

# **Reconfiguring Community Services in a Mobility-Oriented City Evidence from Beijing**

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## **Abstract**

**Job-housing separation and everyday mobility have become distinguishing characteristics of metropolitanization and permanent large-scale spatial restructuring of cities that is increasingly problematic to models of community service based on territory. This paper analyzes the effects of mobility-based social organization on the way the residents utilize community services and enhances structural discrepancy of the services. Through the particular example of Beijing, the study uses the trajectory-directed social network approach to study and examine the interrelationship among job-housing separation, commutative time, and the spatial structure of community-based social work. Based on secondary data, the paper shows that social relations among residents are becoming structured around rising comings and goings of everyday mobility instead of residential communities, which undermines informal supports and generates disparities in access to services especially to working-age commuters. The results also indicate that transit-oriented spaces serve as strategically relevant interfaces between extremely mobile populations, and skewed service dispensal systems. This reimagination of the process of community service delivery based on a mobility-based perspective offers the field of social work and city services a conceptual tool to evolve into a highly mobile context based on this community service framework.**

## **Keywords**

**Job-housing Separation; Urban Mobility; Community-Based Social Work; Trajectory-Based Social Networks; Transit-oriented Service Interfaces.**

## **1. Introduction**

As urbanization has gathered pace, and urban spatial restructuring on the large scale has been experienced, there is an increasing number of people in a city travelling daily, and job-housing segregation has become a normal aspect of urban life [1]. The increased housing prices, the functional zoning, and the unequal allocation of the working places in mega-cities like Beijing have led to the increase of its commuting distance and the more complicated everyday mobility patterns. These transformations are altering the pattern of living of residents and accessibility to the resources, which is creating new challenges to the urban governance and the delivery of community based public services [2]. The conventional model of social work and public service is mostly based on assumptions of residential stability and local community contact, and service design and provision focused on residential communities that are geographically confined. Nevertheless, in high mobility situations and job-housing distance, social relationship existing among residents, their support systems, and needs of services tend to move outside the residential regions, to the workplace, commuting places as well as through the Internet. Such spatial anomaly decreases service provision effectiveness of such place-based services and makes it difficult to determine service needs and target populations.

Against this backdrop, this study examines the structural mismatch between residents' daily mobility trajectories and existing community service organization models. Adopting a social network perspective and using Beijing as a case study, the research integrates analysis of job-housing separation patterns with residents' everyday mobility experiences to explore the formation of cross-spatial social connections and their relationship with community services. The study seeks to illustrate how mobility-driven social networks reshape residents' engagement with community services and to provide insights for adapting community social work and public service delivery in highly mobile urban environments.

## **2. Urban Job-Housing Separation and Mobility-Based Social Relations in Beijing**

The urban job-housing structure of Beijing is marked by a pronounced spatial separation between residential areas and major employment centers, resulting in increasingly long and complex daily commuting patterns [3]. Over the past decades, rapidly rising housing prices in central districts, combined with the concentration and relocation of high-quality job opportunities in inner-city cores and major business districts, have progressively pushed a large proportion of the working population toward peripheral residential zones. As a result, extensive commuter-oriented neighborhoods have emerged in the urban fringe, where residential development has far outpaced local employment provision. This spatial mismatch between places of residence and work has fundamentally reshaped everyday mobility in Beijing [3]. For many residents, daily routines now involve cross-district or even cross-regional commutes, often requiring multiple modes of transportation and substantial time investment. Commuting has thus become not merely a functional necessity but a defining feature of urban life, structuring individuals' temporal rhythms, energy allocation, and opportunities for social interaction.

Beyond reshaping mobility patterns, this spatial configuration has profound implications for how social relations are formed and sustained. Although people live in high densities, the absence of time to maintain physical contact with the neighborhood due to long working hours limits the possibilities of sustained interaction with neighborhoods. The everyday social interactions are becoming more and more common at work places, on the roads to work, and via online communications, as opposed to local communities with a geographical range. Social networks under such circumstance are made on schedules, mobility patterns, and objectivity necessities as opposed to the durable residential nearness. This holds because the social relationship of the residents is slowly evolving out of residential community location to anchored in everyday mobility paths [4]. Social networks are built and sustained by creating incessant motion within the urban space, This shift marks a transition from place-based communities to trajectory-formed social networks, in which represents a trajectory-formed pattern of social network. This change upsets traditional beliefs that community solidarity and access to services are based mainly in residential regions and highlights the increasing significance of mobility in organizing the social life of residents of highly urbanized areas. This holds because the social relationship of the residents is slowly evolving out of residential community location to anchored in everyday mobility paths. Social networks are built and sustained by creating incessant motion within the urban space, This shift marks a transition from place-based communities to trajectory-formed social networks, in which represents a trajectory-formed pattern of social network. This change upsets traditional beliefs that community solidarity and access to services are based mainly in residential regions and highlights the increasing significance of mobility in organizing the social life of residents of highly urbanized areas.

### **3. Service Mismatch in Community-based Social Work**

#### **3.1. Spatial and Institutional Assumptions of Community-based Social Work**

Community based social work and community service systems are also based largely on a residentially-grounded spatial governance logic. Their institutional structure presupposes informally the activities of residents, their social relations, involvement in political life on the local level on the one hand, they are situated primarily in their neighborhoods where they live. In this framework, the society is theorized as the basic unit of social support, delivery of public services, and formation of social capital, and social work interventions as spatially confined within the administrative communities. In an urban setting, with relatively stable populations and low mobility on a daily basis, such a strategy was historically quite acceptable. Nevertheless, in mega cities like Beijing, the rapid urban growth and functional specialization, has been a major challenge to these premises. The job-housing distance has become a heightened and enduring tendency the housing market, effective functional zoning, and the concentration of the job market in central districts and industrial parks providing this pattern. Although the community based social work is still functioning on the same basis of operation of the communities within the same residential border designation, the worlds being lived by the residents continue to grow very far beyond the neighborhoods. This separation has created a continued spatial dislocation between the spatial organization of community services and the lived urban paths of residents.

Beijing is a typical picture of a city with a lack of balance between residence and work and long-distance commuting. The average one-way commute duration to the residents in the central urban region of Beijing between 2021 annual reports on Commuting Characteristics is approximately 51 minutes with an average of 13.3 kilometers being the average commute distance. Approximately 52 percent of commuters travel less than 45 minutes down to their destinations and the percentage of commuters that travel greater than 45 minutes is a high percentage of office workers in a long distance commute state [5]. This fact implies that the inhabitants of the big residential areas like Huilongguan, Tiantongyuan and Tongzhou have to travel inside districts or even further to workplaces located not far enough in terms of distance like Zhongguancun, Financial Street, and the Central Business District where there are jobs. Low- and middle-income families and young professionals are prone to spending a lot longer time commuting to work every day than one hour [6]. Commute time is now the fashion and this highly consumes the disposable time of residents as well as impacting their living standards. In such a space arrangement, the relationship between the daily life rhythm of residents and the spatiotemporal organization of social work services of the community is deteriorating. The community services are primarily offered at specific times of days during weekdays and hence, the long-distance commuters cannot engage and access service resources in a timely manner. Even though all residents of the community are supposedly permitted to use these services, the service rate revealed around the services exhibits a high level of imbalance. Thus, the community social work is primarily focused on the retired, the unemployed, or those, who have lived in the neighborhood long enough, and the working population taking up long commuting to work on a disconnect form of working is usually left unattended.

#### **3.2. From Community Embeddedness to Trajectory-Based Social Relations**

In addition to limiting the possibility of residents to engage in community services, the geographic division between employment and places of residence has radically transformed the organizational form and generativity processes of urban social relations. The mechanisms of social interaction in such megalopolis as Beijing are slowly transforming into a residentially based and community-incorporated mode to a trajectory based or networked

mode based on daily mobility [2]. Social bonds and sustenance are no longer relying on the consistent neighborhood contact, but are progressively occurring in commuting pathways as well as in work places, in socially diverse online social environments and in the urban spaces that are focused on particular functional needs. Through this, social relations are increasingly occurring beyond residential areas, and in so doing, destabilize local communities as the key to the social lives of residents. Great population density in mass residential groups does not necessarily reflect the presence of strong ties within neighborhood or high community cohesiveness. Though the spatial proximity is high, chances of interacting with a neighbor, coming together in community activities and experiencing emotional attachment to the place of residence is limited due to high differentiations in day to day schedules, less time spent in the neighborhood and daily outward orientation of activities. In these circumstances, informal support systems which the community-based social work previously depended on, neighborly mutual aid, social relations due to acquaintances, and a system of trusts established through prolonged living together, become more and more challenging to maintain.

Consequently, the social work interventions of the community level tend to have an unstable social framework, the mobilization abilities of the social sphere are restricted, and the area of their coverage is limited. Much as the community services may be institutionally structured to accommodate the entire population, the real beneficiaries are those with comparatively flexible time and those with more locally situated areas of activity, like retirees, jobless people, or residents who are not mobile. Contrastingly, the working population whose lives are organized on the basis of cross-district mobility owing to job-housing separation holds a more peripheral place both in systems of social relations as well as in systems of service provision. The end-results of this structure marginalization are the weakening of the overall effectiveness, and social impact of community-based social work.

## **4. Transit-Oriented Spaces and the Reconfiguration of Community Service Delivery**

### **4.1. Transit Nodes as Stable Anchors within Mobility Trajectories**

Transit systems by rail forms part of regular and recurrent spaces within the daily mobility flows of residents of megacities located in areas of high mobility like Communities and even cities, such as Beijing. Metro stations and interchange hubs do not just constitute spaces of transgression but ordinary spaces of transit situated on the day-to-day schedule [7]. These transit nodes are a more continuous experience at work than residential neighborhoods when many working-age residents of the area base their social lives on long-distance commuting and/or cross-district commuting. In the trajectory-oriented view, transit-oriented spaces are important not because of long-term co-presence but because of repetition and regularity in time. Whereas residential neighborhoods assume longevity in terms of in-situ interactions, transit nodes bring their life patterns so much closer to mobility life, which is predicated upon commuter rhythms. Being convergent nodes in hitherto diffused urban practices, transit-oriented spaces hold a special structural place in the organization of daily social life.

### **4.2. Transit-Oriented Spaces as Interfaces for Community Service Engagement**

Recognizing the structural role of transit-oriented spaces enables a reconceptualization of how community services may engage highly mobile populations. Instead of being alternative locations of holistic social work intervention, transit systems can be viewed as the points of contact that bridge the movements of everyday mobility of residents and discontinuous service provision systems. Transit-oriented spaces provide a chance to access services of low threshold, which is associated with the day-to-day scenarios of residents. These might be information disseminations during service, referrals, and self-mediated access gate ways that

do not necessitate the extension of spatial devotion [8]. By crossing the daily paths of the residents and not affecting the residential locations of people, these interfaces may expand the distribution of community services across administrative lines and heterogeneous communities without the detriment of residential communities. Notably, this strategy is not meant to substitute community-ship social work but to supplement the social work by matching the service mobilization with the spatial rationality of mobility-based urban living. Treating transit systems as interfaces thereby offers a viable way of modifying the way the community can deliver its services to cities in which the daily social organization is progressively organized across movement instead of place.

## **5. Policy Implications: Enhancing the Responsiveness of Community Services to Mobile Populations**

The results of the presented study show a strong need to change the orientation of policy frameworks regarding urban community services and social work based on the realities of highly mobile urban populations. Urban governance needs to move on to the view that mobility and job-housing disconnection are transitional interruptions, instead of acknowledging that these factors are structural features of modern megacities. This change has immediate implications over the design, target and evaluation of community services.

To begin with, policy makers must stop relying solely on the territorial based models of services. Although residential neighborhoods are still the key platforms of intervention, access to services of mobile populations is less determined by residential access compared to temporal compatibility and coincidence with day-to-day mobility patterns. Policy systems in which specific places and regular work hours are preferred tend to systematically eliminate working-age commuters, especially those with long and rigid commuting patterns.

Second, a greater flexibility of service arrangements and cross-boundaries is necessary in increasing service responsiveness. This incorporates aiding mobile, digital, and hybrid modes of social work practice that are not limited by residential neighborhoods, like inter-community support systems, work-related provision, and services through platforms. These strategies facilitate services to touch on people in various places along their daily paths instead of basing the intervention at the place of living.

Lastly, there is a trajectory-informed policy lens that argues that mobility-related data needs to be incorporated into the service governance. Data about commuting, use of time as well as mobility on daily basis can guide decision making about service location, timing as well as the allocation of resources. On the one hand, it is possible to improve the capacity of policy instruments and community services to meet the social risks and support needs that the highly mobile urban setting generates by aligning their policy instruments with the lived spatial practices of the residents in the urban space.

## **6. Conclusion**

This paper explored the spatial incompatibility of the daily movement patterns of residents and the topographically located community service patterns in cities at high levels of urbanization as an example of Beijing. Combining the discussion of job-housing separation, commuting, and social network structure, the study demonstrates that sustained mobility has come to represent a characteristic of city living. Since everyday life and everyday social interactions are becoming more and more geographically non-residential, traditional forms of community-based social work which much relied on residential security is inherently restricted on its ability to reach mobile populations. Social relations in the city are beginning to experience a transformation between place-based community embeddedness into

trajectory-based and networked forms of organization, when informal support networks are weakening and an inequitable access of services, especially over working-age commuters who have less flexibility in terms of time.

In order to solve this imbalance, the analysis develops a trajectory-based viewpoint and classifies transit-stimulated spaces as tactically important mediators in-between highly mobile people and reminiscent service structures. Instead of being a substitute to the residential communities, transit systems present a supplementary point of node in line with the daily mobility path of the residents, and this offers an expedient route where community service delivery can amend mobility-driven urban settings.

The primary weakness of the present study is that it is more of a conceptual one, which relies on the secondary data and does not rely on the more detailed empirical evidence concerning the personal mobility patterns and services utilization. Future studies can empirically study mobility-sensitive service delivery with mobility data, time-use surveys, or service participation record and make comparative study of cities with disparate transit infrastructures to further evaluate the efficacy and equity connotation of transit-oriented service interfaces.

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