

Jason Henderson and Natalie Marie Gulsrud, *Street Fights in Copenhagen: Bicycle and Car Politics in a Green Mobility City*, New York: Routledge, 2019. ISBN: 9781138334892 (paper); ISBN: 9781138317536 (cloth); ISBN: 9780429444135 (ebook)

July 2019 was the hottest month in history. With temperatures on the rise, the world is now predicted to be three degrees Fahrenheit warmer by 2030. Transportation emissions and sprawling urban growth are two well-established factors that make cities responsible for contributing to high levels of carbon in the atmosphere. These alarming trends are seen in infrastructures of cities in the United States, China, and other countries with a national economy intimately tied to a strong automotive industry. Increasingly, however, multi-lane freeways, automobile traffic and low-density housing are seen as relics of the past, as cities must embrace green mobility infrastructures by envisioning bicycle infrastructure, compact urbanism, and building affordable, dense housing for all.

In their recent book, *Street Fights in Copenhagen*, Jason Henderson and Natalie Maria Gulsrud reinforce how and why Copenhagen became a city with an impressively high rate of cycling. In seven chapters, Henderson and Gulsrud organize the book around the details and history of what made cycling a success in Copenhagen, the politics that surfaced regarding the cycling system and automobility, and the infrastructural proposals that restructure urban space. The authors ultimately emphasize that the struggles occurring between car and bicycle space are not unique to Copenhagen, but overall demonstrate a hopeful outlook for a future where increased levels of cycling can be achieved anywhere in the world.

Despite the fluctuating weather and topographic challenges, a forward thinking commitment to bicycle infrastructure has allowed Copenhagen to be a model cycling city. With great detail and attention to empirical metrics, the first chapter establishes Copenhagen as an urban model built for cycling in comparison with other cities globally. The authors provide fine grained analysis of the cycling infrastructure that allows the reader to have a sensorial experience of riding the bicycle during peak traffic time in Copenhagen. The development of sustainable transit infrastructure oriented toward cycling and public transport in Copenhagen has allowed it

to remain a city in which 29 percent of trips are made by bicycle – the highest rate not just in Europe but the world (p.20). The city’s cycling infrastructure is planned with great detail and considers the many features that make cyclists feel safe.

First and foremost, cycle tracks are separated from traffic. Details such as dedicated tracks, daily de-icing in cold weather, continuous pavement, and even a superhighway, ensure a good experience for users. Spatial range is imperative as the city remains compact for adequate distances to be achieved by bicycle. Overall, having this infrastructural set-up promotes comfortable cycling, the positive co-existence with public transit, and leads to less antagonism with automobiles.

Historically, cycling has been a vital component of the city since the early 1900s when it was able to establish itself due to the political ideology of social democracy and the Danish vision of the car as a luxury good. Henderson and Gulsrud emphasize how social democracy, understood as a “political ideology that includes universal social welfare, human rights, and hefty market regulation of capitalism” (p.47), generated favorable conditions for the survival of the bicycle. The onset of mass cycling went hand-in-hand with social democratic politics and heavy taxation on car ownership. Such features produced an ideological basis for cooperation and egalitarianism. The authors argue that the Danish car tax helped finance social democracy. The history of cycling ebbed and flowed in the mid-to-late 20th century because the bicycle had to contend with the rise of the automobile, as was the case in other Northern countries like the United States. Nevertheless by the 1990s, economic crises and restructuring had its impacts on Copenhagen’s families and urban space. The generation of suburban jobs in an effort to balance jobs regionally resulted in a deindustrialized urban center.

Copenhagen’s cycling city model is part of a powerful capitalist urbanization strategy. The authors establish how Copenhagen embraced neoliberal urban redevelopment schemes to lure high-income populations back to the city, improving the city’s tax revenue. They also indicate that by the 2000s there was a renaissance of cycling that reestablished space in the city for bicycling. By 2010, the bicycle city was branded as a green, mobile, and livable place as part of the city’s market-oriented vision. However, as the authors of *Street Fights in Copenhagen*

document, even cities with a strong cycling history and a commitment to adapt to climate change are subject to the political pressures of auto-oriented urban growth. In Chapter 3, Henderson and Gulsrud detail how the city has fought against car-dependent growth due to suburbanization and national demands for automobiles, while the use of cycling has plateaued.

Henderson and Gulsrud carefully remind the reader that maintaining high levels of cyclists on the road is at odds with the political and economic goals of many interest groups locally and nationally. Yet, they urge for the consideration of more bicycle or transit space in the city to achieve future carbon neutral targets that are planned. In Chapter 4, the authors develop a “politics of mobility framework” to understand how contestations reproduce themselves, considering “how political power, expressed through political ideology and operationalized through political ideology and operationalized by political parties and organizations, shapes transport policy in Copenhagen” (p.3). Overall, car ownership and car trips have increased in the city center. The authors discuss the alliances that form between various political parties, labeling these Left/Progressive, Neoliberal, and Right/Conservative (p.88). They show that car ownership is generally supported by Neoliberal and Right/Conservative coalitions, and refuted by Left/Progressive and sometimes Neoliberal alliances. The makeup of the city council as well as interactions with national political trends and deindustrialization have contributed to how the bicycle city is slowly encroached upon by car-friendly suburbs. Such a politics of mobility is also found in cities that face similar challenges.

At the same time, spaces dedicated to people’s mobility are always sites of encounter. Henderson and Gulsrud discuss the appropriate designation of public space for cycling, public transit, and automobiles. In Chapters 5-7, the authors delineate how cyclist, transit user, and automobile interests are not in opposition, but struggle to compromise on the quantity of space dedicated to each traveler. The increasing desire for car parking in Copenhagen threatens the street space that is needed for the currently over-crowded cycling infrastructure.

At the center of struggles between cyclists and automobiles is a disagreement regarding the appropriation of infrastructure. Such struggles represent the “street fights” or ideological battles about how bicycles and automobiles are accommodated in the city (p.3). The book details

such struggles by shedding light on the number of cars that are allowed into the city center, how parking policies are enforced, and the diverse options available to finance a toll ring road around the city. The authors reveal how there are invisible policies that promote car use by limiting bicycle parking construction at metro stations. Despite these struggles, Copenhagen's position as an iconic green mobility capital is complex and still open-ended.

Henderson and Gulsrud emphasize that there are still critical debates unfolding between the newer infrastructural projects that are underway, including the harbor tunnel, Eastern Ring Road and shifting management of public transit. Ultimately, in Copenhagen decades of expertise on cycling infrastructure is currently being undermined and threatened by a move toward automobility that is neither socially just nor environmentally acceptable. The authors complete the book by outlining a "politics of hope", emphasizing that Copenhagen continues to strive to be a city that deserves to be recognized as a green mobility icon.

Copenhagen is a model city that establishes itself as a bicycle haven through a complex set of discourses, ideologies, and practices. There is powerful potential in cycling and transit policies that the authors convincingly indicate can help cities across the world. The authors show how expert knowledges that circulate internationally also take on the politics of mobility that cities face. Sustainable transport models circulate through the mobilization of policies (Montero 2017), but too often do not consider limitations on the ground. Such conflicts in knowledge between locals and experts surface internationally and are an enduring debate between northern and southern cities (Schwanen 2018). Even Copenhagen, the international gold standard for cycling in the city, is subject to politics, which are defined through national and local interests. While expert, scientific knowledge about cycling and sustainability has worked well for Copenhagen, it remains difficult to apprehend how cities adopting Copenhagen's best practices must address these politics. This book offers a well-researched and detailed account of the contradictions within sustainable transport in Copenhagen. In the end, it leaves the reader questioning: are urban transport models based on colonial, expert knowledge from the north applicable globally?

Expert-citizen clashes come out in cities across the world, but are not part of the best practices that travel to other cities. Access to street space is a fundamental “right to the city”, where citizens have the ability to make the city their own out of a quest for social justice (Harvey 2012). Such expressions are found in gentle rule breaking amongst cyclists that aim to bend traffic rules in order to get to desired points of opportunity. However, despite the rich data and sources that the authors mobilise, readers might well be left questioning what actual people think and experience. Do Copenhageners agree with such assessments?

Nonetheless, it is difficult to compare cyclist claims when comparing cycling in Copenhagen, as a city with a well-established code of conduct with attending signals, rules and non-aggressive mobility practices, with cities where cycling is often a demonstration of struggle. In cycling cities in Latin America like Bogotá or Mexico City (two cities the authors mention), cycling as a mode of transport is a daily struggle or a deliberate, rebellious exercise to appropriate space or demonstrate rights to the city. These rights, however, are still fundamentally attached to appropriation of urban space through infrastructural provision. Copenhagen’s model of “if you build it, they will come” proliferates, but does not provide sustained analysis for cities that are outside of the North Atlantic. The one-size-fits-all model that favors the socialist system of Denmark is ultimately out of reach for cities in the global South. Instead, the overwhelming focus on establishing bike infrastructure might not be the correct question to begin with for people who circulate according to other needs and values. Placing and constructing infrastructure without considering racial, class and ethnic segregation can also reinforce existing social problems (Lugo 2018).

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