

Hans-Liudger Dienel, Barbara Schmucki. *Mobilität für alle: Geschichte des öffentlichen Personennahverkehrs in der Stadt zwischen technischem Fortschritt und sozialer Pflicht.* Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1997. 269 S. 96,00, cloth, ISBN 978-3-515-06892-5.



Reviewed by Paolo Capuzzo

Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (March, 1998)

Commissioned for H-Urban by Pierre-Yves Saunier, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Lyons, France

Munich Learns from Los Angeles

This volume collects the papers presented at the Conference on Urban Public Transport held at Munich in December 1994 and is a tribute to a general interest in history of urban transport, which is filling the gap in the research between USA or Britain and the European continent. The goals pursued by this volume are a discussion of the results reached by the research until now; the presentation of new case studies on issues which have already received some attention by historians; and even the presentation of new works, which bring up new methodological approaches and focus on the age of the automobile, a topic almost completely neglected by the European historical research. Consequently I will give different space to the papers according to the different degree of innovation they present.

B. Schmucki and H-L. Dienel (7-27) open the volume with a review of the existing German literature on urban transport history and suggest some perspectives on the new directions that re-

search should pursue. The task of research on urban transport history is to overcome technical reductionism by involving a wider analysis of technical systems which includes aspects such as speed, price, noise, safety, comfort, etc., which influenced the adoption of different technologies. Equally important is the investigation of the role played by actors involved in the determination of transport systems (particularly transport companies, local administrations, transport industry, national transport administration, transport technology....); the features of urban space in relationship to transport technology; and a more accurate analysis of users.

Dietmar Klenke contributes a wide ranging, innovative essay, "Urban Transport in the Age of Automobile," which finds the turning point in the urban transport history in the twentieth century - i.e. the transition from mass to individual transportation, and in the competition between different social, economic, and cultural options. Three factors seem to have been very important: the lack of efficiency and market orientation of the German public transport; the capacity of cars to support the suburban dissemination, which devel-

oped particularly from the 1950s onwards; the externalising of some car costs. The most important factors pointed out by Klenke to explain the rise of cars as mass urban transport are the following: city-planning developments such as the spread of low density suburbs detached from transport networks with many parking spaces; the allocation of public resources, which until the mid 1960s was inspired by a general enthusiasm for cars; a widespread ideology praising consumption and individual freedom as fundamental values (with repercussions on housing, leisure, and use of space, which increased the need for mobility); the role of balkanization within urban and regional contexts; the weak marketing orientation of the mass transport system; the lack of an efficient pursuit of inter-modality; the lack of an efficient integration of different technical system into a competitive public transport system. The most important factors to be considered in a new urban transport history, which inexcusably has to neglected the analysis of bicycles until now - are the external costs of transport, which Klenke summarises as follows: the decline of street as social and communicative space; the danger for children and all people who cannot adapt themselves to the new behaviour required by the increased traffic; the damage to the quality of urban space provoked by noise and pollution; the damage to the buildings; the consequences of accidents. All these external costs concern every transport system, although in different measure, some other problems are specific to the automobile age: the damage to the environment (woods, forest, countryside...); the greenhouse effect; ground pollution; the ecological consequences of road building. Thus only a global analysis of the implications of transportation modes will allow further development in transport history.

Stefan Fisch (51-61) analysing the contribute of city-planning history to the urban transport history underlines the gap between city planning practice - and in the twentieth century, theory too - which developed a functional analysis of ur-

ban agglomerations and the political approach, which remained linked to the traditional concept of city as political entity. The history of planning has mostly followed the narrow perspective of the city as entity defined by political boundaries.

Barbara Schmucki (63-81) compares urban transport systems in West and East Germany, studying the cases of Munich and Dresden after the Second World War. The starting point of the two cities was similar, both dominated by electric tramway as the most important means of transport. The crisis of tramway in Munich happened in the 1960s, because of the increasing mass use of cars, which reduced the ridership of public transport, the competition of buses in the new suburban, low-density areas, and the building of a subway started in 1965. The subway was the means of transport, which along with the building of the auto friendly city (*autogerechte Stadt*) that could not tolerate the hindrance offered car traffic by tramways. This process of substitution of subway and buses for tramways was stopped by civic protest at the end of the 1970s. In Dresden - although the official propaganda stated repeatedly the dominance of the public transport - different measures, particularly in the 1970s encouraged similar trend in favour of the private use of cars. The substitution of buses for some tramway lines occurred in the 1970s, a bit later than in Munich. The comparison of the number of trips/inhabitant shows a stronger role of public transport in Dresden than in Munich, which is scarcely surprising if we note that the level of motorisation in the DDR was lower than the BRD; but this comparison also shows that the supply of public transport in Dresden increased until the 1960s, while in Munich stagnated at the level of 1950 until the 1980s when a new transport policy seems to have started. In her final chapter Barbara Schmucki has skillfully used photographic sources, a different and interesting method of analysis, to show the adaptation and transformation of urban land-

scape according to the need of the mass motorisation in the course of the century.

Nikolaus Niederich (83-107) investigates the history of tramway in Stuttgart and confirms some trends already pointed out by the research on other cities. His focus is on the study of property and financial structures of the companies, with two aspects important to be remember: the connection between city interests and transport initiatives in the first phase of development of tramways and the change in the managerial and financial structure of companies that occurred with the electrification of network when transport interests overcame local control, becoming part of an international strategy carried out by big trusts.

The paper of Uwe Grandke (109-36) on Muenster in the inter-war period describes a situation of general stagnation in transport initiatives explained by the general stagnation in the German economy as well as by the resistance of the technocratic and oligarchic political class to the requests of the civil society. Indeed, the conclusions seem to be doubtful, since the requests presented as civic demands are typical of urban transport history in every city as is the resistance of the authorities to implementing them. It seems difficult to reach any conclusion without a more accurate analysis of the real options and an evaluation of their feasibility. Moreover, the rigid opposition between civic initiatives and political power does not seem to be an effective paradigm for the analysis of public policy.

Burghard Ciesla gives an overview on the development of transport in Berlin after the Second World War. If the auto-friendly city is the goal of city planning and transport policy in West Berlin, in East Berlin the initial opposition of Moscow to the Anglo-American urban pattern favoured mass public transport. The development of transport infrastructures in West Berlin showed similarities to those pointed out by Barbara Schmucki for Munich, i.e. the gradual substitution of buses and

subways for tramways and subways and city-planning intervention in order to adapt the city morphology to the car's needs. The criticism that arose in the 1970s against the auto-friendly city caused a partial reorientation of the transport policy, although it seems unlikely that new policies will change much in the short term. On the other side of the Wall, transport policy was inspired by an increasing pragmatism as, in the 1960s, the ideological opposition against individual transport begun to disappear. The provision of public transport remained based on the old tramway network, since resources for a bold development of the subway were not available.

Elfi Bendikat (137-179) compares the municipal intervention in urban transport in Paris and Berlin (1890-1914). In Paris the public guarantee of monopoly for the management of the omnibus service to the Compagnie Generale des Omnibus created a significant revenue source for the municipality, which saw the management of public transport services also as a part of fiscal policy. The conflicts between the CGO and the municipality do not seem to have been very different from those arose in other cities, being focused on the development of the network, which the company tried to limit to the core city, being reluctant to pursue doubtful profits in suburban extensions, improving the quality of the service, and a better timetable. All these contrasted to the big European cities in the age of horse-drawn urban transport. What is specific to Paris was that the powerful monopoly of the CGO extended to the horse-drawn tramways, which allowed it to keep tramway prices as high as the omnibuses prices, whereas in the other cities the entry of tramways in the transport market pushed down the average price of transport. The unsuccessful attempt to break down the monopoly in the 1890s was followed by a debate at the beginning of the century on municipalising urban transport, a debate stopped by the state refusal to give the municipality the power to run the undertaking. Thus, the municipal intervention took the form of regula-

tion and reorganisation of private initiatives. I would not share the emphasis of Elfi Bendikat on the delay of Paris in the motorisation of the omnibus service. In London this process started some years earlier, but in a contradictory way so that a substantial degree of motorisation was only reached around 1910 just a couple of years earlier than Paris which was the first metropolis in the continent to boldly carry out this innovation. Indeed, it seems to me that the new attitude of the company could have been influenced by the need to counteract the challenge brought by the electrification of tramway by the motorisation of buses. The CGO managed to relaunch its monopoly in the face of competition from the new Metro, as well as limiting the influence of tramway in the central area thanks to the innovation in technology, meaning buses, and to a more helpful attitude from the municipality. Anyway, the new trend in city intervention was regulation and co-operation with the private initiatives, which had its best achievement with the creation of the Metro, an efficient and profitable transport system. In this case it was possible to combine efficiency and fiscal goals of the municipality. It must be remembered that Paris had the best conditions for the successful creation of a subway: a compact, wide, and wealthy central area and a rocky subsurface. In Berlin there was no company with a guaranteed monopoly as in Paris, although in the field of tramways the BGS had a very strong position. The result of a more competition oriented system was not just a lack of co-ordination, but also a reduction in fares. Conflicts between companies and the municipality were similar in Paris and Berlin. The Berlin municipal council tried to react by creating a municipal tramway company, of limited size. The control exerted on the municipal government by the state and the constraints represented by the fragmentation of the agglomeration into different political authorities, which created fiscal concerns about the emigration of well off classes, limited the scale of city intervention. The municipal council of Berlin did not get involved in the

building of the subway as its Parisian counterpart because of the lack of sufficient financial resources. Paris already had a tradition of "deficit spending" started during the Haussmann era. Bendikat concludes that public intervention in the metropolis has a specific character due to size, complexity of political and social geography, and the complexity of the technical systems involved in transportation. Thus public intervention took the form of regulation, agreement, and co-operation with private companies, rather than direct management of companies. I think this thesis is convincing, but it must be recalled that beyond this metropolitan complexity there was a fiscal strategy linked to the running of services, which aimed at defending the fiscal interests of the middle-class, which ran the cities before the First World War. That form of interventionism fitted well with those political goals. Such constraint was removed by the war and indeed, in the 1920s, interventionists took a bold action bringing direct involvement in the management of transport infrastructure, although metropolises did not stop to be complex entities.

Stefan Bratzel's paper deals with the "extreme forms of mobility" taken in metropolitan Los Angeles. The heavy dominance of cars in the mobility system of Los Angeles shows in an exemplary way the consequences of such a mobility system; along with low density urban morphology: traffic delays and pollution are the most evident. As already stated by the American research on this subject Bratzel does not impute the urban structure of Los Angeles to the car boom, since the suburbanisation process started already at the end of the 19th C with electric rail. Thus the extension and differentiation in space of urban functions begun already in the rail era, when transport were not - as in other American cities - a profitable entrepreneurial sector, but an instrument to increase land prices, a part of the land marketing strategy. The radial structure of the transport system and a spatial structure, which preserved jobs in the central area and residential functions

in the suburbs created an early crisis of congestion, which was overcome through the diffusion of cars in the inter-war period. Cars allowed the filling of the gap between the main axes of expansion by providing a transversal mobility - impossible with the radial structure of a rail-based transport mode. This supported the diffusion of urban functions over wider areas.

After the Second World War a new congestion crisis was overcome through a program of highway building funded by the Federal Government. So public policy favoured the self-dynamic development of traffic without providing a long run answer to the mobility problem. The author does not give a definitive judgement on the recent revival of a rail-based transport system, but clearly shows a sharable scepticism: the possibility of building an efficient subway in the current urban geography of Los Angeles seems to be a desperate undertaking. This last attempt shows a continuity in the approach to the mobility problems faced in Los Angeles, i.e. the intervention on the supply side. The provision of infrastructures for the increasing traffic resulted from the action of land speculators and met the preferences of public opinion for a privatised and anti-urban lifestyle.

"Learning from Los Angeles" for the German cities means to overcome the simple opposition of private and transport system, since in Los Angeles cars accelerated a process already started with the rail. The approach hinged only on supply does not have future in terms of sustainable mobility, so the author invites intervention through a sort of mobility engineering, which should reduce the need to move, rather than providing a means of transport. A reorientation in city planning would be the main tenet of a complex strategy of sustainable mobility.

The last two papers do not have a direct urban focus. Gert Zang deals with rail and boat networks in the area of the Bodensee in the nineteenth century and Hans-Liudger Dienel deals with leisure transport in the two Germanies after

the war. Notwithstanding, Dienel's article is worth mentioning here because of the interesting comparison between West and East Germany. Dienel considers the traffic for leisure purposes the main feature in the development of transport after the Second World War. The use of car was closely linked with the development of the leisure industry both in West and East Germany. It is interesting that Dienel-- beyond the differences in the economic performances of the two societies, which deeply influenced the respective level of motorisation-- underlines similar trends in the development of the mobility system of both society, in a similar way as Schmucki and Ciesla. Indeed, both in West and East Germany no real alternative to the private car was provided for leisure traffic. In spite of the official propaganda even in East Germany the transport for leisure purposes was fundamentally entrusted to the private use of cars. So the reunification accelerated a process already ongoing and the gap in the level of motorisation was rapidly filled. Cars were the top of aspiration in the explosion of consumerism in East Germany which followed the fall of the Wall. Thus the chance of transformation in East Germany was wasted without pursuing new perspectives in sustainable urban mobility by imitating the Western pattern. Summarising the results of his study Dienel underlines the different social and cultural functions of travel in West and East Germany: in the socialist country travel had a meaning of discovery and escape from a society of narrow horizons. So, in order to pursue this aim the car was even more important than in West Germany.

Although the quality of papers is rather uneven, this book achieves some of the purposes mentioned by the editors in the foreword and can be seen as a sort of bridge between achievements and new perspectives of the German research on this topic.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

Citation: Paolo Capuzzo. Review of Dienel, Hans-Liudger; Barbara Schmucki. *Mobilität für alle: Geschichte des oeffentlichen Personennahverkehrs in der Stadt zwischen technischem Fortschritt und sozialer Pflicht*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. March, 1998.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=16047>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.