

Musselwhite, C. (2012). Book review on *Mobilities: new perspectives on transport and society* by Margaret Grieco and John Urry (eds) (2011). Ashgate: Farnham *Journal of Transport Geography*, **25**, 162. DOI information: 10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2012.06.006

Book review:

Mobilities: new perspectives on transport and society by Margaret Grieco and John Urry (eds) (2011). Ashgate: Farnham, Surrey. £65.00 hardback. ISBN 9781409411505 (hbk)

While studying for my PhD, some 12 years ago, I was disheartened by how traffic and transport research, policy and practice appeared to ignore the importance of the person and the wider social context within which transport is part of. This has changed over the past decade and there is a growing realisation that people and the wider social context is central to understanding transport. Along with this realisation has come new scholars (or old ones now allowed to sit at the transport studies table), new research methods (or at least new to transport studies) and new theoretical paradigms that championed the social context within which transport resides. One of these has been the mobilities movement, championed by John Urry amongst others. *Mobilities: new perspectives on transport and society* edited by Grieco and Urry, brings together key scholars, research and thinking within that movement.

Mobilities: new perspectives on transport and society shows the diverse range of methodologies that adorn the mobilities movement. It has chapters covering what you might expect from mobilities, there is no surprise that mobile ethnography is found in Eric Laurier and Tim Dant's chapter describing what we do whilst driving, for example. But, there is also to be found mixed method approaches, for example in Porter et al.'s excellent chapter on young people's mobility, transport and service access in Sub-Saharan Africa where we are reminded just how lucky we are to have the access to healthcare and education that we do have in the Western World. For example, we have vignettes from schoolchildren about their journey to school. Charles aged 11 from Ghana travels 5km to primary school by foot each day as his parents cannot afford the transport fare, on his journey he encounters torrential rain, poisonous snakes and is continually worried about being kidnapped. Also mixed methodology is seen within the novel layering of narratives, photographs and geographical datasets found in Hodgson's chapter on path making and managing encounters in the context of walking which shows how new technologies can be used with traditional research methods to understand patterns of travel behaviour. Perhaps more surprisingly a raft of traditional transport studies methods are also found in the book including Julian Hine's secondary data analysis of the national travel survey and other data sources to highlight transport disadvantage in the United Kingdom (UK). We even find an example of factor analysis (using a VARIMAX rotation with Kaiser Criteria nonetheless) to identify clusters of people with similar attitudes towards travel in Gotz and Ohnmacht's chapter on mobility patterns in Switzerland. Here it can be seen how attitudes and lifestyles impact on modes of transport used and hence a mixing of traditional transport study methodology with mobilities style social context. They find for example that elevated sporty types do more cycle trips and walk further distances compared to other groups, a culture focussed individual uses public transport more often and a traditional more conservative type of person is more likely to use a car than the other groups. Hence an acknowledgement that traditional transport study techniques and methods can have a role in answering new questions posed by a more social approach to transport.

Mobilities: new perspectives on transport and society is largely UK centric but does have forays into mobilities in other lands. Urry describes the peak oil crisis from the perspective of car-dominated USA culture and the now tourist reliant Dubai. As already noted there are

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interesting visits to Sub-Saharan Africa and Switzerland but the book also has chapters covering France, where Licoppe and Lavallois-Bath examine interactive advertising on the Paris Metro from different stakeholder perspectives and Fiona Raje takes a novel approach in examining air passenger transport associated with ethnicity and social bonds in flying in and out of the Caribbean.

Different perspectives on mobilities are covered too. Specific chapters focus on social exclusion as explored by Karen Lucas, the role of technology in relation to behaviour change by Glenn Lyons and the role of sustainability is covered well by Mimi Sheller. Similar themes permeate throughout the chapters too and it is clear that there is an ongoing tension between more transport management and top-down policy versus a more organic bottom-up person-centred transport solution. However, the book does little to question the seemingly inherent need for mobility. People appear victims unable to change or alter their need for mobility and this is something that mobilities could offer an important debate on.

The diversity of methods, locations and subjects is perhaps the book's biggest downfall. *Mobilities* has perhaps grown so all encompassing and embracing of so many transport perspectives that it could be argued the subjects covered in the book are too broad and they are not always linked well together.

Mobilities: new perspectives on transport and society shows how far mobilities as a paradigm has developed. *Mobilities* has always been a bit edgy, offering art where science dominated, adding complexity and variability to a static need for proof and cost-effectiveness, offering new challenges to the validity of traditional approaches like modelling and statistics. It asked the difficult questions of transport studies that needed to be asked, revealing the depth of social disadvantage across the world that transport has not only contributed towards but activity created. *Mobilities: new perspectives on transport and society* shows how this is continuing but within a shifted paradigm, one that is beginning to be embraced by the wider transport studies context. The question left is how does the mobilities paradigm continue to develop and access the mainstream without diluting the challenging edginess it has always had. I guess only time will tell.

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