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Book review

Designing Mobility and Transport Services: Developing Traveller Experience Tools, edited by Mike Tovey, Andree Woodcock and Jane Osmond (Oxon/New York: Routledge, ISBN 978-1-4724-7846-7 (hbk), xxii + 255 pages)

Designing Mobility and Transport Services is the final deliverable of 'METPEX', a research project funded in the context of the 7th Framework Programme of the EU. METPEX stands for 'MEasurement Tool to determine the quality of Passenger EXperience'. The main objective of the project was to develop and evaluate a standardised tool to measure passenger experience across whole journeys, so from door-to-door. Coordinated by Coventry University, the METPEX consortium brought together sixteen European partners from twelve different countries. Virtually all chapters in the book are written by one or more of these project partners. The book's editors, in turn, Mike Tovey, Andree Woodcock and Jane Osmond, are all affiliated to Coventry University. Except for their role as editors, they have also authored or co-authored nine of the sixteen book chapters.

The project and the book are driven by the (surprisingly recent) ambition to make the transport system more inclusive. The project's underlying rationale was the proposition that "if transport operators and authorities were provided with a robust, reliable and tailorable means of measuring the whole passenger journey, they could improve service provision". The book thus focuses on public transport only, although it obviously includes access and egress trips as inevitable parts of the traveller experience and also touches on the traveller experience of car drivers in a number of chapters.

The book consists of four parts. The first part presents the context of the project and includes chapters on sustainable transport, the complexity of the public transport system, the elements of the door-to-door journey, a conceptual framework for analysing the journey experience, land use and mobility behaviour, and the possible impact of broad socio-economic trends on accessibility and mobility in the European Union. Most of these chapters address issues that are well-known for anybody studying or working in the domains of transport and urban planning, such as the environmental impacts of transport and the institutional context of public transport. The chapter by Andree Woodcock (with Gabriela Rodica Hirn) is probably the most useful contribution, as it gives a broad overview of the indicators used in a range of (inter)national studies to assess the quality of public transport, as well as the data sources that are typically relied upon. This overview not only provides the basis for the remainder of the book, but is also useful as a reference for researchers working on the topic. The broad range of indicators is systematized in the book's next chapter, in which Woodcock presents and discusses the 'Hexagon-Spindle model'. This is basically a visual tool to create some order in the large pool of quality indicators as diverse as reliability and on-time performance, the behaviour of public transport staff, accessibility for different user groups, quality of information before and during the journey, vandalism and graffiti, and so on.

In the second part of the book, the METPEX tools are presented. Five tools to obtain information on passenger satisfaction were tested within the project: two different apps, an online survey, a paper-based questionnaire, and focus groups. The chapter by Yusak Susilo and Roberto Abenoza provides an interesting discussion of the pros and cons of these survey tools. The results show that reported satisfaction was partly related to the measurement tool, as well as to the traveller's mood and experiences directly before making a trip. These findings are discussed in more detail in an additional chapter by the same authors. The broad range of questions on journey satisfaction included in the five survey instruments poses the need for either selection or integration of indicators. Marco Diana and co-authors explore the latter option and discuss how indicators were defined through a data-driven approach, by 'letting the data speak'. They use Principal Component Analysis to reduce the number of variables to a set of indicators, ultimately resulting in over twenty indicators. These indicators, in turn, are suited for different purposes. Some indicators are more useful to generate a 'general' impression of the quality of the journey experience, while other indicators are particularly suited to gauge the experience of particular types of travellers, and yet another set is tailored to measure the quality of particular trip components. Taken together, this part of the book provides interesting insights into the measurement of journey quality and satisfaction, but also highlights the virtually impossible ambition to gain a comprehensive and reliable understanding of the journey experience across all types of travellers, transport modes, and journey legs. There is simply too much variation to capture all relevant dimensions of a traveller's experience in one single survey.

Part 3 is titled 'practical applications' but basically continues the discussion from the previous part. The key chapter in this part presents an overview and detailed description of 'super quality indicators'. A distinction is made between 25 'super key performance indicators' that are to provide a general understanding of the quality of the public transport system; 23 mode-specific indicators (bus, rail, cycling, tram, …), supplemented by 7 specific journey leg indicators; and 30 user-groups specific indicators (visitors, women, rural dwellers, …), supported by 7 dedicated indicators for travellers with various kinds of impairments. The reader is again overwhelmed by the sheer number of indicators and it is difficult to see how such a broad range of indicators is to serve as a basis for 'practical applications'.

The final part of the book provides an overview of the METPEX contributions and recommendations. The authors of the two chapters belonging to this part argue that the project has made (small) contributions through its various activities and products. For instance, it is argued that METPEX has developed replicable surveys for a wide range of traveller types, has provided methods for reducing the costs of commissioning surveys, and has encouraged public transport operators to increase consultation with difficult-to-reach groups.

Designing Mobility and Transport Services is unmistakably the final deliverable of a European project. Some of the chapters are clearly written because they *had* to be written. The tendency to prioritize completeness over usefulness and focus in the development of quality indicators is at least in part the result of the involvement of many

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partners, each with their own expertise, interests, and priorities. It is also clear that the project had an end-date that cut short the intellectual effort. The result is that some parts of the book read like a long list of issues and dimensions, rather than as an argument in favour of a particular perspective or approach. This holds for both some of the early chapters that set the context, as for quite some chapters that discuss the project results. This is too bad, as the book does provide interesting and meaningful insights into the measurement of the journey experience. Hopefully some of the consortium members or others will build on the METPEX project, without the burden of deadlines, deliverables and a 'balanced' consortium, so that they can make the next steps towards the development of 'a standardised tool to measure passenger experience across whole journeys'.

But while the book is stronger in its breadth than in its focus, this also makes it useful for transport practitioners, researchers and students seeking to (more) systematically measure the quality of public transport services. All can benefit from the broad overview, as it provides a solid basis for designing more tailor-made survey tools. Geographers may appreciate that the ambition to develop a standardised tool to measure passenger experiences is far from straight forward. Indeed, one of the lessons arising from the book is that standardization can only go that far – tailoring tools to meet the local context of space and time will often be necessary to adequately capture the experiences of public transport users.

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