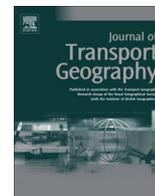


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Book review

Sage Handbook of Transport Studies, Jean-Paul Rodrigue, Theo Notteboom, Jon Shaw (Eds.). Sage, London (2013). £95, Hardback, ISBN: 978-1-84920-789-8

As with many edited collections, this book is large. Weighing in just shy of 1 kg (983 g to be precise) and measuring just over 33 by 23 cm in length and breadth, its 4 cm of thickness arrived on my desk with a resounding thud. Physically, it is more of a 'deskbook' than a handbook: if I were a practitioner implementing new infrastructure in the field, I would be unlikely to take this on site due to its volume alone. Another problem with edited tomes is consistency: the enormous compilation on "Energy, Transport and the Environment" (Inderwildi and King, 2012), for example, is composed almost entirely of versions of existing papers which have little in common. I was pleased to see that consistency in this book was much better. The editors have clearly ensured that each chapter was well integrated with the others.

Safely on the desk the book is aesthetically pleasing, with a consistent style of images throughout, very readable font size and consistent use of headings – two levels and no numbers is a sensible default in this regard. The text is in two columns usually associated journal articles. This gives the narrative an academic feel and provides space for small diagrams, tables and equations slotted into the main text, a feature that worked well when implemented but rather under-used.

These physical characteristics provide a hint about who this book is aimed at: it's not practitioners but other academics, university libraries and students who will be attracted to the book as a source of authority on the subject matter. The authors are "renowned international experts" (p. 11), as the editors are keen to point out. The introductory chapter itself acknowledges that one cannot hope to find great depth in an academic book on such a broad issue, instead providing overview. Indeed, in each of the 25 chapters, breadth is prioritised over depth.

The chapters are divided into 6 sections: global transport, the regional level, "transport, economy and society", policy, models and the environmental impacts. Despite the size of the overall book, each chapter is actually quite small, averaging just over 16 pages including references on sub-A4 paper – similar in length to academic papers. One introduction reads: "The purpose of this chapter is to review issues surrounding the challenge [of international borders]" (Anderson, 2013, p. 31); this statement could be made for the subject matter of any of the chapters (see tiny-url.com/hts-toc for chapter titles).

A minor criticism linked to this lack of detail relates to the title: shouldn't a 'handbook' be useful on a regular basis, providing practical guidance during research? Yet, aside from the four short chapters on modelling, there is little in the way of reusable equations, research methods, or worked examples. Chapters on urban land use (ch. 7), freight distribution (ch. 10) and inland terminals do provide useful methodologies at a *conceptual* level through clear

text and diagrams. More in this direction (e.g. software, data analysis and modelling tips) would have made the book more useful to PhD or other research students embarking on empirical research. The book is more handy for setting research priorities and literature reviews. I therefore suggest that "An Overview of Transport Studies" would have been a more accurate title.

Reviews undoubtedly have an important role to play in the context of academic over-specialisation. I found the concise overviews of "Transport Policy Instruments" (ch. 16) and "structure and dynamics of transport networks" (ch. 20) particularly useful, providing much needed coherence to fractured sub-fields. Chapter 14 also provides a much-needed up-to-date overview of the impacts on ICT on travel behaviour but, in my opinion, misses out the most important impact: the potential to reduce energy use, e.g. teleconferences replacing long-haul flights. The energy chapter (23) partially compensates for this oversight, and demonstrates the commitment to overview by placing the issue within the wider context of climate change, energy security and politics, concluding that "a sustainable transport energy approach is likely to be entirely sidelined unless it can also deliver economic, political and social sustainability" (Potter et al., 2013, p. 401). This is pragmatic thinking that should be taken on-board by purely technical researchers.

This is not to say that authors always included the most relevant information. To take another example from the energy chapter, there was no data on the energy intensity of different modes (measured in MJ per passenger kilometer), surely a critical consideration for planning low energy futures. Also, some chapters were parochial, over-emphasising authors' favourite topics or study areas: the energy, climate change, social policy and health chapters were UK-centric, for example.

The academic tone means that the authors' opinions are often concealed by the impersonal language. Even Lee Chapman, who has written passionately about the urgent need to address climate change in transportation "so that the impacts of transport on the environment can be minimised and fossil fuel resources conserved" (Chapman, 354) comes across as banal in the penultimate chapter of the book. This is disappointing as climate change mitigation in transport is an exciting area where new, innovative thinking has vast potential benefits. No mention is made of more radical and potentially more effective proposals such as carbon rationing or carbon budgets (see Bows-Larkin and Anderson, 2013). Indeed, such lateral thinking transport policy may be essential if transport is to play its part in a transition away from fossil fuels (Banister and Hickman, 2013). A more decisive stance is at least implicitly supported by the previous chapter: "At currently predicted growth rates, the aviation sector will constitute about 33% of total UK [emissions] by 2050" (Potter et al., p. 400).

My final criticism of the book is that it is bland. Granted, it was never designed to be a thriller. Yet the dry, uncontroversial and regimented narrative is sometimes hard to digest, especially if

much of what one reads is in an academic style, as will be the case for many in the target audience. Transportation and its wider impacts on the world is too important an issue to leave to the status quo and academics have a vital role in setting the agenda. We need new ideas. I suggest that, while the tone and content of this book provides an excellent foundation for informed debate, more dynamic language is needed for *policy impact*.

The *Handbook of Transport Studies* is not the place to look for such exciting and urgently needed thinking in the field. However, it undoubtedly provides a cohesive account of the current state of play in academia. Whether access to this overview is used to perpetuate or disrupt the field is up to the reader. Towards the end of the book's 448 pages, I find myself advocating for the latter.

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Robin Lovelace

School of Geography, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT,
United Kingdom

E-mail address: R.Lovelace@leeds.ac.uk