Journal of Transport Geography 82 (2020) 102585

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Transport Geography

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jtrangeo

Book review

Governing Compact Cities: How to Connect Planning, Design and Transport, P. Rode. Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham UK and Northampton MA USA (2018). (pp273 & xi; £85 hardback)

Rode uses the examples of London and Berlin to investigate the integration of urban planning, city design and transport. He assesses how far new approaches to urban governance have been able to increase the integration of planning and policy beyond structures and processes of decision-making. Compact urban growth requires supportive urban governance arrangements that connect together spatial planning, city design and urban transport. Rode argues that most contemporary urban development is unsustainable and that compact urban growth is central to more sustainable development. It aims to increase urban density and mixed-use, improve the quality of urban design and prioritise public transport, cycling and walking. It is an antidote to further urban sprawl, mono-functional and car-dependent urban development. Rode contends that more integrated planning and policy-making is essential to deliver more compact urban growth.

Despite the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Declaration of Principles of Sustainable Development, later urban Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 11) and the United Nations' New Urban Agenda (2016), there is a lack of knowledge about the required integrated planning and governance structures. Integration relies conventionally on a hierarchical top-down management structure and is characteristic, for example, of the Dutch planning system.

Rode identifies three challenges for co-ordinating urban planning, design and transport: firstly, a transition from government to governance with deregulation, planning flexibility and private sector involvement. This is a move towards an enabling state with more public participation and a more democratic decision-making process. Privatisation of urban services, infrastructure provision and operation makes policy integration more complex and harder to deliver. The second challenge is the need to cut across temporal and spatial scales. Tensions exist between short electoral cycles that require politicians to deliver quick results and long term planning, and the mismatch between multiple urban administrative units and larger functional metropolitan regions. Thirdly, decades of fragmentation, urban splintering and weak planning need to be reversed to integrate transport and urban planning and deliver more strategic urban development.

This densely written and well-referenced book analyses the compact city agenda by examining how objectives for urban planning, city design and urban transport policies have been pursued, what mechanisms have been identified for integration, and what broader concepts of integrated governance can be observed. The two case studies of London and Berlin are justified by their pioneering use of cross-sector urban policy integration since the 1990s, their position as their countries' largest urban centres, and their differences in state organisation, planning cultures and attitudes to government. London is more decentralised with independent boroughs and a Greater London Mayor and Authority with limited powers, whilst Berlin is more centralised with a citywide government. London operates the UK's discretionary case-by-case planning system whilst spatial planning in Germany and much of continental Europe is based on legally binding land-use plans.

Evidence for this exhaustively researched book is gleaned from documentary evidence and archival records supported by 20 in-depth interviews with key stakeholders in London and Berlin: political and administrative leaders, civil servants, policymakers and private/third sector representatives.

Compact urban growth and sustainable transport is discussed in Chapter 2 with a focus on trends and outcomes in policy and urban development. Rode then examines recent development patterns and compact city development agendas in Berlin and London.

Chapter 3 examines links between institutional arrangements, policy capacity and outcomes and the critical role of integrated urban governance for implementing compact urban growth. Rode also discusses how planning and policy integration can be operationalized. He investigates the role of hierarchical structures and networks in facilitating integration, the impact of institutional change and the importance of urban form and transport.

Chapter 4 considers the impact of Berlin's distinctive system of government and institutional arrangements on enhancing the integration of land-use planning, city design and transport. Berlin relies heavily on plan making and the involvement of multiple stakeholders.

Chapter 5 examines changes to London's unique governance structure, the role of leadership in facilitating integration, and planning processes and mechanisms.

Chapter 6 concludes by comparing integration practices in Berlin and London and links the compact city agenda with institutional changes. It also considers whether the evidence from these two unique cities is transferable to other cities. Barriers and tensions that constrain integration are usefully summarised in Table 6.1. Transferable integration mechanisms are outlined under headings of structures, processes, instruments and enabling conditions in Table 6.2.

Rode is not convincing in suggesting that the spatial mismatch between the functional conurbation and the narrower administrative city may incentivise the development of the compact city within its boundaries. The wider functional metropolitan area is where most growth still occurs and where the mismatch between development and non car-based transport continues to produce urban sprawl that is the antithesis of the compact city. Rode concludes more convincingly on page 221 that the experience of Berlin and London shows that to holistically shape the city, strategic planning has to integrate transport planning with urban planning and design strategies. This is best achieved at the level of citywide government. He identifies an urban nexus in Fig. 6.1 characterised by an X-shaped governance and integration model.

Rode should be commended for his impressive, detailed understanding of urban processes, structures and policies in Berlin and London. However, the unique histories and circumstances of these two cities must cast doubt on the extent to which their experiences can be easily transferred to smaller provincial cities and conurbations.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2019.102585

Available online 06 November 2019
0966-6923

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Political and administrative leaders, planners, researchers and students will find this book a useful source of evidence about the compact city, but its dense style makes it a challenging read and may limit its wider audience.

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