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Book review

Restructuring Public Transport Through Bus Rapid Transit: An international and inter-disciplinary perspective, by J. C. Munoz and L. Paget-Seekins (Ed.). 2016. Bristol, Policy Press. £75.00 (Hardback), ISBN 978-1-44732-616-8.

The cover text describes the book as being *"the first to offer an in-depth analysis of BRT, examining the opportunities it presents along with the significant challenges cities face in its implementation"*. I agree, and for me the book's greatest strength is its comprehensive coverage of all the major issues around BRT, with readability assisted by helpful cross-referencing between chapters. Despite a rather uneven tone in places that is no mean achievement, given that as well as the editors there are 37 contributing authors.

From the point of view of transport geographers the wide coverage is a real asset because many of the issues have geographical implications or are topics where the outcome is at least partially the result of geographical factors. However, whilst the book makes clear the relation of its subject to geography, its value is hindered slightly by the fact that there is an overemphasis on examples from South America, and comparatively little from other areas of the world. Perhaps this is an understandable consequence of the fact that it is based heavily on research conducted by the BRT Centre of Excellence in Chile, in a continent where efforts to introduce BRT have been groundbreaking, but I found it slightly disappointing. For instance, my own personal experiences of BRT elsewhere (e.g. Nigeria and Indonesia) showed me certain aspects of the mode - such as, for instance, challenges of the boarding and alighting procedures, and the mixed use of BRT corridors by both BRT and conventional bus services - which the book didn't really cover.

One geographical-related criticism I have is that the book doesn't seem fully to get to grips with the fact that the role of BRT is very different between urban environments that reflect very different levels of development. Although there are a number of different features that characterise 'classic' BRT (e.g. off-bus ticketing), there are also actually a wide range of BRT types in practise and the book doesn't fully address this, in my view. For instance, while Chapter 2 deals with benchmarking of BRT systems and makes reference to variations of BRT, such as BHLS ('buses with high level of service'), its failure to give concrete examples of BHLS means that the table of the number of systems by country (Table 2.1) is not very meaningful.

I found Section 1 on Institutional Relationships the most inspirational and interesting part of the book because it seemed to me to deal very well with issues that are of great interest to social scientists but which are often glossed over in discussions of development. These are the 'messy' structural and cultural features of public transport organisation that can be a key determinant of success or failure in attempting to introduce transformational change. I appreciated the practical analysis of real situations where there was insufficient regulation, and the book's comparison of 'sudden' and 'gradual' pathways to integration, as well as the coverage of BRT as a tool for negotiated re-regulation. The history of the emergence of minibus operations is instructive, although I missed references to the international institutions that had sometimes been promoting these as a policy principle. There is a good explanation in this section of the political process of bringing private-sector consortia on board and of then formalising them alongside the implementation of BRT.

Two other elements in this Section are worthy of mention because of their addressing of often 'hidden' issues. These are, firstly, the involvement of multiple agencies, with the fact that institutional and governance structures may not reflect new relationships and interactions. Secondly, public 'buy-in' is covered. However, this is where the tight relevance of the book to its subject matter begins to show the first sign of fraying, as the chapter on this is essentially not really about BRT but rather is about public buy-in to transport infrastructure schemes per se, although the chapter does use as an example the introduction of the *Transantiago* BRT system.

Section 2, on *BRT and the City*, is of special interest to geographers because of the link to the form of the city, though I felt that it was rather an uneven section with not enough evidence of an appreciation of the wide differences between different cities which have BRT systems. So, for instance, Chapter 12, on *User Preferences and Route Choice*, is an interesting analysis for a city with fully integrated public transport, but I felt it was less relevant in cities which do not have that. Chapter 9 in this Section (*Conflict over public space*) has reviews of power dynamics and discussions of how different governments react in different ways, with interesting examples of political geography. The next chapter on *Designing BRT-oriented development* is also interesting from a geographical and land-use perspective but is disappointing to the extent that there is much more emphasis on theoretical design than on practical implementation.

Some parts of the book cover topics which have great relevance to BRT but do this in ways which lack much specific application to BRT itself – arguments are presented relating to the impact of planned and formal public transport rather than specifically to BRT. I felt this was the case in the Section 3 chapters on *Opportunities provided by automated data collection systems* and on *Managing drivers and vehicles for cost-effective operations in regulated transit systems.* However, both these chapters are refreshing and satisfying in that they give sound and comprehensive coverage of these topics, which are often otherwise difficult to find.

By contrast, there are a few chapters in the book, in all the three Sections, which to me were unconvincing in their presentation of evidence or which seemed to omit key factors. These tended to be those that were making points in favour of a particular way of planning or operating aspects of BRT systems, or which were largely theoretical rather than giving evidence based on particular BRT systems.

But these gripes are minor: the book's accessible style and wide coverage of issues make it one I would recommend.

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