

Research on the Countermeasures to Promote the Optimal Allocation of Public Service Resources under Population Mobility

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Abstract: *At the beginning of the establishment of Chinese household registration system, urban public services were linked to the household registration system and only provided to urban residents considering the actual supply capacity of cities. This move was also to adapt to the planned economy and industrial development needs. With the changing times and the needs of economic development, population flow policy has been lifted and population flow has accelerated. The problems of supply gap, unequal supply and low supply quality of public services have gradually emerged, and the allocation of public service resources is in urgent need of optimization. By combing the literature related to population mobility, household registration system and public service, this study traces the source contradictions from the theoretical and practical level and studies its development and evolution. In order to promote the optimal allocation of urban public service resources, combined with the actual urban development, Countermeasures and suggestions are put forward to promote the decoupling process of household registration system and urban public service supply, accelerate the implementation process of supporting reform, explore the further development of the form of voucher system government purchase of public services, and implement the differentiated allocation of resources for different public services.*

Keywords: *Public services; Household registration system; Population mobility; Voucher system*

1. Introduction

In the era of planned economy, urban and rural areas were relatively separated and communication between cities was poor, so urban planning was often based on registered population. With the promotion of the reform and opening up process, restrictions on population flow have been gradually lifted. Cities with abundant resources, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities and geographical advantages have ushered in a large number of population inflows. The number of urban population has surged, and there is no exclusive access restriction, but the average level of public services with limited total supply and carrying capacity has declined. The public services with certain exclusive nature and directly related to the household registration system exclude the floating population from the scope of application.

In modern society in the 21st century, with the progress of science and technology and the rapid development of transportation and communication, the migration of population has no technical difficulties. The dense road and railway transportation network facilitates the flow and migration of population, and people are increasingly staying in other cities for travel, work and medical treatment. The daily population of Shanghai, Beijing, Chengdu, Xi'an and other cities far exceeds the registered permanent population, which brings transportation difficulties and housing congestion.

Although many cities have taken the floating population into consideration in their future planning and development, there is still a supply gap in the supply of urban public services, as well as unbalanced supply and low efficiency. Urban governments restrict population inflow through strict household registration system to maintain urban order and orderly supply of urban public services, but the free flow of population is an irreversible trend. Due to its more development opportunities, higher service and welfare level, big cities will remain attractive to the floating population for quite a long time in the future, resulting in further expansion of urban scale. The problem of public service supply is becoming more and more prominent. The provision of public service based on the permanent population has caused the debate of congestion and queuing. In the inflow and outflow areas, the allocation of public service resources based on the registered population will cause serious resource misallocation and waste, and the supply efficiency is low.

The policy model of linking public services to the household registration system faces challenges in

today's free movement of people.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Public Service

Many experts and scholars at home and abroad have reached a consensus that public goods refer to non-competitive and non-exclusive goods in consumption, which have the characteristics of natural monopoly, difficult charging and large initial investment. Public service is a class of public goods.

Local public service is a kind of public service whose benefit scope is limited to a certain space. Due to the different levels of economic development in different regions within a country, residents' preferences for public goods and demands for the same public goods are also inconsistent. Therefore, in order to reduce welfare losses, local public goods and services provided by local governments are more effective than unified provision by the central government.^[1] The "public services" mentioned in this paper mainly refer to the local public services provided by local governments.

2.2. Public Services and Household Population

When the household registration system was first established, China was still in a planned economy and the level of socio-economic development was low, and all kinds of public goods and services provided by local governments were tied to the household registration. From the late 1950s to the late 1970s, urban-rural and inter-urban population movements were strictly restricted, and public service provision linked to the household registration system was still applicable.

With the progress of reform and opening up, restrictions on population mobility were gradually liberalized, and the problem of public services for urban residents with non-local household registration gradually came to the fore. The discriminatory provision of basic public services based on the household registration system excludes a large number of mobile populations, and the role of urbanization in narrowing the urban-rural gap is severely limited, resulting in efficiency losses.^{[2][3]} In the context of population migration, the allocation of resources based on the household registration population leads to a mismatch of resources such as land, education, and health care.^[4] Public services and welfare levels vary greatly among cities of different sizes, and the policy of large city governments to control population size through strict household registration controls is hardly effective.^[5] The public service supply system based on household registration is facing reform.

2.3. Public Services and Resident Population

In recent years, due to economic development and improvement of residents' living standards, public services have increasingly become an important factor influencing population mobility, even surpassing economic factors such as wage income. Higher levels of public services in large cities have attracted an increasing inflow of foreign population.^{[6][7][8][9]} Therefore the difference between the number of urban resident population and the number of household registration population has been expanding.

With the acceleration of population mobility, the population in rural areas and the foreign population are increasingly pouring into cities, and the urban public service supply system dependent on the household registration has caused a shortage of public service supply for the urban resident population other than the household registration population, and these inflowing people contribute and create value for urban construction in different positions, but cannot enjoy the public services of urban residents, which obviously violates the principle of equity and taxation of public services. The principle of benefiting. The issues of housing security, health care, employment and entrepreneurship, social insurance for the migrant population, education for their children and pension for their parents have raised concerns, and scholars have suggested that full coverage of public services for the resident population should be promoted.^{[10][11][12]}

2.4. Public Services and Actual Population Served

The prosperous development of modern transportation networks has facilitated the short-term mobility of the population across regions, and there is not only a resident population in cities, but also a significant portion of the population that needs to stay in cities for a short period of time for business, tourism, medical treatment, etc. Research has found that the actual population in large cities, such as

Shanghai and Suzhou, is much larger than the resident population.^{[13][14]} The provision of public services based on the resident population excludes the "short-term resident population who have lived in the city for less than 6 months", resulting in a mismatch between supply and demand for some public services, which is one of the reasons for traffic congestion and other "urban diseases".

Zou Bo et al.^[15] proposed to establish a public service supply mechanism based on the "actual population" of the city; Shi Cheng et al.^[16] proposed that mega-cities should allocate public facilities and resources based on the "actual population".

2.5. Public Services and Finance

Public services have positive externalities, and there is a loss of efficiency when people enjoy public services but do not pay for them or pay taxes on them. In their study of coordinated development policies in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, Yu Wang and Yihang Zhao find that the positive externality of high level public services provided by regional central cities benefits the surrounding small and medium-sized cities, but there may be a supply efficiency loss for them themselves.^[17]

Based on this, local governments, driven by self-interest motives, city governments control public service spillovers by setting household registration thresholds to restrict mobile populations' access to local public service benefits.^[18] However, public service resource allocation that is not adapted to the population mobility pattern can also lead to inefficient allocation of financial resources: public services are provided based on the number of registered population, and the number of people enjoying public services in inbound and outbound cities does not match the amount of financial resources allocated, resulting in inefficient resource allocation.^[19]

Local governments have different economic and financial capacities. In order to address horizontal differences, ensure a minimum level of supply, and implement central policies, the central government needs to make transfer payments to localities, and for a long time, the central government has been implementing transfer payments to localities based on the number of registered population, which also causes an imbalance between supply and demand for public services.^[20] Under the fiscal decentralization system, the mismatch between fiscal authority and expenditure responsibilities for public services has led to a lack of financial resources and incentives for inflowing areas to provide public services to the migrant population,^{[21][22]} reducing the level of public service provision in each region.^[23] Therefore, the responsibilities and powers of the central and local governments should be clarified, the costs of public services should be reasonably shared, the financial capacity of local governments should be enhanced, and the reform of financial affairs and expenditure responsibilities should be continuously and vigorously promoted.^{[24][25]}

2.6. Equalization of Public Services

There are differences in the public services provided by cities of different sizes, and the disparity in welfare levels between cities is so great that some agricultural professionals prefer to accept the lower welfare of non-resident domicile in large cities rather than stay in small and medium-sized cities to enjoy the benefits of resident domicile. In response to the current problem of differentiated public services among cities, government departments should focus on improving the level of public services in small and medium-sized cities and promoting the equalization of public services among cities, which can help solve the problem of insufficient public service supply and also help alleviate population clustering.^{[26][27]} Zhang Kaizhi et al.^[28] further pointed out that regional and category parity of public services should be balanced.

Scholars generally agree that the introduction of public services into labor migration research can be traced back to the "voting with feet" theory proposed by Tiebout in 1956, which suggests that population mobility is the result of residents' choice of tax burden and public service combinations in different regions. Current research on the allocation of public service resources and population mobility focuses on the efficiency and equity problems and measures to solve them. The main problem is that the existing public service supply system, which allocates public service resources based on urban household registration, does not match the actual number of public service users and demanders, and the public service needs of non-agricultural households and urban migrants cannot be met and guaranteed, and inequality exists. There are four main ideas to solve the problem: first, reform the household registration system, abolish non-agricultural household registration, promote the construction of urban-rural integration, improve the residence permit system, and enhance the mobile population's sense of social belonging; second, change the household registration population benchmark of the public service supply

system to the resident population and the actual service population benchmark, expand the scope of public service supply recipients, and meet the needs of the wider urban population; third, promote the public service Third, promote the reform of fiscal authority and expenditure responsibilities of central and local governments, enhance the financial capacity of local governments, and expand the supply of urban public services; fourth, promote the equalization of public services and narrow the differences in public service supply within and between cities.

The relevant literature reflects the views of different periods of development and understanding of public service resource allocation and population mobility, and proposes to gradually relax the restrictions of the household registration system, but these views and understanding still fail to break out of the policy framework of thinking about the provision of public services based on household registration. Most of these studies have attempted to adapt to the problem through localized changes, adopting only the immediate perspective of solving the existing problem without a long-term development perspective to scientifically plan and interpret this long-standing and still long-standing problem, and failing to analyze and deconstruct the problem from its root causes.

3. Household Registration System and Public Service Provision

The author believes that the root cause of the problem of public service resource allocation and population mobility is the contradiction between supply and demand, and that the supply cannot meet the demand. The cause of the contradiction lies in the design of the urban public service supply system, which is dependent on the urban household registration system.

The household registration system was originally designed as an institutional tool for population management by public security departments, while public services are part of social welfare, and the combination of the two is not naturally related but originates from artificial institutional arrangements.

3.1. Theoretical Roots

The household registration system has expanded from its initial alienation of the function of population management services to its function as a discriminatory public service and a restrictive threshold for urban welfare, and academics have categorized this analysis of the alienation of the function of the household registration system as "social control theory" or "social control theory". The household registration system in New China was created for the purpose of rebuilding social order, and the construction of order requires social control. At the early stage of national industrialization, China's socio-economic level was low, and the development of heavy industry required accelerating capital accumulation on the one hand, and controlling the outflow of labor from the countryside on the other hand to ensure that urban employment opportunities and welfare did not spill over, initially by means of food control and labor restrictions. The foundation of the social management system was laid, gradually forming an institutional form in which the household registration system is closely linked to the public service provision system. The alienation of the function of the household registration system stems from the infinite amplification of its social control function, which is the result of the expansion of instrumental rationality.^[29]

From the perspective of public goods theory, public services have strong positive externalities, and because of their non-exclusivity, they often result in economic spillover to the detriment of the original consumers. Another important role is to reduce the pressure of urban management caused by the expanding size of cities by limiting population migration.

3.2. Practice Development

After the reform and opening up, the household registration system around the world has undergone a change from further tightening of grip to gradual relaxation. With economic development, changes in industrial structure, and improved transportation levels, population mobility has accelerated. For reasons of urban security and management, and to protect the employment of local labor, urban governments, especially in the more developed regions, further tightened the restrictions on household registration and artificially controlled the growth of urban size by administrative means.

Soon afterwards, China's "demographic dividend" was no longer significant, and with the gradual transfer of surplus rural labor to non-agricultural industries, the surplus rural labor force gradually decreased, and the phenomenon of "labor shortage" appeared in many places. At the same time, the

economic level of cities has been developed, and their management and governance capacity has been improved, so that they can afford the public service expenditures of a larger proportion of the population and provide urban management and services to a larger population. The reform of the household registration system is on the agenda, and the restrictions on urban settlement are gradually relaxed around the world.

However, the household registration system has long been linked to a number of urban benefits, and the cost of decoupling the household registration system from public service provision is enormous, and the cost of this change is directly proportional to the size of the city: the larger the city, the greater the resistance to change. This is why governments around China tend to start reforms in small and medium-sized cities, and the reforms are much stronger.

With regard to the issue of public service provision under population mobility, many experts and scholars advocate partial changes from the perspective of feasibility, starting from the implementation of the residence permit system in the household registration system, such as adopting the policy of "enjoying public services and related welfare benefits with a residence permit" to gradually expand the scope of urban public service provision.

To address the issue of the benchmark of public service provision, researchers in related fields have conducted further studies on the actual population of public service users. The Shanghai Urban Master Plan (2017-2035) proposes to allocate resources according to the "actual service population", while Beijing proposes the concept of "management service population" and Guangzhou also adopts the concept of "management service population". Guangzhou also adopts the concept of "management service population". The Guidelines for the Preparation of Municipal Territorial Spatial Master Plan (for Trial Implementation) (2020) provides a standardized definition of "actual service population", which refers to the actual urban population requiring basic urban services such as transportation, municipalities, commerce and administration from the city, including short-term stays such as business trips, tourism and medical treatment, in addition to the urban resident population. In addition to the city's resident population, it also includes short-term stays such as business trips, tourism and medical treatment.

4. Suggestions for countermeasures

4.1. Promote the Process of Decoupling the Household Registration System from Urban Public Service Provision

Chen Juan argues that the original function of the household registration is to provide a basis for decision-making in social management and services, rather than a functional vehicle for public service provision.^[30] The former focuses on the management of the population to meet the planning and governance of the city, while the latter focuses on the services of the population to meet the development needs of people. However, as the times change, this "bundle" policy thinking is no longer suitable for today's fast-developing society, and this bundle should be abandoned and a drastic reform should be implemented.

The 21st century is an information-based society, and the means and methods of population management by city governments have developed greatly compared to the planned economy. In today's information technology and digital means are more convenient and fast, the household registration system should return to its function of population management and service, and remove its original function of restricting population flow and controlling the size of cities for a long time, and make it independent of the public service supply system.

The rigid household registration system of the past does need urgent reform, such as improving and strictly enforcing the ID card management system and the residence permit management system, in order to adapt to the rapidly developing modern information society. Public services also need to be considered to cover a wider range of people and to improve the quality and level of services to meet the actual development needs of the city.

4.2. Accelerate the Implementation Process of Supporting Reforms

The difficulty and key to the reform of the household registration system and the decoupling of urban public service provision is not only the relaxation of public service applicability, but also the speeding up of the stripping of various interests attached to the household registration, and the decoupling of labor, education, health care, housing, social welfare and other systems hidden behind the household

registration from the household registration. Therefore, hukou reform is not only a breakthrough of the hukou system itself, but also requires supporting reforms including labor and employment system, education system, medical system, housing system, social security and social welfare system, etc. At the same time, fiscal and revenue policies, central to local transfer payment policies, social management system, and inter-regional policy coordination also need to be adjusted accordingly to provide less developed regions with public service supply. The reform and development of public services in less developed regions should be supported.

4.3. Explore the Voucher System Government Purchase of Public Services in the Form of Further Development

Since the New Public Management (NPM) movement, public management academics have advocated the introduction of market participation in the supply of public goods and services to optimize the supply of public services through market dynamics and efficiency, and vouchers are one of the market-based instruments. Vouchers are coupons given by government departments to individuals who are eligible to consume certain goods or services, with the characteristics of subsidizing specific groups of consumers around specific goods, directly subsidizing consumers rather than producers, and usually taking the form of vouchers rather than cash.^[31] The voucher system makes decisions based on consumer preferences, which gives citizens more choices than the contractual system and is conducive to satisfying utility maximization expectations, and is also more conducive to improving the efficiency of financial resources utilization and promoting optimal resource allocation due to its precise ex-post payment form.

China has already tried to implement the government purchase of public services in the form of voucher system in the fields of education, pension, employment training, etc., and has achieved initial experience and good results. For example, the education voucher system first introduced in Changxing County, Zhejiang Province, is a form of application of the voucher system. At the beginning of the implementation, the education voucher system gave a strong impetus to the development of private education and vocational education and guaranteed the right to education for poor students, and its subsequent development, though frustrated, also brought about a policy diffusion effect, and the ideas related to education vouchers were practiced in the province and even in a larger national arena.^[32] With the gradual advancement of government reform and the gradual improvement of socialist market economy system, local governments will more and more commonly adopt government purchase of public services, and the voucher system will play a greater role.

Although the application of this foreign product in China does not adapt to the voucher system, but it does bring about the improvement of supply efficiency, local governments must improve the supervision and management system when using this means, strengthen the control and evaluation before, during and after the purchase, strictly control the quality of service supply, and improve the efficiency of the use of financial funds.

4.4. Implementing Differentiated Resource Allocation for Different Public Services

The supply of public services should be based on the actual needs of the current and future development of the city, rather than on the size of the household population, which takes into account the legitimate rights and interests of the non-domiciled urban population who contribute to the operation, construction and development of the city. Even if the restrictions on settlement are completely liberalized in the future and the urban floating population may gradually have urban household registration status, the change of the supply benchmark is still necessary, which reflects both the concept of "people-oriented" urban development and the principle of sustainable development.

Public services include not only basic public services such as basic education and health care, which are "essential for the survival and development of all citizens," but also services such as transportation and infrastructure, which cannot be excluded from users by charging fees or adding household registration restrictions. In either case, the exclusion of the non-domiciled population as beneficiaries is a clear violation of the principle of equity. It also fails to achieve optimal allocation of resources from an efficiency perspective. The allocation of public service resources based on the urban domicile population is no longer appropriate for a mobile society.

The author suggests to divide urban public services into two categories according to the degree of exclusivity and difficulty of exclusivity, one of which is public services with certain exclusivity for specific groups of people in need, such as basic education and social insurance, and the other is public services that are difficult to exclude and generally enjoyed by citizens, such as urban public transportation

and landscaping. The former allocates resources based on the city's resident population, taking into account the development needs of non-resident workers and their families, while the latter allocates resources based on the city's actual service management population, taking into account the city's daily management and future planning and development positioning.

5. Conclusions

With the progress of technology and economic development, the expansion of some cities has an unstoppable trend. For the development and construction of cities, it is necessary to balance the relationship between "old city people" and "new city people", not only to ensure the orderly and quality supply of public services, but also to continuously innovate the way and type of supply of public products and services. In addition, for small and medium-sized cities, in order to attract the inflow of high-quality talents, small and medium-sized cities should focus on public service development and construction at the same time of economic development, and create a better and more comfortable working and living environment for the urban population by improving infrastructure and enhancing the quality and quantity of public service supply, so as to narrow the gap of public services between cities of different scales, which is not only conducive to the equalization of public services between cities, but also conducive to It is also conducive to alleviating the pressure of population concentration in large cities.

On the one hand, digital empowerment is used to improve the efficiency of public services. By building smart city platforms and other means, we can provide basic services such as civil affairs, social security, and housing fund in a "one-stop" cloud for the convenience of residents. On the other hand, by taking advantage of the interpersonal temperature in small and medium-sized cities, grass-roots communities and streets can pay full attention to community residents and provide a variety of unique community products and services to enhance cohesion and give the "new urbanites" a sense of belonging.

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