

The spatial mismatch hypothesis in Brussels and its fringe: implications for transport and urban development

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The Brussels metropolitan area is facing a double challenge in, firstly, the predicted demographic boom and diversification and, secondly, in the increasingly burdening issues of congestion, pollution and overall livability. This paper examines the hypothesis of a twofold socio-spatial mismatch between working and living both within the Brussels Capital Region (BCR) and between the BCR and its hinterland. In this hypothesis, the rising demand of high-skilled workforce in Brussels' city center is associated with the increasing removal of low-skilled jobs from the urban core, which often relocate towards its fringe and hinterland. Ever since, Brussels has known an important incoming commuter flow from the adjacent regions Flanders and Wallonia, although apparently the so-called 'reverse commute' is less well-developed. Moreover, current car commuting patterns towards Brussels have a great impact on urban residents' environment, while central neighbourhood gentrification seems to contribute continuously to shrinkage of the already small low-skilled inner-urban job market. Starting from earlier studies hinting at its validity, we re-test and refine this hypothesis based on currently available statistical evidence, while developing a theoretical framework that will serve to assort implications for transport and urban development, to propose policy solutions for the outlined issues. From this perspective, strategies of city densification, mixed land use, and a more efficient public transport-oriented mobility system, will be assessed through data acquisition and analysis and by tracing back historical path dependent policies. These strategies, coined as key drivers of increased livability of city and residents, require cross-regional policy collaboration. Therefore, the current research will be conducted in association with the BCR government and Ghent University (Flanders), which provides expertise on urban-fringe interactions.

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