

Logistics Systems for Sustainable Cities: Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on City Logistics (Madeira, Portugal, 25-27 June, 2003)
Edited by E. Taniguchi and R.G. Thompson

The field of urban logistics is receiving growing attention and the “Logistics Systems for Sustainable Cities” book is a very good indication of this trend. It includes an impressive array of views and analysis which can certainly be seen as an accurate assessment of the state of the discipline. To put it in its context, the book is the third installment of the proceedings of the International Conference on City logistics; the first two were published in 1999 and 2001. The fourth City logistics conference took place in 2005 and it can be expected that the proceedings will also take the form of a book. Being able to provide a book within a year of the conference is in itself remarkable.

With the globalization and commodification freight transport in urban areas has become increasingly difficult to manage. This is more so in cities having high density levels making urban freight circulation a challenging activity. The growing public awareness on environmental issues has placed urban freight distribution in the crosshair. The fact that almost every paper either concerns Europe, Australia or Japan is a reflection of the more advanced stage of the discipline on those countries. The shockingly low number of North American contributors is an indication that city logistics has a long way to go in order to become part of the research agenda in this part of the world.

Although the book commits the sin of using the overemphasized “S” word in its title, logistics are certainly a strategy to improve urban transportation systems in terms of its reliability, costs and efficiency. As the issue of urban passenger transportation receiving the bulk of the attention, the book is rectifying the imbalance. The first chapter written by the editors sets the tone, but they appear to be falling involuntarily into the vague pitfall that the intractable concept of sustainability has become. One has to please public funding agencies who in recent years have shoveled the sustainability requirement down the research community’s throat to abide to the environmentalist ideology (as opposed to reason) of their constituents. Once this homework has been done, the book gets down to business. Much of the “S” word is left behind and the work focuses on what researchers and practitioners in logistics do best; provide substantiated and rigorous analysis and insight for a wide range of topical and geographical settings. The reader is then exposed to what one would expect from the work of the world’s leading scholars in the field. It surely does not disappoint.

The editors have not tried to organize the work in thematic chapters. However, the articles are sequentially grouped along a commonality, so each article matches well in this continuity. It is impossible to here review the 34 chapters (articles) of this book without overlooking an issue or putting too much emphasis on another. At start it is important to state that several articles were extremely interesting and tough provoking. They suit very well different purposes related to background research and education in the field. There are a few chapters that this reviewer would gladly make reading requirements for transport and logistics related classes and seminars. Three common perspectives appear to be emerging and most of the chapters fall within either one of

them:

1) Optimization of urban freight movements. This represents the standard operations research perspective in logistics adapted to a set of unique constraints related to an urban setting. The issues of modal choice, routing and adaptability in urban distribution are extensively covered and many original approaches are provided. The issue of location and operation of urban distribution centers is well covered.

2) Designing and adapting modes and infrastructure. This is more of an engineering perspective where improving city logistics can be helped with a better configuration of sites and the adaptation of freight distribution modes to the urban setting.

3) Management of urban distribution. Investigating in which way the management of urban freight distribution could be improved, particularly in terms of procedures and practices. Information technologies and policies (from national to municipal) receive the bulk of the attention.

Overall, the book is an excellent compilation of various approaches and perspectives pertaining to city logistics, a good indication of an active and productive community.

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