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Book review

Geographies of Transport and Ageing, by Angela Curl and Charles Musselwhite (Eds.). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. £96.50 (hardback); £91.68 (e-book). ISBN 9783319763590

This book presents an insight into some of the most recent and novel research stemming from layered geographical perspectives on transport and ageing. The use of the plural "geographies" in the title is apt in that this book does not just retell the relatively well established narratives from the Western world. It instead draws on studies from rural as well as urban perspectives, from the Global South, as well as the Global North.

The book is divided into four parts. Part I sets the context; Part II engages in the issues to which rural inhabitants are exposed; Part III details the urban perspectives; while prospects for the future are highlighted and discussed in Part IV. The placement of the rural perspectives before the urban seems to be an intentional move by the editors – conveying the message that these perspectives have been somewhat overlooked in the research agenda to date. In this way, the editors bring the less frequently "heard" narratives to the fore.

One of the main strengths of this book is the overview presented in Chapter 1. Chapter 1 presents a refreshing perspective on the dimensions of mobility, as well as very convincing arguments for why transport should be afforded more attention as part of the geography-gerontology discourse. Chapter 2 then outlines the generational shifts in mobility taking place in the UK, through the employment of an interesting visual method. The authors analyse longitudinal panel data. However, a mobility biography or individual trajectory analysis is somewhat missing, given that this type of rich data allows for such a rare opportunity. Nonetheless, the issues outlined are highly relevant, with similar trends apparent in other Western countries. Furthermore, the authors' critical perspective on urban policy and planning in the production of "modal choice" is both fair and thought-provoking.

One notable strength of the book is the presentation of methods that can be adapted and applied to other contexts (e.g. Chapters 4, 5, 7 and 8). Chapter 4 highlights the fact that ageing is occurring at a faster rate in the developing, as opposed to the developed, world. This chapter presents an interesting mix of methods, employing a "co-investigation" element. The chapter explores the themes of intergenerational dependence, safety and security, motorcycle taxis and smartphone technologies and their effects on mobility for older people living in rural Tanzania. This is a highly insightful chapter which ends by emphasising the rather urgent need for more attention to be placed on the mobility issues faced by older people in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially considering the necessity to work well into later life.

The role of digital technology and its potential to enhance the well-being of largely housebound older people in different parts of Scotland is explored in Chapter 5. The chapter is based on a study which helped to develop and test a "window to the outside world". This portal (in the form of a tablet) allowed for participants to view local activities in a familiar setting. The chapter ends with the authors emphasising that such a portal should function as a supplement to – as opposed to a replacement for – social interaction.

Chapter 7 presents a study from Kochi City, India, which explores how changing household compositions and family structures (largely from joint to nuclear family) influence older people's outdoor mobility. In urban India, it is the norm for older people to shoulder large amounts of childcare duties and domestic chores, with tangible consequences for their outdoor mobility. Traffic safety presents as a major issue for outdoor mobility in this context.

Chapter 8 provides a powerful description of the methods employed to investigate walking among a variety of older people in different contexts – referred to as "mobile methods". The authors emphasise the significance of walking in later life, and how the built environment can be more important for older people than for younger. This chapter has a different character to the other chapters in that it provides practical advice and ethical considerations for the application of these methods.

Another strength of the book is its emphasis on future research needs (Chapters 3, 6 and 9, in particular). Chapter 3 presents a detailed acknowledgement of other forms of mobility (as opposed to just corporeal). Here, the role of digital technology in transport is examined. Digital technology is problematised as an opportunity, as well as a barrier. The author is critical of the ways in which ICT is often regarded as a tool for mitigation and adaptation, as opposed to something positive which can enhance the well-being of older people. Chapter 6 encompasses a review of studies which examine the health benefits of cycling for transport. The authors highlight several areas for future research, stressing that e-bike use and its potential contribution to older people's mobility, as well as the inherent traffic safety aspects, require (rather urgent) further investigation. However, the stark gendered difference in cycling among older people, although mentioned, is not really emphasised in this chapter, even though this difference is quite remarkable.

Chapter 9 is also somewhat focused on future research. The chapter starts with a discussion of autonomous vehicles and the utopian and dystopian narratives surrounding their diffusion as a technology. However, the empirical work presented is based on the extrapolation of situations for participants from a recent study. Although some interesting insights are presented, this exercise lacked the scientific rigour present in the other studies upon which the book is based.

Chapter 10 presents a very informative outlook for the future, and places a distinct emphasis on the increasing diversity of the ageing population in tandem with the process of rapid urbanisation. The authors call for the integration of transport policy with other policies (a recurring issue in the book). They highlight progress in the realm of "age-friendly cities", emphasising that emotional aspects such as "place" are now starting to gain momentum. They stress that older people – in all their diversity – must be engaged in policymaking and planning for the future.

Geography is clearly the focus of the book. However, this book is most probably just as insightful and useful for disciplines such as public health, social gerontology, occupational therapy, as well as interdisciplinary ageing education and research more generally.

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Overall, the editors and authors succeed in taking broad subject matter and converting it into a succinct, accessible and easily digestible book. This book is a valuable contribution and is recommended for anyone working with these topics.

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