

BOOK REVIEW**Sidewalks: Conflict and Negotiation Over Public Space****By Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Renia Ehrenfeucht****The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2009. 328 pages.**

Reviewed by John M. Francis

Concern for the design and use of city streets and sidewalks has long been a preoccupation of city planners and urban designers. Middle class reformers of the late 19th and early 20th century, from whom the roots of our profession spring, sought to cleanse industrial cities of their physical and social “maladies.” Later, the modernists attempted to design human interaction out of the street altogether, turning the city in on itself and the street over to the automobile. By the 1960s, Jane Jacobs and others were calling for reclamation of city streets and sidewalks and helped planners recognize the value of an active public realm. In *Sidewalks*, Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Renia Ehrenfeucht sensitively continue this long-running discussion of the proper role of sidewalks for creating a diverse and just urban environment.

The authors begin their exploration of the sidewalk’s role in the cityscape with a history of its origins in the built environment. They demonstrate how, in the United States particularly, the sidewalk is a transitional space between the public and private realms; it is thus the source of much conflict in defining who may legitimately lay claim to its amenities. The sidewalk has, throughout history, been a place of identity expression, protest, shelter, employment, consumerism, leisure, and transportation; as such, the authors argue that much is at stake today in the negotiation between competing groups of sidewalk users.

Taking five major U.S. cities as case studies, Loukaitou-Sideris and Ehrenfeucht present in extensive (and sometimes painstaking) detail the policies of negotiation and control each city has adopted to address the claims of various sidewalk users since the beginning of the 20th century. In successive chapters, they describe the challenges faced by women, African Americans, immigrants, the homeless, sex workers, labor unions, and the LGBT community in confronting the powerful forces, specifically local business and property owners, that have often viewed them as undesirable sidewalk users. According to the authors, the desire of businesses for a safe, clean, comfortable and unobstructed sidewalk often competes with the needs of these groups; yet these needs,

as uncomfortable as they may be for many urban dwellers, must be accommodated by city planners if they truly value diversity and justice in the public realm.

“A just city requires the flexibility that allows diversity to stimulate greater diversity and that creates opportunities for people to find their niches by constructing parochial spaces in public cities” (59). At first blush, the authors’ call for a balanced approach to sidewalk policy seems simplistic and insufficient in addressing the complex realities on the ground. However, Loukaitou-Sideris and Ehrenfeucht adeptly demonstrate that the process of negotiation between competing sidewalk interests has been at play throughout history. When policy has become too restrictive, forces have pushed the pendulum in the opposite direction, whether through economic pressure, grassroots activism, the courts, and even violence. Despite this delicate balance, the authors see the scales as tipped too far in favor of municipal and economic control and raise the troubling prospect that increasing privatization of the public realm poses for diversity.

Unfortunately, *Sidewalks* is short on practical or policy guidance for planners. The book is meant as a theoretical point of reference for urban observers who have an interest in the intersection of land use, design, and social policy. If one has the patience to study the dense, multi-page tables that detail the specific policies of the five case study cities, one could probably take away a set of best practices. Although their style is at times repetitious, Loukaitou-Sideris and Ehrenfeucht offer planning literature an in-depth and sensitive treatment of the many legitimate demands that are made of city sidewalks by those both powerful and powerless. They highlight the challenges we as planners must face in ensuring a just city for all.