

Research on Population Mobility under the Background of New Urbanization

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Abstract

The floating population plays a vital role in advancing the process of new urbanization. The imbalance in spatial resource distribution between urban and rural areas and the disparities in income among regions are key reasons for population mobility. Additionally, once people have migrated into urban spaces, several problems have arisen, such as the lag in urbanization of the agricultural transferred population, significant obstacles in the external system and mechanism of population mobility; limited rights of the floating population in urban spatial development, lack of spatial justice; unequal occupation of spatial resources, and differentiation in social space. The process of new urbanization must follow the guidance of Marxist urban thought, strengthening spatial justice, orderly promoting the urbanization of the agricultural transferred population; eliminating the spatial capitalization, optimizing urban spatial resource allocation; scientifically handling urban-rural spatial relations, promoting integrated urban-rural development, thereby achieving further advancement in new urbanization.

Key words: New urbanization; Population mobility; Spatial justice

1. Why does the population move?

1.1 The imbalance in spatial resource distribution leads to cross-regional population migration.

In urbanization, the fundamental reason for population mobility is the change in human needs and the pursuit of maximizing welfare. Urbanization is a means to achieve this end, reflecting the essential role of human resources as a factor of production in economic and social development. When an individual finds that the resources in the existing spatial environment cannot satisfy their needs, it will result in population movement.

The unreasonable allocation of urban and rural resources, imbalanced urban and rural development, and the imbalance in spatial resource distribution have led to cross-regional population migration. The strategy of new urbanization must change this pattern of floating population distribution, and the first step is to change the distribution of opportunities and resources. Within a large country, the free flow of population is not only a condition that favors improving resource allocation efficiency but also a basic condition for fully and equally enjoying the fruits of national development.

1.2 The gap in income between regions is the fundamental driving force for population mobility.

If the population can move freely, population agglomeration would synchronize with economic activity agglomeration. Therefore, as long as there is a significant enough real income gap between regions, the population would move from low-income areas to high-income areas, thereby narrowing the income disparities between regions. However, many areas suffer from severe inter-regional market segmentation, with local governments aiming to maximize local economic growth, investment attraction, and tax revenue, and residents of more developed areas being unwilling to accept outsiders as permanent residents.

Consequently, inter-regional population mobility is hindered by obstacles such as household registration, land, and public services, leading to a lag in population agglomeration compared to economic agglomeration. When population mobility is restricted while economic agglomeration continues to occur, the inter-regional income gap will widen. Only when the actual income disparity between urban and rural areas and different regions narrows to zero will the population size in different places stabilize, and a true balance between urban and rural areas and regions can be achieved.

2. Current Situation and Existing Problems of Population Mobility

3. 2.1 Difficulties in the spatial integration of agricultural migrant population and significant obstacles in the external system and mechanism of population mobility.

4. In recent years, a large number of "migrant workers" who move but do not settle between urban and rural areas have appeared in the process of population mobility. This means that many migrant workers have not yet achieved "urbanization" and still remain in a "semi-urbanized" state. The degree of land urbanization does not match the degree of population urbanization. There are significant differences between the urbanization rates of the permanent population and the registered population, leading to many cities exhibiting typical "incomplete urbanization" and "semi-urbanization" states. This refers to an incomplete transformation process of rural population into urban population. Migrant workers in the city, residents transformed locally in the suburbs, and a large number of farmers in expanded urban areas, although residing in urban areas and counted as urban residents, are only "residents" in name. They do not enjoy equal treatment with urban residents in labor remuneration, children's education, social security, housing, etc. Though living and working in the city, they find it difficult to truly integrate into urban society and enjoy basic public services like education, employment, healthcare, pensions, and affordable housing. Many external systemic and mechanical barriers such as cost barriers, institutional barriers, capability barriers, cultural barriers, social exclusion, and carrying capacity constraints hinder the urbanization process of the large number of migrating agricultural population.

5. 2.2 Migrant population's urban spatial development rights restricted.

6. Marx stated in "Anti-Dühring" that "all men, or at least all citizens of a state or all members of a society, should have equal political and social status." However, in reality, due to constraints such as labor remuneration and living costs, these incoming populations often reside in suburbs, urban villages, or low-rent urban housing. These areas are often relatively remote with inadequate infrastructure, inconvenient transportation, and far from the city's core functional areas. They struggle to fairly enjoy public resources such as basic infrastructure, educational resources, and healthcare services. Issues related to urban migrant workers' children's schooling, employment, and healthcare are even met with societal exclusion or discrimination. They cannot actively and effectively participate in urban spatial construction, let alone the decision-making process, exacerbating their poverty and excluding them from the benefits of urban spatial production.

7. The principles of equal opportunity and equal employment are prerequisites for realizing citizens' urban spatial rights. However, due to historical factors and current circumstances, some cities still exhibit varying degrees of prejudice and discrimination against farmers in employment. Equal competition and equal pay for equal work have not been achieved in areas such as occupations, pensions, healthcare, education, and assistance. The urban spatial development rights of the migrant population have been damaged, resulting in a lack of spatial justice.

8. 2.3 Unequal occupation of spatial resources lead to social spatial differentiation

9. As mentioned above, after the migrant population enters the city, due to restrictions in urban housing and rental policies, and limited economic capability, they mostly reside in cheaper suburban areas. In some places, the number of non-local residents exceeds the number of local registered residents, leading to the formation of migrant population clusters. These clusters often have poor environments, unsatisfactory social security conditions, lack of green spaces, squares, and other public spaces, and incomplete supporting service facilities. In contrast, the inner-city areas have convenient transportation, beautiful ecological environments, and well-equipped high-end communities.

Different communities have varying locations and environments, reflecting the inequality in spatial resource possession across different social classes and the differentiation of social strata. This spatial differentiation in society is not only detrimental to the development of low-income and disadvantaged classes, but it also causes barriers and opposition between different classes. Moreover, this social spatial differentiation hinders disadvantaged groups from accessing good survival and development resources and opportunities and may lead to the concentration of poverty and the spread of negative subcultures. Furthermore, social spatial differentiation leads to a lack of interaction and communication within and between communities, hampering people's equal and comprehensive development and harmonious coexistence, and giving rise to a series of new social problems.

2. A few concepts for promoting new urbanization development

3.1. Improve spatial justice and promote the orderly urbanization of agricultural transfer populations.

3.1.1 Distribute the dividends of urban development while emphasizing spatial justice.

Space justice, as a value law of space production, is not only a law of space resource allocation, but also a norm of humanized space, including the most fundamental urban living space. Marx's space thought, based on criticism of capitalist society, holds that people's social space cannot be divided into classes as a result of the capitalization of space, and urban space cannot be a place for the bourgeoisie to exploit the working class. It is necessary to gradually eliminate the negative effects of capitalist production relations of space capitalization in urban space construction, so that every resident in the city can share the city's development dividend, demonstrate the fairness and justice of space construction, allow urban residents to truly live and work in peace and contentment, and finally realize everyone's free development.

3.1.2 Protect the interests of agricultural transfer population while also ensuring fairness and justice.

The accelerated development of spatial production in China's new socialist urbanization process has resulted in the spatial concentration of social contradictions. The issue of floating population is one of the most pressing issues in the urbanization process, and it is also a critical issue for us to promote agricultural transfer population urbanization. In the process of agricultural transfer population urbanization, we should first emphasize the critical role played by the law of spatial justice value under the guidance of Marx's spatial thought. It is necessary to consider meeting the broad masses of people's interests as the fundamental starting point for urbanization, and to protect the interests of agricultural transfer population as equally important as protecting the interests of urban residents. Allow agricultural migrants, particularly urban builders, to enjoy the same public resources and social welfare as urban residents, and allow them to fully participate in politics, economy, society, and urban cultural life, in order to realize agricultural migrants' economic foothold, social acceptance, identity, and cultural integration.

3.2 Eliminate spatial capitalization and optimize urban spatial resource allocation.

This traditional urbanization road with the goal of capital accumulation, inspired by Marx's space thought, is unsustainable. If we want to continuously promote urbanization development in Socialism with Chinese characteristics, we must embark on a new urbanization path. "It is necessary to clarify the demand orientation of space production and shift the fundamental purpose of space production from capital accumulation to meeting the needs of social space use in order to move towards new urbanization." Specifically, we should maximize the benefits of the socialist system, strengthen the state's macrocontrol, and manage the relationship between government management and free market competition. We should not only fully utilize market competition in resource allocation, but also fully utilize the government's macro-control role, as well as fully utilize the government's management function in top-level design, creating planning blueprints, improving infrastructure, innovating public services, and strengthening social governance. Simultaneously, it is necessary to address the relationship between the central government and local governments, to perform well in top-level design, and to ensure the formulation of major policies and overall urbanization plans. Local governments should be responsive to local conditions, develop corresponding local plans while thoroughly implementing the central government's overall plan, and creatively carry out new urbanization construction and management.

3.3 Conduct scientific research on the spatial relationship between urban and rural areas and promote the integration of urban and rural development.

The key reason for the polarization and opposition between urban and rural areas in the process of urbanization, according to Marx's spatial thought, is the irrationality of production relations, which necessitates the establishment of a new type of urban-rural spatial production relations when it comes to the new urbanization construction in China. This new production relationship must be based on spatial justice, so that the urban-rural production relationship is based on meeting the needs of the vast majority of people rather than the free appreciation of spatial capital. The benefits of increased spatial productivity should be shared by society. The following aspects can help to solve the problem of urban-rural duality: First, some dualistic urban-rural systems, such as urban-rural household registration policies, can be eliminated in order to remove the artificial barriers that contribute to the existence of dual social structures and lay a solid institutional foundation for urban-rural integration. Second, eliminate the price "scissors difference" between workers' and peasants' products, and give full play to financial support for agricultural production and rural infrastructure construction through financial system reform, so that workers' and peasants' products can be fairly traded in the socialist market economy. The third step is to establish a land financial policy that integrates urban and rural areas, increase rural land circulation, and allow rural land to benefit from the same circulation system and financial mortgage policy as urban land. Fourth, gradually establish and improve urban and rural integration fiscal and tax policies, establish a type of urban and rural land finance with fair management and a fair tax burden from the management mechanism, and gradually eliminate the "scissors difference" in urban and rural land finance. Dealing with the relationship between urban and rural areas is critical to promoting the new urbanization process. According to Marx, spatial production is a type of spatial productivity, and only by addressing the relationship between urban and rural areas can we contribute to the overall liberation and development of urban spatial productivity.

4. Future trends

The large-scale population migration is closely related to the development of new urbanization. The core of new urbanization is the urbanization of "people." Urbanization is not only a spatial transfer but, more importantly, a transformation from farmers to citizens. Under the guidance of Marxist urban thought, the process of new urbanization must strengthen spatial justice, orderly promote the urbanization of agricultural migrant population; eliminate spatial capitalization, optimize the allocation of urban spatial resources; scientifically address the relationship between urban and rural space, promote the integration of urban and rural development, thereby achieving further advancement and development of new urbanization.

5. Acknowledgement

This paper was supported by Research project of Jiangsu Police Institute (2020SJYSZ04), and Education project of Jiangsu Provincial Department (2021SJA0514).

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