Reviews

Urban transport, environment and equity: the case for developing countries by E Vasconcellos;
Earthscan Publications, London, 2001, 333 pages, £60.00 cloth, £24.95 paper (US $85.00, $35.00)
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The book is a welcome and a very timely contribution to a woefully understudied area of
concern. Eduardo Vasconcellos's focus on environment and equity in urban transport develop-
ments in the developing countries highlights the Achilles' heel of transport planning practice in
this part of the world. The paradox of Third World cities whereby, on the one hand they need to
modernize their transport infrastructure and services, and on the other hand, need also to deal
effectively with profound social and economic inequalities, is truly a huge challenge. This is
particularly so as much policy and planning guidance in this field to date has been at best
inadequate or inappropriate, and at worst downright negligent.

This publication has the potential to make a major contribution to the field of urban
transport planning in developing countries. It comes from a person with considerable experience
in both transport planning practice and research and who, significantly, is from the developing
world. The author's assertion that traditional transport policies created an unfair distribution
of accessibility and environmental impacts is not new; it nevertheless remains an accusation that
warrants strong reinforcement because it has too often been ignored, despite the fast-growing
numbers of poor living in cities of the developing world.

The book offers a valuable summary of current conditions of urban transport developments
in developing countries. Most interestingly, it attempts to provide an insight into how (and why)
these developments took place, giving due attention to social and institutional concerns that
are all too frequently addressed inadequately. The analyses of the types of proposals that are
typically employed in Third World cities, in particular, provide interesting reading.

The views expressed and the perspective offered may not be received well by many politi-
cians, consultancy firms, construction companies, and other automobile industry interests that
see the future of cities in the developing world closely associated with automobile dependency.
For Vasconcellos strongly challenges this premise and adds his voice to a growing chorus of
transport specialists who advocate more sustainable and equitable responses to urban transport
needs. These challengers of conventional wisdom have become increasingly influential in certain
political circles and among several international development agencies, albeit rather belatedly.
Their influence, however, remains dwarfed by that of the motor vehicle lobby.

The unashamed sociological and political bias of the book, drawing in some instances
from Marxist paradigms, poses many challenges to the conventional wisdom of transport analy-
sis and planning, that has remained dominated by economic and engineering rationales. The
author's unique critique is the basis of many of the concluding guidelines he offers in the latter
part of the publication, where he seeks to provide the reader with potential new tools for
analysis *and* action to "help support an equity coalition among those concerned with the future
of developing countries" (page 7).

Despite the importance of the overall focus of the book and the significance of some of
the arguments it advocates, the book unfortunately suffers from an awkward structure and
writing style. Among other things, the author is guilty of repetitiveness which dilutes the potency
of some of the arguments he presents. The early part of the book (that is chapters 1 – 7)
commences well, with the introduction of many of these chapters clearly laying out its contents,
providing an in-depth analysis of substantive issues and offering very useful summaries of their
main observations and findings. The latter part of the book, however, is not only repetitive in
parts but also has chapters in a sequence that does not always appear logical. The discussion,
for example, of Third World city typologies in chapter 18 would have been better offered
much earlier in the book.

Although significant, these failings should not deter the committed reader from extracting from this book the many gems of innovative thinking it offers. What the author succeeds in doing is to bring to the forefront of transport and development studies many very important nontechnical issues and concerns, in a manner that shows that the employment of alternative perceptions and planning frameworks yield very different insights from those generated by conventional wisdom. The neoliberal economists and traditional traffic engineers will no doubt take issue with much that Vasconcellos writes, which is understandable, given that his starting point is very different from theirs. However, what the open-minded reader will realise when reading through the often complex and meandering arguments is that for all these weaknesses, the author highlights many concerns that remain unaddressed by conventional practice. He provides numerous innovative thoughts, especially in his proposals, that offer promise for the future development of urban transport planning in developing countries.

Notwithstanding the differences among developing countries, Vasconcellos advocates the adoption of five generic concepts and proposals in his new approach to urban transport planning. These include: belief that people have the right to an equitable life; roads and sidewalks are public assets; public transport should be seen as an essential service; safety has to be treated as the most important transport-related environmental problem; and scarce financial resources need to be prudently used. He also cites a number of key political and strategic measures, and planning procedures, as a means by which his advocated approach can be achieved, and highlights the critical role of nonmotorised transport, public transport, and traffic management in achieving them. He concludes that the long established and inherent tension within all conventional urban transport policymaking and planning, between equity and efficiency, remains unresolved. As a result, he again declares his opposition to those efficiency-driven traditional approaches to urban transport planning (associated with globalisation forces) that perpetuate these tensions, calling instead for the adoption of equity as a prime objective of urban transport policymaking and planning—difficult and complex a challenge though this might prove.

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The environment in corporate management: new directions and economic insights by J-B Lesourd, S G M Schilizzi; Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, Glos, 2002, 400 pages, £75.00 (US$ 110.00) ISBN 1 85898 916 7

The key words in the title of this book are the last two 'economic insights'. Written by economists, the book takes a perspective based in the microeconomics of the firm, especially in focusing upon ways to measure, manage, and optimise environmental costs and benefits within private companies.

The first part of the book, chapters 1 – 3, introduces and examines the key rationales suggested for environmental management: economics (the authors' first love) and ethics. The main body of the book, chapters 4 – 7, deals with managing information and risks, specifically environmental accounting and reporting, financial investment, and environmental insurance. The approach relies primarily upon economic methods of analysis and evaluation, for example, in calculating the value of environmentally related investments, resulting in lots of equations and abstractions but few empirical examples. To remedy this, case studies are appended to most chapters, giving company examples of the issues raised. However, these are (perhaps inevitably) based on a company's own materials and therefore tend to be anecdotal and descriptive, making the triangulation of claims, such as about environmental performance improvement, difficult. The final part, chapters 8 – 10, covers environmental management standards (especially the ISO 14000 series in detail), environmental marketing, and some brief conclusions. All three parts rely mainly on reviewing previously published material and, although this is done fairly clearly and in a well-organised way with some useful summary tables, there is little about the authors' own opinions or distinctiveness of approach.

Indeed, although the authors claim that they are using a stakeholder analysis as a theoretical framework, the views offered are very much "rooted in the disciplines of industrial organisation and modern microeconomics" (page 13). This means that cost–benefit calculations dominate and the issues of market characteristics, the macroeconomic climate, regulatory shifts, and, indeed, environmental quality in the world outside are only mentioned in passing. This is driven by the authors' diagnosis that environmental management within firms is primarily stimulated by an estimation of the 'optimal involvement', calculated on the basis of costs and benefits, rather than by moral commitment, social expectation, or even (contrary to lots of other business literature) regulatory regimes.

Overall, this book would serve most usefully as a text for academic reference in economics and management. Its style is too dense for everyday management use and it primarily reviews existing materials rather than develops an innovative framework for future research. It is also not cheap. On the plus side, it assumes little prior knowledge of the field on behalf of the reader. The tone is introductory, for example, in defining key terms and in explaining why companies are interested in environmental management. That said, some affinity with (quantitative) economic approaches would be a great help when reading the central chapters.

Finally, it was a minor relief to find that the authors are not taking sides: unlike much other 'green' business literature, this book is not an evangelical exercise. The authors are seeking to provide tools that companies can apply to environmental management, rather than to convert the reader. Their tone and evaluations are therefore more often bland than polemical, although they do lean towards the view that economics and environmental management can be, if not perfect partners, then at least mutually informative.

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Geographic information systems and health applications edited by O A Khan, R Skinner; Idea Group Publishing, Hershey, PA, 2003, 325 pages, $84.95 (£53.65) ISBN 1591400422

I suspect if asked to review this book five years ago, my comments would have been rather different and probably more positive given the fact that it would have had very little competition. Skinner, in his foreword is right to point to the dearth of major conferences given over to the use of GIS in the health arena in the mid-1990s, despite the fact that some health organisations were early adopters of these technologies. However, since then there have been (international) conferences given over to health GIS applications, a number of books have appeared that have described examples of the application of GIS in public health [including the excellent Cromley and McLafferty (2002) book] and GIS software companies, recognising the potentially significant market opportunities, have provided customised add-ons to their packages specifically tailored to health organisations. As Skinner further acknowledges, the field of health geographics has matured significantly in the last five years. The fact that papers included in this edited volume were largely drawn from International Health Geographics conferences held in 1998 and 2000, therefore, almost inevitably gives some of the contributions a dated feel.

The book consists of seventeen chapters arranged into four sections. Section 1 comprises four chapters which focus on the use of GIS in investigating health disparities and in community health planning. All the examples are from the United States which certainly limits its international appeal—some attempt to tease out lessons for health researchers in other contexts, many of whom are researching widening health inequalities in their own countries, would have been helpful here. Some objective and realistic description of how GIS could help to eliminate such disparities would have been useful. For example, we are told that GIS "possess the right sort of tools to meet such a challenge" (page 8) but are left to our own devices to guess what these are. Section 2 consists of four chapters describing the use of GIS in visualising patterns of cancer incidence and examining potential socioenvironmental factors that may be influencing such patterns. These chapters represent some of the stronger contributions; the use of clustering packages and the concerns surrounding the use of data available at a variety of spatial scales, for example, has resonance for researchers facing similar sorts of methodological issues. There are five chapters in section 3 which cover the use

of GIS in investigating patterns of infectious disease. The chapter by Curtis et al (chapter 9) presents a particularly interesting and novel use of clustering and animation as exploratory data analysis tools in the examination of spatiotemporal patterns of racoon rabies in West Virginia using nearest neighbour hierarchical clustering to locate detailed areas of interest prior to the application of animation software. These patterns can be used to plan intervention programmes. The final section, consisting of four chapters, outlines the use of GIS in planning services and measuring accessibility to primary and secondary health care. There is a relatively large literature that has focused on the role of distance in accessing health services. The current networking capabilities provide an extra dimension that enables researchers to take into account detailed characteristics of transport networks in order to examine the impact of such factors in relation to compounding influences such as socioeconomic status. All these contributions are from the developed world (United States, Canada, and New Zealand) and an example from the developing world would have been a useful addition here.

Whilst reading the chapters included in the volume, I was left wondering who the book was aimed at. Skinner throws down the gauntlet by suggesting that the book presents "a very limited overview of some of the ways GIS is being applied in health" before encouraging potential readers "to think outside the box" (page ix). The editors are keen to emphasise that these contributions merely provide a sample of many potential applications of GIS in health and this is a fair point but, by the same token, there is no real attempt to bring the material together and the book, despite containing some useful case studies, has a rather disjointed feel. The back cover notes suggest that "the needs of less developed countries ... should not be neglected." Again, this is a valid comment and addressing such concerns would have been a useful addition to the literature but twelve of the seventeen chapters report on research conducted in North America, and there are only two chapters (both on case studies in Bangladesh) that could be categorised as research conducted in developing countries, neither of which, draw on the material presented to describe wider ramifications for researchers in similar environments.

The quality of the figures in some of the chapters is a particularly disappointing aspect of the book (the fact that legends for some of the maps are indecipherable is a cardinal sin in a book that purports to highlight, for example, the visualisation aspects of GIS in health applications). The fact that some of the figures are referred a few pages on into the text, whilst some are not referred to in the text at all, suggests that its production could have been tighter. The index is particularly unhelpful—there are certainly more than one reference to cancer clusters, accessibility, and geocoding, and the term "geographic information systems" certainly appeared more than eight times in the book, for example. In requesting user feedback in the preface, the editors ask potential readers of the book to let them know how they have used it suggesting that the book could be taught in academic schemes "as part of your day-to-day applied work or as a resource guide" (page xii). My overall impression is that there are enough good case studies to recommend interested health-GIS researchers borrowing the book, and for lecturers to include some of the individual chapters on their reference lists for relevant modules. However, there are other books on the market, such as the Cromley and McLafferty book that provide a far more grounded introduction to the use of GIS in public health and, as a consequence, I would be less inclined to recommend purchasing this volume, particularly given its hefty price.

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Reference
Cromley E K, McLafferty S L, 2002 *GIS and Public Health* (Guilford Press, New York)

Elsevier's dictionary of geographical information systems. In English, German, French and Russian
by B Delijska; Elsevier Science, Amsterdam 2002, 363 pages, €135.00 ($135.00) ISBN 0 444 50991 7

As an author and practitioner in the GIS field I am always excited to receive new GIS books. When asked to review a dictionary of geographical information systems I accepted without hesitation for here was a chance to read, learn, and debate what was included and what failed to make the cut. I started to compile lists in anticipation of the book arriving in Redlands by mail: definitely in—raster, vector, database, spatial analysis, and object (all straightforward and covered in every introductory course); possibly in—IDRISI, Douglas–Peuker (may be even Poiker if they used the modern spelling) algorithm, cost–benefit analysis (let's see how it does on management issues), aspect, and client-server (what about computing terms?); unlikely to be included unless it's a very big book—*r*-tree index, kriging (tricky technical term), wavelet compression, fractal, and Sierpinski carpet (a killer that no one has heard of).

Delijska's *Dictionary of Geographical Information Systems. In English, German, French and Russian* published in 2002 as introduced in the preface "contains 4,040 terms with about 1,700 cross-references that are commonly used in the theory and practice of geographical information systems. The terms were selected according to their significance or frequency of use. The terminology covers the areas of geoinformatics, geostatistics, computer cartography, geospatial databases, computer graphics, geodesy, photogrammetry, remote sensing, etc." The reader is left to cogitate on what is in the etc category.

This book is a real curate's egg. It is not a dictionary in the conventional popular use of the term. Where better than to look up the definition of the word dictionary than in a dictionary! I used Merriam-Webster's Dictionary online (http://www.m-w.com):

Dictionary
1: a reference book containing words usually alphabetically arranged along with information about their forms, pronunciations, functions, etymologies, meanings, and syntactical and idiomatic uses
2: a reference book listing alphabetically terms or names important to a particular subject or activity along with discussion of their meanings and applications
3: a reference book giving for words of one language equivalents in another
4: a list (as of items of data or words) stored in a computer for reference (as for information retrieval or word processing)

Delijska's book is a dictionary of type 3 in that it contains English–German–French–Russian translations of key GIS words. Rather enigmatically the meaning of a few words or phrases is (partially) explained: jack-knifing—an iterative process for estimating the errors associated with spline interpolation; psychomotor error—of manual digitizing; and ray-casting—computational technique used to simulate a visual scene with optical effects, variations in light sources and other effects. Definitions of all words would have been of great interest to many readers.

For the record, of the seventeen words in my list above eleven made the 'dictionary': those missing were IDRISI (excusable as it's a software package), Douglas–Peucker (both spellings: should be present), cost–benefit analysis (given the technical focus this is acceptable), client-server (I could go either way on this one), wavelet compression (should have been included), and Sierpinski carpet (hardly surprising). Incidentally, all the seventeen phrases/words are in the six page index of Longley et al (2001). It is fairly easy to obtain details and definitions of many terms by searching the web using your favorite search engine. In the case of Sierpinski carpet, Google returns 1510 entries (so it is 1509 entries from being a googlewack). Incidentally, Eric Weisstein's site (http://mathworld.wolfram.com/SierpinskiCarpet.html) lists a Sierpinski carpet as "a fractal which is constructed analogously to the Sierpinski sieve, but using squares instead of triangles."

The book also has some interesting entries that I had never heard of and my interest was sufficiently piqued to make me check for formal definitions on the web: anamorphose—after ten minutes of reading French and German entries I gave up; Hamiltonian Circuit—"graph cycle (i.e., closed loop) through a graph that visits each node exactly once … . A graph possessing a Hamiltonian circuit is said to be a Hamiltonian graph" (http://mathworld.wolfram.com/HamiltonianCircuit.html); medial-axis transformation—the medial-axis transformation is useful in *thinning* a polygon, or,

as is sometimes said, finding its *skeleton*. The goal is to extract a simple, robust representation of the shape of the polygon (http://www.cs.sunysb.edu/~algorith/files/thinning.shtml). The point here is that even the definitions of very technical words can be looked up on the web quite simply and on demand. What about alternative language translations? Well there are even sites that do multilanguage translation of words such as raster, vector, and database (http://wombat.doc.ic.ac.uk/foldoc/, http://www.yourdictionary.com/, http://www.m-w.com).

In summary, this book was a big disappointment for me. I expected a dictionary of type 1 with explanations of GIS terms, but I got a dictionary of type 3 with lists of English – German – French – Russian terms. At $135 this is a very expensive source of words (3 words per cent). A website would be a much more useful way of making this type of material available. Such a site could be kept up to date, allow searches, and even offer pronunciation using speech synthesizers (check out http://www.yourdictionary.com). I feel that the authors/publishers misled me in choosing the title and that $135 is at least $100 too much for a work such as this. I will have to continue to hope that the GIS equivalent of Johnston et al (2000) or Thomas and Goudie (2000) with extended entries, great explanations, and follow-up material is available soon.

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Virtual reality in geography edited by P Fisher, D Unwin; Taylor and Francis, London, 2002, 404 pages, £55.00 ($79.95) ISBN 0 7484 0905 X

This edited book, by two prolific writers—Fisher and Unwin—represents the most recent addition to the rapidly growing body of publications on virtual reality (VR). However, despite this explosion of interest in VR over the last decade, there has been a general lack of emphasis on basic epistemological issues, such as an accepted definition of VR, and, by implication, a clarification of the extent of the field in which it is studied. This book attempts to demystify the term by examining its potential and its deficiencies, through a documentation of the current state-of-the-art work in the field of VR applications in the spatial sciences.

The book is an outcome of a workshop, organised by the authors in association with the Royal Geographical Society, which was held in Leicester in 1999. A selection of adapted papers from this conference form the chapters of the book, with combinations of authors collaborating to write an introduction to each of the main sections. These introductions offer very useful prefaces to the field of VR in geography and will appeal to those using the book to gain a rapid introduction to the topic. The tone of the book is somewhat cautionary, with many of the authors suggesting that developments in the use of VR for geographical research are still dominated by what is technically possible rather than by any real desire to forward scientific discovery. It is argued that this almost exclusive emphasis on representation and the continuing absence of linkages between the model and abstract information diminished the 'realism' of the models. For example, Batty et al (chapter 15) call particularly for the inclusion of such things as social context, practice, and other abstract information which form an 'invisible' part of reality—and say that, without this, VR models offer little to geographical research. This general undertone resonates through almost all of the chapters. The book is structured into four main sections, which efficiently segregate information into digestible chunks for the reader and make the book very easy to 'dip into' for specific topics. The sections range from the theoretical definitions of VR and the proposal of an interesting framework for putting VR research into context (part 1), through to the more practical applications of VR for landscape analysis (part 2) and the construction of virtual cities (part 3). In the final section of the

book there is an interesting departure from the expected, with several chapters concentrating on the use of VR in understanding nongeographic phenomena, and the geography of VR (as opposed to the use of VR in geography).

Each of the sections tackles its own epistemological issue. In part 1 the focus is on the current lack of an accepted definition of VR; this issue is innovatively tackled here. Instead of attempting to provide a universal, single definition of VR the authors propose a framework to describe VR, within which any subsequent research may be placed. In their argument the authors identify VR as being the creation of construct from reality within which the user and the representation (or virtual environment) may interact to varying degrees. It is this variable level of interaction which is used in this book to classify VR applications. The accompanying diagrams used to elucidate this framework were very effective, and I especially liked the introduction of a number of chapters in part 1 by way of such diagrams, these situated the research within the context of the framework. This was a novel concept and one which worked well here. The remaining chapters of part 1 followed the general theme of defining VR, with Gillings's (chapter 3) enlightening theoretical discussion of the meaning of 'realism'. In addition, Brodlie and El-Khalili (chapter 4) discuss web-based virtual environments, concentrating on current ideas and architectures, and concluding with a useful discussion regarding the limitations of current standards (such as VRML)—including a useful, if somewhat short, look to future solutions. The remaining chapters of the section cover the expected issues such as the links between VR and GIS (chapter 5), cartography and VR (chapter 6), and imagery and VR (chapter 7). The book then departs from such theoretical issues, and focuses on practical applications of VR first in virtual landscapes (part 2), and second in virtual cities (part 3). In the former, the focus is heavily on the use of VR for planning and decisionmaking in rural development. The six chapters in this section cover issues such as the ability of VR to aid public participation in decisionmaking (chapter 9), and visual impact assessment (chapter 10). There is an interesting contribution from Brown et al (chapter 11) on the challenges posed by representing multiresolution landscapes on the Internet, an issue further developed by Wood (chapter 12) who discusses the structure and scale dependencies inherent in landscape models. Chapters 13 and 14 both tackle the issue of using VR as a teaching aid. For those readers for whom this is a primary area of interest chapter 7 (Dykes) is also recommended.

Part 3 is a clear strength of this book, with some excellent chapters discussing the problems of the creation of VR models of cities and the built environment, namely data capture (chapter 16), and the creation of links to abstract data (chapter 18). For those readers using the book to gain an overall feel for recent developments in VR research chapter 19 is recommended as an excellent introduction to developments and problems in modelling urban environments, drawing on many international examples. In this chapter, Batty and Smith discuss the previous development of VR for urban environments, and the challenges currently faced, using detailed examples of different types of VR to show how social problems can be communicated to the public, and finally a discussion of VR research for geographical analysis. Unfortunately, chapter 17 seemed to sit outside of the focus of part 3—and indeed the book in general. Although an interesting article, this chapter which gives a detailed discussion of an ancient Thailand city offers only a tenuous contribution to a book dealing with VR in geography.

Finally, part 4 provides a fascinating collection of papers concerning the geography of VR, and the use of VR in representing nongeographical space. Although some of the contributions in this section will be familiar to those who have perused even basic VR literature previously, this collection of papers is an excellent conclusion to the book—without which the book as a whole would be considerably less attractive.

This book has some significant strengths: it is well edited, well written, offers clear definitions, and importantly assumes no prior knowledge of VR or of the concepts surrounding it. The primary strength is in the careful structuring and the efficient editing. The introductory chapters to each of the four sections are excellent, and provide a useful summary of VR research and challenges in their own right. All such qualities render it very accessible to the VR novice, whilst also being a useful record of current research to those already in the field.

It was noted that there was some degree of repetition, in descriptions of, for example, Virtual Reality Modelling Language (VRML), but this is by no means problematic—indeed, it serves to highlight the encyclopaedic nature of the book.

There are, of course, criticisms to be levelled at this book; the aim of the book was to demystify VR and to review current state-of-the-art work for the spatial sciences. These were ambitious aims, but by and large they have been tackled well here. However, the book documents principally research conducted in the United Kingdom—and largely ignores international work. To the neophyte this is a potential shortcoming of book as an introductory text. I was also surprised that there was no closing chapter from the editors, given the wide range of issues discussed with a clear focus on challenges ahead, the book ended somewhat abruptly and may, I feel, have benefited from a closing summary. In addition, any book on VR should contain clear, well-proportioned images to supplement textual descriptions. The book contains a good number of clear black and white images, with colour versions available on the accompanying CD. However, the excellent clarity of most of the original images is such that most of the CD images are essentially redundant. The CD does, however, contain some useful examples of VR in action and for the novice user is a most valuable accompaniment to the book. Finally, the book appears to be aimed at those requiring an introduction to current VR research— given that many of the potential readers will be students or postgraduates the book is perhaps beyond the financial capabilities of the audience at £55 ($80).

Despite the shortcomings identified above it should be recognised that these are relatively minor criticisms, and that the overall impression was that this is an excellent book for those new to the area of research. The value of the book lies in its clear documentation of current VR research in the United Kingdom, and an open discussion of the barriers to development in the spatial sciences. As such, I would highly recommend it to be included in required readings for computer-science-related graduate courses.

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Books received

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