



Archived at the Flinders Academic Commons:

<http://dspace.flinders.edu.au/dspace/>

This is an Author's Accepted Manuscript of an article published in *Australian Planner*. for the final version of the article as published in the Australian Planner [Published online 31 Jan 2014] [copyright Taylor & Francis], available online at:

www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/07293682.2014.880067

doi: 10.1080/07293682.2014.880067

Please cite this article as:

Levin, I., (2014), "Book review: The street: A Quintessential Public Space" (by Vikas Metha), *Australian Planner*.

Copyright (2014)Taylor & Francis. All rights reserved. **Please note** that any alterations made during the publishing process may not appear in this version.

The street: A quintessential social public space

Vikas Metha. Earthscan from Routledge, 2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN
2013, xiv +237 pp., £55 Hbk. ISBN 978-0-415-52710-1.

Iris Levin, Flinders University of SA and the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Australia

As someone who is interested in urban design, the public domain and social encounter, I find a book like *The Street* most appealing. It is not that the urban designers' interest in the street is new – as Metha fully acknowledges, there have been many important works about the street since the early 1960s, starting with Jane Jacobs's influential piece on the significance of streets and sidewalks and Rudofsky's and Lynch's writings, followed by other works in the next two decades (e.g. Anderson 1978; Appleyard 1981; Modoun 1987) and, more recently, some publications on various aspects of the street such as conflict and negotiation (e.g. Celik et al. 1994; Loukaitou-Sideris and Enfrenfeucht 2009). But, as Metha explains, few books on urban design cover the details of social behaviour, and even fewer do so with reference to the street (p. 3). And this is exactly what Metha aims to do in this book: provide readers with the tools to create 'sociable streets'.

The Street is a book about the local retail street, the High Street, the neighbourhood commercial street –any street that serves the commercial, leisure and social needs of the neighbourhood or the city and is part of the network of public space of the city (p. 2). It is not about the residential, provincial or private street. Metha is interested in streets that are sociable and lively for most of the day and week, and not only on special occasions or planned events; streets that are accessible to the public and are not in indoor shopping malls.

The book is organised in two parts. In the first part, Chapter 1 provides a theoretical understanding of the street as an urban public space and 'the case for continuing to espouse and endorse the street as a public space of easy access and immense meaning' (p.4). Chapter 2 briefly discusses the history of streets, how the street has been established as an important public space with examples from different cultures which span several centuries, and the transformation of streets according to modern ideas and models of urban planning, using engaging photographs of streets from different parts of the world in different periods of time. Chapter 3 discusses an approach for design that is based on the understanding of everyday social behaviour. Here Metha uses an environment-behaviour approach to suggest that the empirical study of the interrelationships between the characteristics of the street, and the behaviours and attitudes of the users 'provides an appropriate basis for planning and design of the street' (p. 5).

In the second part, the book focuses on case studies of three streets in different neighbourhoods of Boston. Chapter 4 presents the three streets and details the qualitative and quantitative methods used to measure the sociability of the street. Then it presents the main findings of the research conducted on the streets, such as the nature of gathering on the street (using tables), the kind of active social behaviours (using behavioural maps and photographs), how long people stayed on the street (using graphs), or how people perceived the street (using people's quotes). Chapter 5

documents the whole range of social behaviours observed on the streets, which serve as the basis for Metha's typology of social behaviour on the street (ranging from passive sociability and fleeting social behaviours to enduring social behaviours). Chapter 6 interprets the findings of the research to determine the essential characteristics for supporting sociability on streets. It discusses the social, psychological and physical needs for sociability, elaborating on the features of the streets that may support, enhance or restrict social behaviour. The various presentation formats convey the relationships between the environment and social behaviour on the street. I found this chapter most interesting because it discusses issues such as the sense of belonging in the street, or the street as a place. Lastly, in Chapter 7 Metha discusses the evolving culture of the street in present times and urges designers, planners and policy makers to learn from sociable streets with different street cultures. Then he proposes a comprehensive set of design, planning and management guidelines to create and sustain sociable streets. For example, the first guideline is 'Design and manage the neighbourhood commercial street as a gathering space', where Metha covers issues regarding easy access, speed and volume of automobile traffic, seating on the street, width of sidewalks, shade and shelter, street furnishing and light after dark (pp. 190-194).

The Street is well designed and includes more than a hundred black-and-white figures and tables. Overall, the first part is accessible but although the book's second part (empirical chapters) is engaging, it demands careful reading in order to fully understand the methods as well as the findings. The book will suit students in the built environment disciplines where it can assist with understanding the use of qualitative and quantitative methods for the exploration of public spaces and social behaviour in the city. In addition, with its guidelines in Chapter 7, the book will serve very well the urban designers, architects and planning professionals who are responsible for the creation of sociable streets in our cities.

References:

Anderson, S. (1978). *On streets*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Appleyard, D. (1981). *Liveable streets*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Celik, Z., Favro, D., and Ingersoll (eds.) (1994). *Streets: Critical perspectives on public space*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Jacobs, J., (1961). *The death and life of great American cities*. New York: Vintage Books.

Lynch, K. (1960). *The image of the city*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Modoun, A.V. (ed.) (1987). *Public streets for public use*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Loukaitou-Sideris, A., and Enfrenfeucht, R. (2009). *Sidewalks: Conflict and negotiation over public space*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Rudofsky, B. (1969). *Streets for people*. New York: Doubleday.