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Book review

Bike Nation - How Cycling Can Save the World, by Walker, Peter. 2017. London, UK: Yellow Jersey. (£12.99(paperback). ISBN 978-1-911214-94-6).

Peter Walker's *Bike Nation* successfully sucks everything into its orbit that is worth knowing about transport cycling as a political subject. Whilst being well researched and referenced, it is also written in an engaging style and peppered with personal stories. The writing style is very affable to the point of being disarmingly frank towards the reader. A total must read for everyone who wants to find out more about 'pedal politics' – and expand their understanding to just what fast food restaurants and day-glo vests actually have in common.

The nine chapters of Peter Walker's book compile an excellent companion. The book diligently delivers where politics and policy implementation in the UK has not (yet) succeeded. Peter Walker, a journalist by profession, tells a compelling story by putting, rightly, the emphasis on urban design. Recent research has once again highlighted the importance and centrality of cycling infrastructure to a transport transition away from the private car (Pooley et al., 2013; Pucher and Buehler, 2012) and *Bike Nation* firmly and constructively builds on that knowledge. Chapter by chapter the storyline unwaveringly returns to the current car-centric urban design of our cities, as the underlying root cause for the lack of progress on the grave matter of utility cycling. For that very reason, I find it a rather refreshing read. It presents a healthy antidote to the 'cyclist identity' path of politics that pro-cycling organisations often trail. So much so, that for my reading of the book as both an activist and academic, I was delighted to see Pooley et al.'s *Understanding Walking and Cycling* (2013) been given a rightful place in *Bike Nation* (pp 41–2). *Bike Nation* is a standing ovation to inclusive urban design and functional cycling infrastructure.

Given the breadth of the book I could not be entirely sure of its intended audience. For sure, the recent arrival of urban design on the cycle campaigning landscape warranted the writing of a book and *Bike Nation* was hence timely to proffer new priorities. The so-called 'separation debate' and the subsequent scrappage of vehicular cycling (p.116–7) as a campaigning dogma are discussions that had taken place wholly inside the specialised realms of cycle advocacy. These issues never were central to the wider public debate about transport and cycling. However exclusionary road safety (Chapter 2) and more recently health (Chapter 1) and air pollution have made on and off appearances in the public discourse, national and local media. *Bike Nation* constructs the health narrative as the foundation and urgency for action. Too much cost is wasted on the current transport system that is excluding environmental damages and harming the majority of people. Social justice is discussed in chapter 3; it could be the chapter for progressive politicians to harvest further narratives. Chapter 4 deals with aspects of economy and business and should appeal to the commercial mindsets. Whilst chapter 5 concentrates on urban design, chapter 6 tidies up some sociological elements surrounding cycling and transport. It is in those two chapters that the *Bike Nation*'s real inclusivity lies. Combining urban design with a sociological approach gives *Bike Nation* its tremendous humility. The following chapters assemble examples of recent activism (chapter 7) and give an outlook and a bigger picture (chapter 8 and 9).

An old dispute whether or not there is a war on our roads resurfaces in *Bike Nation* (p.138). The author's no-war argument, to me, sits awkwardly with the rest of the book's narrative: people find cycling uncomfortable under the current conditions (in the UK). To me, cycling, particularly in traffic, is indeed a battle. Perhaps we should rephrase this ageing dispute, include the urban built environment, and agree to at least call it a 'space war' that is raging in our cities? Spatial advocacy for cycling is a relatively new form of campaigning (Aldred, 2013; Balkmar and Summerton, 2017). It seems that the spatial argument usefully politicises the demand for protected cycleways (Leyendecker, 2019). We should not be afraid of spatialising demands for cycling, especially given the urgent reasons for action that *Bike Nation* so carefully itemises. On another minor issue, I would also critique the occasional use of "segregated" to describe spatial realignments. Language is undoubtedly important in any campaign, and segregation does have a rather negative political connation. I would therefore propose the use of "separated" for its neutrality or "protected" for its cycle-positivity instead.

But these are minor points. *Bike Nation* is a fantastic read. It is resourceful in its arguments and obliging to the reader in its writing style. What *Bike Nation* does not do is outline the way forward or describe the transport transition in detail. But, *Bike Nation* thoughtfully articulates the reasons why we should act and why our transport system does not work without enabling cycling infrastructure (dramatically expressed in the subtitle: how cycling can save the world). It is a call to action by laying out the arguments. It will now depend on cycle advocates to mainstream *Bike Nation* onto the reading lists of not only friends and family but: politicians, local and national, decision- and policy-makers in general. Only by publicising and proliferating the points that Peter Walker makes in *Bike Nation*, will cycling finally burst out of the 'bike bubble', the echo chamber of cycling advocacy. *Bike Nation* is here, at your fingertips, to inform and challenge, and should be of great interest to every politician who seeks to set up and implement sensible long-term transport policies.

Cycling is a good thing, that much is clear to the reader of *Bike Nation*; and we need cycling infrastructure to democratise cycling – so that everyone is enabled to cycle. To democratise cycling through infrastructure will require a broad and progressive alliance of advocacy, academia, engineers, planners and politics. It follows that the old vehicular-cyclist advocacy must reform for the common good. But more importantly a public debate about the future of our cities and transport systems must be started, including the spatialisation of cycling demands.

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