

***The Walkable City: Dimensions of Walking and Overlapping Walks of Life.* By Jennie Middleton. Abingdon: Routledge. 2022. xiii + 178pp. £36.99 eBook. ISBN: 9781315519210.**

The Walkable City is an important and incisive rumination on the role walking plays in people's lives and in society. Jennie Middleton is an established authority on walking across geography, urban and transport studies, and *The Walkable City* is the culmination of her intellectual perambulations, drawing together insights from various projects to discerningly and critically question how everyday walking in the city is framed, understood, enacted, planned, provisioned, researched, and the politics that emerge from this.

Throughout *The Walkable City*, Middleton pushes back against received wisdom and ways of doing in walking research, policy and practice. She argues that it perceives and treats both walking and walkers too narrowly, with significant implications for the equity and potential of the practice. Walkability work has generally sat within discourses of low-carbon/sustainable or healthy/active travel with little regard for the wider socio-economic, political and cultural contexts within which walking takes place. The walking bodies accounted for under this guise tend to be that of white, non-disabled, heterosexual, cisgendered men. As Middleton expertly unpacks, this is neither accurate nor good enough.

At the heart of the book is an argument for more widely examining walking, accounting for the diversity of walking practices, scrutinising the multiple ways walking is conceptualised and experienced in different contexts by different bodies. Central to Middleton's approach is keen attention to the embodiment of walking and understanding walking as socially and materially coproduced. The rich engagement with everyday experiences in *The Walkable City* enables the social, political and spatio-temporal dimensions of walking to emerge and the book is bursting with analytical perspectives to interrogate and understand this. This is not always positive. Many experiences shared in the books puncture the romanticism of walking, revealing its difficult, endured, tolerated, arduous and undesirable qualities. But, as Middleton carefully articulates, this is necessary and important for better understanding walking in contemporary cities.

Middleton's extensive expertise and sharp analysis skilfully infuse *The Walkable City*. Readers walk in the shoes of everyday urban walkers, visually impaired young people, new mothers, Street Pastors and Sock Mobbers. We walk with Bergson, Butler, de Certeau, Latour, Lefebvre, Massey, Sacks, Seamon and Simmel. We walk through concepts of time, rhythm, space, habit, routines, rights to the city/mobility, (non)encounters, socialability, performance, senses, affect, emotion, and methods. *The Walkable City* is richly considered with impressive conceptual and theoretical resonances for cultural geography, expanding beyond their empirical application in the book.

Reading it, as I did, with recent memories of pandemic lockdowns, *The Walkable City's* arguments felt in sharp relief with renewed significance, something Middleton reflects on in the book's epilogue. While I appreciated my own permitted daily walks and valued the place-connections forged through regular loops in my corner of Birmingham, I was also aware of my privilege in experiencing this. Such therapeutic/boredom-relieving/'yeah sure, why not' walks were not possible or desirable for all and indeed, could even impinge on the experiences and health of others. The differentiated, inequitable, relational, co-produced and political nature of walking has been thrust to the forefront of societal consciousness and *The Walkable City* is *the* book for understanding this and understanding that it is nothing new.

The Walkable City is an emphatic and important analysis of walking in contemporary urban life. Middleton expertly demonstrates the complexity of walking, how people do it, how they do it differently, how they appropriate space on foot, and how walking entangles with the richness and intricacies of everyday life. *The Walkable City* is holistic, critical, empirically rich, theoretically astute and is indispensable for engaging meaningfully with walking without treating it all the same, something sorely needed.

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