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**Accessibility, equity and efficiency: Challenges for transport and public services**, edited by Karst T. Geurs, Roberto Patuelli, and Tomaz Ponce Dentinho. 2016. Cheltenham (UK) and Northampton (USA): Edward Elgar. GBP 81 (hardback) ISBN 978-1-78471-788-9

The volume edited by Karst Geurs and colleagues is a collection of papers on policy-relevant applications of accessibility, a difficult-to-grasp notion that survived for more than two decades as a big promise for more “sustainable” transport planning practices. The publication was conceived to be positioned in the context of this debate: how the accessibility lenses could be applied to accommodate efficiency and equity, two major tenets of sustainable mobility? The book was seeded within the Network on European Communications and Transport Activity Research (NECTAR), one of the most active academic networks in promoting scientific events around accessibility. Geurs is a key scholar in accessibility research, author of globally relevant articles on this topic (e.g. Geurs and Van Wee, 2004).

Perhaps surprisingly for readers unfamiliar with the triad of abstract keywords mentioned in its title, the editors did not provide much room for conceptual clarifications and skipped any attempt to enter abstract debates with the appropriate intensity. Instead, right from its beginning, the volume is filled with empirical analyses that show how explorations on accessibility could support a more balanced economic and territorial development. Also, the book is very economical in justifying the need for research on accessibility, equity and efficiency. As a consequence of such editorial choices, the reader is more or less compulsorily invited to grasp the complex relationships between transport interventions, social and spatial equity, and economic efficiency by their own interpretative efforts while placing the meaning of accessibility somewhere between the presented ideas of urban liveability, commuting opportunities, connectivity of transport hubs, place attractiveness, among others. Readers be warned that establishing such connections is not a straightforward task.

The first part of the book sheds light on the somehow ambiguous and still poorly understood relationships between accessibility and urban growth. The analyses brought by these contributions are convincing in showing that not every investment in transport is supportive of demographic growth and economic development. However, this message will be challenged in the last chapter of the book, which restates the belief that improvements in the transport network are an innate instrument to enhance territorial cohesion in Europe, which benefit the poorest and more peripheral regions. Such an apparent contradiction should not be seen with fierce criticism in a book that involved the work of not less than 26 contributors. Rather, this is just a demonstration of the healthy debate that moves the diverse field of accessibility research.

Next, the book connects to important topics in current policy agendas, such as the impacts of the recent unexpected increases of energy prices, the construction of new high-speed rail corridors, and the importance of integrating the connectivity of transport hubs into a more comprehensive view of accessibility to effectively enlarge people’s activity spaces. Even though these papers would hardly be described as very innovative or extremely insightful, they add vitality to the academic discourse on accessibility by highlighting further policy fields interlinked with transport planning.

The last section of the book was somehow disappointing, probably due to the section title (“Accessibility evaluation and appraisal”), which fosters the expectations of contributions proposing new relationships between accessibility assessments and the economic methods of evaluating alternative transport projects and, from there, engaging in the wide field of policy and decision-making. As such expectations are not fulfilled, the potential and the challenges of integrating

accessibility into appraisal and evaluation frameworks consist of a relevant topic missing from the book.

Although the organisers were careful in sequencing papers in a way that connects one chapter to other logically, the quality of the contributions unavoidably varies (as in most collections of papers written by different authors). Some highlights of the book include the messages conveyed in Chapter 2, which stressed the dynamic character of the relevant accessibility factors for urbanisation, the calculation and comparison of distinct accessibility measures in Chapter 11 (although it misses the opportunity to distinguish geographical peripherality from low transport accessibility) and, of course, Chapter 6, which nicely relates accessibility to territorial structuration and social equity in an Angolan region.

Overall, the book brings valuable contributions and excels for the plural perspectives on accessibility but does not achieve the stated objective of exploring “the links and trade-offs between accessibility, economic efficiency and equity in both the developed and developing country contexts” (p. 3). With a few exceptions, such as the chapter reflecting on the optimal allocation of public services, the trade-offs between equity and efficiency received little attention, leaving this crucial dilemma still to be adequately addressed in future works. Despite its title, the book is poorly connected with narratives on social justice within the transport domain, which have gained prominence in recent years (Lucas et al., 2019; Martens, 2017). This gap has been partially filled by the newest title of this collection (Hickman et al., 2019). Also, regrettably, the geographical scope covered by the book is sharply biased towards advanced economies. Lastly, the quite large number of authors does not ensure a richness in the methodological repertoire. While econometric models abound in the book, novel geospatial approaches to measuring accessibility and exciting applications of qualitative instruments that have opened paths to assess accessibility from more individualised perspectives are missing. Readers more excited with the new technological developments in the transport sector may miss at least one chapter reflecting on how mobility as a service or the introduction of autonomous vehicles impact on accessibility landscapes.

In general, the book is a relatively broad collation of accessibility applications, which, taken together, provides an intriguing overview of the potential use of accessibility as analytical lenses for enhancing transport and service provision. Several relevant topics for transport geographers are covered, including migration flows, housing market dynamics and freight logistics, even though critical perspectives on human geography are missing. The volume is pitched for a fluid readership, which encompasses both the more experienced audience as well as less familiar readers. However, those intending to understand the issues announced in its title may certainly complement this book with additional readings.

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