

Transport and Children's Wellbeing

E. Owen D. Waygood, Margareta Friman, Lars E. Olsson, and Raktim Mitra, editors (2019)

Amsterdam: Elsevier, 396 pages

\$125.00 (paperback or e-book); ISBN: 978-0-12-814694-1

Transport and Children's Wellbeing came out in late 2019, just before the worldwide coronavirus pandemic upended the lives of people everywhere, stopping travel, sending work and school online, and shuttering community gathering places. Reading the 19-chapter edited volume a year after its publication, in the context of a transformed global transportation landscape, one can perhaps more fully appreciate the depth and value of the editors' intentions to offer academic researchers, graduate students, city leaders, and policymakers a new way of conceptualizing the role and impact of transport on the everyday lives of young people. The book is well timed to inspire thinking about how to "build back better" with more resilient, equitable, and child-friendly policies and practices (OECD, 2020).

Building on the findings of an integrative literature review published in 2017 (Waygood et al., 2017), Waygood, Friman, Olsson, and Mitra construct a strong armature of theory for their book, providing a structure that allows for a unique synthesis of knowledge across a variety of literatures and disciplines. The editors themselves exemplify cross-disciplinary and international collaboration: Owen Waygood is a transportation engineer who has studied and worked in Canada, the United Kingdom, Japan, and Sweden; Margareta Friman and Lars Olsson are Swedish professors of psychology who specialize in transportation dynamics; and Raktim Mitra is an urban planner originally from Bangladesh, now based in Canada. Each contributes to chapters throughout the book, alongside contributions from researchers and practitioners in public health, geography, sociology, education, and the design professions.

The book is organized around a conceptual framework that posits three "means of influence" by which transport affects five domains of children's wellbeing: *access* (the ability to get to different places), *intrinsic influences* (those encountered during transport), and *extrinsic influences* (those resulting from others' transport behavior) potentially impact children's *physical, psychological, social, cognitive, and economic* wellbeing, as initially defined by Pollard and Lee (2003). Each of the chapters in the book engage this conceptual framework, homing in on specific interactions or impacts. The chapters are loosely organized into three themes: 1) relationships between children's travel behavior and their wellbeing, 2) key externalities or risk factors of transportation that affect children's wellbeing, and 3) approaches to improving the contexts and conditions of children's travel in terms of the socio-ecological framework originally developed by Bronfenbrenner (1989).

For researchers and policymakers concerned with young people, families, and transportation, *Transport and Children's Wellbeing* provides an excellent synthesis

of research conducted over the past several decades. Contributors draw from a wide range of both classic and contemporary studies, methodological approaches, and findings from practice, pointing to a way forward with wellbeing at the center. There is widespread consensus among the book's contributors that systems-level analysis and policymaking to address the complexity of the contexts of children's transport is needed, and that local adaptation of international policy frameworks such as Vision Zero and the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities approach can help guide innovation focused on the needs and capabilities of young people.

Most of the book's chapters are literature reviews that address specific aspects of the editors' conceptual framework. This leads to a certain amount of redundancy, as some themes—the physical health benefits of walking and bicycling, for example—are more common in the literature than others, such as the connections between children's travel and the economic aspect of wellbeing. The chapter that addresses the latter domain—chapter 10, by Noreen McDonald, W. Mathew Palmer, and Ruth Steiner—is one of the most compelling and concise contributions in the book. The authors bridge the gap between the health benefits of active travel to school and the economic benefits of investing in infrastructure and supports that facilitate it, including reduced pedestrian injuries and school transportation costs. They point to the need for more research in this area, noting that little is yet known about how parents perceive school-related travel costs, or how school systems and municipalities quantify the value of infrastructure for walking and bicycling.

There is also a need for more, and more consistent, research that directly engages young people themselves, as demonstrated by the six chapters in the book that report on empirical research or case studies of children's travel behavior. The chapter that makes the clearest case for authentic child and youth engagement is chapter 11, by Karen Witten and Adrian Field, which discusses an 18-month co-design process with students in a suburb of Auckland, New Zealand. The Te Ara Mua—Future Streets project involved a “multi-layered participative approach” that resulted in streets and public spaces redesigned to prioritize young people, informed by their knowledge and experience. The authors conclude, “If children's mobility needs are not taken seriously, transport planning will undermine children's wellbeing and cast gloom over the urban futures of us all” (p. 213).

That is precisely the main point the editors of the book aim to communicate: doing research, planning, design, and engagement processes only with able-bodied adults in mind marginalizes roughly a quarter of the population of any given country (World Bank, 2019). Children with disabilities are further excluded, as discussed by Timothy Ross in chapter 15. But countries that have thoughtfully integrated children's needs and capabilities into urban planning and policy have been able to sustain high levels of walking and bicycling over successive generations, unlike elsewhere. Case studies from Japan (chapter 16) and the Netherlands (chapter 17) detail how supportive environments can foster and nurture child-friendly cultural norms around independent and active travel.

As rich as the content of this book is for researchers and policymakers focused on the health, wellbeing, mobility, accessibility, and engagement of children and young

people, it is diminished somewhat by a lack of editorial attention to detail. The book appears to have been rushed to publication without thorough copyediting. Aside from typos and awkward phrasing in several chapters, *Transport and Children's Wellbeing* is a valuable volume that brings a new body of research and ideas together under a clear and inspiring theoretical framework that is highly relevant in the current context of planning for a more equitable and sustainable post-pandemic future.

Review by Darcy Varney Kitching

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