

Foreword

Mobility is at once the most intriguing and the most intractable of population dynamics. For households and individuals it is the process that underpins activity in every life course domain; for localities and regions it is the primary agent of population flux; for nations it is the thread that stitches together the spatial fabric and connects it to global society. What complicates analysis is the elasticity of time and space; as well as being multifaceted and repetitive, mobility is almost infinitely variable in duration and spatial extent.

As in all fields of science, scholars have sought understanding of this complex whole by segmenting mobility into discrete chunks, categorised and defined by convenient space-time boundaries. While inevitably artificial, this process of classification has been fundamental to progress in conceptualising, measuring, analysing and interpreting the dynamics of population mobility. Theories, data sources and models of mobility have all advanced.

With contributions extending over more than 30 years, the University of Leeds School of Geography sits at the epicentre of British research on the quantitative analysis of migration, and this volume stands as another distinctive pillar in the development of mobility scholarship, drawing together an impressive cast of leading contributors. Building on earlier ESRC-funded initiatives, the volume's title foreshadows a focus on technologies and applications. These are important goals: mobility shapes lives and transforms communities and we need to demonstrate how tools and technologies can advance our understanding of processes and outcomes. The chapters in this book serve that goal well, with exciting and thoughtful perspectives on important contemporary issues such as the role of migration in socio-economic polarisation, patterns of rural commuting, and ethnic migration differentials: all driven by innovative techniques.

But this volume is worthy of note for at least three other reasons. First, is its insistence on a clear understanding of the data upon which the researchers draw; a critical ingredient to rigorous analysis. Second, is the endeavour to extend beyond the Census and encompass alternative sources of mobility data, such as the LS, the School Census, higher education statistics and the Labour Force Survey, and to build new integrated databanks. Availability of data has long been viewed as the fundamental constraint to mobility research, so this wider perspective is both notable and welcome. Third, and perhaps most significant, is the broadening of focus beyond conventional internal migration, to encompass not only commuting, as heralded in the volume title, but also international migration, a dimension in which statistical data are arguably still more deficient. Together, these features represent a clear endeavour to

bridge the spatial and temporal fragmentation that characterises mobility studies, and it is this breadth of scope and compass, as well as the innovative technologies and applications, that recommend this excellent book.

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