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Book review

Cities, Regions and Flows, Peter V. Hall, Markus Hesse (Eds.). Taylor Francis, Abingdon, Routledge (2013), £90 (Hardback) ISBN: 978-0-415-68219-0

This edited volume, which is part of the Studies in Human Geography series of Routledge, explores the way freight flows shape and are shaped by specific places. In an excellent introductory chapter the editors argue that goods flows have been largely ignored in academic literature on urban and regional development. The book does not consider freight as a simple derived demand, but presents a convincing set of papers underlining that freight can structure cities and regions and vice versa. The editors and the expert contributors provide a timely overview of how cities and urban regions interact with systems of freight flows and to what extent these interactions are subject to regional and temporal differences and changes. Conceptual considerations and empirical findings are linked using a framework centered around the tension between integration and disintegration. While the concluding chapter identifies clear academic and policy-oriented challenges for the future, the book is not aimed at providing a clear picture on how the cities – flows interaction might evolve in the future. Instead, the book provides a contemporary analysis of the interaction between flows and cities/regions supported by theoretical foundations and case-based empirical and historical, often path dependent, reflections. The editors managed to engage an impressive line-up of experts in the field each bringing their perspective and specific contribution to the general theme. The book combines academic and conceptual insights with down-to earth discussions on real challenges and tangible solutions for dealing with freight flows in an urban setting.

The book consists of five parts. Part 1 provides an extensive and well-developed introduction to the volume. Part 2 covers four theoretical chapters each of them addressing a specific dimension of the integration/disintegration spectrum: integration in an economic sense (chapter 2), in terms of digital and virtual architecture (chapter 3), in terms of logistics and supply chain management (chapter 4) and in terms of political processes (chapter 5). The depth of the discussion on integration/disintegration in each of these chapters varies, but overall these chapters provide enough theoretical backing for the later chapters. While the editors do not ignore that freight flows are linked to information flows and associated ICT systems networks, the management of these information flows and the power of ICT networks in optimizing flows in space is somewhat underrepresented in the book. Chapter 3 discusses the integration of virtual flows into material movements, but the reader might feel that this valuable chapter is somewhat disconnected from the rest of the book simply because the attention given to the role of information flows is rather marginal in all other chapters.

Part 3 contains five case studies from different parts of the world: the Paris region (chapter 6), the Chicago region (chapter 7), the Amazon basin in Brazil (chapter 8), Incheon in South Korea (chapter 9) and Durban in South Africa (chapter 10). All five chapters excel in providing a very detailed discussion on the past and current situation of freight flows in the respective regions, the identification of key challenges and the way challenges have been, are being or should be addressed. The five case studies in this edited volume demonstrate that cities and regions are not to be seen as passive nodes in wider logistical systems. Agents based in cities or regions actively reshape and restructure the urban space for the sake of accommodating freight flows. While the truly global orientation of the case studies is undeniable a strong point, the book does not elaborate on the motivation behind the choice for these five case studies. In other words, it is somewhat unclear what these five regions have or do not have in common (e.g. in terms of economic, logistics, urban or governance dimensions) and how the overall conclusions are affected by the choice of these five particular cases. A minor comment relates to the use of data. Many of the case studies contain slightly outdated figures and tables with the latest data relating to 2009 or in some cases even 2006. The case studies thus do not analyze the present-day situation but provide a picture of the immediate past.

Part 4 of the books deals with some of the challenges for policy and planning with respect to the interactions between flows and places. In essence, the challenges are not being addressed in a general manner, but presented using another set of case studies. Chapter 11 analyzes the environmental policies in and around seaports of Southern California. Also chapter 12 on the regulation of road vehicle emissions in Germany has a strong focus on environmental challenges and related policy. The third paper in part 4 addresses the tension between local negative externalities linked to freight flows and wider economic benefits generated by the same freight flows. Using Ontario, Canada as a case study, the authors demonstrate in a detailed manner how local agents try to increase local benefits connected to flows whilst minimizing negative externalities. Some readers might wonder why these three case studies form a separate part of this book while at the same time five other case studies are presented in part 3 of this volume. The dividing line between general case studies and more policy-oriented case studies is indeed very thin. What sets the chapters in part 4 apart from part 3 is the strong presence of the environmental/externalities dimension, reflecting the increasing role of environmental concerns in the policy debate on the interaction between cities/regions and flows. Given its importance, the environment could have received a more prominent place in the introductory chapter.

Urban governance issues are strongly visible in many of the chapters of parts 3 and 4. The editors rightly state that tensions exist between the need for coherent governance and the need for adaptive and flexible urban policy. One could say that some planning is needed, but too rigid planning risks negatively affecting the competitiveness and effectiveness of cities and regions in dealing with freight flows. Urban governance and institutions thus play a

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key role in facilitating and guiding the interactions between cities/regions and flows. The role of institutions and the often observed fragmentation of agents in dealing with urban flows rightfully receive attention in the case studies and the policy chapters, and is also touched upon in the more theoretical chapter 5. However, the lack of a uniform application of a coherent conceptual framework on the role of institutions and agents makes it hard to compare the lessons learnt from the various cases and to identify any (dis)similarities that might exist. The lack of coherence in the way the case studies were developed is somewhat compensated for by the meticulous identification of the challenges for freight and logistics development, policy and planning in the concluding part 5.

A final observation relates to the research units in the case studies. It is noteworthy that a lot of the chapters in part 3 and 4 have a strong seaport-related orientation. Does this imply that processes of integration/disintegration are most visible in seaport regions? If that is the case then the tension between positive and negative impacts of freight flows to cities and regions as identified in chapter 13 will become even more visible in seaports which serve wider global logistics systems beyond the immediate port region.

In summary, this is an excellent book providing readers with a wealth of theoretical and empirical insights which will help them to address the mounting academic and practical challenges in dealing with the interaction between cities/regions and flows. The book will not only be appealing to academics and researchers with an interest in this emerging field of research. As the book is largely kept at a policy level, it is also appealing to practitioners and policy makers.

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