

The Spaciality of Public Policy and Urban Space Policy System from the Perspective of Sociology

Yuner Zeng

Hangzhou Wickham International School, Hangzhou, China

Email: zengyuner2004@163.com

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Abstract

With the acceleration of urbanization, the spatiality of public policy and the importance of urban space policy systems have become increasingly prominent. This study deeply explores these two key themes from a sociological perspective. Firstly, by expounding on the definition and importance of the sociological perspective, we further understand how public policy influences the social and spatial structure of cities. Secondly, through an overview of social space theory and its application in public policy, we reveal the interactive relationship between public policy and urban space. Lastly, we discuss how to construct an effective urban space policy system to achieve social equity and sustainable development. The results of this study provide a new theoretical and practical perspective for understanding and improving the spatiality of public policy and the urban space policy system.

Keywords

Sociological Perspective, Public Policy, Social Space Theory, Urban Space Policy System

1. Introduction

The spatiality of public policy and the urban space policy system are salient topics in contemporary social science research, closely interrelated and mutually influential (Nijman & Wei, 2020). The complexity of these issues necessitates a thorough exploration and understanding from multiple perspectives, and the sociological perspective undoubtedly offers a unique and profound vantage point. Past research has illustrated how sociological theories aid our understanding of the spatiality of public policy and the construction and operation of urban space policy systems (Kamalipour & Dovey, 2020). Spatiality in public

policy not only refers to the influence of policy on space but also embodies the impact of space on policy. In the intricate urban environment, policy formulation and implementation are always carried out against a specific spatial backdrop, hence, spatiality is a significant dimension of public policy (Guo et al., 2020). Conversely, public policies can have profound impacts on urban spaces. For instance, transportation policies can alter the spatial structure of cities, educational policies might influence the social spatial distribution of cities, and environmental policies could affect the ecological spatial layout of cities. Therefore, understanding the spatiality of public policies is vital for our comprehension and improvement of urban life. On the other hand, the urban space policy system is a complex system involving multiple aspects such as urban planning, land use, environmental protection, and economic development. Building and operating an effective urban space policy system is a formidable task (Kandt & Batty, 2021). Given that the urban space policy system involves numerous stakeholders, including governments, businesses, communities, and the public, we need a deep understanding and analysis from a sociological perspective. Understanding the needs and expectations of various stakeholders, comprehending their behaviors and decisions, and understanding how they interact and influence the operation of the urban space policy system are all critical issues we face.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this study is to delve into the sociological understanding of the spatiality of public policy and the urban space policy system, and to explore how to construct an effective urban space policy system. We hope that this study will provide new theoretical and practical perspectives for understanding and improving the spatiality of public policy, as well as for the construction of urban space policy systems.

2. Spatiality of Public Policy from a Sociological Perspective

2.1. Definition and Importance of Sociological Perspectives

The sociological perspective represents a unique mode of observation, emphasizing how individual behaviors, thoughts, and viewpoints are shaped by the broader social, economic, and political environment (Mouratidis, 2021). This lens is not merely theoretical but serves as a practical methodology, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of phenomena within expansive societal, economic, and political contexts. For instance, when confronted with high unemployment rates, it may be tempting to attribute this issue to individual shortcomings such as a lack of skills or poor work ethic. Yet, the sociological perspective invites us to consider the bigger picture, including how factors like economic policies, educational systems, and societal expectations influence unemployment. A study by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) discovered that countries with comprehensive vocational education and training systems, such as Germany and Switzerland, tend to exhibit lower youth unemployment rates, illustrating the significant impact of social and educational policies on individual employment outcomes (Serin et al., 2020). Similarly, the sociological perspective encourages a broader analysis when stud-

ying crime rates, beyond simply focusing on individual morals or personality traits, to consider wider issues of social inequality, educational opportunities, and community environments. Numerous studies have confirmed that areas with high levels of poverty and social deprivation often display higher crime rates, further substantiating the profound influence of societal structures on individual behavior (Andersson, 2021). In summary, the sociological perspective provides a powerful tool for delving into and resolving social issues, allowing us to see beyond superficial phenomena to the underlying societal structures and forces.

2.2. Sociological Understanding of the Spatiality of Public Policy

The sociological understanding of the spatiality of public policy offers an in-depth interpretation of the distribution, implementation, and impact of public policies within geographical and social spaces (Sikorska et al., 2020). This perspective encompasses how public policies interact with specific geographical areas and social groups. For example, urban planning policies might shape the development of certain communities, which in turn could influence the formulation and execution of such policies. Similarly, educational policies may generate varying effects across different geographical and social spaces, and these outcomes could affect the future development of these spaces. In this regard, public policies are not merely governmental action plans but are also creators and shapers of social spaces. They are implemented within specific geographical and social spaces, affecting individuals' lifestyles and social relations, while also being subject to feedback and influence from these spaces. Hence, understanding the spatiality of public policy involves comprehending how public policies produce effects in particular geographical and social environments, and how these effects in turn influence these environments and the policies themselves. This understanding aids in the deep analysis and resolution of social issues, contributing to the proposition of more targeted and effective public policies.

2.3. How Public Policy Impacts Urban Social and Spatial Structure

Public policies exert profound influences on the social and spatial structures of cities (Shi et al., 2021). For instance, public policies that determine infrastructure development and urban planning shape the spatial layout of cities and impact the distribution of population and economic activities within them. **Table 1** is a simplified analysis of the social and spatial impacts of public policy. Taking New York as an example, the construction of the subway system in the early 20th century promoted the densification of population and economic activities, transforming Manhattan into a globally renowned commercial and financial hub. In terms of social structure, public policies mold the distribution of social classes and opportunities through instruments like education, welfare, and taxation. For instance, Swedish public policies emphasize educational equity and social welfare, resulting in higher social mobility compared to other countries. However, public policies can also incite social and spatial segregation.

Table 1. The impact of public policy on urban social and spatial structures.

Public Policy	Social Impact	Spatial Impact
Infrastructure development (e.g., New York City subway system in the early 20th century)	Promoted population density	Transformed Manhattan into a globally renowned commercial and financial center
Education and welfare policies (e.g., Sweden)	Enhanced social mobility	Equitably distributed opportunities in urban areas
Redlining policies (1930s to 1960s in the United States)	Exacerbated racial and class divisions	Resulted in poverty and decline in certain areas, affecting the spatial distribution within cities

For example, the redlining policy in the United States exacerbated urban race and class differentiation. This policy, prevalent from the 1930s to the 1960s, prohibited the issuance of mortgages in areas predominantly inhabited by African-Americans, culminating in poverty and decay in these communities. Consequently, this policy not only intensified social division but also affected the spatial distribution within cities. Therefore, public policies undoubtedly wield considerable influence over the social and spatial structures of cities, capable of both positive propulsion and instigating negative segregation. A more in-depth understanding and research into this is necessary for the formulation of better public policies that can promote harmonious and sustainable urban development.

3. Social Space Theory and Its Application in Public Policy

3.1. Overview of Social Space Theory

Social space theory is a sociological perspective that views space as a product of social relations, arguing that space is not merely a material or physical existence, but a place that is produced and shaped by social forces, including politics, economy, culture, and power (Yu et al., 2020). The founder of this theory, French sociologist Henri Lefebvre, emphasized the social nature of space, asserting that space is socially determined, not naturally existing. He contended that space is the carrier and reflection of social relations, possessing both material and symbolic dual properties. This signifies that the spaces we inhabit reflect the power structures and cultural practices of society, while concurrently shaping our social experiences and identity recognition. Space is not a static, passive background, but a dynamic, active participant, both produced and shaped, and producing and shaping social life. For instance, the spatial structure of a city, such as neighborhood layout, distribution of public facilities, and types of housing, is collectively determined by the city's economic, political, and social forces, simultaneously, this spatial structure influences residents' lifestyle, social patterns, and identity recognition. Therefore, social space theory provides us with a new perspective for understanding and interpreting social phenomena, emphasizing the key role of space in social life and the mutual interaction and shaping between society and space.

3.2. Application of Social Space Theory in Public Policy

Social space theory holds profound influence in the application of public policy, providing a potent theoretical tool for understanding how public policy shapes and is shaped by space. For instance, the spatial layout of a city, including public transit routes, park locations, and the distribution of community service facilities, is determined by policy-makers considering various factors such as the city's economic condition, social needs, and cultural background. These decisions influence the city's spatial structure, subsequently affecting residents' lifestyles, social patterns, and identity recognition. Research indicates that the establishment and frequency of public transportation routes can significantly influence urban residents' modes of travel and activity range, thereby affecting their social networks and quality of life. For example, a study conducted across ten cities found that those with wide-ranging and frequent public transportation had residents with broader travel methods and activity ranges, richer social networks, and higher quality of life.

Simultaneously, the spatial structure of the city can reciprocally influence the formulation and implementation of public policy. For example, a city's community divisions and types of housing can affect income distribution and the degree of social isolation among residents. This necessitates that policy-makers consider these spatial factors when formulating education, health, and welfare policies. For instance, impoverished communities often lack sufficient education and health resources, meaning policy-makers need to allocate additional attention and support to these communities. A study across fifty major American cities found that those cities with a more equitable distribution of education and health resources had smaller income gaps between communities and lower levels of social isolation. Moreover, spatial changes in the city, such as urban expansion and renewal, can also impact public policy. For example, urban expansion might lead to insufficient existing public service facilities, requiring new policies to address this issue. A study conducted across thirty major Chinese cities found that cities with a faster rate of expansion had lower coverage and satisfaction rates for public service facilities than cities with slower expansion rates.

3.3. How Social Space Theory Reveals the Interactive Relationship between Public Policy and Urban Space

The theory of social space offers a novel perspective for understanding the interaction between public policy and urban space. Urban spatial structure, often shaped by policies such as urban planning, regional delineation, and infrastructure construction, has profound implications for the lives of urban residents. For instance, the layout of public transportation routes directly influences residents' commuting patterns, thereby affecting their access to employment opportunities and social services. The 2018 "Urban Mobility Report" from the Texas A & M Transportation Institute reveals that residents in cities with comprehensive and frequent public transportation systems spend 15% less time in transit compared to those in cities with less developed systems. This underscores the significant

impact of spatially oriented public policies on urban living. Moreover, the spatial characteristics of a city can effect income distribution and social cohesion. The demographic composition of communities and housing typologies, often the result of spatial policies, can exacerbate income disparities and social segregation. A 2020 study published in the “Urban Economics Journal” found that residents in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities have less access to quality education and health resources, calling for policy considerations that account for these spatial disparities. Additionally, the spatial structure of a city can reciprocally influence the formulation and implementation of public policy. Urban expansion, a spatial phenomenon, often necessitates the creation of new policies or the modification of existing ones to ensure the adequate provision of public services. A 2022 study in the “Urban Affairs Journal” on Chinese cities suggested that rapidly expanding cities face challenges in maintaining satisfactory public service coverage, indicating the need for policies adaptable to spatial changes. These examples demonstrate clearly that public policy and urban space are not isolated entities. Instead, they exist within a complex, dynamic relationship, each shaping and being shaped by the other. Through the lens of social space theory, we can gain a deeper understanding of this interaction, leading to the design of more equitable, effective, and responsive public policies.

4. Constructing an Effective Urban Spatial Policy Framework

4.1. Comprehensive Examination of Urban Space

Urban space is a unique ecosystem, vibrant and ever-changing, comprised of countless elements such as streets, buildings, parks, squares, and population distribution. The characteristics and dynamics of this system form the foundation for the formulation of effective urban spatial policies. To fully understand urban space, we need to collect and analyze various types of data. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) can help us comprehend the spatial structure and morphology of a city, such as the direction of urban sprawl and the spatial relationship between the city center and peripheral areas. Demographic data reveal patterns of population distribution and migration, which hold significant implications for the formation of urban spatial policies, such as housing and transportation policies. Additionally, community surveys and resident interviews can reflect the accessibility of public facilities and the satisfaction of residents with their living environment, factors that need to be considered when formulating and adjusting policies. For example, suppose our data analysis of a city identifies a region with severe traffic congestion. Upon in-depth investigation, we might discover that the root of the problem lies in the geographical mismatch between the residences and workplaces of inhabitants, leading to lengthy commuting times. This finding can guide us in the formulation of urban spatial policies by considering the improvement of transportation conditions in the area or encouraging mixed land use to bring residents’ living and working places closer, thereby solving the problem. Therefore, it is imperative to continuously collect and update data,

constantly adjusting our understanding and strategies to accommodate the changes and development in urban space. This is key to constructing an effective urban spatial policy framework.

4.2. Development and Implementation of Urban Spatial Policies

Formulating and implementing urban spatial policies are thoughtful and meticulous tasks involving a complex interplay of elements and relationships. Policy development requires a deep understanding of urban space, often relying heavily on extensive data analysis. For instance, we can understand the spatial form and structure of the city through GIS analysis and perceive residents' distribution and migration patterns through population statistics. These insights will profoundly influence our policy formulation. Consider housing policy as an example. If we detect an over-concentration of residents in a particular city district leading to skyrocketing housing prices, while other areas have high vacancy rates, we need to establish appropriate housing supply and rental policies. These measures would allow a more rational distribution of housing resources, satisfying the residential needs of more citizens. Similarly, if we identify severe traffic congestion in a specific urban area, we can alleviate this problem by enhancing the public transportation system or encouraging mixed land use.

During the implementation of urban spatial policies, we need to continuously collect and analyze data to assess the effects and impacts of policies. For example, through resident interviews and community surveys, we can understand residents' satisfaction and the policy's impact on their daily lives post-implementation. If the results are not as expected, or unanticipated side effects emerge, we need to adjust the policies promptly to ensure they genuinely meet the city's and residents' needs.

In summary, formulating and implementing urban spatial policies is a complex task requiring a deep understanding of urban space, the collection and analysis of vast amounts of data, and flexibility to respond to various challenges. This ensures our policies genuinely promote the healthy development of the city.

4.3. Evaluation and Optimization of the Urban Spatial Policy System

The evaluation and optimization of urban spatial policy frameworks is a continuous process, requiring constant data collection and analysis to understand the effects and impacts of policies. In this process, we need to adjust our policies based on actual conditions and data feedback to ensure that the policies truly meet the needs of the city and its residents. For example, after implementing a policy aimed at alleviating traffic congestion, we may find that while traffic conditions have improved, the policy may have had a negative impact on low-income groups, possibly increasing their commuting costs. The evaluation and optimization of urban spatial policy frameworks is an ongoing process and requires a comprehensive evaluation system to understand the effects and impacts of policies. The following **Table 2** is used to evaluate policy effects:

Table 2. Urban spatial policy evaluation standards.

Indicator	Target	Scoring Criteria
Traffic Congestion Level	Reduce by 20% within a year	Reduce by 20% or more: 10 points; Reduce by 15% - 19%: 7 points; Reduce by 10% - 14%: 5 points; Reduce by 5% - 9%: 3 points; Less than 5% reduction: 1 point
Impact on Low-Income Groups	No increase	No increase: 10 points; Increase by 1% - 5%: 7 points; Increase by 6% - 10%: 5 points; Increase by 11% - 15%: 3 points; Increase by over 15%: 1 point
Housing Supply	Increase by 10% within a year	Increase by 15% or more: 10 points; Increase by 10% - 14%: 7 points; Increase by 5% - 9%: 5 points; Increase by 1% - 4%: 3 points; Increase by less than 1%: 1 point
Housing Affordability	Increase by 15% within a year	Increase by 20% or more: 10 points; Increase by 15% - 19%: 7 points; Increase by 10% - 14%: 5 points; Increase by 5% - 9%: 3 points; Increase by less than 5%: 1 point
Urban Sprawl	No increase	No increase: 10 points; Increase by 1% - 5%: 7 points; Increase by 6% - 10%: 5 points; Increase by 11% - 15%: 3 points; Increase by over 15%: 1 point
Ecological Environment	Improvement in all parameters	Improvement in all parameters: 10 points; 75% improvement: 7 points; 50% improvement: 5 points; 25% improvement: 3 points; No improvement: 1 point

For example, for the indicator of traffic congestion, our goal is to reduce it by 20% within a year. This will receive a score based on the actual percentage decrease, from 1 to 10 points. Similarly, we will also evaluate other indicators such as the impact on low-income groups, housing supply, housing affordability, urban sprawl, and the environment, and give scores based on actual conditions. In addition, it's important to remember that these scoring criteria are not fixed, but should be adjusted according to actual conditions to maximize the needs of the city and its residents. At the same time, we also need to pay attention to the long-term impact of policies, such as whether our policies might lead to excessive urban sprawl, or whether they might damage the environment, etc.

In conclusion, the evaluation and optimization of urban spatial policy frameworks is a process that requires our continuous attention and effort. Only by deeply understanding urban space, continuously collecting and analyzing data, and flexibly responding to various challenges can we formulate truly effective urban spatial policies.

5. Conclusion

From the perspective of social space theory, the key factors influencing urban space can be attributed to many aspects such as public policy, economic activities, social relations, cultural traditions, market supply and demand, and technological progress. Complex interactions exist between these factors, jointly shaping the social space and geographical space of cities. The application of social space theory provides us with a unique perspective to gain an in-depth understanding of the interaction between public policy and urban space. To construct an effective urban spatial policy system, it is imperative to fully consider

the influences of various factors on urban space, and continuously optimize during the policy formulation and implementation process. This necessitates a comprehensive, data-driven approach, while also paying attention to the long-term impacts of policy implementation. Only in this way can the needs of cities and residents be truly met to achieve social equity and sustainable development. Looking ahead, social space theory will play a core role in guiding public policy to shape more rational urban spaces.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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