



Residential mobility, urban preference, and human settlement: A South Korean case study



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ABSTRACT

Considering the theory of place attachment, we examine the relationship between residential mobility preference and socio-demographic characteristics, social ties, and environmental perceptions. Based on the application of this western theory to a different national and community-level context, social and economic factors that contribute to such mobility preference are considered. Categorical and multilevel models are employed using cross-sectional census and survey-based data collected from residents in seven South Korean cities. Economic condition, degree of education, transportation elements, social ties, environmental perception, and place-based characteristics were found to contribute to residential mobility preference.

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1. Introduction

What makes some residents more likely than others to move from a community? Are push factors within the existing community responsible or are pull factors from another community the reason for mobility? In this article, we address empirically such questions using cross-sectional census and survey-based data collected from urban residents in South Korea. Such data are analyzed using a variety of appropriate modeling approaches.

Whereas residential migration refers to residents moving from one region (or area) to another, residential mobility encompasses the dynamic mechanisms involved in such residents making a move within the same region (Howley, 2009). In terms of distance, mobility is usually taken to imply short moves, while migration is long-distance mobility (Howley, 2009). Since residential mobility is dynamic through time, changes in the social and economic

structure of urban areas can occur simultaneously. This mobility as a causal element of social and cultural change, especially for social relationships or networks (Oishi, 2010) is thus of central interest.

The effects of residential mobility can be affected by the degree of change in social relationships. Therefore, residential mobility associated with the well-being or opportunity of a social group is a fundamental indicator identifying how a city gains or loses its competitiveness or attractiveness for those contemplating relocation. Bramley and Power (2009) argue that the frameworks of geography of opportunity and place attachment should be considered in explaining the enhancement of urban competitiveness and attractiveness, presumably by affecting whether places attract and retain human capital. With respect to residential mobility from urban core to suburbs, Sen (1992) claimed that this mobility “might have been concealing deep inequality in human capabilities to flourish and prosper” (as cited in Israel & Frenkel, 2015, 580). Likewise, Niedomysl (2010) has also explored how mobility is configured by place attractiveness and regional economic structures.

Residential mobility is not something unique to any one region or country. Even in countries with traditional cultures (such as

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those in Asia), residential mobility occurs with great regularity. Koreans in southeastern Korea have shown dynamic residential mobility over time as individuals relocate to improve their quality of life in search of better employment, education, and a place to live. According to Lee and Lee (2008), as the newtown residential property redevelopment projects surrounding Seoul were initiated between 1996 and 2005, approximately 6% of residents living in Seoul had moved to adjacent areas in pursuit of an improved quality of life. Southeastern Korea contains two of the largest metropolitan cities in the country—Busan and Ulsan. These cities are located in close proximity to each other and have industries that are focused on technology, importing/exporting, petroleum, and manufacturing. Such an environment is ideal to examine the preference for urban residential mobility considering the theoretical framework of place attachment.

While determinants of residential mobility preference are often discussed in relation to socio-economic factors (Randall, Kitchen, & Williams, 2008), few studies explain residential mobility preference through the application of place attachment (Lewicka, 2005). Extensive research has been conducted to determine the causes and consequences of residential mobility preference, especially those focused on social and economic implications at the level of intra-urban mobility and in comparison to the migration between other cities. More importantly, our primary contribution is the application of western theories to a different national context and the focus on both individual- and community-level attributes in light of urban human settlement.

2. Residential mobility preference and urban settlement

Residential mobility can contribute to the transformation of land use, commuting, and traffic flow and often is a catalyst of social and economic change (Clark, 2005). Rather than the actual or unexpected mobility (de Groot, Mulder, Das, & Manting, 2011; Kan, 1999) and movement behavior from empirical research techniques (Buck, 2000; Coulter, van Ham, & Feijten, 2011), our work reported here explains the determinants of mobility preference by surveying residents at a particular point in time.

The association between residential mobility preference and social and economic status can be explained through mobility determinants. Residential mobility preference not only depends on residents' social status, such as home ownership and length of residence, but also the physical condition of the residence (Howley, 2009; Lewicka, 2010). As might be expected, the better a residents' social conditions, the lower the probability of residential mobility. For households and neighborhoods, household characteristics reflect personal and household attributes such as life-cycle stage, income, and ethnicity (van Ham & Feijten, 2008; Kley, 2011). In this sense, mobility preferences are an important topic worthy of further research for many of the reasons addressed here.

Numerous studies concerning residential mobility utilize various theoretical frameworks, such as invasion and succession, filtering, life-cycle models (Kim, Horner, & Marans, 2005; Oishi, 2010), life course or events models (de Groot et al., 2011; Kley, 2011), and trade-off models (Chen, Chen, & Timmermans, 2008). The relationship between residential mobility preference and diverse urban structure along with other phenomena (e.g., an evolving city, population segregation and housing choices, housing market, urban growth, and sprawling settlement), have been examined. Dynamic residential mobility preferences and determinants derived from a variety of spatial scale and socio-economic variables are associated with moving due to work or job changes (Howley, 2009), finding good schools or housing (Böheim & Taylor, 2002), and searching for safe surroundings or milieus (Keels, Duncan, Deluca, Mendenhall, & Rosenbaum, 2005).

These efforts to earn an opportunity for better social and economic conditions through relocating to a new area are central. The geography of opportunity—suggesting that places provide opportunities, inequality, and life outcomes as a result of spatial differences in access to good jobs, schools, safer streets, richer social networks, and other opportunities (Briggs, 2005, 17–41)—indicate that individuals experience profound changes if they move to environments that afford greater opportunities (Galster & Killen, 1995; Rosenbaum, 1995). As noted by Quillian (1999) and Briggs (2003), a weaker labor market status and a weaker employability can lead one to move into a poor neighborhood. As another example, by defining a new class of people (e.g., architects, engineers, scientists, educators, artists), Florida (2002) documented that such individuals are attracted to and stay in communities that create and maintain high-quality places and prefer active, authentic and participatory experiences. In this regard, the geography of opportunity speaks to the characteristics of places rather than those of people. People living in a very poor or dangerous neighborhood may prefer to move away. However, implicitly in any analysis of mobility preferences, a better place must exist for individuals to relocate. A pull, in addition to a push, must be present and the benefits of the former must outweigh those of the latter.

The association between residential mobility preference and place attachment can be supported by two potential dimensions of attachment—rootedness (e.g., length of residence, home ownership, and expectations to remain in the same residence) and bondedness (Hay, 1998). From the rootedness and bondedness perspective, residential mobility preference can be linked to place attachment in that long-term relationships and perceptions among residents lead to a stable and vibrant neighborhood (Randall et al., 2008). A number of studies have been conducted that use socio-demographic characteristics, social ties, and environmental perception characteristics to explain residential mobility preference for place attachment. The demographic or economic drivers include information on resident age and educational level (Howley, 2009), gender and home ownership (Kley, 2011), residence duration and household size (Lewicka, 2010), housing price (Clark, Deurloo, & Dieleman, 2000), household market (Ferreira, Gyourko, & Tracy, 2010), marital status, presence of children and children's ages and ethnicity (Clark & Huang, 2003), religious status (Theodori, 2001), race (Myers, 1999), and family ties (Zorlu, 2009).

In addition, physical and social factors pertaining to resident perception and satisfaction about neighborhood amenities encompass building size or structure (Howley, 2009), safety precautions and sense of security (e.g., crime, disaster), access to material resources (Lewicka, 2010), neighborhood ties (Kley, 2011; Lewicka, 2010), and public services along with direct or indirect economic opportunities and financial situations (Hui & Yu, 2009). Clark and Huang (2003, 323) claim, "... neighborhood satisfaction plays an important role in predicting residential mobility." Lewicka (2005) points out that civic activity is also correlated with residential mobility preference. In this vein, our work reported here utilizes place attachment to explain residential mobility preference and addresses the linkage between socio-demographic characteristics, social ties, and environmental perception characteristics. Furthermore, since residential mobility relates to "... the householders themselves, the characteristics of houses and housing market, and access to amenities ..." (Winstanley, Thorns, & Perkins, 2002, 814), this study will be useful in addressing the urban planning and policy concerns that involve low social ties among neighbors and community, low accessibility to social service assets, dwellers of substandard quality, disrupted family life, and mental and physical ill health.

With respect to mobility preference, this theoretical framework is diametrically opposed to the geography of opportunity approach.

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