

Book review:

Rob Konings, Hugo Priemus and Peter Nijkamp (2008) *The Future of Intermodal Freight Transport Operations, Design and Policy*

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In another recent book review published in the *European Journal of Transport and Infrastructure Research*, David Banister (2008) wrote "Having read this book, one is left with a feeling that the important issues raised should have been at the forefront of policy debates for many decades, not just now". I have to confess that I have exactly the same feeling after having read "The Future of Intermodal Freight Transport". Indeed, this book explores the important challenge of increasing the scope of intermodal freight transport, and I remember the same question was already an issue in the 80', when I was a young researcher. This reflection, however, does not affect the overall quality of this book.

The volume is a collection of contributions written by researchers involved in the "Freight Transport Automation and Multimodality" (FTAM) research project, carried out at Delft University of Technology, together with experts in this field from many countries.

The book is published by Edward Elgar and is presented as a contribution of experts to provide an overview of the present role of intermodal freight transport, addressing opportunities to significantly improve current performance, and demonstrating design and modelling tools used to analyse and support this performance. Requirements for the implementation of intermodal innovations are prescribed, and policies needed to improve its competitiveness are outlined.

Most of the experts come from Europe, a few from the United-States and two from Japan. Knowing that the maritime container flows are heavily related to the East-Asian countries, one could regret that no more experts come from these countries. Nevertheless, many authors have a World-Wide recognised expertise in the field, compensating this small weakness.

FTAM was a five years research programme, which goal was to provide knowledge and tools to design and develop technologies and organisational structures for an integrated, highly automated transport system for inland intermodal transport. Note that this book only deals with intermodal freight transport, transport automation being handled in a companion book.

The volume is organised around three themes. The first presents a series of contributions discussing intermodal transport operations. The way they are organised in the European Union, the United States and Japan are described in three different chapters, followed by two contributions dealing with hinterland bundling networks and container handling quality. If these

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contributions are all very interesting and helpful to understand interdomodal transport markets, my personal opinion is that a section in which the differences and the best practices in the different areas of the world misses somewhere.

In the next section, design and modelling issues are discussed. Topics related to container handling in mainports and design of innovative intermodal freight bundling networks are covered, along with more conceptual ideas about intermodal transport system design or intermodal freight network modelling. Even if the five chapters of this part of the book could have been quite technical and operation research oriented, the authors avoid to go into very much technical details and to develop extensive mathematical formulations. This is probably one of the strengths of this book. It is written from a multidisciplinary perspective, because of the complexity and diversity of the covered issues. As claimed by the editors, such an approach has the great advantage of presenting a large view on the theme. The book is indeed intended to be read by people in the academic world, but it could also appeal to policymakers or practitioners in the transport industry.

The third and last section addresses implementation and policy issues, and is build around four contributions. The first two identify the critical success factors of intermodal freight transport and explain how information technology can improve interorganisational coordination. The last two papers have a more strategic dimension, as they analyse the future development of intermodal transport in Europe and the role of government in fostering this type of transport, based on perceived lessons in the United States. As for all the contributions in this book, the texts are pleasant to read and not too technical.

The book is well balanced : Starting from a description of the current intermodal freight transport markets in three major areas of the world, it proposes a set of design and modelling tools that makes it possible to develop prospective analyses. It ends with some strategic considerations about the future of this kind of transport.

I started my review telling that the issues raised should have been at the forefront of policy debates for many decades, not just now. Even if I'm still convinced it is true, there is however a huge difference between the content of the contributions and what was written twenty or thirty years ago. Indeed, the "dogmatic speeches" of the years 80' have completely disappeared. It is no longer claimed that intermodal transport is the universal panacea that will solve all the problems related to congestion, pollution or road safety. A lot has been observed since then, lessons were drawn from experiences, huge new infrastructures are not any more claimed to be sine qua non conditions for any success. The authors, through their multidisciplinary origins, depict the reality of this complex world and identify the right strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

References

Banister D. (2008). Book Review: Richard Gilbert and Anthony Perl (2008). *Transport Revolutions: Moving People and Freight without Oil*. *European Journal of Transport Infrastructure Research*, vol. 8, no.4, pp 355-357.

Konings R., Priemus H., Nijkamp P. (2008) (eds.). *The Future of Intermodal Freight Transport, Operations, Design and Policy*, Edward Elgar, transport economics, management and policy series, USA, 343 pages.