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Review: Sidewalks: Conflict and Negotiation over Public Space

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Loukaitou-Sideris, Anastasia and Ehrenfeucht, Renia. *Sidewalks: Conflict and Negotiation over Public Space*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009. 336pp. ISBN 9780262123075. US\$28.00, cloth.

The authors of this work have attempted to “document the evolution of municipal sidewalks as well as their competing functional, social, political, commercial, and environmental uses” (p.11) in a work that is relatively unique in its field. Sidewalks have been in existence, in one form or another, since about 2000 B.C. Throughout history sidewalks have been many things, including the place to see and be seen; a method to move foot traffic; a place to showcase vendor wares, and a quiet point of contention between public and private entities.

Case studies of five major U.S. cities – Boston, Los Angeles, New York, Miami, and Seattle – provide glimpses of how sidewalks have become public spaces that are constantly in conflict and being negotiated for. Sidewalks are considered spaces of economic survival when used by street vendors; as a place to establish one’s individual or group identity as in the suffragettes parades in 1920; as a place of dissent (the free-speech advocates of the early 1900s); and, in more recent years, as a place to create an urban forest of trees. The glimpses given in this book are succinct and extremely useful.

The book uses themes of distinctiveness, publicness, diversity and contestation, and regulation to delve into the competing uses and claims of sidewalk users. The chapter “History and Evolution” provides overall background concerning the development and uses of the sidewalk. The chapter “Sidewalk as Space of Dissent” investigates sidewalks political spaces from the free speech riots of the early 1900s, through Vietnam protests in the 1960s and 1970s, right up to the Free Trade Area of the Americas protests in Miami, FL in 2003. Chapters 10 and 11 speak to the role of municipalities in the regulation of sidewalks.

The amount of archival and statistical information in the writing attests to the thorough research completed by the authors. The number of photographic depictions is limited, yet very relevant to the topic of the section. Tables that are included are clear and easy to decipher. The list of references is quite comprehensive and very diverse. The index is extensive and an asset to the overall work.

Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris is Professor and Chair of UCLA's Department of Urban Planning. Her research focuses on the public environment of cities and its impact on the urban resident.

Renia Ehrenfeucht is Assistant Professor in the Department of Planning and Urban Studies at the University of New Orleans. Her research is concentrated in the production and meaning of the public environment and the social production of that environment.

This book is recommended for social science researchers, undergraduate libraries, and anyone interested in how public spaces are competed for and developed.

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