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Book review

Diane E. Davis, Alan Altshuler. (Eds.), Transforming Urban Transport, Oxford University Press, New York (2019). ISBN 978-0-19-087571-8, Paperback, $34.95

The litany of adverse health and environmental impacts of urban and suburban transportation (urban air pollution, in-vehicle pollution, motor vehicle accidents, global warming, noise, stress, partition of neighborhoods, etc.) has long resulted in a growing interest in alternative approaches, including more walking and biking, reduced goods transportation, improved public transit, and other solutions.

Among recent scholarship documenting such alternative approaches and initiatives, *Transforming Urban Transport*, a collective book by an international group of faculty and researchers led by Diane E. Davis and Alan Altshuler (Harvard GSD), stands out for its analytical innovativeness, richness of content, and the elegance and persuasiveness of its narrative clarity.

The book documents eight case studies of 21st century "transformative" innovations in urban transport in cities in developed and democratic countries (Vienna, Paris, Stockholm, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Mexico City and Seoul).

As Alan Altshuler explains in the introduction, the focus of the book is on processes of public decision-making, the strategies and tactics developed – and the barriers that have to be overcome – to effect transformative change in urban transport. The book explores the practical meaning and ramifications of decision-making in the midst of intersecting webs of mutual interdependence among various sets of stakeholders (political parties, urban officials, technical experts, advocates and civil society groups).

This is a carefully organized search around "strategies and tactics" that have proven successful to effect transformative change and are each present in at least two of the cases. They are: issue framing, benefit sharing, shifts in the locus of decision-making, disaggregation, coalition-building, privatization and public-private partnerships, and piloting.

The empirical material is very rich, and Altshuler explicitly suggests in the introduction (p. 23) that the book's analysis does not preclude alternative and supplemental contributions. It is certainly a strength of the book to present its approach and conclusions as an inspiring template for decision-making in urban transport that could certainly be followed and enriched by other researchers in the future.

The eight case studies are as follows: regarding New York City (chapter authored by David Luberoff), the focus is on bike sharing system and the creation of pedestrian plazas. In Los Angeles (also by Luberoff), the study is about new taxation to finance a multimodal but transit-dominated plan. The chapter on San Francisco, by Onésimo Flores and Lisa Rayle, is devoted to commercial ride-sharing in the first city to adopt this modality. Flores also discusses Mexico City (focusing on the bus rapid transit system, the 6th largest in the world) and Seoul (the development of mass transit system and the resulting transformation of the city center).

The discussion on Stockholm is on the implementation of congestion charging by referendum, by Diane E. Davis and Amy Rader Olsson. The chapter on Vienna, authored by Ralph Buehler, John Pucher and Alan Altshuler, explains the expansion and modernization of public transport, keeping prices low, which caused the reduction by a third of automobile share of person trips. Lastly, the Paris case, authored by Charlotte Halpern and Patrick LeGalès, tells the story of the comprehensive strategies of widespread traffic calming, agreed upon between city and suburbs in favor of public transportation and pedestrians.

All such transformations work as underlying factors in the direction of increased urban sustainability in each city. This linear arrow of causality, however, should not distract the reader from the complexities exhibited in the changing inter-actor webs of decision-making, the establishment of preferences, perceptions, coalition-building efforts and choices by various sets of stakeholders. Exposing, describing and explaining these complexities constitutes, in this reader's view, one of the most important contributions of the book.

This network, relational approach is enriched by taking into account contextual and structural factors (framing of issues, time horizons, spatial scales, boundaries, components, drivers, what is known, what is uncertain, what might change, what outcomes emerge from processes, etc.), and by proposing a multi-level comparison where the cases are adequately grouped in three sets (Europe, United States, Mexico-Korea).

Thus, the book describes what I see as *networked and embedded agency*, and convincingly narrates sets of intersecting "transactions" (to use the concept favored by the book's authors, p. 282) among actors and sets of actors in specific settings, where emergent processes and outcomes unfold. In addition, the book proposes a rich and open-ended comparative portrait among the eight cases highlighting overlapping features combined with case specificities. All of this is a major undertaking, and *Transforming Urban Transport* superbly succeeds at it.

The concluding chapter, where Diane E. Davis takes on the empirical material from the eight cases and interrogates the relationships and co- variations between processes and outcomes, is a key chapter in the book. Importantly, we learn here that changes in urban transport affect not only regulations, accountability and mobility conditions, but more fundamentally (p. 287) longer-term institutional capacities (relationships, commitments, mandates, responsibilities among actors). In turn, regional and urban factors other than transport have an impact on the outcomes.

So, Davis asks - what explains transformative change (the expansion of institutional and planning capacity in the service of an agenda for sustainable mobility) in urban transport? Differences in outcomes point to stakeholder dynamics – number, scale and nature of transactions. In the most transformative cases (Europe), one finds "the broadest range of stakeholders across a wide variety of sectoral, political and territorial domains" (p. 292). The transactional nature of the processes mattered, as did communication, sustained engagement, and stakeholder networks and involvement in "constant public discussion" along a bumpy road to implementation. Thus, "institutionalization for sustainable mobility is a factor of engaging a large number and wide range of

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stakeholders" (p. 298).

The role of stakeholder engagement, together with the formation of publics, participation, and democracy are thus fundamental preconditions for transformative change in urban transport. In fact, the case studies in this book reveal that "deep democracy" (transparency and inclusivity in negotiations between citizens and authorities, p. 300) is possible across a wide range of governance regimes.

The book will appeal to academics, planners and practitioners alike, as well as both graduate and undergraduate students interested in urbanism, transport and sustainability. Transport geographers, in particular, will appreciate the book's rigorous, cross-cultural examination of sets of heterogeneous stakeholders influencing transformative change in urban transport.

Discovering and narrating complexity's rugged landscapes in analytically path-breaking, eloquent and suggestive ways deserves much credit and attention, and a wide readership. This book is a *tour de force* and a major contribution to scholarship on urban transport, sustainability, comparative analysis and local democratic theory.

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