

Book Review

Gunilla Jönson and Emin Tengström (eds.) *Urban Transport Development. A Complex Issue.*

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This book presents a selection of contributions to the 2003 Conference of The Volvo Research and Educational Foundations in Göteborg. It is not meant as a book of proceedings but as a book representing the major perspectives of the conference on urban transport problems. These perspectives can be summarized as follows: a more or less holistic view to be achieved through a system approach and an emphasis on complexity; in addition, a focus on the long-term dynamics of the development of the transport system. The book is structured into five sections.

Section one (chapters 1 through 3) is an attempt to elaborate the above perspectives to provide common ground for the subsequent sections. The perspectives are highly relevant but also very comprehensive. In this light, the discussion is rather brief and could have been more systematic as an introduction.

The second section (chapter 4 through 8) deals with complexity and understanding the variety herein in the practice of public transport systems in various places, i.e., Toronto (Canada) and Melbourne (Australia), Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania), Kingston (Jamaica), and some cities in China and the US. The focus is on planning systems of urban public transport, including the level of competition, for example, coordination by the city administration as a monopoly and, as the opposite, to leave urban public transport to private operators. Both in Kingston and Dar-es-Salaam reforms of a monopoly towards privatisation and deregulation appear not successful and call for intermediate systems of controlled competition and coordinated planning. This section is very informative but sometimes also too broad, e.g. by including the impact of mass motorisation on societal development and problem perceptions.

In section three (chapter 9 through 12) various analytical perspectives are provided, mainly related with mega-trends. With regard to the US, attention is drawn to the policy complexity as a result of experts' conflicting ways of interpreting transport problems, and political and institutional barriers to introduce new ideas. However, also some promising new initiatives are forwarded by the authors, like car-sharing and shuttle programs for home-work trips.

Next is a description of the traffic situation in Asian cities facing a rapid urbanization. The mostly poor people here need to travel to participate in formal or informal work, relying on walking, cycling and rickshaws, and motorised two-wheelers etc. However, formal transport planning often disregards mobility of the poor. This situation leads the authors to a plea to integrate not only the transport situation of the poor in transport planning but also their ability to establish self-organising systems of non-polluting vehicles, viz. bicycles and cycle rickshaws. The message from sub-Saharan Africa regions is similar, in that transport planning focuses too much on motor vehicles. In this context opportunities from South-South learning are given, including the model of Bogota, Colombia which facilitated change in favour of the poor. This section concludes with a description of a set of best practices in European cities including an emphasis on the gap between possibilities (good ideas and best practices) and realities (large traffic jams) in cities.

Section four (chapter 13 through 16) deals with the role of actors in solving urban transport problems. First, the question of barriers to successful implementation of urban transport projects is addressed and the empirical basis for this is Kingston (Jamaica). In the second chapter, a somewhat rhetorical analysis is given of positive planning experience in Portland (US), in which among others citizen participation and leadership mattered. Next chapter brings an environmentalist's perspective to the discussion through the description of a future compact city and an elaboration of various barriers to creating sustainable transport systems, viz. political unwillingness, existing complex organisational structures, existing mobility patterns derived by habits and historical circumstances, people's perceptions, and vested interests in the present transport system. According to the authors, the potential at the EU level seems limited caused by a paralysing conflict between the two Directorates of the European Commission responsible for transport and environment policies, and between the principle of subsidiarity and the Commission's fulfilling its Treaty obligations on promoting health and the environment. This situation can only be overcome, in the authors' view, by a strong political will and breaking with patterns of belief and behaviour. This section is concluded with an analysis of the economic impact of light rail in various European and North American cities. The authors show that the economic effects of new lines tend to be under-estimated by many decision-makers, and claim that close cooperation between private developers and planners is absolutely necessary for success in choosing the new alignment of a light rail line. This case exemplifies how researchers may also perform as actors (not only analysts) when recommending particular policies.

The final section (chapter 17 through 20) deals with challenges in coping with the complexity of urban transport, and introduces some new ideas from North America, India and Europe. First, there is an analysis of the complicated role of political actors. According to the authors, to better understand how political decision-makers deal with complexity of changing urban transport systems, it is necessary to understand their position towards the core of power which tends to define the basis of decisions. In this context, the major dilemma of politicians in democracies is to find a stable balance between what is considered efficient and legitimate. Next in this section, the key role of education and research in the search of solutions is forwarded, and MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) is taken as an example of providing improved education and research. This is followed by an analysis of India drawing the reader's attention to the unacceptable lack of road safety and shortage of knowledge among researchers on factors influencing road fatality risks. In the final chapter, a discussion is provided on how The Volvo Research and Educational Foundations could adapt its policy to the challenges of future urban transport development and ensure learning processes that

break with path dependency of present developments and of handling the tension between power and rationality.

In summary, this is an introductory book addressing new perspectives in tackling problems in urban transport systems. It reads pleasantly and is rich in facts, particular by including analysis from developing countries. As a logical consequence, it is somewhat poor in depth and a few chapters miss substance. However, the book forms part of a longer research trajectory and the commitment that speaks throughout the book, gives a good indication that in-depth knowledge will be provided in next steps of the program.

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