Journal of Transport Geography 38 (2014) 159–160

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Transport Geography

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jtrangeo

Book review

Sustainable Transport for Chinese Cities, R.L. Mackett, A.B. May, M. Kii, H. Pan Bingley (Eds.). Emerald (2013). £77.95 (Hardback) ISBN: 9781781904756

This book is a collection of 15 papers focusing on sustainable transport, Chinese cities, or both presented at an international conference held in Shanghai in 2010. The contributors from Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Japan, and China approach the sustainable transport issues from multidisciplinary backgrounds, which demonstrate the complexity of these issues and the importance of productively bridging ideas and best practices across the world.

The papers are structured into 16 chapters under five sections, namely, (1) introduction and the global and Chinese context, (2) approaches to policy formulation, (3) traffic and passenger transport, (4) freight and logistics, and (5) conclusion. The addition of an introductory and a summary chapter by the editorsprovide readers with an overview of the book. As almost all the chapters discuss sustainable transport as a policy issue, I use public policy and its implementation to describe the major theme of the entire volume. Under this theme, the best practices and lesson from mistakes of different countries are compared with those of Chinese cities.

I found three chapters to be the most comprehensive in terms of theoretical grounding and guidance for policy implementation. Crozet (Chapter 4) proposes three stages of accessibility that occur in cities worldwide. He defines the first stage of urban accessibility as the period when cities search for individual (car) speeds in overcoming the distances a city is creating between jobs and homes. The time when urban dwellers and their representatives realize that the density of urban land use and the activity distribution are important forms the second stage of accessibility. In this stage, the provisions for better public transport, which consists of a combination of high frequency, comfort, and speed, are better understood and emphasized. The third stage is when accessibility becomes interpreted as more of an overall land use issue for the city. The concern for individual mobility and travel time is considered a partial concern for overall urban functions. This conceptualization of three-staged accessibility, which uses Lyon as an example and compares it with Chinese cities, offers a solid foundation in explaining how accessibility is understood gradually, in relation to sustainable urbanity, as a whole by stakeholders. This explanation implies that, even though the idea of a gravity-based simple accessibility concept was initiated by Hansen (1959) more than half a century ago, individual cities tend to go through the three stages step by step. Highly complementary to Crozet's work is Chapter 6, which is written by Doi and Kii. The authors explain how a cross-assessment model with the framework of land-use and transport integration may work as a policy instrument to manage urban mobility systems. Although the placement of parameters of land use and transport components in an integrated manner for urban transport modeling (for example, see the discussion by Miller et al. (1998)) comes as no surprise, this chapter demonstrates how a properly simplified structure of land use–transport interrelationships can be associated appropriately with the quantitative indicators of user's benefit, CO_2 emission, and financial balance of public transport in a real scenario testing exercise that evaluated Japanese cities. In Chapter 3, Pan presents his comprehension of the Chinese situation in a different way by providing a detailed and informative discussion of sustainable transport issues in China. Pan and other authors featured in the book emphasize the special characteristics of megacities in China, namely, urbanization in an accelerated manner, high density both within the city proper and suburban districts, and rapid pace of motorization (with large quantities while still at the early stage). Chapters 5 and 12 highlight another interesting feature with respect to thesspecial characteristics of megacities in China. They introduce new ideas and technologies in urban transportation, such as bus rapid transit (BRT) and electric bicycles (e-bikes), which were not present when motorization occurred in the early 20th century in Western cities.

To what extent can the policies and related frameworks on the pursuit of sustainable transport in developed countries be transferred to and implemented in developing countries such as China? May (Chapter 7) and Kendal et al. (Chapter 8) touch on this issue by examining the transport policy packages and the many individual policies in the United Kingdom, respectively. Their introductions and summaries broaden the perspectives of their Chinese counterparts as well as the readers in less developed countries, but I have reservations about the transferability largely because of one factor: the institutional differences between China and the West. In the West, as demonstrated by May in this book, the processes of policy formulation and implementation are not only transparent but also considered as research subjects. By contrast, little has been done academically in investigating the policy formulation processes in urban transport in China. The reason is that, in most situations in China, the major decisions on urban transport are made in a top-down decision-making fashion. These processes lack the transparency that would enable most academics, who are considered "outsiders," to gain a good comprehension of the decisions. Moreover, the decisions are made too quickly for researchers to evaluate the situation thoroughly. For example, the decision to construct an urban railway system in any city in mainland China has to obtain approval from the Commission of Development and Reform (CDR) of the Central Government. In 2012, the CDR immediately granted approvals to construct railway systems in 33 cities that submitted applications in the past decade. This strong control from above might have changed some of the development paths of these cities. The BRT in Xiamen, which is presented in Chapter 12, was actually built on an elevated infrastructure designed for light rail, which was among the projects that did not receive approval in time. The lack of transparency in the decision-making process has also led a considerable number of Chinese researchers to focus

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2014.03.005

more on technical and individual solutions to sustainable transport, which is also apparent from the chapters in this book that are written by Chinese authors.

Having three chapters devoted to urban freight transport is interesting, as e-commerce and other technical advancements have led to a rapid growth in parcel deliveries that have replaced shopping trips. Two important issues are discussed: the development of freight villages by Liu and Savy in Chapter 14, and the last-mile issues by Zhang, Fan, and Zhu in Chapter 16. A brief but comprehensive summary of freight village development in France provides excellent reference for China, as both countries are faced with new and serious challenges from extra freight volumes generated from soaring online sales. By 2020, it is expected that 20% or more of total retail sales in China will be online. How many Chinese cities and related logistics firms will deal with this increase remains unclear, not to mention how much extra CO^2 will be emitted because of the increased trucking trips with less-than-full loads and the resultant congestion in high density urban areas. Unfortunately, only a limited analysis on China's situation in this area can be found in the book. This supports the call for more and deeper investigation into urban logistics from Hall and Hesse (2013).

Overall, this book is a valuable addition to the sustainable urban transport literature in two ways. First, for readers who want to learn more about China, this book provides a comprehensive update on what has been implemented and is currently being implemented in this country, as several authors are actually policy executers in city governments. Second, this book is an excellent collection of practices and lessons from some major non-English speaking countries, such as Japan, Germany, and France. Therefore, the book reflects the geography of the diffusion and implementation of sustainable transport concepts.

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