from the client.' As is typical of many of his peers, his social life and other commitments gear around work. Explaining his working schedule, Peter states:

> Regarding working hours, there's no formal schedule . . . you are supposed to work as long as you have to. I work more or less constantly and I do everything else in between: I would go for a dinner with my friends, and then I'd come back and work; I exercise, and then I come back and do a bit of work.

In addition to highly mobile everyday living, every few months Peter travels to Cyprus to visit family and friends and maintain his transnational connections. A similar mobility scheme was repeated in

many of the interviews with high-skilled professionals in London. Depending on a project's complexity and duration, the time spent 'away' from the primary place of residence could vary significantly – from regular international trips (once in every one to three months) to weekly long-distance commuting.

However, despite the regular job-related mobility of many, the interviews found that transnational skilled migrants have migrated for economic reasons. While some respondents described their migration to London or to Moscow as a step in a transnational career pathway (e.g. expatriates building a career through a number of international work placements), others presented their migration as an 'adventure' or 'experience'. Several participants explained their current residence in Moscow as an attempt to familiarise themselves with a different culture through the use of professional skills. Comparably, 'experience' in London for a number of high-skilled migrants typically started with an initial exploratory trip 'to learn the language' in an English-speaking environment, which consequently was expanded from one year to longer (cf. Ryan 2018). That said, both ways of experiencing transnational mobility – moving abroad for a job and job-related mobility – contributed to the formation of transnational living and (to differing extents) mobile lifestyles. The key difference with the embedding trajectories that many migrants tend to follow eventually (as discussed in Ryan 2018) is that the migrant group of transnational professionals in this study maintained high levels of mobility, transnationalism and temporal arrangements.

Another crucial aspect identified related to the housing of highly mobile people is a shifting perspective of 'home'. The processes by which mobile individuals construct and reproduce homes in destinations becomes relevant due to their complex spatial and temporal relations with transnational places. In the interview narratives, the respondents commonly relate to the place of residence as 'home', as well as when describing the commute time to get 'home' from work. The study found that the actual construction of this concept is rather more complex for them. The first basis is the reference to the country of origin, where they have their own, or a parental, house. This was particularly valid for migrants who had moved abroad for the first time – for them, home represented 'an emotional place of origin' (Nowicka 2007). However, for those with significantly longer transnational 'careers', the meaning of home evolved into something different and referred not only to a geographical location but also to relationships with people and objects. Despite being away from their home country for long periods, many interviewed migrants managed to maintain meaningful connections with family and friends and established additional connections abroad within the diaspora. However, in some extreme cases of highly mobile lifestyles, 'home' was found in the condition of 'dwelling-on-the-move'. Vicente (Spanish, age 27, lives in Moscow), a language teacher and activist leading a nomadic lifestyle and currently residing in Moscow, explained this viewpoint in the following way:

> After Ukraine, I'd been in Poland for eight months and Norway for three summer months, now I'm here. In between I was doing some projects and travelling. Actually, for me, to be abroad is to be at home. When I am in Spain, I don't feel like I'm at home - when I am there, I feel like I'm on vacation.

For some other respondents, home is located at the focal point of their social relations, in the place where their family, partner or children are physically present. In most cases of mobile work, they regularly returned to that place and claimed it to be their home. Some interviews found that home was constructed through the objects and physical space of the house: for instance, Diana (Italian, age 28, lives in London), living in a house-share in London, explained the motives for her move by saying 'It was like a flat … I thought maybe I can find something better … with a living room, being more like home, instead of something that is *just for the moment*'. From the broader perspective, 'feeling at home' remained unattainable for mobile professionals (and immigrants in general), in many cases: as Conor (British, age 52, lives in Moscow) put it: 'I miss the sense of community. Back home you feel being a part of what's going on. I don't have a clue what's going on here … Because I am a *migrant*.'

The presented features of mobile lifestyles directly influence the housing choices of the high-skilled transnational migrants, which will be addressed in the next section.

Housing practices of high-skilled transnational migrants in Moscow and London

Reflective of the aforementioned lifestyles, the interviews found that the housing practices of high-skilled professionals abroad differ from the housing behaviour of the settled population. The findings unfold through three key features structuring the housing practices of high-skilled transnational migrants: (i) economic considerations – e.g. budget constraints due to high housing costs or optimisation of housing expenses; (ii) temporal limitations – including shorter spells of living arrangements due to job-related mobility and intermittent periods of absence from the primary residence, and temporality related to the life-course stage; (iii) requirements for the physical and functional dimensions of dwelling – particularly, the quality of housing design and its expected features. These characteristics are described in more detail below and discussed, together with their implications, in the following section.

- Economic drivers of housing choice

Compared to the previous waves of transnationally mobile 'elites', current high-skilled migration comprises an increasing number of middle-class migrants, who encounter more limitations to their housing preferences as imposed by urban housing markets. In particular, the interviews have shown that a number of young, career-oriented and transient migrant groups in Moscow tended to choose house-sharing options in order to save on living costs. This strategy has previously been used by students, young people, and low-skilled migrants to overcome the economic constraints of housing markets. In addition to saving on housing costs, the motivations expressed in the interviews were also related to the preference for more central locations that only became affordable as house shares, and the social support from living with other people.

In Moscow, sharing options were almost exclusively pertinent to the early-career life stage, and practised by relatively young immigrants (the study participants in the flat shares were generally in their 20s – early 30s), whereas the prevalence of house sharing in London due to economic reasons found that several respondents of more mature ages (e.g. Sara, Italian, age 42, lives in London) were also occupying rooms in house-shares. In London, a large number of respondents shared a house or had a previous history of house sharing in London, mostly in multiple-occupancy flats or houses (on diverse patterns among house sharers in London, see Maslova and King 2020), whereas in Moscow proportionally fewer participants in the sample were sharing, commonly with no more than one or two housemates. These differences are likely to be caused by differences in housing costs and available housing supply.

The economic constraints of transnational professionals were, in several cases, driven by their status as a foreigner. In particular, poor knowledge of the Russian language and Moscow's landlords' perceptions of Western expatriates as wealthier migrants exposed middle and lower-middle class migrants to inequalities: 'There is an assumption that if you are a foreign worker here, you can pay 25% over the market rate, but that's not true' (Evan, Canadian, age 39, lives in Moscow). In contrast, for London, the interviews did not find instances of landlords' pre-conceptions of higher purchasing power of foreign professionals. Moreover, rental adverts, especially for the house-shares, commonly advertise for 'professionals', as this seems to ensure the stability of income, considerably calmer lifestyles and prospects for longer rental contracts.

In terms of the transition to home ownership in Moscow and London, the decision to invest in local property was chiefly found among migrants with more 'rooted' values, whose lifestyle is more settled, whereas recent and unattached migrants predominantly chose to hold to renting options. In Moscow, study respondents who had bought a flat in the city were expatriates with both an international career path and a Russian partner, and who had lived in the city for a longer period

of time. Similarly, several participants who bought a flat in London had had a longer upward career trajectory in the city before this step. In both cities, the respondents had the necessary financial resources to buy property, something which is more feasible in later career and life stages with stable and high-income jobs. In this respect, transnational professionals' housing trajectories resembled those of local middle-class residents. However, some respondents identified the need for flexibility in the home ownership sector, and some migrants invested in property temporarily. For instance, Conor (British, age 52, lives in Moscow), a British managing director in a large company, had lived 'on and off' in Moscow for 11 years. He 'bought an apartment about six years ago, lived there for four years, sold it and then decided to rent', and now is considering purchasing another apartment. Having said that, it is worth noting that less economically privileged middle-class migrants experienced reduced flexibility in buying and selling properties.

- Temporal limitations over the life course

Since highly mobile professionals belong to the most intermittent groups of residents, housing for this group requires significantly higher levels of temporal flexibility than for the settled population. Given that the current residence is typically a temporary housing solution shaped by their career and life stage, it is subject to change. The interviews showed that the housing choices of highly mobile professionals incorporated various flexible arrangements that are commonly cost-effective, close to the workplace or offer an easy commute, and where certain factors outbalance the others depending on individuals' preferences.

Another temporal limitation is related to the terms and duration of housing contracts. Typically, rental agreements require tenants to sign a contract for six to twelve months in order to prove their commitment and purchasing power to a landlord or an agent. In contrast, highly mobile transnational professionals require more flexibility and shorter prospects of renting, and certain living arrangements were found to be increasingly common among the interviewees. The demand for temporality can be satisfied where the host organisation supports the provision of temporary housing for the worker whether through the direct management of housing properties, or assistance with the search process and arrangement of agreements with landlords. These two placement options were found in both Moscow and London, but as part of the employment contract terms. In both cities, the respondents in question were employed by international organisations that generally provide this kind of support service across all their international locations.

Many of the respondents in both cities pursued a house-sharing strategy based on temporality and flexibility. Moreover, transnational professionals use this housing practice not only to share housing space but time. Respondents mentioned cases of (often informal) sublets for 1–3 months – while the main tenant is away for a project, a sabbatical, or travelling. The benefits of these living arrangements are that the main tenant can keep the house while being away and avoid paying rent for the period of absence. Meanwhile, a migrant professional who came to the city for a short-term project is able to bypass a long search process of short-term lettings and an official contract but still enjoy a suitable housing option instead of lodging in a hotel or Airbnb. This housing practice was more common in London than in Moscow, even though the London housing market provides more formalised regulations for rental contracts to secure a tenancy while the scarcity of rental housing in Moscow leads to higher levels of informality for rental arrangements and, therefore, lower accountability. However, despite enjoying the benefits of flexible arrangements, transnational professionals expressed expectations for some regulation to be in place in order to feel socially secure: e.g. some respondents underlined disturbing levels of informality in the rental housing market of Moscow. For example, Joanne (British, age 31, lives in Moscow), a pre-school teacher, describing the features of the housing market in Moscow, explained:

> What I find strange in this process – it is probably not very legal but I think it's quite common – that you pay the rent in cash … in England you would never do that. Here I think a lot of people request cash. For me that's

> unusual and I was a bit uncomfortable, so I said - can we have a piece of paper that you sign to say - yes, I've paid the rent, because I don't want you to come in six months and say - you owe me six months' rent.

This observation on the largely informal rental housing in Moscow was repeated in several other interviews.

Under more advanced and regulated labour and housing markets, housing practices can take the form of house-sharing in both time and space, simultaneously. Respondents in London highlighted the growth of Monday-to-Friday sublet schemes. An example of this would be a transnational professional based in London with projects abroad, who has a weekly long-distance commute to the project site from Monday to Thursday/Friday (as in case of Peter, as above) and returns to the city for the weekend. Meanwhile, other professionals, with a main residence elsewhere, commute to London for work, including within-country professional workers from other parts of the UK. They may sub-rent a place for weekdays, in order to avoid long daily commutes or to be able to work longer hours, but return to their homes and families and do not require lodging in central London over the weekend. The emergence of such housing use is economically driven, and whilst such schemes might be used by other population groups, it is well suited to transnational workers and its popularity was mentioned in several interviews. While wealthier economic 'elites' can afford to maintain dual-household arrangements, the more heterogeneous and 'middling' groups of migrants have to consider different, more cost-effective options. Reflecting this, such housing arrangements predominantly pertain to individual rooms rather than entire properties. In Moscow, this housing practice has proved to be less developed: highly mobile expatriates have to rent for a whole period, even though the property may remain empty for significant periods of time.

The temporality of highly mobile professionals also reveals the choice of temporal lodging arrangements. Peter (Cypriot, age 26, lives in London), mentioned above, rents housing simultaneously in two countries: in London where he is 'based' and where the headquarters of his company is located, and in Copenhagen, where he carries out a long-term project for the client. However, Oksana (Russian, age 28, lives in London) who works as a consultant in London but is required to be at the client's site in Portugal from Monday to Thursday, prefers to stay in a hotel, even though the project has been running for over six months. She continued, 'There's an option of Airbnb, of course, but a hotel is better – you collect points, they provide everyday cleaning'. For her, the idea of renting in Portugal was not considered to be an option. Hence, the international dual-household arrangements vary significantly between professional migrants.

- Requirements for physical and functional dimensions of housing

Highly mobile transnational professionals also expect certain requirements from the dwelling itself, with a particular focus on quality and comfort of use. Particularly, for some respondents, it was common practice to relocate internationally with cumbersome furniture, even though the relocation itself was not permanent. In cases of house-sharing, many respondents indicated a wish for more indoor space among their search requirements, including the presence of common areas and comfortable-sized rooms, preferably with separate bathrooms. The latter appears to be a feature frequently requested by house-sharing professionals. However, older housing stock in both cities did not provide enough of such options since traditional housing for a nuclear family rarely had more than one bathroom. Therefore, against the backdrop of an increasing share of 'living-apart-together' housing arrangements, demand has turned towards new housing developments that are designed with separate bathrooms for each bedroom. In some cases, this became a factor in the house search: Inga (Russian, age 30, lives in London), sharing a house with a friend, specifically considered housing around Canary Wharf because many of the new housing developments in the area were flats with individual bathrooms for each bedroom.

Apart from the requirements in terms of physical layout, a number of respondents expressed particular preferences for specific dwelling interiors and use. This need partially explains why, in

many cases of house sharing, there was a certain line of 'inheritance' involved in expat housing: when one expat moves out, another takes over. In Moscow, it was common in the narratives of the respondents that some flats were circulated continuously within expatriate circles. Unsurprisingly, one reason for this was the social connections within expatriate circles. As an illustration, entrepreneur Damian (Swiss, age 24, lives in Moscow) plans his future move: 'I would probably move to Nikitsky Boulevard, because I have a friend who moves back to Switzerland but wants to keep the apartment. So I would sub-rent this apartment as it's a good *expat flat*'. However, expatriate flats can also circulate irrespective of personal social connections. For example, Jean (French, age 29, lives in Moscow) described his house in the following way:

> [The flat] has its own style … even with all the Soviet furniture. It is a flat for expats. Since it is two steps away from the American embassy, it has always been lived in by some Americans or other foreigners. In ten years, so many foreigners have lived there, everyone left something behind – so now it has a collection of things and it has this special *atmosphere*.

The 'inheritance' of flats was perceived as a guarantee of the dwelling's suitability and quality, as well as a proof of the trustworthiness of the housing arrangement, which in the aforementioned conditions of a highly informal rental market in Moscow was essential for mobile foreign workers. Similarly, another interviewee, Ignacio (Spanish, age 43, lives in Moscow), confirming that he rents a flat, said: 'Yes, but I don't have a contract. Because this flat is that of a friend – they now live in another country, so they let this house to me'. Similarly, in London, a common finding in respondents' narratives was that some houses were repeatedly occupied by transnational professionals. However, in the context of a more advanced rental housing market and the larger international community of London, the rotation of flats happens with considerably more ease.

Discussion: factors of transnational living

Having examined housing practices of high-skilled migrants in Moscow and London, the study identified three key factors of transnational lifestyles which contribute to the transformation of traditional housing practices: (i) the economic considerations of housing choices resulting from the constraints of housing costs and the need for managing multiple housing arrangements; (ii) the temporal limitations in housing decisions imposed by a particular life course stage or by the length of a job-related assignment; (iii) the requirements for the physical and functional dimensions of dwelling. These inter-related factors form particular housing practices of this migrant group, and are discussed below.

(i) Economic drivers of housing choices

Cost-effective and flexible housing arrangements are important elements of transnational living. High prices of housing in Moscow and London as well as the need for financial maintenance of other transnational obligations, including multi-local residence abroad, motivated migrants to modify their housing preferences towards cost-effective solutions. Consequently, to optimise housing costs, migrants embraced housing options such as house-sharing, sublets, etc. that had previously been adopted predominantly by students and economically disadvantaged residents. Feeding back to the literature on high-skilled transnational migration, this finding may be seen as somewhat unexpected given that transnational professionals are commonly designated as privileged migrants, presumably unrestricted by economic constraints. However, given the increasingly 'middling' status of this migrant group, economic factors become more crucial. Furthermore, the migrant narratives demonstrate that the primary motivation for employing flexible housing practices is not only to reduce housing costs per se but rather to balance their housing costs more efficiently and to compensate for the time they are absent in the places where they work and live. To that end, London provides a broader variety of flexible options due to a more advanced housing market, while transnational professionals in Moscow are less flexible in their household arrangements.

(ii) Temporal limitations over the life course

The spatiotemporal aspect of the lives of transnational professionals is modified by the intrinsic features of their global mobility. The factor of time emerges in two main respects. On the one hand, it is conditioned by the stage in their life course. Given the high levels of mobility that typically belong to a temporal life-course period induced by career-progression, educational, lifestyle and other reasons, temporal housing solutions are more prominent among transnational professionals. It could be concluded that sublets and sharing with other professionals is a temporal 'compromise' allowing them to put forward other housing needs, such as residence in a central location and transport accessibility, better housing quality and flexible rental contracts. On the other hand, time limitations also affect the everyday living perspective of housing, especially for transnational professionals engaged in LDC and FIFO living. For them, higher levels of flexibility in household and living arrangements are required, e.g. Monday-to-Friday sublets. However, different lengths of stay and lack of suitable housing solutions in the destination rental markets may motivate them to live in hotels or Airbnbs instead: both even provide dedicated offers for short-term business stays.

(iii) Requirements for physical and functional dimensions of dwelling

In the architectural and planning literature, adaptations and flexible housing solutions were predominantly designed for social groups beyond the scope of the 'standard' nuclear family (students, elderly, people with disabilities, etc.) and has not addressed the needs of the transnational middle-class professionals. However, in various cases such as London, socio-economic changes have had such an impact that transnational professionals now comprise one of the major consumers of housing, and their needs have to be accommodated. Furthermore, mobile workers require particular housing solutions (e.g. bedrooms with separate bathrooms in house-shares). Professional migrants in both London and Moscow have identified the need for housing to be functional, comfortable and within reach of amenities (shops, cafes, gyms etc.; cf. Lawton, Murphy, and Redmond 2013). This close proximity to amenities is seen as a priority need because people exposed to regular long-distance travelling prefer to reduce local commute distances as far as possible. Having amenities and services to hand may also be seen as features of flexibility, as they facilitate social adaptation after moving in and assist with integration into local communities. Whilst the housing market of London mostly accommodated these housing quality requirements, the transnational professionals in Moscow expressed general dissatisfaction with the existing rental options.

Another aspect of the physical flexibility of housing relates to the dwelling standards and 'inheritance of flats'. Commonly, highly mobile professionals require a similar level of comfort across the destinations in which they work and live. Owing to a scarce and dissatisfactory supply of rental options in Moscow for middle-class immigrants, highly mobile professionals implemented the mechanism of 'inheritance' of suitable flats among the expatriates. It might be argued that this mechanism emerged to ensure the suitable quality of a flat and living arrangements with the landlord and other tenants.

After having examined the factors shaping needs for household and living arrangements by transnational professionals, it is worth reflecting on whether existing examples of adaptations in housing accommodate these needs. Revisiting the scholarship on flexibility and adaptations of housing (see Section on flexible housing forms and uses) in the light of the study's findings, the aforementioned factors of highly mobile living were taken into account. The paper makes the case for adding this growing group of residents, who require flexible solutions in terms of housing forms and uses, to the existing literature. This group, in turn, implies additional challenges for housing flexibility, as systematised in Table 2.

Although some of the existing housing forms and living arrangements might also be applicable to the living arrangements of transnational professionals, to date they have not been analysed by the systematic targeting of transnational professionals with higher degrees of temporality and flexibility, as attempted by this study. This exploratory paper has illuminated the gap in studying the relationship of transnational migrants to local housing markets and calls for more research in this direction.

Firstly, examining structural level dynamics would be useful, particularly as to whether the emergence of housing sub-markets specifically targeting this migrant group of mobile professionals is taking place in major cities like Moscow and London. This includes consideration of the tenure agreements, discussions with the landlords or property-operating agencies, sub-let arrangements, tenure length, etc. One possible housing solution for transnational professionals could derive from privately delivered shared housing in the co-living housing sector as it can provide short-term lease and address the community needs for mobile workers across global cities (Bergan, Gorman-Murray, and Power 2020). Secondly, the studies of housing and its modifications for transnational workers would benefit significantly from capturing the changing meaning of home in transnational contexts, as this may contribute to the formation of different housing needs and expectations (Heywood 2005). In cases of multi-local residential arrangements, when migrants perceive their main residence as home, they typically express simpler preferences for a smaller secondary dwelling, often in rented and shared accommodation with high amenity values. However, those who give more meaning to home and comfort in their second residence tend to have comparably higher housing expectations. Nevertheless, these preferences are commonly modified by external constraints, imposed by housing markets and by the economic barriers which draw migrants to smaller or shared residencies (cf. Reushke 2010).

Conclusion

The analysis of the housing practices of high-skilled transnational migrants in Moscow and London has demonstrated how global skilled mobility is involved in the production of particular housing demands in the destination cities. It presented the diverse ways in which highly mobile professionals have negotiated the traditional housing forms and uses. The emergence of these living arrangements seems to be primarily a product of the highly mobile transnational lifestyles pertinent to this migrant group. From this perspective, three major factors driving the growth of these housing forms came to light, namely: (i) economic constraints modifying housing preferences; (ii) temporal limitations over the life course; (iii) requirements for the physical and functional dimensions of dwelling. It was also demonstrated that, firstly, the need for flexible and cost-effective housing solutions determined the preference for sharing options rather than individual renting, and, secondly, that particular points in the life-course demanded a degree of time flexibility, mostly in the form of short-term rentals and sublets. Moreover, the temporal considerations of a weekly long-distance commute have led to the flourishing of particular forms of sharing, e.g. Monday-to-Friday sublets. Furthermore, from the perspective of migrant requirements for physical space, particular needs in housing structures and designs emerged as well as easy access to amenities and community. In some cases, the requirement for physical and functional comfort engendered 'inherited flats'.

Table 2. Factors of highly mobile living driving the need for housing flexibility.

Characteristics of highly mobile living	Implications for housing uses	Examples among existing housing forms and uses
Economic constrains for housing preferences	• Saving on housing costs • 'Middling' nature of transnational workers • Multilocal dwelling	• 'Living apart together' • Sublets • Airbnb
Temporal limitations over the life course	• 'Non-traditional' households: single-person households instead of nuclear family • Short period in the lifetime • Highly fluid and flexible arrangements	• House-sharing • Sublets • Hotels and temporary housing • Dual home-ownership
Requirements for physical and functional dimensions of dwelling	• Adaptable housing solutions (e.g. open floor plans) • Need for 'standardised' spaces • Flexible living arrangements • Easy spatial and social integration	• Short-term rentals • Student dorms • House-sharing • 'Second' homes

This exploratory research makes several contributions to the literature. Having observed the housing practices and flexibility calls of transnational high skilled migrants in Moscow and London, the paper highlighted a crucial yet neglected gap in housing and migration studies, that is, the relationship of transnational professional migrants to housing markets. This gap identifies the dearth in housing forms and living arrangements that are mapped through three inter-related factors pertinent to highly mobile living and shaping housing demands. Although most of them are not new to the housing literature per se, but the links to transnational professionals have not yet been explored.

The case studies of Moscow and London illustrated how different socio-cultural, economic and political contexts modified the housing behaviours of high-skilled transnational migrants. The paper calls for more research in respect to the changing housing demands of transnational professionals in global cities. Particularly, in light of the recent global pandemic of COVID-19, travel restrictions and shifting of work arrangements into virtual space, the highly mobile and multi-local living of transnational professionals will change considerably in the post-pandemic world. Companies worldwide are currently developing strategies towards hybrid work and green agendas and increasingly acknowledge the values of remote working, such as cutbacks in office space, lower associated costs, and the opportunity to reduce corporate carbon footprint by eliminating the need to travel and commute. Hence, the mobility of transnational professionals is changing inevitably, and the questions around the impact of COVID-19 on their lives and housing choices will require further investigation in the future. Observation of the changing housing forms and living arrangements, and the consideration of other (de)globalising contexts, mobility and housing regimes, is clearly needed.

Notes

1. Geographically, most studies on mobile lifestyles have emerged from or relate to the European and North American contexts, with a particular plethora of studies on Germany (Vonderau 2003; Hesse and Scheiner 2009), Austria (Hilti 2009), and Switzerland (Kaufmann 2002).
2. A quantitative growth of residential multi-locality in Europe is noticeable: around 5% of the urban population in German cities have two or more dwellings; 13% in Austria; up to 50% of all households in Scandinavian countries have a secondary residence (Wood, Hilti, and Kramer et al. 2015).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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