There is, however, to some extent unfortunate shift in the methodological approach between the first analytical chapters, which provide a historical review combined with a well-researched investigation of knowledge exchange among urban planners and transport politicians in the 1980s and 1990s, and the second more anthropological section. Whilst this is understandable as the available data sources may differ in the exploration of a subject over 40 years, the monograph could have benefited from a unitary research framework throughout. On the one hand, the historical analysis in the first part misses promising details about the production of cultural signifiers among bicycle performances in the 1980s and 1990s. On the other hand, the latter part would have potentially benefited from an additional focus on the exchange and distribution of international/European knowledge regimes, not only in the cultural sphere but in academic debates on urban planning and political negotiation, as well as in the build-up of interest groups and social movements.

Nevertheless, the study comprises a detailed, well-researched and noteworthy analysis of urban cycling policy developments and their sociocultural embeddedness. It invites scholars to expand the research on urban mobility in Eastern Europe, which can potentially contribute new insights due to the unique historical development of these countries. Of particular note is the impact and experience of the unleashing of market liberalisation in the urban space, and the manifold confrontations regarding social inequalities, which remain too often neglected. Tóth underlines the relevance of a careful analysis of urban policy negotiations in a diachronically as well as synchronically complex manner, while at the same time succeeding to provide a well written and enjoyable read for a widespread public interested in contemporary Eastern European Studies, Urban or Mobility Studies, transport and mobility history, as well as the growing field of cycling research.

Dejan Petkov, *Tramway Renaissance in Western Europe: A Socio-technical Analysis* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2020); 368 pp., €67.59, ISBN 978-3658288785.

**Reviewed by:** Kevin D. Tennent, *University of York, UK*

The global resurgence in popularity of tramway technology will probably come to be considered one of the defining features of the broad period from c. 1980–2020 in transport history, at least until Coronavirus seemed to spoil the party by making proximity unfashionable. This tramway, or light rail, comeback has not been without its difficulties or controversies, and arguably may not quite have fulfilled the potential once claimed of it by boosters. Petkov’s contemporary history of this phenomenon, based on his PhD thesis at Technische Universität Darmstadt provides a theoretically grounded perspective drawing on rich case analysis to tell the
story. Starting with the decline of traditional tramways and the slow rebirth of the concept after the oil crisis of the 1970s, a rich narrative is built, interweaving a broad discussion of the emergence of the technology with some well selected case studies which demonstrate that context is all important in the application of big ideas.

In terms of theoretical perspective the book views tramways through the lens of the theories of the historian of technology Thomas P. Hughes, who theorized that messy and complex socio-technical systems are typically pioneered by influential actors who combine the non-technical, or socially constructed, with the technical. Network systems can then be established which have the potential to be made generic and disembedded, creating a system capable of being adapted and installed anywhere in the world.

Petkov applies this lens to six case studies from three countries – Karlsruhe and Hannover in Germany, which pioneered the new form of the tramway as they sought to rebuild and revitalize their traditional systems, as well as totally new system builds at Strasbourg and Rouen in France, and Manchester and Sheffield in England. Petkov uses these studies to richly demonstrate how the different institutional settings of the three countries essentially prevented the adoption of a generic form of tramways internationally. Usefully in doing this he traces the origin of the new genre in Germany, where, unlike the UK and France, a new generation of tramway vehicles had been purchased in the late 1950s, staving off abandonment of traditional systems. While local, state and federal government policy still tended to favour motorization there remained a concern with making public transport competitive, and the emphasis was put on moving tramways underground to avoid conflicts with road traffic, even in some cases converting to a ‘full metro’ system. This process was partly facilitated by the Tax Amendment Act of 1966, which established a federal fuel duty, which was split between road and public transport schemes, being redistributed to the Länder and cities. Thus a funding mechanism was established, while cities started to realize that surface level segregation of tram transport was also a possibility, allowing for the cheaper adoption of schemes coupled with the avoidance of underground stations, which were often perceived as unattractive and dangerous by passengers.

The book lucidly tells the story of this re-adoption in Germany, which inspired interest among public transport planners in France and the English speaking world. Here the real strength of Petkov’s multinational case study approach becomes clear. The French national government responded to the 1970s oil crisis by encouraging the idea of tramway reintroduction, and a 1982 Act gave municipalities new powers in terms of the organization and financing of local transport, while subsidies were made available for systems with their own right of way. This encouraged as many as 30 cities to build tramway systems over a 30 year period, but the systems in France often had an aesthetic purpose attached to them, being interlinked with urban re-generation schemes (and the trams themselves often having striking designs). French local authorities, often led by powerful mayors with strong personalities, were able to drive through these regeneration projects
attached to the diffusion of the technology, even if modal shift was not always as effective as first claimed. Petkov’s analysis is perhaps most revealing of policy shortcoming and ideological failure when it comes to the relative failure of trams in English cities. In England adoption may have been driven by claims of the environmental benefits and of modal shift, but the relatively weak powers of local government and the diffusion of transport powers through PTAs and PTEs together with the de-regulation of bus services after 1985 restricted what could be achieved. Relatively few systems were built and the institutional setting prevented integration with other local transport forms, restricting ridership. Professional transport planners often championed the systems over local politicians and strict market logics were applied to their operation once built. English systems were therefore not very innovative in implementation and had fewer positive impacts than the efficient German or aesthetically pleasing French systems.

This powerful synthesis brings Petkov towards the conclusion that the institutional context does matter for the transfer of network technologies, which are perhaps not as generically adaptable as they first appear. The interaction between the stakeholders involved in setting up a network – planners, policy makers, politicians, researchers and users alike therefore become critical in setting up that context. This is a diverse and enjoyable book that critically maps the challenges and pitfalls of the tramway renaissance without boosterism and should be essential reading for anyone who would like to see trams adopted in their own city.

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David W. Gutzke and Michael John Law, The Roadhouse Comes to Britain: Drinking, Driving and Dancing, 1925–1955 (London: Bloomsbury, 2017); 181 pp., £95.00, ISBN 978-1474294508.

Reviewed by: Simon Abernethy, Independent Scholar, UK

There’s something of an irony reviewing The Roadhouse Comes to Britain: Drinking, Driving and Dancing in the midst of the Covid 19 lockdown, when drinking, driving and dancing have been in short supply. The book takes us through the rise and fall of the British Roadhouse; an establishment that grew out of the ability and desire of well-to-do individuals in the 1920s to make their way out of town by private motor car to have some fun; of varying salacious degrees. For the authors, the “intriguing aspect of the roadhouse is that it is almost forgotten” and ‘even for most interwar historians, is an obscure relic of the period”. Certainly, this represents the first piece of literature I’ve seen that’s explicitly examined the roadhouse, and the result is a comprehensive overview of this largely forgotten phenomenon.