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Book review

Designing for Cycle Traffic - International Principles and Practice, by Parkin, John. 2018. London, UK: ICE Publishing. £65 (paperback). ISBN 978-0-7277-6349-5.

Parkin's book is a technical guide for cycling infrastructure that reaches beyond a collage of international design concepts. The book is published by the Institution of Engineers, addressing transport engineers, but the writing style is also be accessible to most non-technical readers. The reader can find the text's centrepiece on page 46: it is a table prescribing appropriate infrastructure solutions according to vehicle volumes, road speeds and cycle traffic.

The text seeks to counterbalance the dominance of the motor car in urban space by providing authoritative guideposts towards cycling infrastructure. It has a myth-busting character. The overarching design principle behind the text is space distinction: to separate driving from cycling, and cycling from walking. It primarily borrows and translates contexts from the Netherlands, but also Denmark and the USA, as well as London's Cycling Design Standards. The text painstakingly explains to the reader the underlying principles for good cycling infrastructure design. It addresses a lack of technical expertise in the UK: engineering expertise must be honed to empower the transition processes that are underway in UK cities like London and Manchester.

The book's introduction lays out the gravity of the undertaking: the current disconnect between policy and implementation. The fourteen following chapters deal with the various angles of designing cycle infrastructure. The focus is an infrastructure that enables a wider population to use the bike for everyday travel. Chapters 2 to 4 ease the reader into the peripheries of cycling infrastructure, looking at policy, funding, legal, evaluative aspects (chapter 2), types of cycles, geometric requirements and cycling networks (chapter 3), and car reduction strategies to assist cycling (chapter 4). Chapters 5 to 7 lay out principles for cycling infrastructure and separation from driving and walking. Whilst chapters 8 to 11 home in on crossing designs. The remaining chapters address cycle parking, traffic modelling, global South and innovation respectively.

Understandably, the text heavily relies on photographic depictions to convey design ideas. Regrettably, however, the photographs are printed in grey scale hence losing much in clarity and expressiveness.

The book is impressive in its wide-ranging yet meticulous approach. Its argumentation is attentive to detail and remains technically astute. Various cycle concepts have been brought under one roof, including spatial separation of transport modes. For a technical guide, this is a welcome development as it parallels the recent spatial turn in active travel. Up until recently, cycling advocacy had supported on-road solutions. Hence, spatial separation, or protected cycling space, was a highly contentious subject amongst cycling groups. Only lately, starting in the UK in 2011, other voices became more prominent in civic society, often pointing to the democratising effects of Dutch design principles. The new generation of UK cycle proponents promoted the conversion of road space to cycle space. The book's attentiveness to intermediary concepts like primary position and bike boxes demonstrates that we are firmly in a transition phase.

Cycling has thus been put on the political agenda over the last decade in the UK (Leyendecker, 2019b). This spatialisation of demands brought with it a politicisation leading to physical changes in some cities (Sadik-Khan and Solomonow, 2016; Walker, 2017). With Parkin's book, it is good to see developments in civic society and the technical realm work hand-in-hand. Academic writing on cycling has been burgeoning (Pucher and Buehler, 2017).

Parkin's text mainly, and rightly, addresses transport engineers, but transport planners make preliminary decisions such as networks and traffic flows and may even be involved in policy making. These initial decisions narrow down scopes and impact heavily on street designs. In transport, the decision-making process is often exclusionary at various levels. As I have pointed out in another Institution of Civil Engineer's publication, road safety requires an unpicking of entangled transport practices (Leyendecker, 2019a).

The mission of the book is to bring Dutch principles into UK's technical expertise. In detail it is most valuable to the UK context, but in principle the text would apply to other low-cycling countries. I wish the text would be much clearer on design choices. A UK engineer reading the text could still easily come away designing inadequate infrastructure because subgrade options are listed in the text. The book is a courageous undertaking as it seeks to redirect current practice. Due to the transitional position the UK finds itself in, a transformation of engineering skills is both paramount and necessary.

Design decisions rarely happen in an empty room. Political circumstances contribute to technical possibilities. Parkin's technical collection of cycling concepts should be tremendously useful companion for transport professionals and civil engineers and who specialise in active travel. Change can happen, when the political direction is positive towards enabling cycling for all. Engineers may also decide to cooperate with active-travel activists and combine powers: seek to educate politicians and planners so that change can happen.

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