Social and economic effects of commuting:  
a case study on commuting households within  
Umeå enlarged local labour market region  

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Travel distance and travel time have interested me for a long time. I have often glamorized it though and thought of it in relation to leisure time and vacation, where the transportation could be something fun and filled with positive anticipation. But, a few years ago I moved away from the town where I work and became a father and then my opinions about and relation to travel distance and travel time started to change and became more nuanced. Therefore this topic is highly personal for me and my family, our friends, neighbors and fellow commuters within our small community. It is also an important topic to emphasize when the trend of commuting trends is increasing in many societies all over Sweden, Europe and the world.

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Jonatan Mårtensson

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ABSTRACT

The geographical distance between home and workplace is present and increases within modern society. Along with changing economic structures and technological developments it has increased the spatial division of labour and changed the pressure on global, regional and local markets. Regional development strategies today emphasize on more mobile, flexible and larger geographical labour markets to improve matchmaking between jobs and labour force to reach and obtain development. Commuting has therefore increased and is often promoted as a positive solution for involved individuals and the regional society at large. Although, the notion and benefits of such regional development strategies have been questioned as commuting involves a consideration between economic and social circumstances and effects on all involved household members. The social and economic effects on commuting households in Umeå enlarged local labour market region have therefore been studied in and investigated in this thesis. Empirical data has been collected through qualitative interviews with four commuting households with different home-work locations and commuting situations. Results of this study goes in line with previous studies and pictures how commuting is a strategy to obtain or maintain desired living conditions within desired location when the local labour opportunities are limited. Commuting households therefore gain “quality of life” and labour opportunities. But, the economic benefits are reduced by transport costs and reduction of labour hours, and the social consequences of reduced time in the home environment effects relations between family members and the division of household responsibilities’. This study have also broaden the understanding of commuting effects and showed that shorter commuting distance also hold social and economic implications for commuting households.

Keywords: Commuting, Commuting time, Commuting distance, Social effects, Economic effects, Household responsibility, Gender roles.
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1 INTRODUCTION
Travel distance and travel time is nowadays as important within human geography, economics and politics as it has been through history. Overcoming a geographical distance is costly as it demands a great amount of effort and time which is constraint to the involved abilities and circumstances. In modern time mankind have learned to overcome larger distances in less time and human effort (European Commission, 2010). In present time, people can live far away from their workplaces and travel by car, high speed trains, airplane etc. and/or interact and work from home via technological solutions with colleagues and other firms on the other side of the world. With modern technological solutions and improvements, and with a shifting economic structure the human distribution in geography and the regional pressure on the global arena have changed. Improved spatial movement and increased knowledge based economic character have made economic structures and the human capital less place bound and therefore increased the pressure on political and economic development strategies on national, regional and local level (Hoyle & Knowles, 2001; Boschma, 2004). Although, as the separation between home and workplace (Haugen, 2005), and the human interaction within geography have increased the limitations and implications with overcoming distances still remain today (Hoyle & Knowles, 2001).

Modern regional development strategies often emphasizes improvements of travel distance and travel time to be able to cope with increased regional pressure within a larger, more diverse and flexible global market (Boschma, 2004). The European Union has adapted such strategies and highlight the importance for its member countries to create more flexible and mobile internal labour market to better match jobs and increase the regional strength and development of each market. With enlargements of regional labour markets, improvements in infrastructure and collaborations between and over regional borders synergy effects and economic development increases (European Commission, 2010). Although, spatial, demographic and economic variations between countries and regions rise to different abilities and opportunities. The spatial, economic and demographic variations are especially apparent in Sweden, a sparsely populated country with strong urbanization trends. With larger local labour markets the involved actors are considered to improve the economic opportunities by travel, interaction and collaboration within a larger geographical space (Scholten & Jönsson, 2010). Such regional development strategy is partly based on the theoretical assumption that increased travel distance will be compensated by infrastructural and technological improvements which will lead to a constant travel time (Gil Sola, 2010; Östh & Lindgren, 2012). Work related commutes in Sweden have increased the last decades (Boverket, 2005; Östh & Lindgren, 2012). Commutes have increased both in time and distance and followed each other’s relation, meaning that commuting time have not been improved and
compensated by any infrastructural or technological improvements to any significant degree (Gil Solá, 2010). Due to high infrastructural costs, the complexity of human distribution and movement in space (Kwan, 1999), the benefits and consequences of enlarged commuting distances could therefore be questioned (Boverket, 2005; Gil Solá, 2013).

Sweden is currently faced with an uneven regional development that varies between urban and rural areas, between north and south, coast and inland. The majority of the population live in the south and most of the people living in the north live in the cities and towns by the coast. The rural landscape suffers from depopulation and decrease in labour opportunities meanwhile the urban cores develops and attract people and business. Although, the decision of the location of home is imbedded in a complex network of each individual households preferences and abilities to live in desired location and their opportunities to obtain a livelihood (Tillberg, 2001; Toregé, 2008). Increased commuting distance is therefore used as a political development strategy to improve the regional match between workers and employees on the labour market. Commuting could act as an alternative to migration and by commuting people could live in a desired location (Sandow & Westin, 2010). Although, commuting distances and time could effect the involved individuals and their families in economic and social ways. Hence it is important to study and increase the knowledge on commuting effects for involved commuting families to improve the abilities for good political decisions and investments, and for sustainable spatial development strategies to obtain sustainable regional development. Furthermore, most of the previous scientific research within commuting have been focusing on distances more than 50 kilometers or 45-50 minutes commuting time. Shorter commuting distances have received little attention and the gap within the vast commuting field in science is present. This study will therefore shed some light on and improve the knowledge on how commuting households perceive their social and economic effects from their work-related commutes in relation to shorter and longer commuting distances. The area of study is Umeå enlarged local labour market region, and the research is based on qualitative interviews with respondents involved in daily work-related commutes.

1.1 Aim and research questions
This paper aims to study social and economic effects on families, and the individuals within families, in regard and relation to work-related commuting. More specific this study will investigate how commuting individuals within families perceive commuting distance and time and how this effect their households in regard to (i) economic benefits and limitations, (ii) social and relational effects on families, and as well (iii) the distribution of household responsibilities and its relation to gender roles.
1.2 Definitions of terms
The terms travel distance, commuting, commuting distance and commuting time is often used and considered vital in this research. In general, travel distance and commuting is used and discussed along each specified and mentioned in relation to either spatial distance (kilometers), time distance (minutes) or individual perception of work-related commuting distance. Although, in some broader discussions commuting and travel distance could be used and seen as an overall term which includes both spatial distance and time distance in general.

In Sweden, the definition of commuting is often defined as the travel between home and workplace if it crosses a municipal border (Haugen, 2005). This study will use that definition but will also study commuters with internal municipal commuting distance as well as cross-bordering municipal commutes to obtain data needed. In this study, commuting is considered to be a work-related travel between home and workplace in two different geographical locations (e.g. cities, towns, villages etc.) with a distinct distance in-between, within a municipality as well between municipalities.

In this study the term dependent age is not connected to any predefined definition. Dependent age are considered to be the age interval between zero and 13 year. Within this age interval children are considered to be dependent (to different degree) of the adults in the household to handle their everyday life.
2 THEORETICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE
Travel distance and travel time have long been a well discussed matter within geography. It takes both time and distance to overcome a distance and will therefore be a consideration and evaluation of what to gain and what to lose from the distance to conquer. The time-space dilemma is therefore as present and important in modern geography as it was in its historical foundation, leaving each society and its involved actors in constant considerations regarding the purpose and need of overcoming distance and its positive and negative consequences. Since the early industrialization period and forward a technological and infrastructural boom of improvements have lead humans to overcome larger distances in shorter time periods. This had changed the opportunities for human mobility, both on the local and global spatial arena. Improved transportation abilities have played its part in rearranging human settlements from more sparse and small agglomerations to more modern flows of urbanization and suburbanization to larger cities, but as well effecting and changing local and global economic structures (Hoyle & Knowles, 2001; Pacione, 2005). Travel distance and travel time will in this sense be inherent of both an economic and social perspective which effects the human behavior and their spatial distribution.

During the last century, and in particularly during the last decades, technological improvements and changing economic structures, with shifting needs towards a more knowledge based industries, have made industrial and economic power less spatially bound and increased the global economic competition. In modern geography, regions not only compete on a national market but to some extent on a global market as well. This has increased the pressure on the national and regional development opportunities and the political strategies (Boschma, 2004). The regional development policies from the European Union emphasizes the increased global pressure and highlight the need to invest and improve in education and innovation, but also to well improve infrastructure systems to enlarge the international, national and regional labour markets to serve a more mobile economy and to better match employees with employers (European commission, 2010). Sweden as a sparsely populated country with few large urban areas and with changing rural composition has adopted the proposed regional strategies with enlarged local labour markets to improve regional development abilities and therefore compensate for decreasing local labour opportunities (Ministry of Enterprise…., 2007; Scholten & Jönsson, 2010; Östh & Lindgren, 2012). Along this regional development strategy of enlarged local labour markets, each region is considered to broaden, improve and enlarge the numbers of employers and employees to serve and match a more specialized and complex labour market to reach future economic and social development (Boverket, 2005; Ministry of Enterprise…., 2007). Within this regional development strategy the general theoretical consensus is partly based on the theoretical assumption that if
distance increases the travel time will be constant. Meaning, as travel distance increase technological and infrastructural improvements will compensate and further improve travel time (Gil Solá, 2010; Östh & Lindgren, 2012). Although, due to high costs of infrastructural improvements such benefits are not always possible in all geographical settings. With increased commuting the environmental pressure and damage increase and the social and economic consequences remain unclear and individual, and the sustainability within regional development strategies of enlarged local labour market areas could therefore be discussed and questioned (Boverket, 2005; Gil Solá, 2010). Within a sustainable regional development system all perspectives have to be imbedded and sufficiently reached as commuting effects all involved individuals, families, children and relatives, in society (Boverket, 2005).

2.1 Work-related commuting
The basic foundation within travelling a distance derive from the notion that human activities are spread within geography (Fahlén, 2013). Work-related commutes could therefore be defined as the travel distance and travel time the individual have between home and their workplace. At first sight, the time and effort within the home-work nexus will be effected by real geographical distance, but also by means of transportation, road network systems and geographical and demographic spread and distribution (Boverket, 2005; Toregé, 2008). Historically, the spatial distance between home and work place have been closer attached than in contemporary time. Nowadays, people can live further away from their working place and use modern means of transportations and infrastructural systems to overcome larger distances instead of having to change their location of home and move closer to their working place (Östh & Lindgren, 2012). In this sense, commuting is a consequence of the consideration that each individual and household have to make within their relation between home and workplace, or as Sandow and Westin (2010) explains it;

…"commuting is a consequence of spatial split between place of residence and place of work and can be regarded as an alternative to migration; likewise, migration can be seen as an alternative to commuting" (Sandow & Westin, 2010:435).

Commuting distance within the home-work nexus have showed clear tendencies to increase during the last decades (Östh & Lindgren, 2012) and the tendency is similar in many European countries. Commuting distance increase in numbers of daily trips, and the real geographical distances and time distance are further increasing as well. Increasing commuting distances is nowadays an often promoted political strategy that are discussed to promote improved regional development and individual financial benefits. Commutes are considered positive as people could obtain desired living standards and environments to serve their financial capacity and social wishes
(Toregé, 2008). Norms and values within society, land and house prices, different income levels and the relation between supply and demand of labour between urban, suburban and rural areas effects the regional commuting pattern (European Commission, 2010; Tillberg, 2001; Toregé, 2008). Commuting could for some be a voluntary and personal strategy to create long-term benefits within the home-work nexus meanwhile, for some, it could be a more short-term solution to gain financial or social benefits (Sandow & Westin, 2010). The commuting distance is not always a straight line distance between home and work, people often connect other daily activities along the way which makes the trip more complex and time consuming (Kwan, 1999). The consequences and effects of commuting will differ in character since individuals’ base the decision of commuting on personal needs which depends on their backgrounds and other circumstances. When commuting is an consequence of a freely taken decisions within the home-work nexus, the positive effects have an better chance to serve its commuter, meanwhile as the decision is based on a more forced background the impact of commuting could have a negative character (Sandow & Westin, 2010; Scholten & Jönsson, 2010). The commuting distance within the home-work nexus is in this sense inherent of a complex relation between structural set up within society, transportation systems available, social norms and the personal desires and opportunities to live in a certain setting and the abilities to conduct desired work. The commuting pattern in Sweden is of an increasing form. Mean commuting distance have doubled from 10 kilometers in the early 1970s to 20 kilometers in the start of year 2000 (Boverket, 2005). Long distance commuting have increased in numbers as well as distance (Sandow & Westin, 2010). As a consequence, travel time has increased. Travel time have although not been improved nor been compensated by infrastructural speed and improvements (Gil Solá, 2010).

The psychological perception of travel distance and travel time for the commuters is a perspective within commuting that is important and should not be overseen (Sandow, 2011). Perceptions of travelling time/distance depends on many different aspects and will most certainly vary between individuals and means of transportation. Travel distance/time could be seen as a straight loss of time and effort where travel is unproductive, but as well as a productive period of activities (Fahlén, 2013). Travelling a distance could well serve as the needed break within the ordinary stress of everyday life where commuters have time to connect in social conversations, listen to music and relax. The mobile room could in this sense become a sphere where the commuter feel free in-between obligations in the private and workplace sphere, or a productive room where work and private activities could be fulfilled. Travel distance and travel time could although be perceived as an additional limitation and restriction within the time puzzle which induce further stress (ibid) and health concerns (Evans et al., 2002). Car-commuters may perceive increased stress as travel involves the unpredictability and helplessness of other traffic-users behavior, traffic pace and
stocks, and their low abilities to do productive activities meanwhile driving (Evans et al., 2002). Meanwhile public transport-commuters could often suffer from unproductive and boredom of travel time, and the implications and unreliability of services in public transportation system (Evans et al., 2002; Sandow, 2011) and as well the adaptation of restricted time tables (Fahlén, 2013).

2.2 Economic effects
Commutes within the home-work nexus is often promoted and considered to have many positive financial outcomes for the involved individuals and the household. Economic benefits and incentives could be both of a direct and indirect character, and as well have the opposite and negative economic consequences, which is more recently highlighted and discussed within the vast field of commuting (Boverket, 2005; Gil Solá, 2013). With commuting, individuals are able to gain labour opportunities on a wider labour market with higher potential for proper individual desires and personal development (Haugen, 2005). Direct economic benefits such as higher salary, the ability for a change of career or a chance to evolve and climb the career ladder increases as the search radius expand (Sandow, 2011). Specialized and high educated workers enhance their abilities to find suitable employments as small labour markets is inherent of few specialized opportunities (Sandow & Westin, 2010), and unemployed improve their opportunities to find work and employers rises their abilities to obtain needed and demanded labour force. With increased mobility, individuals therefore increase their opportunities and possible choices within the home-work nexus in regard to a labour market which demand a more mobile and flexible labour force (Haugen, 2005). Housing and housing prices are in many cases a big decision within a household. Within a denser urban environment, land and house prices tend to be higher compared to suburban and rural location. Hence, it could be an opportunity to afford a house, or another economic beneficial solution for people to move away from a city to a less expensive location further away. In the opposite direction households who live in more rural places may obtain economic benefits by keeping their living when gaining labour opportunities in more expensive locations. Such circumstances may improve and lessen the household expenditures with lower household costs or improved living standards, e.g. more living space (Boverket, 2005; Haugen, 2005). Although, as the travel distance increases between home and workplace some extra expenditures will often arise. The cost of overcoming a larger commuting distance is a direct negative economic effect which may e.g. involve ownership of an additional car with expenses for the household economy. Within a dual-earner household, it could also involve a reduction of working hours as an indirect effect and compensation of increased commuting time (ibid). The individual in the household that reduce his/her working hours often have to take a step back or pause his/her career which will effect the total disposable
income in the family, at least meanwhile children are little (Adolfsson Jörby, 2006). Positive economic effects are not always compensating for the negative economic effects that come with increased commuting distance (Sandow, 2011). Depending on the life course stage, an individual or household are situated in the implications and constrains of commuting could have different economic effects. Young individuals, singles and households with older children could easier obtain the positive financial consequences of increased mobility meanwhile households with dual-earners and smaller children in need of more and intense care could have more constrains and less economic benefits (Boverket, 2005; Sandow, 2011). Although, in the long-term commuting could be beneficial as e.g. working hours increases when young children becomes older and the full extent of a higher salary will reach the household finances (Boverket, 2005).

2.3 Social effects
Along with commuting distance and time comes both economic and social benefits and implication. Seldom do they stand as separate spheres and not effecting each other. Equally do not the relation between home and work appear as two separate worlds which do not relate and give consequences to each other (Kwan, 1999). Economic consequences may be of a positive character but result in social downsides for the commuting families, or vice versa. As commuting is inherent of a time and resource consuming transport to overcome a distance, it will give social effects on the commuter and the household. Each commuter with work-related travel is therefore pressured to consider and plan his/her time along the daily tasks and the commuting distance and time to be able to fulfill the everyday life (Scholten & Jönsson, 2010). Depending on the means of transportation used to overcome the commuting distance, commuters will have certain abilities, opportunities or implications which affect them in their social room. Commuters that travel with public transportation systems have to further adapt to time tables and will often get more time consuming commuting distances. Although, public transportation commutes could include opportunities for activities as e.g. resting, social conversations and reading, but to what extent these activities are perceived meaningful and valued compared to spare time could be discussed. In this sense commuting time could also be considered and discussed as a grey area which is influenced and characterized by both work and spare time (Haugen, 2005). Commuting time, and the adaptation and implication of time-consuming travel is often a negative and stressful consequence of commuting that will influence commuters’ relations within the household and to friends and family and the overall quality of life to different degree (Boverket, 2005; Evans et al, 2002; Fahlén, 2013; Haugen, 2005). Increased commuting distance could also decrease the health status of commuters. Studies have shown that longer car commutes correspond to high
blood pressure, stress, neck problems, lowered mood and as well lower task performance at work (Lyons & Chatterjee, 2008). The subjective well-being of many commuters decreases along increased commuting distance (Sandow, 2014). More recently, Sandow (2014) has addressed the increased separation risk between partners in long-distance commuting households within a longitudinal Swedish context, which furthermore highlights the social consequences and implications of commuting distance.

Commuters’ social spare time is reduced with time spent on commuting. One way of dealing with this is by migrating closer to workplaces and the urban environment and therefore gain time with the children and benefit from urban utilities. However, the individuals would at the same time loose housing size, increase housing expenditures and furthermore lose closeness to nature and safer upbringing environments for children (Toregé, 2008). As location of home is well situated and fixed to decisions such as place-bound social networks, belonging and heritage as well as adaptations abilities to new environments, migrating may not be the proper alternative (Boverket, 2005). In dual-earner households, one of the partners may commute meanwhile the other work nearby the home, meaning that a migration could end up in the same situation all over again. Instead of migrating, commuting will serve as an alternative. In households with children, commuting could be a way of keeping social bonds to friends and school and stay in an environment where the children feel safe and comfortable (Sandow & Westin, 2010). Although, commuting when children are present could produce feelings of guilt and mental stress of insecurity within the parents as they miss time of their children’s development and they are physically far away (Sandow, 2014). Different strategies are used to compensate and overcome the implications of commuting. In dual-earner households, a reduction of the numbers of working hours is one way to compensate for commuting time. The reduction of working hours often falls on the partner that obtain the lowest income salary, or is not commuting. An increased responsibility of household chores, e.g. grocery shopping and child care, is therefore put on the partner with reduced working hours (Sandow & Westin, 2010). Another strategy is to construct a network of friends and family or hired labour force, who could support the family with household responsibilities. With new technology and supplies, some are able to work from home meanwhile others use flexible working hours to elaborate and reduce the commuting time within their home-work nexus. The effects of such strategies and elaborations between work and spare time could although be discussed as it makes the distinction between them diffuse and hard for the involved individuals to separate. Further negative stress and implications on the social room could therefore be the final outcome in such behavior (Scholten & Jönsson, 2010).

As commuting effects the household, the children will also experience the consequences of their parent’s time away from their everyday life. Parents strive to
diminish the negative consequences within the home-work nexus to fulfill the needs and wants of their children. Congestion and traffic within larger agglomerations decrease children’s safety and abilities to play freely and outdoors. Meanwhile increased travel distance diminish the time spent between parents and children (Toregé, 2008). For little children, the conception of time is not the same as for adults and therefore time amount absent could not that easy be compensated with time quality (Adolfsson Jörby, 2006). Although, it’s not always necessary that children perceive the inherent commuting situation within the family as negative when parents elaborate and compensate with e.g. reduction of working hours (Adolfsson Jörby, 2006; Boverket, 2005). But as children needs time with their parents and as well the opportunities to play and explore to develop the home-work nexus is pushed to consider its consequences and benefits (Toregé, 2008). Although, the knowledge of commuting effects on children within the home-work nexus is limited and have received little attention (Adolfsson Jörby, 2006). Therefore it is important to further study and shed light on their situation and the consequences they receive, as many families are involved in commuting and the children is the future of our societies.

2.4 Household responsibilities and gender roles
The goal within the Swedish equality politics is that men and females should have equal power and opportunities to shape their own life and the society they live in. Although, within the Swedish society gender differences still exist leading to social and economic consequences and effects (Scholten & Jönsson, 2010). The pattern within work-related commuting differs between women and men. Men have longer commuting distances and obtain higher wage development when commuting (Toregé, 2008). Women do, in general, have shorter commuting distances, fewer number of journeys (Gil Solá, 2013; Sandow & Westin, 2010), and lower income but obtain a larger part of the unpaid household chores within the family (Scholten & Jönsson, 2010). Gender differences in everyday life will effect each gender’s abilities to use the geographical room in regard to travel distance and work-related commuting (Friberg et al., 2004). Work and work places are often considered an arena for men meanwhile the home environment a sphere for women. In this sense, home and work is separated and given different access in relation to gender belonging (Kwan, 1999). When the household is inherent of children, the work places of the women tend be located closer to home (Scholten & Jönsson, 2010). Such conceptualization of home and work will give different result when men and women use the spatial arena. Women are considered to take a larger share of the household responsibilities within the family, e.g. grocery shopping and taking children to daycare and school, (Sandow & Westin, 2010; Toregé, 2008) which increase both their travel distance and time on a daily bases and furthermore the daily stress (Kwan, 1999). Men seldom take the extra household responsibility that is a consequence
commuting (Boverket, 2005). Women also have less accessibility to transport vehicles, especially cars (Gil Solá, 2010; Scholten & Jönsson, 2010), and they reduce working hours to compensate for commuting distance. Furthermore, women more often settle for work closer to the home environment with lower wages (Toregé, 2008). Increased mobility policies within the labour market further deepen gender inequality, as men have higher tendency’s to move around within geography (Gil Solá, 2010). The way men and women use their travel time could be different as well. Women considers travel time more often in the sense of spare time where they can relax or socialize. This in contrast to men who focus and prioritize preparing or finalizing work related matters so they can be free and enjoy their spare time when coming home (Fahlén, 2013).
3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
This study is based on previous scientific knowledge regarding the studied topic and the authors own collected data. The theoretical base which this study lean upon treat and discuss the relation between human activity within geography and the benefits, loses and consequences of overcoming distances. Recent studies and knowledge is chosen according to their relevance to the research topic, geographical connection and historical attachment. This selection is made to obtain a strong and well connected theoretical background which the empirical findings could further be discussed upon and add new insights to the studied phenomena within this research (Holme & Solvang, 1997; Major & Savin-Baden, 2010). Although a neat search quest is performed for this study some relevant (along these criteria) studies may be missed within the large field of commuting.

The question of method choice to obtain empirical evidence is always relevant and present within science. Depending on the aim and questions of the study, either a qualitative or quantitative approach could be relevant, as both have their benefits and limitations. Both methods could well be working next to each other and compensate each other’s insufficiencies if the aim of the research and time limit allows it (Holme & Solvang, 1997). Simply speaking quantitative methods are interested in measuring phenomena’s with numbers and draw generalized and statistical conclusions of its patterns and extensions, meanwhile qualitative method studies reaches for understanding of the underlying, individual and more in-depth explanations behind these patterns of an studied phenomenon (ibid). Choice of method therefore leans upon the purpose and aim of the study and the ability to get further understanding. The chosen method in this research are of a qualitative character as it enables the author to gain more in-depth knowledge and understanding of the studied phenomena (Major & Savin-Baden, 2010) and could therefore be considered an appropriate method when studying, in particular, complex social effects, but as well as economic effects within individual households. The qualitative method strive to find and understand the intrinsic value within each story to reveal the imbedded diversities and similarities. Each studied story is individual and reflect the informants personal view of the studied phenomenon, which makes it trustworthy for that informant but not for the phenomenon in general (Holme & Solvang, 1997). With a qualitative approach and small sample group this research do not aim to give any generalized explanatory substance (Holme & Solvang, 1997; Trost, 2008) to the effects within the home-work nexus overall, but instead add new insights and broaden the understanding of potential social and economic effects of commuting.

In qualitative methods there are many different approaches to obtain and investigate the studied phenomenon. What characterizes the qualitative method is that the researcher want to create a close relation to the studied entity to be able to more fully understand it. With different techniques and close relation a deeper perspective from
within the phenomenon could be studied and give understanding to the overall effects within society. The internal and individual preferences, intentions and consequences could therefore be investigated along the imbedded social structures, norms, gender roles (Tillberg, 2001) and household responsibilities. Along this background this research is using a respondent-interview method (Holme & Solvang, 1997:104). With respondent-interviews the interviewed individuals are directly involved in the studied phenomenon, the information and reflections will come straight from the involved parts and therefore be reliable (Holme & Solvang, 1997) and not effected from any third party selection. Although, respondents-interviews may obtain difficulties which could give rise to skewed information. Power structures, previous close or not close relational bonds, interview environment and interview questions and appearance, and the author’s subjective view may influence the respondents’ answers and the result in general (ibid). The author have tried to delimit these implications by being aware and being critical his own appearance. A careful and precise transcription and analysis of the interviews was carried out. Themes and keywords surrounding the research aim was used, and quotes where added to the report to obtain credibility (Holme & Solvang, 1997; Major & Savin-Baden, 2010).

3.1 Site selection

The study area is Umeå municipality and its enlarged local labour market area. Umeå municipality is situated in Västerbotten County, the second most northern county in Sweden. Umeå enlarged local labour market region is studied due to its character with one strong core labour market, Umeå, which attracts commuters from surrounding areas, villages and municipalities to work in the city. Commuting is therefore a well-known and present phenomenon for households in the surroundings of Umeå. Umeås enlarged local labour market area involves Umeå, which is the largest core municipality and the surrounding municipalities of Robertsfors, Vännäs, Vindeln, Bjurholm and Nordmaling (see figure 1). The city of Umeå and the municipality have the largest population size in the labour region and act as the administrative and financial center (Sandow & Westin, 2007). Umeå is inherent of a university and have a large, broad and more diversified labour market compared to the other municipalities. This attract people from nearby surroundings and municipalities to commute on a daily basis. Robertsfors, Vännäs, Vindeln,
Bjurholm and Nordmaling are municipalities which are characterized by outgoing commuting trends (ibid). Each municipality have a negative relation between in- and outgoing commuting to their municipality, with a larger amount of outgoing than ingoing commuting in year 2013 (see appendix 1, figure 1). The relation between in- and outgoing commutes to Umeå is positive, and the number of commutes to the municipality from surrounding municipalities have increased between 2004 and 2013 (see appendix 1, figure 2). The transportation system in the region is mostly based on car and bus traffic, meanwhile the train network for personal transportations is limited and less widespread within the region.

This study has investigated the commuting effects of four different households. Their commuting stories and effects differed as well as their geographical location of home and workplace (see further presentation in the results chapter). Transportation networks and the means of public transportation is fairly good within the area, but differs along geographical location and size of the community. All respondents have had good accessibility to roads for car-traffic along the European road 4 which goes along the coast in a north-south direction through the Umeå enlarged local labour market region.

![Figure 1. Map of Umeå enlarged local labour market region.](image-url)
3.1.1 Sampling group and criteria
The respondents interviewed for this study are both women and men and are all connected to a work-related commute, either commuting themselves or indirectly as spouse to a commuter. Furthermore, the respondents live and work within the enlarged local labour market region of Umeå. The respondents had to be part of a family (household), with children in a dependent age, and where at least one of the responsible adults carried out a significant commute to their workplace. The respondents have been chosen by the author according to their geographical distance between home and workplace, their gender, means of transportation and their direct or indirect relation to commuting. Selected criterion mean that interviews have been carried out with representatives from commuting families with dependent children and its restrictions. Secondly, the chosen criterion have broaden the circumstances, understanding and potential consequences of commuting which may be present within households. The selection was made to obtain a diversified, broad and informative base which further have improved the author’s understanding of the vast effects of commuting within households. Respondents in this study therefore have different means of transportation principally by car but also train and bus. The family size differs between one and three children within different depending ages, spanned from 3 years to 13 years. One respondent live within Umeå city and commute on daily bases to the municipality of Nordmaling (around 50 km), another respondent travel 57 kilometers to Umeå from the surrounding municipality of Robersfors, meanwhile two respondents live in the “commuting village” of Sävar and is involved in commutes to Umeå (around 22 km). The respondent group are all aged in-between 30 and 44 years and have been commuting between 1 and 15 years.

3.1.2 Interview sessions
The location and environment of the interview sessions have been decided along each respondents will and convenience. Two interviews were carried out in the homes of the respondents, another at the respondent’s workplace and the last one at the university. The interview environment was chosen to be as convenient and familiar as possible for the respondents to improve their sense of confidence and make the conversation as ordinary as possible, and to reduce the negative aspects of unfamiliarity and stress which could affect the answers and reliability of the data (Holme & Solvang, 1997). Each interview was also preceded with a face-to-face method to increase and improve the conversation, and to furthermore help the researcher to understand the respondent’s feelings, personality and answers (Kitchin & Tate, 2000). With face-to-face interviews the researcher also increase the ability to get more in-depth knowledge as moments, feelings and answers could be further catch and discussed surrounding the subject (Holme & Solvang, 1997). The interviews where held in Swedish, the mother tongue of all involved, the interviews
lasted between 27 and 56 minutes and were recorded along the respondents approval. The respondents was informed about the aim and purpose of the study and all approved that the researcher could analyze, quote and publish their stories. Further transcription where held in Swedish meanwhile used quotations in this paper is translated by the author to English.

3.2 Research ethics
In research ethical question is always present. A constant reflection and consideration is needed to understand potential implications, restrictions and influence involved. In science the researcher is put in a situation where he/she on one hand should perform and add new appropriate and accurate knowledge to the field and on the other hand show respect and protect the studied informants/entities integrity. Therefore the researcher have to consult and make considerations between the research aim and the potential effects on studied objects (Holme & Solvang, 1997; Vetenskapsrådet, 1990). Due to the fact and need to protect each respondent household’s integrity this study intend to keep the respondents nameless (Kitchin and Tate, 2000; Trost, 1997; Vetenskapsrådet, 1990). Each respondent and their answers are instead presented in code, e.g. Respondent 3. The code/number of each respondent is given randomly to prevent linking and matching to personal data. Although, due to the researcher’s personal and local connection to the spatial location (Sävar), the sampling groups local attachment, small sampling group and especially the Snowball sampling method, the respondents’ full anonymity could not be guaranteed. The respondents have been informed and accepted this, and it is taken in consideration when analyzing and presenting the empirical data in order to avoid integrity issues and delimiting the credibility of the study. A short introduction of the aim, background and future use of the study was given to each respondent to give them clarity, insights and understanding of their participation (see appendix 2). This was done in order to include the respondents within the purpose of the study, and also to make them more comfortable as the interview situation could be perceived both intimidating and highly personal. It was also done, to delimit the power structure imbedded between respondent and interview leader. Each respondent have also been given the opportunity to recede their participation in this study, and as well given the opportunity to comment and give permission upon future processing and publication of conducted data.

3.3 Research and literature limitations
This study has its limitations large field of commuting and its explanatory restrictions within geography. Along the chosen area of study and the used geographically related literature this study is narrow and limited to a Swedish context. The method of choice
and the small sample group have furthermore narrowed the explanatory value to its geographical setting. However, the aim of this study is not to improve or find any generalized picture of social and economic effects of commuting for the whole field, instead it intend to broaden the understanding and shed some new light to the vast effects of commuting to clarify the complexity of the phenomenon.

Similar to the vast field of commuting this study also suffers from a shortage of knowledge surrounding commuting effects on children, but it do it's best to provide new insights. In the search of literature concerning commuting effects on children the author has found and used knowledge from Adolfsson Jörby (2006). The text (as well as another reference) is published in a non-scientific magazine called PLAN provided by the society of spatial planning (in Swedish; Föreningen för Samhällsplanering). PLAN is a journal that discusses spatial planning and combines scientific, political and private business knowledge and PLAN is read by politicians, business people and scientist. The literature could be questioned but the author have considered it reliable due to the strong connection to contemporary knowledge in the field.
4 RESULTS

Respondent 1 is a man, long distance commuter and the most experienced in the study. He has been commuting for 15 years and had a one way commuting distance of 57 kilometers which takes between 35 and 45 minutes depending on season, weather conditions and traffic. He lives in Robertsfors, a neighboring municipality to Umeå (see figure 2), with his wife and three children (10 to 13 years), and commutes on a daily basis by car to the city of Umeå.

Respondent 2 is the female partner of a commuter. She works and lives in Sävar, a “commuting village” outside the city of Umeå but within the municipality border. Her partner is commuting on daily basis to his workplace in Umeå, 22 kilometers one way trip. The partner of respondent 2 combines commuting by own car with carpooling with colleagues. The couple has been involved in work-related commuting for three years, and they have two kids aged three and six years.

Respondent 3 is a man and he also live in Sävar and commutes to Umeå on daily basis. Both he and his wife commute to Umeå, but work in different parts of the city. Respondent 3 commutes 22 kilometers meanwhile his spouse commutes a bit shorter. He commutes by using a combination of public buses, private car and additional bike rides. They have both been commuting for three years and combining transport means during the time. Together they have one child aged three and a half.

Respondent 4 is a women who lives in the city of Umeå but commutes to the neighboring municipality of Nordmaling. She has a spouse who work in the city, and they have two children between one and four years old. Her daily commuting distance is around 50 kilometers, one way, and it takes between 40 and 60 minutes depending on means of transportation. She is using a mixture of means of transportation, private car and public train and buses, in her daily commute to and from work. Respondent 4 is the least experienced commuter with one year of commuting, but she is although well experienced with a previous commute to the city of Örnsköldsvik around 110 kilometers away from Umeå.
Figure 2. Map of respondents’ location of home and workplace within Umeå enlarged local labour market region.

4.1 Commuting and perception of distance
For the studied group, the experience and perception of commuting distance and commuting time varies along many different everyday circumstances, lifestyle choices and decisions, working hours, geographical distance as well as transport and infrastructural opportunities and limitations. Perception of commuting distance and time is therefore well connected to each respondent’s social and financial needs, abilities and opportunities to obtain the life they need and want. For some of the respondents, the perception of commuting is neutral, toned down and seen as an ordinary thing in life at first. Their commuting distance and time is partly overseen and neglected and not considered part of their everyday time limitations. Meanwhile, for some it is part of a well-organized and structured time frame which is present in
their daily thoughts. But during the interview and their own discussions they all perceive commuting as an implicating factor in their everyday life. Due to the decisions taken and made within their home-work nexus, preconceived thoughts and previous commuting situations the respondents perceive the social and economic effects of commuting in different ways. Three of the respondents have experienced previous commuting situations which they perceived worse than their current situation. Meanwhile, one respondent lacked previous experience and based his perception partly on his partner’s previous commuting experiences. The respondents’ perception of social and economic commuting effects therefore is compared and put in light of their previous and preconceived experiences of commuting.

“Because we had a situation before when we were seldom home together, when we both commuted and worked shift… the situation today is much better for the whole family.” (respondent 1)

“…our situation today is good… his (her partner) previous commute was intolerable, it took almost one hour, one way drive!” (respondent 2)

“My wife thinks the commute is quite crappy! But she is always comparing with the situation from her upbringing when she commuted with school buses… I think it’s okay, but of course I thought the communications would be better and more flexible… I based my thoughts on hers when we took the decision to move here.” (respondent 3)

Commuting distance and time differs with geographical distance and means of transportation. Car is the most popular mode of transportation among the respondents. Car use is considered to be most time effective and flexible. By commuting with car, commuters are able to travel from their home directly to their workplace without any unnecessary stops. Cars are also flexible to further combine the work trip with household responsibilities or other activities, e.g. leaving and picking up children and shopping. Time efficiency and flexibility is considered vital for the respondents as commuting intervene in their restricted daily time puzzle. Although, commuting by car, either by themselves or together with others, comes with both positive and negative perceptions. Travelling together has its benefits as an enjoyable and pleasant time of social interaction meanwhile it is also implicated with a time consuming adaptation to other people.

“He (her partner) thinks it’s more fun when they can talk to each other meanwhile driving, time to be social before work starts.” (respondent 2)

“…the morning could be stressful, I think… when we (the family) are carpooling it’s a consequence of three people getting ready at the same time. If my son and I are going by ourselves it takes much less time, so that is stressful.” (respondent 3)
Commuting on your own could instead be more time effective but as well become routine and boring with few new inputs which makes the commuter tired and not alert in the traffic situation.

“When you have driven this stretch quite sometimes it become routine…”oops, am I here already!”, you can think sometimes. It becomes too much routine of it all and that’s a downside to it. But I like driving so it’s okay.” (respondent 1)

“It is because I get so tired when I’m driving car, it is too far for me to drive, I get sleepy and bored and that’s troublesome.” (respondent 4)

Public transportation is considered less time effective and flexible according to the interviewed individuals. Two of the respondents (respondent 3 and 4) use public means of transportation, although combined by own commuting by car. Public transportation systems involves additional walking and bicycling transports as either home nor workplaces is located next to transport nodes. Additional walks and bicycle trips adds up to extra time and effort to the total transport, but are both perceived in positive and negative ways. It’s considered time consuming, and unwanted but at the same time necessary and sometimes stressful. But it is also enjoyable if the season and weather is good, and it could be a moment for some physical exercise.

“I appreciate the bicycle ride and the small exercise I get…but if I’m honest it’s a bit troublesome…it’s a risk moment, the more stops and changes of transports the more complicated it gets!” (respondent 3)

Respondent 3 and 4 do not really enjoy driving and find public transportation system better suited for their commuting, they appreciate the abilities to relax and to do useful activities meanwhile travelling. While commuting with public means of transport they could take a nap, listen to music, read a book, perform easier work chores or prepare and get ready for work or home activities. They can appreciate the fact of lack control of the transport situation, but at the same time find it a little bit stressful and restraining to be restricted to limited time tables.

“I enjoy travelling by train… I often read, now my students are reading a book for a school assignment and then I read that one as well on the train and then it’s not any exhausting work, I also sometimes grade assignments, but I also think that’s quite fun…I can also listening to music or just look at internet on the mobile phone” (respondent 4)

“…at the moment I am quite locked, I am adapting to a lot of time tables…it’s not that stressful today but I think it will be in the future when I will participate more in leaving and picking up the children from kinder garden.” (respondent 4)

“…I don’t see any intrinsic value in driving, actually I think it’s quite boring! Then I think more of just sitting and taking a nap, listening to music and not caring so much…and being without control. Actually, I would like to commute by public transport all the time. It’s perfect for me as
long it’s possible to combine with leaving and picking up from kinder garden and such obligations that one has.” (respondent 3)

The respondents’ answers are direct and well thought through, but at the same time sprawling and contradictory. They all reveal a complex relation to the perception of commuting distance and commuting time. On one hand, they all find their commuting situation good and well manageable, but on the other hand they all could well change their situation to less time consuming commutes if possible. Overall, the respondents find their commuting situations as an unwanted waste of time and resources which is needed to obtain their living situation. Their perception of overcoming the unwanted distance between home and work is not interfering to the extent that they are willing to relocate and move closer to work. Meanwhile, for some of them it is enough to be open to or willing to change work with time, and not see their commuting situation today as a lifelong solution.

“…the advantage with my job in Nordmaling is that I gain a lot of experience, that’s the motivation and the reason why I want to work there one more year at least…if I work a couple of years I have more experience and will be ahead of all newly graduated, and then I have better chances to get work in Umeå.” (respondent 4)

The perception of commuting is therefore partly connected to the means of transportation and geographical distance, as well as connected to the vast socioeconomic circumstances in life which benefit and limits the commuter’s situation in their home-work nexus.

4.2 Economic effects on families
The economic effects of commuting varies for the involved individuals. There are both differences and similarities in the way the respondents look on economic benefits. The respondents experience, limitations and down sides, and perceive them in their individual way. In common for all respondents is that commuting is a way for them to have a job they like and still live in a desired location. When the intended living conditions is located away from a larger labour market the labor opportunities become limited.

“Robertsfors is an industry community and some (industries) are closing, but some are at the same time going well. But it’s not easy to get work up there, that’s the way it is.” (respondent 1)

Although, even in the city the pressure on the labour market could force people to find work and experience in surrounding areas. The number of jobs and the diversity may be larger, but the pressure on each job could be as hard, especially when the
individual is specialized and the jobs are limited, and the city is inherent of a university that educate specialized labour and increase the local supply.

“…I got job in Nordmaling, a job according to my degree, my subjects and my age group. But if I have bad the opportunity to get similar in Umeå I would have taken it…” (respondent 4)

With commuting comes transport costs for the involved households. The respondents feel that they all have to spend a lot of money on transport. Some of the money they spend is possible to get back retroactively on tax reductions, but most of it is spent to overcome the commuting distance. The costs of transport is a direct and clear negative economic effect that all respondent highlight as a downside of their commuting situation. The costs varies along the geographical distance to overcome, means of transportation, number of cars needed, car abrasion and the combination of transport systems used to be able to get the life puzzle together.

“…because of his commuting you get very dependent on having two cars…it’s a lot of gas money although he is car-pooling.” (respondent 2)

“It is a lot of money which you could have done a lot of other fun things with otherwise, so it is of course on the down side. If it only had been the train expenses it would have been one thing, but now I have to drive the car also so it becomes quite a lot of money, and it feels crappy!” (respondent 4)

“The big financial thing is that I drive about 450 kilometers per week, I wear out cars fast, there is little second hand value in them, and then I have to buy a new car each time. I want to drive a good and safe car. That’s a huge financial boom each time! So that’s really what the long commuting distance contribute with on the financial part, and then fuel cost as well.” (respondent 1)

Thanks to car-pooling opportunities, two of the respondent households are able to reduce unwanted abrasions and fuel costs on their weekly commutes. One commuter is even able to commute with neighboring work colleague which makes the transport and the costs more effective.

“Since he (her partner) started his new job, and car-pools, it costs less, less gas money and abrasions.” (respondent 2)

What some commuters’ loose in transport costs, they perceive that they gain in lower house and land prices in their home community. The economic relation and consideration between house prices and commuting costs were and is present within the respondent’s decision-making of home. With lower house prices outside the city of Umeå they perceive commuting a part of a financial consideration and benefit that make it possible to buy a desired house in a wanted location.

“…when we made the decision of living conditions…compared to buying a house for 2-3 million (Swedish krona) in town and still have the need of one car, we understood that we could afford a
lot of cars on the difference between buying in town and our house, and even afford the renovation.”
(respondent 1)

Although, all commuters do not want to live outside the city environment, due to e.g. social reasons. Then, the financial benefits of commuting weakens for the involved household.

“…we would like to buy a house, or something bigger, but it’s so darn expensive in the city! And of course, Nordmaling has its advantages with cheap houses, but the main reason why we don’t want to move from Umeå is that we have our social life here.” (respondent 4)

Further, economic consequences of commuting for the studied families is related to commuting time. Reduction of working hours effects the household economy with less income. The decision behind reduction of working hours is well connected to each family’s limited time puzzle and commuting time. Some of the respondents do, although, not perceive it as a direct effect of commuting at first. But, along their own reflections, discussion and answers they realize that commuting is an vital aspect behind their decision. All households have at least one adult that works part time and within one household, both partners have reduced their working hours. The main reason for all of them is to add time with their children. By reducing the amount of working hours and adjusting to their commuting time, the commuting families chose between financial implications and time spent with their children.

“Now I work 86%, but I have said (to her manager) that I would like to work 75-80% because of the additional travel time and so. I feel that I have to work part time now, otherwise the days become too long with commuting and full time work.” (respondent 4)

“The decision behind working part time is based on our son and the amount of hours for him at kinder-garden. It has been a lot puzzling with schedules and time tables (for public transport)…For example, I have to go from work at 13:00 p.m. when I am picking him up at 14:30 p.m….everything is calculated in this puzzle.” (respondent 3)

4.3 Social effects for commuting families
Each respondent’s home-work nexus derives from their complex decision making of location of home and workplace. Their decisions of home location varies from wanting to live in urban environments to wanting more rural environment and an environment close to nature. The respondent households also base their decisions upon their own upbringing environments, good upbringing environments for children, closeness to family and friends, leisure activities, size of house and price levels as well as infrastructural convenience. Therefore, their perception of “quality of life” varies along their individual’s interests, background and needs. Social effects of
commuting varies along each household’s historical and present situation and along different social criterion.

“We chose Sävar mostly because we have most friends here…(and) we got the house we wanted.” (respondent 2)

“We started looking for house in the beginning of year 2000 and we had some criteria’s. We were both tired of the city, we are both almost born and raised on the country side, hmm, it was quality of life we wanted and we get this on the country side.” (respondent 1)

Imbedded and interlaced in their decisions is the downside of commuting time. Overcoming the distance between home and work is additional reduction of time in already time limited family situations with children in a dependent age. Commuting time therefore becomes an additional intrusion and restriction within the everyday life puzzle with commitments and responsibilities. Due to means of transportation, schedules and time tables, each commuter gets effected and limited.

“I travel by train three days a week, sometimes I travel home by bus, but often train, I go by train the days when it suits my working hours. In the morning it’s no problem, but in the afternoon it’s a big gap between 13:45 p.m. and 16:50 p.m. The other days I drive my own car because I don’t make it to the train in time” (respondent 4)

Commuting distance and time has social effects on the families and the relationships they have to each other within the family. Time spent with each other is reduced with the time spent commuting. The respondents perceive the time missed out from family members as negative and interfering in their relations, although to different degree due to their history and circumstances.

“We had a long period in our lives when we meet each other every sixth weekend and every third Thursday. That sucked! It was not that commuting caused that situation but the fact that we both worked shifts. But, of course, commuting was part of it as we both commuted back then…everything is better now when none of us is working shifts, and only one is commuting” (respondent 1)

The relational effects is therefore present between the spouses as they get less time within their own relationship as well in their relation as responsible parents and house owners. Work-related commuting could also effect the involved individuals’ social life in the city as they are not keen to travelling the distance twice in the same day.

“…we don’t go to town (Umeå) twice the same day! First being at work and going home and then back again, we avoid such things.” (respondent 3)

Children within the commuting household are also effected. All respondent households have in one way or the other tried to minimize the effects on their children from their individual home-work nexus. Talking about the effects on their children was for some respondents’ partly difficult due to the sensitive character. But also due to the difficult connection and perception between commuting distance and
time and the potential involved effects on children. Although, by the reduction of working hours or changed location of workplace, the parents have adapted to the situation and tried to reduce the negative consequences as good as they can. The ways that children could get effected is through longer days at kinder garden, getting tired after long days, late dinners and little time and connection to commuting parent.

“…during the worst period, we had some days when the kids were at child care for twelve hours, it wasn’t good for the kids…Nowadays, they know that we will be at home to help them with homework and so, now that we have more time home since my wife works less and doesn’t commute. I think they perceive that as positive” (respondent 1)

“The children get more time with me because I don’t commute and work less than my partner, so I think that make them more “mumsy”. My partner is seldom allowed to put them to bed, they scream for me and I have to read for them both.” (respondent 2)

The relationships between the commuter and the rest of the family could therefore also get effected. When the distribution of time spent home and time spent working is unfavorable for the commuter, the relationship to both children and the spouse could be perceived negative.

“…I think my partner feel that I am very prioritized by the children and I think he perceive that as quite sad…both because he is not prioritized and as well that he can’t unburden me.” (respondent 2)

Commuting parents could also be effected by being away from their family, especially from their children. By having a clear geographical distance between the children and the commuter, some of the respondents express some insecurity and stress. The notion of being geographically far away from home and their children, as well as being restricted by time consuming means of transportation and adaptations to time tables effects their perception of commuting in a negative sense.

“If something happens to the kids, my partner will get them from kinder-garden because he works in town…But my partner is actually quite often away on work trips, and it will then be an advantage if I have the car and it only takes 40 minutes instead of adapting to a train that may take two to three hours, you are quite locked at site, and that could be stressful!” (respondent 4)

Within the everyday puzzle in the home-work nexus, the respondents highlight the need of living relatively close or having a close located social network that could help them within their child care. This social network often consists of close relatives who lives near, e.g. the respondents’ parents, but as well good friends who live near. Social networks are important as extra help in the difficult puzzle the between wanted and needed amount of working hours, the commuting time and the extent to which the children are put in child care. Help from the social network is an extra help that act
as an insurance and emergency backup within their spatially divided home-work nexus.

“…it is a real security thing, we have the family, grandma and grandpa often helps, and they live and work close to the kinder garden and our home…” (respondent 4)

”…we thought that we would be in need of help more frequently from our loved ones when we moved to Sävar, but we managed well. Although, we use help from both friends and family sometimes for practical reasons, and for some more urgent stuff as well.” (respondent 2)

Social networks could also be a well-planned extra help that unburdens the parents in their limited time tables and responsibilities during the week. With help, additional time is set free to handle household errands or make room for individual or relational activities for the parents. But it is also a safe and certain environment when parents have to work on uncomfortable hours and being on call.

“Every Wednesday, grandma picks up our son from kinder garden…that is very good, otherwise we could never get this schedule together. It liberates time for us to do stuff together and by ourselves…we often have a lot of errands to take care which we otherwise we had been force to do during weekends…It is nice to be able to let go of the parent responsibility for a while each Wednesday.” (respondent 3)

The need and importance of friends and family who lives near as additional insurance when their own time and abilities is limited, helps to uphold their chosen living situation. Without the social network, all respondent households reply that they would have had more social and economic effects and less opportunities within their home-work nexus. The importance of a social network effect both their previous background decision of home as well as their decision and abilities behind amount of working hours and child-care.

4.4 Household responsibilities and gender implications

The household chores and responsibilities are many within a family and take a lot of time and effort to cope with. Time and effort spent on household chores effects the time available for social interaction with family members and social activities, and vice versa. Respondent families divide and distribute the chores differently along amount of working hours and means of transportation. Within the respondents’ families, more household chores falls on the spouse that do not commute, or arrives home first each day.

“…the person who has a short day often uses that time to do household chores as shopping, cleaning and washing the laundry…so the idea of coming home early and being committed and playing with our child has totally spoiled to make it work with cleaning, washing, shopping and dishing.” (respondent 3)
“…because I have days off during the week and work part-time, I often that take care of the laundry, shopping, picking up toys and all that stuff…but two days a week he (her partner) has to take care of the children, make dinner, do the dishes and put them to bed because I’m working.” (respondent 2)

Commuting partner in the household could contribute to the household responsibilities with supportive shopping and other needed errands on their way home. Although, this is restricted due to time and especially means of transportations, where car is perceived as most flexible vehicle for extra detours on the way home.

“…if I haven’t had the time to shop be (her commuting partner) who sits in the car could go and to shop the things we need.” (respondent 2)

When both spouses are at home, they all perceive the household responsibility being equally divided. However, during the week the partner with most time in the home environment participate and perform the most of chores related to the household.

“On weekends we try to help each other to clean, or one takes care of the children and the other cleans…I think we divide it quite equal without verbally dividing it, sometimes I can get irritated but so can be.” (respondent 4)

Household responsibilities increases with geographical closeness when children gets sick and the day care system can’t take care of them. The partner with the shortest geographical distance, or the fastest means of transportation is most often bound to end the working day early to take care of the sick child. The respondents perceive such division most time effective, financially effective and most positive for their children in this vulnerable situation. Although, when both spouses commute the division of responsibility is not as easy to divide.

“…if our son gets sick at kinder-garden it’s the one of us that has the car that picks him up as soon as possible. But if we discover that he may be sick during the morning it could be tricky…we both actually think that the one that has the shortest day should be home to avoid losing money and working time, but we often have things planned at work which we like to participate in so a conflict always appears.” (respondent 3)

“It’s to 99% me…because I work closer” (respondent 2)

Within the studied households, all four women involved are part-time workers meanwhile only one of the involved men works part-time. Among the involved households, two women commute to their work and three women out of four work within the social sector, meanwhile all men work within the private sector and three of them commute. With such small sample group and the use of qualitative method, this study is not able to, nor interested in, drawing any broad comparative
conclusions for the generalized situations of commuting within Sweden between men and females. It could although shed some light on to the gender aspect which seems to exist within Swedish commuting, and then particularly within the case of Umeå enlarged local labour market region. Involved gender implications for the interviewed households involves increased household responsibilities and reduced working hours for non-commuters and women, and relational implications to children for some commuting men. Moreover, the two interviewed women also perceived that they had to work-part time in some sense to delimit the parents’ time away from their children. Also, the men replied that this was the background to their household decision of part time work for their partners. The interviewed women felt partly obligated to delimit their working hours against the background that their partners’ working hours and situation were not as easy to reduce.

“…I feel that I have to work part time now, otherwise it becomes too long (days for the children) with commuting and full time work…I feel that it’s on me because my partner has a job where it’s difficult to work part time.” (respondent 4)

“No, because he works in a store. They have opening hours between 0800 and 1700, so the service and repair shop have to be open then. He can’t adjust his working hours.” (respondent 2)

In this sense, the interviewed women are restricted in their abilities to perform full time work and their opportunities on the labour market is both restricted by being part of a commuting household and the geographical setting of their work.

Both the interviewed men and women replied that it is important that both genders are equally involved within the vast amount of household responsibilities they have. They all perceive it to be equally divided on one hand, but on the other they confirm that it is related to the time spent in the home environment. As some of the women tend to work closer to home and they all work shorter days, the amount of household chores has increased for them. Each respondents replies show an awareness of the importance of equality between the sexes. Although their situation and answers in relation to gender roles, commuting and home-work nexus reveal that some gender inequalities exists anyway. No shadow or blame is thrown upon the respondents for this. Some of the respondents are well aware of their situation and motivate their decision on practical reasons in their current home-work nexus. Meanwhile, some are less aware of their situation, partly due to previous worse scenarios. Gender values and norms are present in some of the working situation (part-time work), but as well in the way and how respondents answer and discuss about their partners’ working conditions and household responsibilities. Men are more modest and plain in their discussion meanwhile the interviewed women discuss their spouses’ role in the household responsibilities in a way of gratitude and compassion, although their own increased responsibility. One interviewed household have although tried to divide the reduced working hours as equally as possible between both spouses. In
this household, both spouses performed a daily commute to work each day. Household responsibility is perceived equally divided between the spouses as much is performed when both are given more time at home. Although, during the interview the male respondent said that he had started to work more that week, from 80% to 90%. He did not know how that would effect the equal division of household chores but he and his spouse had discussed it and was clear that it should not burden her more.

“Now when I am about to work more (from 80% to 90%), my wife was very clear that she isn’t going to do more chores at home...and I totally agree with her!...but if this doesn’t work I have to think different, maybe cut down on the commuting time.” (respondent 3)
5 DISCUSSION
Commuting has effects on households. The effects are imbedded in a complex relationship between wanted and needed social and economic circumstances which is furthermore interlaced with individual perceptions and preferences. Commuting effects are ordinary phenomenon in the lives of commuters, and they have gotten used to this and tried their best to overcome and manage the effects of commuting. Commuting effects may therefore not be perceived connected to commuting at first for some, meanwhile for others it could be obvious and present everyday effects which they consider and plan for to seek solutions in their everyday puzzle. Perception of commuting distance and commuting time varies. Previous experiences, preconceived perceptions and means of transportation influence how commuters perceive their daily commute. In line with previous studies commuters in this study perceive car-driving most time effective and flexible compared to public transportation systems. Car-driving could although be perceived as somewhat dangerous since commuting alone becomes boring, routine and unstimulating which affects the concentration. Meanwhile, public transport is considered less flexible and more time consuming it has its benefits as a mobile room which could be used for both productive social and work-related activities, and as well less productive activities, e.g. resting.

Financially, the commuting households benefit by having a job and an income at the same time they can live in desired locations. When location of home is situated outside the denser and more costly city additional economic benefits may appear with cheaper housing. Although, financial benefits of cheaper housing can be reduced by larger housing size. Economic draw-backs are also present because commuting costs. An additional car, increased gas expenses, abrasions, multiple means of transportations and eventually new cars adds up to expenses that increases with commuting distance and is perceived burdening on the household economy. Although, some transport costs are retroactively retrieved due to tax reductions, the extra expenses are perceived as burdening. A more discrete and indirect effect is reduction of working hours to compensate for the time commuting. In dual-earner households this is an often used strategy which is used to decrease the negative effects of time away from children which effects the household income levels, and could also give effects on career opportunities for the part time working parent. For all the studied households, reduction of working hours and income levels is presents. Some perceive it as a direct effect to compensate for commuting time, meanwhile others perceive it as part of a bigger picture which is based in time spent away and with their children. With cheaper, less time-consuming and more flexible means of transportations (especially public transport), the involved commuting families could decrease the negative effects and improve their benefits from their commuting
situation and their perception of commuting could improve to be more long-lasting and sustainable.

The social consequences of commuting are well connected and interlaced with economic circumstances and outcomes, and vice versa. Studied households have chosen location of home based on their individual preferences which gives them and improve what they call “quality of life”. Although their home-work nexus is based on quality of life, they perceive social implications of their commuting circumstances which could be summed up as limitation of time. Lack of time for families with children in dependent age is a well-known every day problem. With additional commuting time the time being present in the home environment is further reduced which influence the attachment and relationship between household individuals. The relationship between parents and children could be effected, but also the relationship between spouses and their overall social networking. The amount of time lost in the home environment with children and spouse is hard to compensate. Commuter’s abilities to participate in their children’s development and spare time activities therefore decreases with their commuting time. Attachment between children and parents could therefore be stronger to the non-commuting and more present parent which effects both children and adults psychological situation. Little is known about the commuting effects on children (Adolfsson Jörby, 2006) and therefore are the findings of this study important as it shed some light and broadens the knowledge regarding children’s situation within the commuting field. Further studies is although needed to improve the understanding of commuting effects on children. Geographical commuting distance could also be mentally burdening for the commuting adult when distance away from children could be perceived as stressful and uncertain if something happens to them. Although, with reduction of working hours and help from social networks each household do their best to delimit the negative implication on their children, as well as their other social relations. In line with previous studies, commuting households perceive their social network important within their home-work nexus. Social networks reduce the negative stress and implications of geographical distance and commuting time as they act as insurance in emergencies and additional planned day care for the families involved in commuting.

Limited and reduced time resources of commuting will also effect the commuting households’ division of household chores and gender roles. The awareness and ambition in each household is considered to be as equal as possible, but due to practical reasons and their home-work situation, unequal circumstances are present. Similar to previous studies, increased burden of household chores falls on the partner with reduced working hours or non-commuting, which in the end often turns out to be the women spouse. In this study, all involved women have reduced their working hours, meanwhile only one of the men involved. Reduction of working hours is part
of or a direct effect of commuting time within the household. Some of the women felt partly obligated to reduce their working hours, due to their male spouses’ difficulties and lacking abilities to reduce working hours. Non-paid household responsibilities and reduced career opportunities are therefore present as an effect of commuting for women involved within households with children in dependent age. Meanwhile, men who are working full time and are commuting loose time to spend with spouse and children. This effects their relationship. Even though the commuting households’ shows awareness, and some tries to reduce gender inequalities within the division of household responsibilities the unequal division is present within each home-work nexus. Similar to previous studies, women has an increased burden of un-paid household chores, work closer to home and a higher tendency to reduce their working hours. These are effects that uphold the unequal circumstances for women and men within the family as well on the labour market. With increasing commuting distance and time women could therefore be hold back in there opportunities to use the geographical room and the abilities to reach equal opportunities as men reduced.

Overall the studied commuting households find their commuting situation in their home-work nexus well manageable along their benefits and limitations. Commuting for them all is a consequence of their own and free decisions but limited to the involved labour market restrictions. Although, they perceive “quality of life” from their decisions made they also perceive draw backs which makes them open or willing to change their commuting circumstances in the future. Their commuting effects is therefore perceived as manageable today when their perceived benefits overcome the limitations, but with time and changing life stage phases they may perceive it differently. This study has also showed that commuting also brings social and economic effects to household even in relative short commuting distances and time frames. Different to many previous studies this study have included commuting households with shorter distances and time frames and have found that they as well perceive and experience social and economic draw backs from their home-work nexus. Commuting effects is therefore not only a consideration for households living far away from their work places and the core labour market, as well commuters in relative close surrounding suffers from the implications of commuting distance and time. Depending on means of transportation and infrastructural system even considered short distances could be time consuming and effect the well-being of family members. Therefore it becomes important to understand the broad set of consequences and effects that commuting distance and time brings to the involved households. Political decisions and strategies gives more effects to households than the sow often highlighted and promoted economic beneficiaries of labour opportunities. Within Umeå enlarged local labour market region the regional development strategies and spatial planning processes have to consider and
implement the diverse effects of commuting to decrease the negative outcomes, and to improve family’s abilities to have desired living conditions and the opportunities to uphold geographical spread within the region. Commuting distance and commuting time effects the everyday time puzzles within household. With different strategies and means of transportation consequences will vary. Although, both economic and social implications is present in the studied households everyday commuting life which effects the relation between and on commuters, spouses, parents-children, children and the gender equality within commuter’s home-work nexus.
6 FUTURE STUDIES
Commuting has effects on political planning processes within society and the involved families in many different ways which could be seen in this study as well in previous ones. Much of the commuting effects is well studied meanwhile others are given little attention. This study focused on the commuting effects on families. Many of the involved effects and decisions for the families were directly connected to the fact that parents do everything to delimit the effects on their children. The knowledge on the commuting effects on children is although little. One objective of this study was to deepen and add some new knowledge to the area, but the increase of knowledge is limited. Therefore, are further studies on the commuting effects on children needed, because the knowledge we have today is limited, but as well because children are the next generation to work and act within society.
7 REFERENCE LIST


Sandow, E. (2011). On the road; social aspects of commuting long distances to work. Department of social and economic geography. GERUM; Umeå.


APPENDIX 1: Commuting graphs

Figure 3. Numbers, and relation between, commutes in and out of the municipalities of Bjurholm, Vindeln, Nordmaling, Robertsfors and Vännäs in year 2013. Source: Umeå municipality (umea.se)

Figure 2. Commuting pattern of numbers of in and out commuters for Umeå municipality. Source: Umeå municipality (umea.se)
APPENDIX 2: Interview guide

Intervjuguide Arbetspendling och familjepåverkan

Kort info om motiven, tillvägagångsätt samt bakgrund.

Denna undersökning är frivillig och anonym, i den mån det går. Intervjun kommer att spelas in och hållas på svenska. Svaren i denna intervju kommer transkriberas och sammanställas av mig Jonatan Mårtensson och användas till en magisteruppsats i Samhällsplanering vid Umeå Universitet. Citat kan komma att användas separat och lyftas fram i studien, men då kommer ni (respondenten) att träda fram under kodat namn, ex. respondent 3. Citat kommer då översättas av mig till engelska. Studien kan komma att användas i sin helhet eller i sammanfattad version i andra sammanhang, ex. arbetsansökningar och vidare publicering. Är detta okej för dig?


Bakgrundsfrågor och information om respondenten.

1. Är du man eller kvinna?
2. Har ni barn, hur många och vilken ålder?
3. Har ni barnomsorg för barnen, i vilken utsträckning (timmar per vecka/procent)?
4. Vad är din huvudsakliga sysselsättning och utsträckning?
   Ex. deltid, %?
5. Med vilket/vilka färdmedel sker din/dina transporter till arbetet?
6. Hur långt (mätt i kilometer samt transporttid) har du till den huvudsakliga sysselsättning, enkel väg (dörr till dörr)? Vid flera transportmedel uppgje alla tidsalternativ.
   .................. Kilometer  .................. Minuter
7. Med vilket/vilka färdmedel sker din partners transporter till arbetet?
8. Hur långt (mätt i kilometer samt transporttid) har din partner till den huvudsakliga sysselsättning, enkel väg (dörr till dörr)? Vid flera transportmedel uppge alla tidsalternativ.


Kilometer
Minuter

9. Vad har din partner för huvudsaklig sysselsättning och utsträckning?
Ex. Deltid, %?

10. Hur länge har ni bott där ni bor idag?

11. Hur länge har pendling varit en förekommande företeelse i era liv?

Tema frågor, med stödfrågor.

Pendling, berätta om er syn, upplevelse och känsla kring pendlingssituationen. (din eller din partners)

Hur länge har ni pendlat?

Vilka färdmedelsmöjligheter finns för pendlingen?

Varför väljer ni det färdmedel som ni använder er av, finns det positiva och negativa sidor med det?

Vilket färdmedel föredrar du, och varför?

Är pendlingsresan en resa från hem till jobb och tillbaka, eller finns det behov av avstickare, ex. handla och hämta barn osv.?

Hur upplever ni distansen?

Hur upplever ni tiden det tar att pendla?

Hur upplever ni situationen med pendling i stort?

Använder ni pendlingstiden till något/har ni någon strategi, ex. läser, arbetar eller samtalar osv.?

Vad kostar pendlingen er i direkta kostnader, ex. extra bil, bussbiljett osv.?

Påverkar pendlingen hushållsekonomin, hur?

Påverkar pendlingen sysselsättningsgrad, hur har ni resonerat?

Hur upplever du att din partner påverkas av pendlingen?

Hur upplever du att relationen med barnen påverkas av pendlingen?

Är ert paddlingsavstånd/tid något ni finner inskränkande i er familjesituation?

Hur upplever ni pendlingen i relation till er övergripande livssituation, ex. ger den mer än den tar?
Påverkas ert sociala liv med vänner och bekanta av pendlingen?

Upplever ni att pendlingen har någon påverkan på er fysiska och psykiska hälsa, ex. stress?

Upplever ni att pendlingen har någon fysisk eller psykisk påverkan på andra familjemedlemmar?

Har ni övervägt flytta närmare arbete istället för pendling, eller ser ni andra komplikationer i en sådan lösning?

Finns det några alternativ till pendlingen, positiva och negativa aspekter?

Vad är ett önskvärt pendlingsavstånd för dig, tid/distans?

Vad är ett överkomligt pendlingsavstånd för er och eran familjesituation, och för hur länge finner ni detta möjligt?

**Boendet, berätta om erat boende och boendesituation.**

Hur kommer det sig att ni bor här?

Resonerade ni kring andra alternativ, och hur gick resonemanget?

Trivs ni bra i ert boende?

Vad finner ni viktigt i val av bostad och närmiljö, positivt och negativt, uppfylls de nu i ert nuvarande boende?

Skulle ni vilja förändra er boendesituation, ex. placering eller storlek? Varför?

Finns det ekonomiska aspekter som hindrar er från det boende ni önskar, vilka och ter de sig?

Har ni vänner och familj boendes nära er?

Är det viktigt med vänner och familj relativt nära er, och varför/varför inte?

**Arbetet, berätta om ditt arbete och din arbetssituation, positiva som negativa upplevelser.**

Trivs du på ditt arbete?

Hur kommer det sig att ni arbetar där ni arbetar?

Finns det liknande arbeten på hemorten som skulle vara önskvärt, om/om inte varför?

Skulle ni vilja förändra något med erat arbete och arbetssituation…om inte vad skulle du vilja ändra och har ni möjlighet till att förändra?

Finner ni erat arbete relevant för er bakgrund, ex. utbildning?

Påverkar ekonomiska eller karriärmässiga aspekter val av arbete och arbetets geografiska placering, ex. högre lön, möjligheter till högre befattning osv.?

Berätta om relationen mellan ditt arbete och familje- och boende situation, påverkar de varandra?
Barnen, berätta hur ni ser på barnens situation i erat hushåll i relation till boende, boendemiljö och er arbetssituation.

Trivs barnen i er boendemiljö?

Önskar dom ändra er boende miljö, varför eller varför inte?

Vad tycker barnen om att ni/er partner pendlar?

Upplever era barn att någon i erat hushåll pendlar, ex. uttrycker dom saknad av pendlaren eller anknyter dom mindre till pendlaren?

Känner ni/er partner (pendlande part) att ni får tillräckligt med tid till att delta i era barns utveckling, om inte varför och hur påverkas ni av detta?

Hur löser ni barnomsorgen då ni är på arbetet, kommunal barnomsorg eller sociala nätverk?

Hur ser ni på barnens omsorgstid, hur har ni resonerat?

Får barnen avstå något till förmån till pendlingstiden, ex. aktiviteter, tid med föräldrar eller annat?

Hushållsansvar, berätta om fördelningen av hushållsansvar i familjen.

Hur fördelas hushållets arbetssysslor i erat hem, ex. vem hämtar och lämnar barn, handlar, tvättar, lagar mat osv.?

Har detta resonerats fram mellan er i hushållet (framförallt ni partners), hur kommer det sig att ni har denna arbetsfördelning?

Anser ni att det är en fördelning som passar er och den livssituation ni innehar?

Finner ni fördelningen som jämlik?

Hur upplever din partner denna arbetsfördelning i hushållet?

Vad skulle få er att förändra arbetsfördelningen?

Gör/använder ni er av någon ”utomstående” (ex. familj, vänner eller anställd personal) resurs för att underlätta hushållsarbetet?

Socialt, berätta om eran sociala situation i relation till arbete, pendling och familj.

Hur ser er sociala närvaro ut med vänner, bekanta och fritidsaktiviteter, har ni tillräckligt med tid osv.?

Känner ni ett behov att ändra er sociala situation, och hur skulle ni kunna göra det?

Innebär pendlingen någon inverkan på er sociala tillvaro, positivt/negativt?