The ‘Elastic Household’
– towards a framework for understanding how households with children cope with mobility in everyday life

ABSTRACT The paper provides a framework for engaging with understanding how households with children use mobility in coping with everyday life. The paper argues that much literature on household everyday mobility tends to emphasise on the individual’s relation to others and focus on mobility as a way of empowering (or disenfranchise) the individual in self-realisation. However, the household is more than a bundle of contractual agreements for coordinating and structuring daily life and framing an individualised lifestyle, it is also a collective of household members that prioritise the social and familial togetherness in daily life. Hence, the paper advocates for exploring how dimensions of relationality, affect and care between household members influence the household’s organisation and mobility in daily life. To enable such an investigation and drawing on Actor-Network Theory, the paper casts a multi-relational perspective on the household with children where coping with daily life is accomplished by seeking and maintaining stability in processes of physical dispersion and contraction in the household’s organisation and mobility practices. Based upon this and drawing upon empirical material from a qualitative study of mobility in households with children in Copenhagen, Denmark, the paper develops an analytical and theoretical framework of called Household Elasticity.

KEY WORDS Mobility; Household with Children; Relationality; Affect; Everyday Life

I. Introduction
Much of everyday life and mobility in households with children in contemporary Western society is concerned with fulfilling mandatory activities, such as work and education, as well as activities of maintenance and welfare needs for the household members, such as shopping, leisure activities and socialising with friends and family. The individual household member’s daily practices, comprised of these reoccurring activities combined with transport, modal and route choice, are configured and organised in relation to the welfare of the entire household and its members. For instance, when parents coordinate, communicate and negotiate the bringing and picking up of younger children from kindergarten; or when the child wishes to attend a leisure activity, it has to be organised in relation to parent’s working hours, the activity’s location, the child’s own mobility capability, car availability; or when parents commute together sharing the car; or when the family tries to coordinate a trip to visit grandparents. Much of this work arises because of differential mobility across
intergenerational relations in the household, as children usually are, at least to some degree, dependent on their parents or other adults, in performing their daily practices.

However, in households with children, the relational coordination effort seems particular strong as there is a higher tendency to perform joint activities and mobility, escorting children, family quality time, etc. In the Copenhagen region in Denmark, the share of joint household mobility performed in relation to daily practices containing mandatory activities, such as work and education, increases with the number of household members: two members 36%, three members 45%, four or more members 60% (Thorhauge et al, 2012:13). The tendency also applies in relation practices with non-mandatory activities, i.e. shopping, leisure activities, socialising, etc., where households with three members (two adults and a child) perform 76% of all daily tours from home fully or partially together (Thorhauge et al, 2012:13). While the majority of mandatory activities are solo activities, a much larger share of the non-mandatory activities are carried out by several household members, such as parents shopping with their children or the entire family visiting friends or going to the gym together. Mobility related to escorting younger children to institutions, school, friends or leisure activities is characterised by joint performance and only 14% of children attends day-care and youth clubs on their own, while 51% attend school by themselves (Thorhauge et al. 2012:15). Not surprisingly, the number of escorting trips within a household, increase with the number of household members, i.e. 23% of the four-person households has three or more daily escorting trips (Thorhauge et al. 2012:15). Also, household members tend to engage in joint travel even when participating in different activities, i.e. when parents and children commute together for work and school, which also give rise constraints to the individual household members mobility, i.e. departure time is typically negotiated in relation to the parent’s work but also when the school day begins or the kindergarten opens (Thorhauge et al. 2012:17).

Based on this, it is fair to suggest that successful accomplishment of daily life in households with children is characterised by the capability to handle mobility dependencies, needs and activities of the household members as daily practices in the household are profoundly intertwined, and equally important, to nurse the affectionate and intimate relationship between the household members and make room for co-presence, togetherness and quality time. Nevertheless, there is no immediate and straightforward formula of how to organise daily life in the household with children. Interestingly, across the households in the empirical data gathered in this study, the particular way in which the daily life and mobility are organised and operated differs immensely (see the next section for further information of the study and empirical data). While some families spend most of the time outside work together, others only see each other during breakfast and dinner in the evening. One common sense explanation ties this to the age and number of children, socio economic conditions, location of residence and so on. However, while these aspects are definitely decisive, they cannot entirely account for the household’s organisation, as there are also aspects such as affect and care, experience and embodied knowledge, routines and attitudes impacting the particular organisation of daily life. It is the puzzlement of
understanding this complexity and what instigates the differentiation in household organisation, that fuel the motivation for developing the framework proposed in this paper.

Within everyday mobilities studies there is a growing interest in investigating this household mobility and family mobility in particular. In a Danish academic context there is a substantial amount of recent literature on various aspects of everyday mobilities. Mette Jensen (1997; 2011) has in numerous publications approached an understanding of modal choice, transport behaviour and attitude towards transport in Denmark and linked this to how the car has become an integrated part of our everyday life. Godskesen (2002) has researched everyday routines as cultural truisms that create predictability and safety in everyday mobility of children families in Copenhagen. Næss and Jensen (2005) has conducted research in transport behaviour in relation to urban geography in Copenhagen focusing on understanding rationales for choice of activities and location of residence. Freudendal-Pedersen (2009) has investigated everyday mobility and modal choice understood through the concept of structural stories. Fotel (2007) and Thomsen (2004) have done intensive research on children’s mobilities in Copenhagen. In the other end of the age scale, Fisker (2011) has investigated senior mobilities in Denmark and Canada. And recently, Ole B. Jensen (2013) has research daily mobilities through a novel theoretical model considering every mobility situation as being continuous staged.

However, much of the mobilities literature tends to lean on the influential contemporary understanding of Western late modern society as being characterised by individualisation and reflexivity as argued by i.e. Bauman (2000), Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2001) and Giddens (1991). According to Schultz-Jørgensen, Summer and Dencik (2008) this has dramatically changed the understanding and meaning of the family. Family itself has become individualised, a platform or frame for the individual’s self-realisation in what they call the contract family. To enable space for self-realisation, the family members negotiate and coordinate daily life in relation to each other. Thus, rules are created to structure daily life, and in a sense, the family members regards this as a mutual contract that enable individualisation within the family.

Based on this understanding of society and the family as being individualised, many mobilities studies on everyday life and mobility tends to emphasise on the individual’s relation to others and focus on mobility as a way of empowering (or disenfranchise) the individual in self-realisation and the individual experience of being mobile (Holdsworth, 2013). Consequently, many mobilities studies refrains from surpassing this perspective of individualised relationality. However, the argument pursued in this paper is that family is more than a bundle of contractual agreements for coordinating and structuring daily life and framing an individualised lifestyle, it is also a collective of family members that prioritise the social and familial togetherness in daily life. As Holdsworth writes:

The mobilities literature has, to some extent, replicated the emphasis on individualised relationality. The need for mobilities to facilitate meeting up
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with other people is a key narrative (Urry 2007), though this can emphasise individual connections rather than more social forms. We can imagine an individual moving around meeting other people, yet this does not necessarily capture the vitality and complexity of family mobilities as this vision continues to rely on the assumption of dialogic relationships and, moreover, of equality within networks [...] the challenge from a mobilities perspective is to recognise both the complexity and the less tangible qualities of intimate and family lives.

(Holdsworth, 2013:8)

Holdsworth seeks to re-conceptualise the understanding family and family mobilities, calling for a academic perspective that embraces the collective relationality, vitality and complexity associated with intimate family mobilities.

Following Holdworth’s call and understanding the family’s organisation and mobility in daily life emphasising the collective relationality between household members beyond the scope of individualisation and individualised relationality, this paper sets out to engage with the wide differentiation in the household’s organisation and mobility found in the empirical data. To guide this inquiry, the paper considers the question ‘how do households with children use mobility in coping with everyday life?’ While everyday mobility in Western societies certainly has, what Jensen (2013) calls a dark side of mobilities, the aim of this paper is not so much to elucidate the negative aspects and limitations that everyday mobility holds, such as segregation, exclusion, asymmetric power relations, immobility, etc. Instead the paper seeks to focus on the positive side of mobilities, how mobility is part of the family’s daily practices and organisation and how these mobility practices are vital elements in the coping strategies utilised in everyday life. Through a relational approach, the ambition of the paper is to cultivate the ground for creating a novel conceptualisation of the household, its organisation and mobility.

The remainder of the paper will be structured six sections. Section II is a brief overview of the empirical data used for developing the framework. In Section III, the relational understanding of the household is developed as a theoretical basis. In Section IV, the paper argues for an actor-network theory inspired perspective and the organisation of family life as type of actor-network. Finally, Section V will turn to the development of the household elasticity framework.

II. Children families in Copenhagen - Empirical Data and Methodology

Before venturing on to the development of the analytical framework, the project and the empirical data underpinning it will briefly be outlined. The theory development presented in this paper is part of a work package under the project XXXXX (project name disclosed), XXXXii. The work packages primarily draws on empirical material from qualitative, semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 45 respondents in 11 households with children spread across the Greater Copenhagen area in Denmark. In the sample, maximum variance was sought within socio economic variables, number of children, age of children, education, income and car ownership of the households.
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Secondly, the work package draws on GPS tracking data. Each of the members in 11 households was GPS tracking approximately a week prior to the interviews. The tracking data was then processed and visualised on maps and presented to a part of the households in the sample during the interview sessions to facilitate the discussion. The other part of the sample was instructed to draw maps of their daily transport modes, routes and activities. These were also used to facilitate the discussion during the interviews, but also reflect the household’s daily activity schedule. Finally, the work package draws on a quantitative questionnaire conducted in the XXXXX project with a large population of 760 households (which is also the basis for the findings presented in Thorhauge et al. 2012).

The empirical interview material was analysed through series of open, but systematic coding and categorising followed by condensation across the categories and interpretation (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). This paper only draws on a partial selection of the analysis focusing solely on the organisation and mobility in the households.

III. The Relational Household
To begin arguing for a relational conceptualisation of the household and to illustrate the messy everyday life that many households with children experience, this section will start by presenting an account of one of household interviews conducted in the project. As there is no other hard record of the interview, besides the audio files from the interview itself, it is presented as it is remembered. It begins on a frosty fall evening:

It’s 5 to 4 pm in one of the many suburbs of Copenhagen, I’ve passed through a gate and a small garden in front of a modernistic villa and I’ve just pressed the doorbell at the front door and I’m now waiting for the family to answer... I’ve been invited (by myself) to do a research interview with this family of five at their home about their everyday life and mobility. Still nothing happens, I press again... Silence, no answer, I have an uneasy felling, maybe I have confused the date or address. I consult my notebook but find everything to check out, there’s also a car parked in the driveway, so I knock on the door – the bell might be broken. After a couple of minutes and a few more knocks I suddenly hear someone running down the stairs on the inside. The door opens slightly and a woman face appears in the chink, she looks vaguely confused. As I formally announce myself (not being a salesman), her expression changes, as if realising something, and says ‘Oh my god, was that today!’ This is not the first time this has happened, other of my respondent families has forgotten about our interview appointments. The mother apologises and jokingly says it’s because they are so busy at the moment while she laughs. There might be truth to that, an extraordinary activity in an already carefully interwoven and tightly organised everyday easily runs the risk of being overlooked or forgotten in the chaotic performance of daily life. While finding her phone, she explains the father is just on the steps, he should be here any minute now. He is picking up their youngest from kindergarten while driving from work. She knows his schedule by heart, but calls
him anyway, just to confirm. Minutes and a cup of coffee later, the father arrives and
the interview begins around 15 minutes too late. The younger sister aged around four
joins in. The older brother has a friend over, but will probably join in later, the
parents assure. Some time into the interview, the boys comes down and interrupts as
the friend loudly announces he have talked to his parents and he is to walk home
himself. The boys are experienced in moving about in the neighbourhood themselves,
but nonetheless, the parents want him to recite how he is to get home. The interview
continues with the whole family, except for the oldest teenage son who is attending
soccer practice. We are sitting around their dinner table in the kitchen drinking coffee
and discussing their daily life. The situation could almost be confused with me be
a visiting friend or relative, but I am not, it’s a formal research interview and they
know this of course. Still, they use it as a joint family activity and a chance to spend
time together, for them its also another way of enacting an affective relationality
The mother’s cell phone rings, it’s the oldest son calling to say he is finishing up at soccer
practice. I can only hear mother’s side of the conversation. With instrumental
precision she takes charge of the conversation quickly (not to disturb the interview
too long I guess) extract practical information: when exactly are you finished? how
are you getting home?, does he need them to come and get him? They don’t, he got
his bike, the mother ends the call by saying ‘love you and drive safe’. 20 minutes
later, as the interview is going into its final phase, the oldest son arrives and joins in
for the remainder of the interview. At last they are all gathered, synchronised in time
and space, not exactly the interview I had imagined. Initially, I had planned for all the
family members to be present during my interviews, but after having conducted a few
this seemed a bit naïve. As I’m leaving, saying goodbye to the family, I realise that
although I might not be able to gather the whole family and conduct my nicely
planned and controlled family interview, I was instead given a much greater
opportunity, as I was allowed into the family’s everyday performance, a much more
genuine experience of the messy daily life situation and not just an artificial interview
setup discursively reflecting on it. And even though it just was for a short while, it was
enough to experience first hand the strong and affective relationality between the
household members. I quickly leave their house and find my notebook to scribble
down the thought before leaving for my next family interview appointment at the other
end of Copenhagen.

Interestingly, the household is more than simply a container with individuals
living under the same roof. As illustrated in the interview account above, these
individuals are conjoined both practically and emotionally and are tightly connected
through their enactment of everyday life. The respondents in the interview are not
simply individuals as they are characterised through this reciprocal attachment and
entanglement. To distinguish and signalise their communal affiliation, it is far more
fruitful to term them as household members. And so, what is put into the centre of
attention is the household member’s affiliation towards each other, their
interconnectedness through physical proximity, and their mental and affective bonds
in daily life. Jensen, Sheller & Wind (forthcoming) explores how households with
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children are conjoined through affectivity and mobility in multi-relational assemblages:

One person’s mobility patterns may have a direct impact on another’s capacity to be mobile, so, we must consider mobile subjects as clusters of interacting agents, not simply singular and individuated actors. Even within households, if one member changes his or her means of mobility, for example by deciding to ride a bicycle to work, then the other household members must adjust to this choice. A new mode of travel may necessitate not only new forms of equipment, clothing, and storage space, but also different temporal patterns which must be meshed with those of others in the household.

(Jensen et al, forthcoming)

Following this understanding, it is proposed to conceptualise the household as a relational entity.

A relational conception of the world has already been (and still is) extensively explored and unfolded in academia. Thus, to elucidate the household as a relational accomplishment, the paper draws inspiration from a strong relational academic current, which is also a key tenet in the topographic/spatial turn in the social sciences and humanities(Hastrup, 2011; Soya, 1989). Furthermore, relationality can be associated with lines of thinking stemming from Dewey & Bentley’s (1949) philosophy of trans-action, Massey’s (2005) relational place understanding, Latour’s (2005) theory of associations and Urry & Sheller’s (2006) new mobilities paradigm. Emirbayer writes in a Manifesto for Relational Sociology about the relational approach:

In this point of view, which I shall also label “relational,” the very terms or units involved in a transaction derive their meaning, significance, and identity from the (changing) functional roles they play within that transaction. The latter, seen as a dynamic, unfolding process, becoming the primary unit of analysis rather than the constituent elements themselves.

(Emirbayer, 1997:278)

Hence, the relational gaze dismisses a static view on the world in favour of fleeting, ephemeral and temporary relations. It facilitates a process oriented understanding where the world is dynamic, contingent, and always on the way to becoming. Both Dewey and Latour underline the aspect of process and becoming by conceptualising the world as populated with events (Brinkmann, 2011). Massey uses a relational understanding to emphasise the becoming of place as an on-going process. And, in the new mobilities paradigm by Sheller & Urry (2006), places are conceptualised as relational assemblages being performed:

The new mobility paradigm argues against this ontology of distinct ‘places’ and ‘people’. Rather, there is a complex relationality of places and persons
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_connected through performances [...] Places are about relationships, about the placing of peoples, materials, images, and the systems of difference that they perform. (Sheller and Urry, 2006:213-214)_

Following this line of thinking and drawing on STS, Sheller and Urry continue arguing for mobility systems as relational configured in social assemblages:

_mobile sociotechnical systems should be analysed as hybrids [...] of humans and nonhumans that contingently enable people and materials to move and to hold their shape as they move across various regions, such as the spread of the car system [...]_

(Sheller and Urry, 2006:215)

Returning to the perspective of the household, the relationality becomes central when the household member’s daily life is understood as an accomplishment. Daily life in the household is accomplished with each other and in relation to each other. _With each other_ as multiple everyday practices are physically carried out in unison by several household members. Furthermore, _in relation to each other_ as all of the household’s everyday practices, even the ones carried out in solitude, are coordinated in relation to the other household members and thus cannot avoid affecting each other. Thus, the relational gaze embraces a perspective that engages with the complexity, messiness and contingency that characterises mundane everyday life.

Seen from this theoretical vantage point, everyday life in the household with children is a profound example of household relationality as it involves a deep entanglement of all kind of everyday practices ranging from mandatory activities of commuting to work, bringing and picking children from day-care and school to maintenance activities of grocery shopping, running errands, visiting the doctor or getting a haircut to leisure activities of seeing friends, going to the museum or catching a flick in the cinema or attending to sports activities. These activities are meticulously carried out as they are fitted into the household’s organisation of daily life and assembled into everyday practices relationally performed by the household members.

In the empirical material of this study, daily life in the households as a relational accomplishment is evident in a number of ways. There is a strong interdependency between household members. It is particular apparent in the emotional and practical bond between parents and their children. Especially, households with younger children often deal with great differential mobility in their daily life as the children are unable to care for themselves. In the interview account above, the youngest child is always dependent on one of the parents when attending the kindergarten (and all other out of home activities) and for this household, this has resulted in dual car ownership. Their youngest son is only partially dependent, visiting friends in the neighbourhhood is doable on his own, but he is still dependent on the parents for many other activities. The oldest son is mostly independent, but as illustrated in the account, he is still entangled into the other household members lives. Thus, being a household with children (young and old), and two full time jobs, can
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necessitate a very controlled configuration and orchestration of daily life. The organisation is a coordinated effort of meticulous synchronisation and de-synchronisation of household member.

Also, it is clear in the interview account that the mother is very invested and engaged in the other household member’s daily life, not only because their lives are deeply intertwined, but also because it is essential to have knowledge of the details of their lives when coordination and correction is needed. The need for re-ordering can quickly arise as daily life has a tendency of deviating from the planned. Coping with this is not only a matter of instinctively knowing the other household member’s schedule and possibility for re-ordering, but coping also depends on tools for communication i.e. phoning, emailing or texting. Through continuous communication, the family members negotiate and re-order activities and practices as needed. This on-going process of relational adjustment of daily life is often an intricate part of successfully accomplishing daily life in household with children (yet, the degree to which this happens in households with children of course differs hugely as just-in-time handling of daily life is far from always a sought ideal).

However, the clearest, and possibly also the strongest case of relationality in the household is found in the ways household members show affection towards each other in their configuration of daily practices. This affection is an integrated part of daily life in the household; it is embedded into the daily practices as small gestures, offerings, helpfulness, jokes, sayings, etc. In the interview situation outlined above, the oldest son phones from soccer practice and through inquiry over the phone, the mother quite effectively reviews his situation and does not hesitate to offer to pick him up by car although she is in the middle of an interview. However, the son refuses wanting to bike with his friends even though it was becoming twilight. The mother ends the call, in contrast to her instrumental phone performance, by saying ‘love you…’. Without putting too much emphasis on this statement, as it might be reflexive way of ending a phone conversation with her son, a saying, this illustrates the small ways in which the family’s daily practices are configured in relation to the affectionate relationality. Thus, this kind of relational performance becomes a way of showing care through mobility. This type of mobility care is twofold as it is both the affectionate bonding between parent and child through shared experiences, however mundane, but also the parental caring present in pursuing and ensuring safety for their child. Also, Finch (2007) notes the family’s affectionate relationality is not only acknowledged, but also needs to be continuously reaffirmed or renewed in practice.

Having established a relational notion of the household, I will in the following utilise this image as a theoretical backdrop for arguing for the possibility and usefulness of conceptualising everyday family life as a heterogeneous assemblage or network constantly fluctuating between states of in-stability and stability.

IV. Daily Life as an Actor-Network

Through the interview account, the wish is to establish a conceptualisation of everyday life in the family understood as a relational accomplishment. This, however, is not something unfamiliar for the family members, and as the empirical material
also illustrates, the family members themselves are aware of the strong relationality and are able to articulate how it is actualised and how it structures their daily life in different ways. One of the strong figures in this actualisation is the way the relationality between family members impacts their organisation of daily life. It is characterised by fluctuation between states of dispersion, physically spreading of activities and family members, and states of contraction, togetherness and physically co-presence. Interestingly, on a side note, Callon and Law underline the relational aspect in the term *co-presence*, as they state that ‘[...] co-presence is both a location and a relation’ (2004:9). The family members perform many daily activities apart from each other, such as work, shopping, etc., not merely for sake of individual gain, but also for the welfare of the entire family. However, activities of togetherness are also a vital part of daily life in the family where activities such as dining together in the morning and evening, attending to leisure activities together, moving together to and from other activities and even conducting more extraordinary common family activities together, such as going on holiday or doing a family interview are prioritised. This process of physically dispersion and togetherness of family members is facilitated by the daily mobility. Thus, daily mobility, activities and the organisation of the family are strongly tied together in everyday life. Elliott & Urry (2010) understands this as a type of *assemblage*:

*Understanding how mobile lives and mobility systems interweave and dislocate is crucial to grasping, as well as confronting, the politics of movement – of people, goods, information and ideas – in the contemporary age. Such interweaving and dislocation of mobile lives and mobility systems, we have argued, operate as assemblages that move both subjects and objects around.* (Elliott and Urry, 2010:155)

These mobility systems of everyday life, such as the auto-mobility system, are deeply rooted in our lives, enabling us (and sometimes disabling us) to carry out the activities that daily life is comprised of. Fisker (2011) explores, through the perspective of seniors, the strong dependency of mobility systems, especially how the car is utilised, through what he terms *mobility action chains*, to connect to basic needs in daily life. Connecting to the mandatory and maintenance activities in daily life is obligatory as we have to move to work, buy groceries, go to school, run errands, visit friends and family, etc. Furthermore, within the household with children, much mobility is generated on the account of intimacy and affectionate relationality between the household members. Parents brings and picks up their kids from day-care, conducts play dates, learns their kids to bike, drives the soccer team to matches, goes on Sunday drive to get ice crème, picks up teenagers from a night in the town, etc. Both children and parents are dependent on each other in performing their daily mobility. As also illustrated in the statistics in the introduction, family members move together in temporal configurations of organised synchronisation in what Jensen (2013) terms as *mobile with constellations*. Hence, everyday mobility in the family is closely related to the strong relationality between family members. The two are intertwined.
The relationality is reproduced through mobility and mobility is reproduced through relationality.

Daily life in the family is accomplished through the physical doings, movement, synchronisation of family members, coordination and performance of activities. However, to base the conceptualisation of the organisation of the household’s daily life alone on this seems to be a crude simplification and infertile reduction for understanding how daily life is performed and accomplished. Hence, following the notion of generalised symmetry proposed in actor-network theory (Callon, 1986; Latour, 2005) the paper proposes the organisation of the household is to be understood as a form of collective or network comprised of diverse and heterogeneous entities in quasi-stable relational configurations. This approach is similar to Fisker’s idea of mobility action chains connecting to needs, but emphasises multi-relationality between the constituting elements rather than the serial chain of entities. Such a framework has sensitivity towards a wide array of diverse entities, including human actors and their sayings and expressions (i.e. talking together, planning, negotiating etc.), their competencies (i.e. driving, way finding, handling rush hour traffic, etc.), but also non-human entities⁷. This opens the conceptualisation up for inclusion of a wide range of varying materiality such as things like cars and phones, systems like ticket machines and road sign, and places like highways and the train stations. Hence, the idea is to formulate a theoretical framework with a broad analytical sensitivity and the capability to render visible a diverse and nuanced understanding of the organisation of daily life and mobility in the household.

Such an analytical tool elucidates how the household is capable of coping with the everyday life situation by assembling heterogeneous entities into the network in search of maintaining stability in the configurations. The strong relationality between the household members both enables them to accomplish a complex daily life through the helping of each other, drawing on each other’s capacities and competencies by enrolling each other into the assemblage, forming alliances that create stability across the network. However, as the household’s life becomes deeply entangled and interdependent, it also becomes vulnerable as networks of dependency works both ways and therefore changes, such as a flat tire or a sick child, can have cascading effects rippling through the whole network eventually causing massive and destructive de-stabilisation, leading to a breakdown in the order of daily life. As discussed, the household’s daily life as a relational accomplishment is always on the path of becoming, never starting or ending, but on going. In this process perspective of the household, the network is always in a state of flux, constantly being de-stabilised and re-stabilised. Translation and maintenance of these complex networks, counteracting processes of de-stabilisation, requires labour and family members continuously work to prevent de-stabilisation of daily life by re-configuring the network, breaking and formulating new alliances. Similar to Boden and Molotch’s (1994) idea of compulsion to proximity, in this ANT inspired theoretical framework of the household, the main driving force can be understood as a compulsion to stability.

To give an example, in the account of the family interview, me knocking on the family’s door was a threat to the stability of the family’s daily life organisation; it
caused at first a minor de-stabilisation. Complete de-stabilisation and breakdown in daily life is very rare as the household members are seasoned experts in avoiding such. When realising the de-stabilising threat, me not being a salesman the mother could turn away but in fact having a prior engaged appointment, she quickly re-stabilised the situation by inducing a series of reflexive interventions: discursively, through apologies and small talk she prevented me from causing problems, she enrolled a phone into the situation calling father, reassuring both me and herself things where on the right track, she prepared coffee to ensure the setting around the interview and social conventions of having guests where uncompromised, and finally, she sat in motion a process of physically synchronising the family members (as initially was requested by me prior to the interview), ensuring the daughter was being picked up, then sending the son’s friend safely home, and finally, confirming the oldest son would come home from soccer practice. When the household is confronted with such an unfamiliar de-stabilisation, i.e. me showing up, the household members have to rely on both intuition and experiment to cope. However, household members often have a series of expertly devised and previously tested, strategies and failsafe backups which are utilised to counteract more common de-stabilisation situations (such as being stuck in traffic jams, having a flat tire on the bike, a delay in a meeting, etc.).

De-stabilisation in the household with children is often caused by the differential competencies and mobility assigned to the household members. Because of this uneven distributed mobility capacity, younger children have a strong dependency on others, which accentuate the aspect of the fragility in the relational household and potential vulnerability for de-stabilisation of daily life in the household with children. The mother, from the family in the interview, notes that external events, such as an unexpected work meeting can have a strong de-stabilising effect for daily life as it affects the scheduling of picking up children. As revealed elsewhere in the interview, all three of the children often attends leisure activities after school, and if the parents for some reason are late to pick up the children, they have to re-order the entire configuration of the organisation of the involved activities and mobility to avoid de-stabilisation. This is mainly done by communicating on the move and negotiating details of re-ordering. For many households, this familiar type of de-stabilisation is not uncommon, they anticipate it, live with it and are thus experienced in handling it. Owning two cars is part of being one step ahead of de-stabilisation. Through knowledge and experience of handling daily life, the family members are often able to forecast potential de-stabilising situations and act pre-emptively or at least be prepared. The way the mother handles the situation in the interview account illustrates a kind of fluid planning that acknowledges that potential de-stabilisation is always looming. Therefore, family members often assume a stance where they are able to stretch and manipulate the composition and configuration of the family’s everyday practices and organisation to cope with the contingent and changing situations in an effort to re-stabilise the household’s network of daily life.

V. Synthesising Household Elasticity
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The 11 households studied in this project all includes children and are located in the greater Copenhagen area. As mentioned in the introduction, through the investigation of their daily life and mobility, an interesting, yet puzzling, differentiation is noticeable across the households as their organisation of daily life is very different. Some of the households clearly have a more dispersed organisation in their daily life where the household members throughout a majority of day life are attending to separate activities and only a few times of the day co-present in different constellations. Contrasting this, other of the households have an opposite way of organising daily life, prioritising the social, where most time outside mandatory activities, such as work and school, is spend together, seldom attending separate activities. Even if the socio-economic variables and composition of the household are taken into consideration, this differentiation in the household’s organisation persists vi.

Aimed at considering this phenomenon and based on the theoretical framework of the relational household and daily life as a actor-network presented so far, the paper will now turn to synthesise the concept of household elasticity vii. Finding a suitable metaphor accompanying this tool or concept is first of all relying on its ability to capture and mimic the actual phenomenon found in the empirical material. A common sense notion of elasticity covers this, as it entertains an understanding of the household as something that can be stretched out, deform to a certain extend without breaking. The etymology of the word elasticity is coined as a scientific term describing gases in the 1650s from the Greek elastos meaning to be ductile or flexible (Etymology Dictionary, 2013). The Oxford Dictionaries (2013) serves this contemporary definition of elasticity:

- **noun**
  
  1. the ability of an object or material to resume its normal shape after being stretched or compressed; stretchiness
  
  2. the ability of something to change and adapt; adaptability

Taking point of departure in both of the two definitions, the household elasticity concept is constructed as an analytical perspective of the household capable of engaging with both what could be understood as the stretchiness as well as the adaptability of the household’s organisation of daily life. In the following, the aspect of stretchiness and adaptability will be explored separately and concluded by attempting a synthesis of the two in one coherent conceptual framework viii.

Household elasticity as stretchiness: As discussed earlier, the organisation of family life can be understood as fluctuating between states of fragmentation and togetherness. With the metaphor of elasticity, the household can be understood as being stretched out, as activities are geographically dispersed and family members are physically spending time away from each other. Besides the activities related to work life, being a household with children often entail lots of dispersed activities for all household members. However, as household members conduct activities in co-presence, i.e. family dinner, leisure activities, commuting together, watching
television in the evening, etc., the household can also be understood as contracting back in on itself, prioritising the sociality and togetherness in the household. The notion of stretchiness in the elasticity concept allows for the process of stretching and contraction but only to a certain degree, at some point if the household is being overly stretched, it will break down as a functioning household. It is the affectionate relationality between the household members and their sense of being a family or a household that drives this rhythmic process of stretching and contraction and sets the boundaries of stretching.

Household elasticity as adaptability: While the first definition of stretchiness describes a central feature or attribute in the household, the second definition of adaptability addresses another aspect characterising the household, namely its ability to conform and cope with de-stabilisation in daily life. Although it differs to what degree this is possible in a particular household, the household can be understood to be elastic in another way than stretching, as it is flexible and can bend or conform to adapt to its surroundings. This adaptation is actualised in the ability to micro manage everyday mobility practices and the organisation of daily life through processes of planning, coordination, optimisation and re-ordering. As discussed in the prior section, this is a natural part of the performance of daily life and the household members continuously construct and re-configure mobility practices to consolidate and stabilise the organisation of their daily life.

Synthesising household elasticity: The household elasticity concept does not understand these two aspects of elasticity as separate from each other but closely related. For merely analytical reasons and the sake of presentation, household elasticity is being treated as being comprised of two separate elements. However, the household’s ability to stretch and contract in the organisation and performance of daily life to successfully connect to needs and carry out activities can be considered an expression of adaptability. And vice versa, as the family adapts to contingent and unexpected situations in daily life, it can be understood as stretching and bending by re-configuring and re-ordering daily practices and the organisation of daily life. Hence, the framework inquiries into uncovering and understanding the complex relational chains of cascading effects changes in either the stretchiness or adaptability can initiate. The daily movement of a particular household can be understood as specific patterns of movement. Closely related to, and in a way mirroring or playing out these patterns, are the household’s organisation of everyday life and its mobility practices. Changes in the movement, i.e. because of a relocation of work or a shift from kindergarten to school, surely have implications and repercussion for other mobility practices and organisation of the household. And in reverse, changes in the household’s mobility practices, i.e. buying a car or shifting a commute from train to bike, also introduce shifts in the movement. It is this exploration of the reciprocal relationship that is the core of using household elasticity as a tool for investigating the household’s organisation and mobility practices in daily life as a function of coping with de-stabilisations and accomplishing daily life.

Based on the dimensions of stretchiness and adaptability, a tentative definition is proposed:
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The household elasticity is defined as a qualitative measure of the household’s ability to cope with de-stabilisation processes in the organisation of daily life. This measure is based upon the household’s geographical and time-wise dispersion of activities, configuration of mobility practices and strategies for organisation of daily life.

The term household in the definition signifies all of the household member’s combined effort and ability to cope with the accomplishment of daily life. Hence, focusing on an individual household member might reveal a very high elasticity, i.e. being a business man/woman travelling a lot. But as the household elasticity is a collective concept, all household members and their combined elasticity are considered, and thus the elasticity is for example greatly reduced if the household includes young children. Instead of conceptualising the household elasticity as a simple binary feature, either there or not, it is understood as a measure, a point on a scale, lying somewhere in between an extreme elasticity and a extreme rigidity or stiffness. Nonetheless, a household always has a certain level of elasticity, albeit how low it might be. Immobile babies, disabilities, breakdown of a car, longer working hours, loss of a driver’s license, financial instability and so on impairs the household’s adaptability and stretchiness and might result in a lowered elasticity, but it will never reach complete rigidity. The household always have strategies or ways in which it is able to perform its daily mobility in relation to mandatory activities and tasks of maintenance necessary to fulfil basic needs. If the household loses its elasticity it will not be able to perform as a household and will most likely result in a complete breakdown (unless outside help is given). Hence, elasticity is to be understood as an immanent and fundamental property characterising the household and its organisation in everyday life.

It is important to notice that household elasticity is differentiated from other theoretical concepts dealing with mobility capacity. It distinguishes itself from conceptualisations like mobility resources (Næss and Jensen, 2005), mobility capital (Urry, 2007; Fotel, 2007) and motility (Kaufmann, 2002; Kaufmann et al, 2004) by investigating the household’s immediate and actualised mobility and organisation in daily life. Thus, household elasticity is not a measure of the capacity to be mobile, whether it is measured in resources, capital or potentiality, but it is a measure of the actual and performed mobility. The attention for the inquiry guided by the household elasticity concept is the actual state of movement, its actual movement space, the household’s ability to cope in everyday life and how this is actualised and enacted in specific mobility practices and organisations of daily life.

Hence, the scope of household elasticity framework is twofold. It considers both what the household’s actual doings are, their extent and layout in mappings of daily mobility and activities, but also, how the household is in fact accomplishing these doings in daily life. The latter insists on further inquiry into the inner workings of elasticity, how the household members assemble their everyday mobility practices as important stabilising elements in the organisation of their daily life, and how the
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household members micro manage these mobility practices through coordination, correction and optimisation, re-configuration and re-ordering, and finally, how the household members accomplish this management with each other and in relation to each other. It is through these perspectives, the household elasticity is proposed as an analytical tool for engaging with the household’s mobility and organisation, and in doing so, consequently, also inquiring into how the household is coping with daily life through mobility.

VI. Concluding remarks
In this paper, a new analytical and theoretical framework has been proposed based on a relational perspective and an actor-network inspired analytical approach to the household’s organisation and mobility in everyday life. The ambitions of such a framework is to enable a novel investigating of the household’s organisation and mobility practices in everyday life. By using a relational perspective as a theoretical basis, the concept of household elasticity is tentatively developed to address how the household handles the stabilisation processes by constructing and performing the organisation and mobility practices of everyday life. It should be noted the construction and development of this framework should be perceived as neither concluded nor finalised. Thus, to move forward, there is urgency for testing or applying this analytical framework. Embracing a pragmatist stance, theory construction holds no the greater purpose in itself, theory should be folded back into the world, applied and put to use. Consequently, this is exactly the purpose of the work presented here. The only way to test and extend the development of the theoretical concepts is by verifying its usefulness and usability as analytical tools.

Hence, the next step is to apply the concept of household elasticity in an analysis of the empirical data from the 11 households in the XXXXX project. By using this analytical framework, comprised of the relational household understanding and the household elasticity concept, the study is better suited for investigating the main research question posed in the introduction of how do families with children use mobility in coping with everyday life. In turn, such an inquiry might potentially also add to explaining the puzzling differentiation in household organisation found across the empirical material as investigating how households cope with everyday life is inextricably linked with inquiring into the extent and daily enactments of differential organisations and mobility.

Finally it should be mentioned, the analytical tool proposed here is not intended to supersede the existing academic theorisation and general literature on everyday mobilities, far from it. Rather it is to engage with everyday family mobilities from a slightly different perspective and hopefully facilitate production of new knowledge. Following the work of Holdsworth (2012), this is a call for academic attention to the intimate, affectionate and caring dimensions and multi-relationality that exists in household and family mobilities to supplement the dominating individualised relationalitiy present in much existing mobilities literature. Thus, the analytical framework of household elasticity presented is suggesting a small step in pointing out a new direction for investigating everyday household mobilities.
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Notes

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iv For more on mobility care see Fotel (2007).

v The conceptualisation of practice here draws on Reckwitz (2002) and Schatzki (2012).

vi It is difficult to sample completely comparable households, no two household are completely alike, but nevertheless, the household in this sample share a great deal of common aspects, making a comparison less problematic.

vii The household elasticity concept should not be confused with the term ’elasticity’ used in transport geography and economic theory (Economics the degree to which a demand or supply is sensitive to changes in price or income), but instead draws on the common sense understanding of the term.

viii The scope of this paper is the actual performance and organisation of corporal mobility in the household. However, as many other studies also show, the intertwinement of communicative and virtual mobility into corporal mobility and everyday life is profound (see for example (Larsen et al, 2006).

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