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# The Journal of Public Space

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## Let Her Guide You

*Editors* Anna Barker, Luisa Bravo

*Founder*
City Space Architecture

*Partner*
UN-HABITAT

*in cooperation with*
KTH Royal Institute of Technology
RMIT University
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**"Public space in cities is a common good, meant to be open, inclusive and democratic, a fundamental human right for everybody."**

Dr Luisa Bravo
The Journal of Public Space, *Founder and Editor in Chief*
City Space Architecture, *Founding Member and President*
(from the statement submitted at the 26th UN-Habitat Governing Council held in Nairobi, Kenya, 8-12 May 2017)

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# CONTACT

**Publisher**
City Space Architecture
non-profit cultural association
Via Paolo Giovanni Martini 26/d
40134 Bologna, ITALY
jps@cityspacearchitecture.org
www.cityspacearchitecture.org

**Partner**
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THE JOURNAL OF PUBLIC SPACE

# Let Her Guide You
## Gender and Youth Perspectives on Urban Design and Planning

*Editors*
Anna Barker, Luisa Bravo

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in collaboration with
UN-Habitat's Her City initiative

HER CITY

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Cover image: Her City mural in Kampala, Uganda.

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https://www.journalpublicspace.org

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THE JOURNAL OF PUBLIC SPACE

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**The Journal of Public Space**
ISSN 2206-9658
2024 | Vol. 9 n. 1
https://www.journalpublicspace.org

**The Journal of Public Space**
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*EDITORIAL*

# Urban Development Together with Girls and Young Women

Anna Barker
*University of Leeds, United Kingdom*
*a.c.h.barker@leeds.ac.uk*

Luisa Bravo
*City Space Architecture, Italy*
*luisa.bravo@cityspacearchitecture.org*

Laura Petrella
*UN-Habitat, Kenya*
*laura.petrella@un.org*

**Abstract**
Public spaces are crucial to everyday life, providing sites for community interaction, mobility, and recreation. Traditionally, however, urban planning has been shaped by a gendered perspective that privileges masculine assumptions that overlook intersectional needs and reinforce societal inequalities for women and girls. This thematic issue, 'Let Her Guide You', developed in partnership with UN-Habitat as part of the Her City initiative, underscores the imperative of incorporating gender and youth perspectives into urban planning and design. The Her City Initiative, a collaboration between UN-Habitat and the Shared City Foundation, advances this goal by equipping urban actors worldwide with tools to integrate the perspectives of girls and young women into urban development. Launched in 2021, the Her City Toolbox has supported over 350 independent initiatives with registered users in 120 countries, demonstrating its effectiveness in fostering inclusive urban environments. This special issue features papers by young academic scholars selected from the Her City Master students' alumni network, including case studies of feminist planning from Heerlen (The Netherlands), Nairobi (Kenya), Stockholm (Sweden), and Weimar (Germany). It also includes a diverse range of invited viewpoints advocating for collaborative approaches to urban development together with girls and young women, complemented by illustrative case studies from around the globe, including Belgium, Iran, Italy, Jamaica, Mozambique, Palestine, Peru, South Africa, Sweden, Thailand, Uganda, and the United Kingdom. By centring gender and youth perspectives in the urban planning process, this thematic issue highlights the potential to transform public spaces into more equitable, engaging, and sustainable environments. It calls on city makers, researchers, and community leaders to ensure that contemporary cities are designed with and for everyone.

**Keywords:** gender equity, public space, inclusive design, urban planning, youth perspectives, innovation.

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## Introduction: The Gendered City

Public spaces are integral to urban life, facilitating community interaction, mobility, and recreation (Low, 2022). However, feminist research has highlighted the gendered barriers that women and girls face in these spaces, pointing to safety concerns, inadequate facilities, and societal constraints that undermine their rights to the city and everyday life (Fenster, 2005; Beebeejaun, 2017). Traditionally, urban planning has been shaped by a gendered perspective that privileges masculine assumptions (Darke, 1996) that overlook intersectional needs and reinforce societal inequalities for women and girls (Kern, 2021). As a result, the needs of girls and young women have often been neglected or deemed insufficiently significant in the design of cities and urban spaces. The notion of the 'gendered city' highlights that urban space is far from neutral in its design, planning, development, management and use (Bassam, 2023), and that gender plays a crucial role shaping how cities are experienced and navigated. Gender power dynamics, particularly patriarchal structures, shape the design of urban environments and the spatial organisation of the city, embedding gendered inequalities in everything from parks to public transportation systems (England, 1991; Kern, 2021). Historically, urban planning has centred around the 'default male' user, treating other identities as variations of this assumed norm (Criado Perez, 2019). This male-centric bias results in urban environments that often differently impact upon the diverse needs and desires of women and girls and other underrepresented groups, particularly in relation to safety, accessibility, and care (Grech, 2024; London Legacy Development Corporation, 2024; Kern, 2021). For example, poorly lit or isolated areas exacerbate women's fear of harassment or sexual violence, restricting their freedom of movement, especially after dark (Koskela and Pain, 2000). Additionally, the lack of adequate facilities, such as toilets, social seating, and gender-sensitive play areas, further limits women and girls' ability to engage fully with urban life, often making them feel unwelcome in public spaces (Barker *et al.*, 2022b). Furthermore, neglecting the need for childcare and the safety of children in public spaces places additional burdens on the women who are responsible for children. Addressing this is crucial if the objective is to enable women's further emancipation and enjoyment of other rights.

Public space is a conduit for accessing the assets, resources and opportunities of the city. However, the gender bias in urban space significantly hinders girls and young women's ability to participate equally and freely in work, leisure, and education. Fear of sexual violence, for example, often results in 'spatial exclusions' (Koskela, 1999), where women and girls avoid certain areas. Many women engage in 'safety work' (Vera-Gray and Kelly, 2020), altering their behaviour, routes, or schedules to navigate these risks. In turn, this negatively impacts mental and physical health, economic opportunities, and access to education. Hence, overlooking the needs of women and girls in urban planning and design can significantly hinder their rights to the city and participation in public life.

A feminist city can be regarded as an action-orientated and inclusive approach to overcome the biases of the gendered city. It confronts these gendered exclusions by designing public spaces with the direct involvement of women and girls to ensure inclusivity (Kern, 2001). Feminist theorists advocate for incorporating women's lived experiences into the urban planning and design process (Beebeejaun, 2009; Whitzman, 2013; Kern, 2021), emphasising the value of their knowledge and expertise in shaping urban spaces to foster safety, inclusivity, and belonging. When public spaces are designed to be appealing and welcoming to women and girls, it can create positive

feedback loops. The presence of women in public areas encourages the presence of more women, gradually shifting the dynamics of these spaces. Conversely, as Koskela (1999, p.113) notes, when women retreat indoors, they 'unwittingly reproduce masculine domination over space' and reliance on male protectors. Importantly, the presence of other women in public spaces can enhance feelings of security, making these areas more accessible for all women (Barker *et al.*, 2022a).

Addressing the material needs of girls and young women in urban space—such as better lighting, secure transportation, comfortable seating, and access to safe water—can significantly enhance their quality of life. However, feminist scholars like Moser (1993) emphasise that meeting these practical needs is only a starting point. Achieving gender equality in urban spaces requires addressing women's strategic interests by challenging the unequal societal structures and norms that perpetuate gender-based violence and inequality. Practical needs and strategic interests can however complement one another (Silvestre Cabrera *et al.*, 2023). Improvements in material conditions, such as better lighting and facilities, can enhance women's independence and access to public spaces, potentially leading to broader transformations in their strategic interests. This opens up the possibility for systemic change, positioning feminist urban planning as capable of leading to advances in women's social and economic standing.

Ultimately, creating a feminist city requires addressing the various physical, social, economic, and symbolic barriers that women and girls face (Kern, 2021) as well as facilitating a progressive shift in societal roles and responsibilities. This means recognising the intersectional needs of women and girls and other marginalised groups, ensuring that urban design serves everyone—not just the default male user, in its 'masculine' role, and that opportunities for transformation of roles and responsibilities are provided and supported. An intersectional perspective acknowledges the diverse experiences of women, shaped by factors such as age, race, and ableism (Crenshaw, 1991). It involves attending to the ways in which diverse forms of disadvantage and marginality compound and interact to constitute different experiences and needs. By centring girls and young women's voices in the planning and design process, cities can foster environments that promote well-being, community cohesion, and resilience in the face of global challenges like climate change and inequality. In what follows, the editorial will introduce the key themes, the work of Her City, and the content and organisation of the thematic issue.

## Focus of the Thematic Issue: Gender and Youth Perspectives

This thematic issue, 'Let Her Guide You', has been developed in collaboration with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme's (UN-Habitat) Her City initiative. Dr Anna Barker at the University of Leeds served as the guest editor alongside Dr Luisa Bravo as editor-in-chief. The thematic issue aims to highlight the contributions of young scholars and illuminate the importance of gender and youth perspectives in urban development, particularly regarding public spaces.

This thematic issue features papers by young academic scholars selected from the Her City Master students alumni network, including case studies of feminist planning and design in Heerlen (The Netherlands), Nairobi (Kenya), Stockholm (Sweden), and Weimar (Germany). It also includes a diverse range of invited viewpoints from campaigners, professionals, and academics advocating for collaborative approaches to

urban development with girls and young women, complemented by illustrative case studies from around the globe, including Belgium, Iran, Italy, Jamaica, Mozambique, Palestine, Peru, South Africa, Sweden, Thailand, Uganda, and the United Kingdom. The issue calls on city makers, researchers, and community leaders to ensure that contemporary cities are designed with and for everyone, and support societal transformation as far as gender roles and participation in decision making is concerned.

## The Her City initiative: Transforming Urban Development with and for Girls

Her City responds to the pervasive feelings of insecurity faced by girls and young women in urban areas worldwide. Alarmingly, 80% of girls and young women in cities such as Delhi, Kampala, Lima, Madrid, and Sydney report feeling unsafe in their daily environments (Plan International, 2018). In six African cities, 90% of girls reported experiencing violence in the past year (Plan International, 2022), and in New Delhi, 88% of women faced sexual harassment on public transport, with only 1% reporting these incidents to the police (The World Bank, 2022). These conditions severely restrict women and girls' participation in public life and their ability to navigate freely within cities.

Her City is a joint initiative by UN-Habitat and the Shared City Foundation that empowers urban actors globally to include young women and girls in the urban planning and design process. It provides a comprehensive toolbox that supports the integration of girls' perspectives in creating sustainable and inclusive urban environments. This toolbox outlines a cost-effective, nine-step process for co-planning cities from a girl's perspective. The initiative began with a pre-study financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) in 2017, followed by further development and piloting funded by the Swedish Innovation Agency (Vinnova) and the Block by Block Foundation. Since its public launch in 2021, the Her City Toolbox has 1,400 registered users across 430 cities, supporting 350 independent initiatives in 120 countries. The publication Her City – A Guide for Cities to Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Planning and Design together with Girls in Spanish and English has nearly 6,000 downloads. The digital Her City Toolbox platform has a total reach of 7 million, including outreach and social media, emphasising the global appetite for gender-transformative urban planning and design tools.

Projects under the Her City banner have included diverse applications from digital to analogue implementations. For instance, in Lima, the toolbox helped local girls and women engage in revitalising public spaces in low-income neighbourhoods. In Kampala, the analogue version of the toolbox was used in the dense informal settlement of Kamwanyi, where local girls and young women were empowered to assess their community and prioritise actions for safer and greener public spaces. These projects underscore the practical utility and transformative potential of the Her City approach discussed by the Shared City Foundation in their viewpoint.

> *"My dream for this place is to be a comfort for a lot of people in the community. For example, women and girls who are beaten at home, instead of running away from home and sleeping in trenches would rather come here and relax"*
> Shanice, young participant, Kampala

Figure 1 and 2. Hero images of the Her City initiative. Credit: UN-Habitat and Shared City Foundation.

**Enhancing Safety and Inclusion for Women and Girls in Urban Parks**

Dr Anna Barker serves as the guest editor for this thematic issue drawing on her expertise in gendered fear in public spaces, particularly parks. Her research has explored how women and girls often avoid or feel excluded from these urban spaces due to concerns about safety and experiences of harassment, but also in different ways by gendered assumptions within park design and management that overlook the specific needs and interests of teenage girls in play provision and safety, creating environments that fail to accommodate or protect them adequately (Barker *et al.*, 2022a; 2022b). Parks are distinct 'spaces apart' (Booth *et al.*, 2021) within cities that embody a complex interplay of gendered safety concerns and potential benefits, such as access to nature, leisure and recreation, and active travel routes. Her research illustrates how urban parks are historically constituted and gendered spaces of hidden labour where women and girls navigate safety concerns and engage in considerable 'safety work' to access and

enjoy their benefits (Barker and Cape-Davenhill, 2024; Booth *et al.*, 2021; Vera-Gray and Kelly, 2020). To address these challenges, she worked with West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Make Space for Girls, and Keep Britain Tidy to develop guidelines aimed at making parks safer and more welcoming for women and girls (Safer Parks Consortium, 2023).

Figure 3. Designing parks through the lens of gender and safety
Credit: Harper Perry and Josie Brooks.

The Safer Parks: Improving Access for Women and Girls guidance is rooted in women and girls views and experiences of safety in West Yorkshire's parks, alongside a review of wider evidence. The guidance was created with input from professionals in park management, urban planning, landscape design, policing, and women's safety organisations. It focuses on addressing gender disparities in park access, using ten principles organised around three core themes: *Eyes on the Park*, *Awareness*, and *Inclusion*. These principles emphasise the importance of activating parks, as the presence of others—especially women—enhances feelings of safety. They also highlight the need for design features that promote (feelings of) security and the involvement of a diverse group of women and girls in co-designing parks to address their intersectional needs. The guidelines provide practical examples of how to implement changes on different budgets and scales and have been incorporated into the Green Flag Award programme, which sets the standard for public parks and green spaces in the UK and globally. This guidance serves as a foundational step toward creating change. It underscores the need to involve teenage girls in park design, ensuring their perspectives and diverse needs are addressed through holistic, coordinated partnerships. Actively listening to their voices at every stage is essential for fostering their use and enjoyment of these community spaces. The additional advantage of empowering young women regarding their environment and quality of life should not be underestimated.

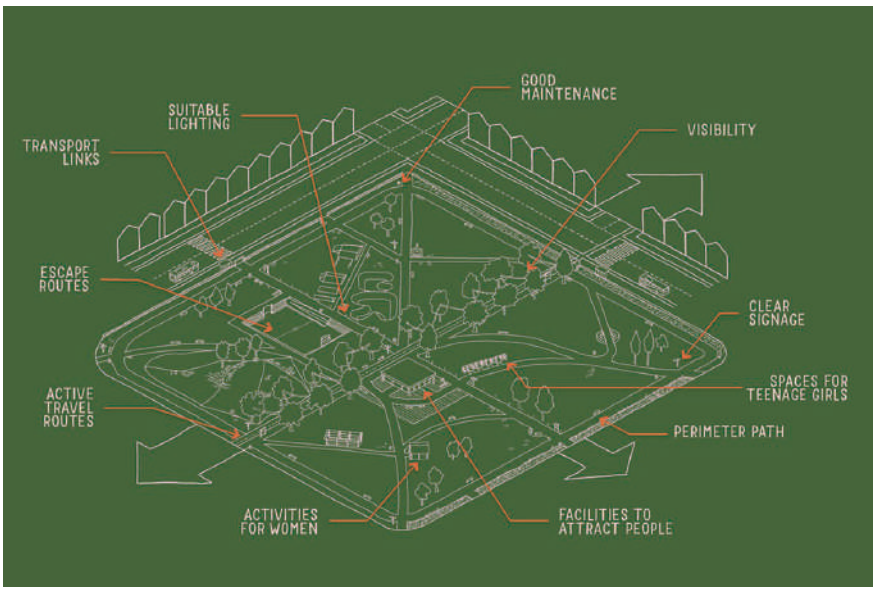


Figure 4. Principles of a safe and welcoming park for women and girls.
Credit: Harper Perry.

## Overview of the Thematic Issue

The academic papers and viewpoints included are timely and important. At its core, this thematic issue seeks to explore the myriad ways in which urban public spaces can be transformed to better serve the needs of underserved community members, particularly girls and young women.

The first part includes papers from young academic scholars of the Her City Master student alumni network. **Emelie Anneroth**, Sweco, focuses on the #UrbanGirlsMovement project in Fittja, Stockholm, exploring how feminist urban planning empowered local girls by involving them in the redesign of a public square. It reframes urban planners as facilitators and underscores the transformative potential of intersectional planning tools. **Michelle Moonen**, Eindhoven University of Technology, develops and applies a framework of eight design principles aimed at making public spaces more gender-responsive, using Heerlen, Netherlands as a case study. It contends that feminist urban design can significantly enhance women's safety, comfort, and accessibility, though consideration is needed when adapting the principles to different contexts. **Lia Zinngrebe**, urbanista.ch, and **Lisa Maßel**, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, discuss the application of Her City Toolbox in Germany's first initiative in Weimar, and advocate for a gender-sensitive, data-driven, and participatory approach to identify key improvements needed in public spaces for women and girls. **Ángela Domínguez**, Universidad del País Vasco, develops a multidimensional framework to analyse how self-produced settlements, like Mathare in Nairobi, impact women's health, arguing that poor access to safe water and sanitation in public spaces exposes women to heightened health risks and violence, thereby perpetuating cycles of poverty and vulnerability.

The second part includes five invited viewpoints from academics, campaigners and professionals working in this field. **Susannah Walker**, Make Space for Girls, argues that facilities in parks and recreation grounds are often geared towards boys, and calls for a paradigm shift in design processes that actively engage teenage girls to ensure their

rights to the public realm are recognised. **Olivia Theocharides-Feldman and Julia King,** LSE, propose a feminist spatial researcher-in-residence methodology to involve young women in design and planning processes through peer research. **Sara Ferlander**, Mälardalen University, **Emilie Anneroth**, Sweco, and **Tanya Jukkala**, Mälardalen University, propose that feminist planning can learn from social innovation approaches, incorporating a focus on outcomes and impacts to drive positive social change and create more equitable cities. Empowering Women, Public Space and Climate Change brings together four case studies by **Rozina Spinnoy** (BIDs Belgium), **Tiisetso Mofokeng** (Vega School), **Atousa Sarmast** (University of Tehran) and **Romina Rodela** (Södertörn University), from cities in Belgium, South Africa, Iran and Sweden to illustrate how young women are using an intersectional lens to reshape public spaces, promoting inclusivity and sustainability. Drawing on lessons learned from the application of Her City Toolbox in Peru, Jamaica, Mozambique, Uganda, Palestine, Thailand and Italy, **Thomas Melin** and **Tove Levonen**, Shared City Foundation, highlight the global impact of Her City, showing how integrating intersectional female perspectives can address systemic inequalities, transform public spaces and foster community empowerment.

**Additional Material: Imagining Public Space With/For Her**

Additional material to this special issue is provided by the exhibition 'Imagining Public Space with/for Her'. Organised by City Space Architecture and curated by **Carolina Anderson**, **Beatrice Ricci**, and **Luisa Bravo**, this exhibition opened on 20 April 2023 at Museo Spazio Pubblico and outdoors at the adjacent public garden, Il Giardino, in Bologna.

The exhibition focused on the urgency of reimagining of public spaces from a gender perspective, particularly with and for women. It emphasised that public spaces have traditionally been designed by and for men, and it sought to challenge this through co-created materials and the display of research projects and initiatives across the globe, giving visibility to leading professionals working at the heart of this topic selected and invited by City Space Architecture.

Interviews with many of these project leads provide supplementary material to this thematic issue, including: **Anabella Roitman** (Urbanismo Feminista, Argentina); **Anna Barker** (Safer Parks Project, UK); **Elin Andersdotter Fabre** (Her City, UN-Habitat, Kenya); **Florencia Andreola** and **Azzurra Muzzonigro** (Milan Gender Atlas, Italy); **J. Antonio Lara-Hernandez** (Universidad Marista de Merida, Mexico); **Nathalie Boucher** and **Sarah-Maude Cossette** (ADOES Project, Canada); **Nourhan Bassam** (Gaming X, Egypt); **Ricardo Klein** (University of Valencia, Spain); **Rozina Spinnoy** (Empowering Women, Public Space and Climate Change, Belgium); **Sara Ortiz Escalante** (Collectiu.6, Spain); and **Silvia Gullino** (Birmingham City University, UK).

The exhibition materials and interviews will be collated online and form educational content for a new mini-course by the Public Space Academy to spark a crucial debate on the inclusiveness and accessibility of urban environments for women.


Figure 5 and 6. Exhibition 'Imagining Public Space with/for Her', Museo Spazio Pubblico, Bologna, 2023. Credit: Luisa Bravo.

## Urban Development Together with Women and Girls

The future of urban planning must be co-designed with the voices of women, girls, and marginalised communities at its core. By letting Her guide us, we can work towards urban environments that are inclusive, safe, and vibrant for everyone. This approach is essential for dismantling the gendered exclusions that persist in our cities. Feminist urban planning does more than change the physical environment; it challenges the societal norms that shape how we experience our cities. As this initiative moves towards a next phase, Her City focuses on long-term sustainability and global capacity building. By fostering a global network and a joint community of practice, Her City aims to advocate for gender-transformative cities, ensuring no one is left behind.

This special issue will be launched at the Urban Library of the 12th World Urban Forum (WUF12) on sustainable urbanisation, convened by UN-Habitat that will take place 4-8 November 2024 in Cairo, Egypt.

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# Renovating Marginalised Urban Areas with Girls and Young Women.
## A case study from Sweden

Emelie Anneroth
*Sweco, Sweden*
*emelie.anneroth@sweco.se*

**Abstract**
This article contributes to an understanding of the experience and impact of using gender-inclusive innovative planning tools to engage girls and young women in urban design, and the capacity of this process to democratise urban planning. The article focuses on the narratives of girls from a marginalised area on the outskirts of Stockholm, Sweden, who participated in the feminist urban development project #UrbanGirlsMovement. The article draws on a theoretical framework of feminist urban theory, intersectionality, and territorial stigmatisation, and illustrates how the gender-inclusive urban planning techniques used impacted local girls and re-framed the role of the planner. The girls' narratives revealed that it was an empowering experience to be part of an urban development process as it enabled them to recognise their own abilities and societal power. The process of engagement gave legitimacy to girls' ideas and designs, enabling them both to recognise and to use their own agency. Additionally, the process of redesigning a familiar place enabled the girls to regenerate the meaning of their local urban public space to incorporate their own subjective spatial identities. The article argues that intersectional planning tools and processes can help transform spatial inequalities in power and oppression which is crucial when renovating marginalised urban areas of Swedish suburbs. The #UrbanGirlsMovement shows that a planning process can produce more than physical designs; it can be a tool for enhanced democracy, equality, and justice in cities.

**Keywords:** Sweden, feminist theory, urban planning, intersectionality, girls and young women, marginalised areas

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## 1. Patriarchal planning: how do we stop it?

A common claim is that the city belongs to all its inhabitants, but it is filled with barriers, both visible and invisible. The contemporary city mirrors in many ways the oppression and exclusion in a society, reflecting past norms and values founded in boundaries between the sexes (see for example Jarvis et al. 2009; Larson and Jalakas 2008; Rendell et al. 2000). Planning theory and practice have been criticised for ignoring gendered perspectives that result in unequal and unjust planning practices (see for example Molina 2018; Jarvis et al 2009; Bradley et al. 2005; Hayden, 1980). In the words of feminist geographer, Jane Darke: "Our cities are patriarchy written in stone, brick, glass and concrete." Indeed, cities have been designed with the idea of a homemaking woman, reinforcing traditional gender roles (Spain, 2014). Yet, despite significant changes to urban life in the 20th century as women entered the workforce, urban structures and services remain unable to meet the needs and wants of women.

These broader trends are especially evident when analysing the long-term effects of the Million Dwellings Program in Sweden. In post-World War II Sweden, the Million Dwellings Program was implemented to address the housing crisis caused by urbanisation and migration. The areas chosen for the project can be found all over Sweden and have different characteristics, such as villas and townhouses, but particularly apartments in tower blocks. While it successfully provided housing, the program's planning ideologies, such as suburbanisation and traffic separation, reinforced gender norms and limited women's freedom (Molina, 2018). Women, children, and the elderly were expected to stay within or near residential areas, while men had access to transportation infrastructure for work (Molina, 2018). These patriarchal planning ideologies perpetuated gender inequalities and increased segregation (Andersson, 2017). Additionally, car-dominated urban infrastructure and zoning patterns created unsustainable transportation and prioritised the needs of men over women, children, and the elderly (Greed, 2019). Many residential areas in the Million Dwellings Program are today in desperate need of renovation. To prevent further segregation of these areas in the future, it is crucial to address how the renovation processes are planned and executed, some of which are adopting gender-inclusive tools.

Determining what is an ideal city, and for whom, is subjective and raises questions about power dynamics and who has a right to shape the city (Beebeejaun, 2017). Various social groups experience the city differently depending on their gender, age, ethnicity, and experiences. Women are a group with distinct intersectional needs in urban public space (see for example Schalk, 2017). To challenge existing gender roles and norms, a shift towards inclusive planning approaches that consider a wider range of experiences is necessary. By integrating diverse perspectives into spatial planning processes, we can create more equitable and sustainable cities. In order to understand the diversity of city dwellers, traditional power structures and social categorisations need to be challenged, and the voice of the marginalised need to be enhanced in planning processes.

Swedish urban planning practice has lately been progressive in adapting to societal changes and new planning ideals (Rodela and Norss, 2022). One example is the feminist urban development initiative #UrbanGirlsMovement that was launched by the Swedish independent think tank Global Challenge. With the explicit purpose of highlighting the lived experiences of young girls in marginalised positions, to test new methods for inclusive and just urban development. It was executed in the suburb Fittja, a part of Botkyrka municipality south of Stockholm. It is one of many Million Dwellings Program areas around Stockholm that are expanding, while the majority of the existing housing units are in dire

need of renovation. The project proposed a toolbox of gender-inclusive urban planning methods to address issues of democracy, gender equality, equity, and justice. The toolbox is today administered by UN Habitat together with Shared Cities Foundation.
This article presents the findings from interviews conducted with girls who participated in the project. Exploring how the planning tools used during the project impacted the girls' perception of public space, as well as their identification towards Fittja as a place. Although this represents only one case study, it provides valuable findings for how a gender-inclusive planning approach can be effective when renovating marginalised urban areas, to create more just and equal cities.

## 2. Feminist Urban Theory: a framework for understanding gender integration in urban planning

Feminist standpoints on urban theory, planning, geography, and intersectionality serve as the theoretical lens through which this research is positioned.
Feminist urban theory brings an intersectional understanding of power relations into planning theory. Mainstream urban theory is countered by feminist urban theory, which stems from a feminist comprehension of space and social relations therein. Snyder (1995, p.103) argues that feminist theory can positively renovate planning theory, making it "critical, emancipatory, and conscious of gender and other differences." Thus, an intersectional understanding of social relations and how these materialise in space is highlighted by feminist theory as a variable of planning knowledge and practice. Feminist theory challenges the inherent principles of planning theory by deconstructing hierarchal dichotomies such as private/public, expert knowledge/lived experience, and theory/practice (Snyder, 1995, p.98). As a result, this opens discussions about the right to the city, citizen participation in decision-making, and the role of the planner.
Urban planning has been based on the principle that greater authority, legitimacy, and credibility are granted to scientific and technical knowledge over personal and lived experience (see, for example, Schalk, 2017; Listerborn, 2008; Snyder, 1995). The duality of expert knowledge and lived experience is particularly interesting when analysing the narratives of the girls participating in #UrbanGirlsMovement. During the project, young girls' experiences of living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood had a greater authority than the knowledge of experts in the field of urban development and planning. Hence, the hierarchy of knowledge during a planning process was purposely challenged during the process of the #UrbanGirlsMovement.
Building upon this, the research uses feminist geography to focus on gender relations as a primary understanding of space and place. This article draws on feminist geography to explore girls' subjective experiences of being in or out of place in Fittja, considering the social and physical aspects of human interaction with an area. Feminist geography understands gender as socially constructed and performed, shaping subjects to conform to normative demands (Butler 2006). Gender is contextual, relational, and productive, challenging the binary understanding of gender (Butler 2006). Feminist geography analyses place and space, where place is a geographically defined location given meaning through space. Space is socially produced through human interaction, while place encompasses both material and emotional connections (Listerborn, 2007).
Feminist geography is used in this paper to explore how space and place contribute to gender divisions and inequality, examining how gender and other power relations shape

spatial actions. As spaces are socially produced, gender is embedded in material spaces (Listerborn, 2007, p.3). Understanding the connection between gender and space is crucial to grasp the complexity of gender roles and norms in relation to the built environment. Gender is performative and subject to change, allowing for gender roles and norms to be transformed.

Further, to understand spatial gender relations, an intersectional analysis is required. Intersectionality examines the interconnected power dynamics of gender, age, class, sexuality, and ethnicity (Valentine, 2007; Crenshaw, 1991). It recognises that gender experiences are diverse and emphasises the importance of considering power relations. Hierarchical power dynamics exist within and between social categories, influencing identity and access to resources. Power is rooted in norms that marginalise and subjugate. Intersectionality is a valuable tool for comprehending the role of space in shaping subject formation (Valentine 2007, p.18), particularly in socio-economically deprived areas like Fittja. For the girls interviewed, gender intersects with age, class, ethnicity, and space, leading to multiple layers of prejudice against them. Understanding these power dynamics is crucial in participatory planning for transformative urban development to not only illuminate but address them (c.f Listerborn, 2008; Cornwall, 2003).

Age, as a social categorization, is especially significant in this research, as the girls interviewed fall under the United Nation's (2015) definition of youth. Youths are often marginalised and excluded from decision-making processes, reinforcing societal perceptions of young people as inexperienced and immature (c.f. Ambjörnsson and Jönsson, 2010; Mabala, 2006). The intersection of gender and age, highlights the disempowerment faced by girls and young women who occupy an ambiguous position between childhood and womanhood.

Lastly, territorial stigmatisation, a concept related to spatial marginalisation, is integrated into the intersectional analysis. When marginalised urban areas become stigmatised, it creates and preserves stereotypes that devalue the identities of their inhabitants (Wacquant, 2007). Understanding how territorial stigmatisation shapes identities is crucial in comprehending the experiences of girls participating in urban development processes.

### *2.1 Methodology*

Feminist research is guided by the recognition of gender as an overarching social category influencing individuals' experience within a patriarchal society (Listerborn, 2008). This research approach informs the study, which focuses on the experiences of girls and young women in urban public space and their involvement in the #UrbanGirlsMovement project. Qualitative research, aligned with feminist geography, enables the exploration of power dynamics and intersectional spatialities. Marginalised voices are amplified, and the hierarchical dichotomy of expert knowledge and lived experience is challenged (c.f. Listerborn, 2008, p.62; Cope 2002, p.45; Snyder, 1995, p.100).

A comprehensive understanding of #UrbanGirlsMovement and its social processes was sought by employing a multi-method approach, utilising qualitative methods such as interviews, participatory observations, and analysis of workshop materials, from the perspective of the girls participating in the project. Reflexivity played a crucial role in ensuring the reliability and validity of qualitative research.

*2.2 The case study - #UrbanGirlsMovement*

#UrbanGirlsMovement was a research project initiated and led by Global Utmaning and carried out in the suburb Fittja in Botkyrka, south of Stockholm between 2017-2019. Fittja is an area classified as vulnerable by the police. The project explored how feminist urban development techniques could improve living conditions for all groups in vulnerable areas. The project was co-financed with the Swedish innovation agency Vinnova together with the municipality of Botkyrka UN Habitat, Mistra Urban Futures, and Changers Hub, a local NGO. Changers Hub helped recruit and support the girls participating in the project. As a result of the financial support, the girls could be hired and paid per hour for their participation. The objective of the project was to develop new methods for urban development that integrated feminist perspectives and could be applied more broadly. This case study examines the experiences of the girls in the project and evaluates the transferability of the process used in #UrbanGirlsMovement. The study was conducted according to the ethical standards and procedures of the author's institution. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

*2.3 Interviews*

Qualitative interviews were conducted to understand girls' perspectives of being part of a local planning process, their identification towards Fittja, as well as their experiences of embodying a young girl in the urban public space. Semi-structured individual and group interviews were conducted with 11 out of the 16 girls participating in the #UrbanGirlsMovement project. The girls were between 16 and 23 years old and all of them lived in Fittja or an adjacent area. All were born in Sweden, but a majority had non-Swedish parents and/or were non-white. The interviews were audio recorded and translated from Swedish to English. Pseudonyms are used to maintain anonymity.

*2.4 Observation of workshops*

'Workshopping', a participatory research tool, was used in #UrbanGirlsMovement to gather data and identify urban challenges and opportunities in Fittja. The project consisted of six workshops conducted between September 2018 and June 2019. The workshops involved a mixed group of local girls, adult professionals working in urban planning, researchers, political representatives, and various stakeholders. The workshops included activities such as place analysis and brainstorming sessions. Through the workshops the girls analysed the area, identified challenges and opportunities, and visualised their ideas of redesigning the urban public space around Fittja main square using Minecraft. The girls then got the opportunity to pitch their ideas to the local authorities.

During the workshops, I kept fieldnotes to document my reflections and experiences during observation sessions. Participant observation is an ethnographic method that is particularly useful in geography to analyse spatial concepts and processes. By immersing myself in the girls' reality and actively participating in the workshops, I gained a deeper understanding of their experiences.

Figure 1. Example of method used during workshop two, where the girls together with adult professionals identified challenges and opportunities for Fittja's public spaces. Source: Global Utmaning

## 3. Findings: Participatory urban planning as a meaning-making process

Through an analysis of the data collected from interviews with girls and workshop observations, three themes emerged: identification, spatiality, and participation. The first theme, identification, explores how the girls express their connection to Fittja and their experiences of being in and out of place. The second theme, spatiality, focuses on the girls' urban design proposals and how they connect to their intersectional identities. Their redesigns reflected their strong connection to the place and sought to enhance what the girls liked about it. The redesigning process positively impacted the girls' place connection, understanding of Fittja and the meanings it holds for them. The third theme, participation, discusses the participation process of #UrbanGirlsMovement and its impact on the girls' identity formation. It provides key learnings from the girls' perspectives that can be applied to other spatial contexts and planning processes.

### *3.1 Identification: The definers of space*

The theme 'identification' explores how the girls express their connection to Fittja and their experiences of being in and out of place. The landscape of Fittja underwent significant changes during the development of the Million Dwellings Program between 1965-1975, resulting in the construction of new housing units and the integration of green areas and lakes into the urban structure. Since then, Fittja, like other Million Dwellings Program areas, experiences housing, socio-economic and ethnic segregation and has a high crime rate (The Swedish Police, 2023). Due to this, Fittja is often stigmatised as a dangerous place by the media, which predominantly focuses on crime-

related stories (see for example Molina 2005; Ericsson et al. 2002; Pripp and Ramberg 2002). Stigmatised areas are produced through societal and medial discourses that diminish the inhabitants of the area, which is an important part of what Waquant (2007) refers to as 'territorial stigmatisation'.

During the first and second project workshops, the girls discussed the negative portrayal of Fittja in the media and how it influences both outsiders' and their own perceptions of the place, which they felt contributes to a territorial stigmatisation of the area and its residents. One of the girls, Belle, tells me that she feels like media has deceived her to look at Fittja negatively. She explains that even if she lives there, media has planted a bad image of the place in her head which she has come to believe. Hence, the girls believe that media coverage has affected outsiders' understanding of Fittja, creating a common negative image of it and its residents. This is exemplified by 17 years old Leona as she says:

> *"I constantly need to keep my head high to prove that I'm not some weak ass… well, I guess immigrant, even if I'm born here... It doesn't matter where I go, I will always have to prove myself either because I'm a woman, or because I'm an immigrant, or because my family is from the working class, in some way I always need to prove myself. It's a preparation for the future."*

The quote suggests that the stigmatisation affects the girls' self-perception and identity formation. The stigmatisation of Fittja and its residents is a form of "othering" that reinforces stereotypes (see Molina, 2005). Numerous girls tell me about being denied access to societal resources, such as school and job opportunities. They feel the need to constantly prove themselves, especially in terms of their identities as Swedish as many of the girls interviewed had another ethnic heritage. Additionally, the girls' narratives reveal that the residents of Fittja have inherited a shared identity that comes from inhabiting an area constituted of various oppressive power structures, shaping their understanding of both the self and the community.

As a result, within Fittja, the girls feel a sense of community and togetherness. They appreciate the multicultural background of the residents and the caring nature of the community. Despite the negative portrayal of Fittja, the girls express a deep connection to the area and a desire to challenge outsiders' perceptions. They believe in their own opportunities for social mobility and see Fittja as a place where they can be themselves and support one another.

Overall, the girls' narratives reflect their desire to challenge the negative perceptions of Fittja and its residents, emphasising the complexities of identity formation in a stigmatised area. The girls enhanced how they, as a group, never have been the definers of place.

### *3.2 Spatiality: Design can be used to enhance and share spatial identity*

During the third and fourth project workshops, the girls identified opportunities for Fittja to thrive and brainstormed how the build environment could be improved to enhance what girls liked about Fittja, visualising their ideas in the data program Minecraft. Figures 2-4 provide visual images of Fittja before and after its re-design.

Figure 2. Overview of Fittja main square from. Source: Google Earth, 2019

The girls' redesign (see Figure 4) illustrates the contradiction between how they see their environment and how others perceive it. One girl, Nova, mentioned that she overheard some of the adult professionals talking negatively about aspects of the built environment in Fittja. From another interview, Belle had a similar experience and put it this way:

> *"It is good that they ask us who knows all the places and have a larger knowledge of what is needed and what is available than someone who doesn't live here. Someone who comes from a completely different municipality, who doesn't live here, shouldn't come here with their opinions and say what's right and wrong"*

Here, the duality of expert knowledge and lived experience present in feminist urban theory becomes relevant. The modern planning practice of The Million Dwellings Program is characterised by the divide between the planning practice and lived reality (Lilja, 2000). Expert knowledge of the planner has often greater weight in the planning process than lived experience (Lilja, 2000). In the narrative above, Belle accentuated the importance of local knowledge when conceptualising change in a local urban area. During the redesigning process, the girls used the built environment as a tool to express and visualise their social relationship with the space. They aimed to reshape outsiders' perception of Fittja by highlighting its positive aspects. The girls' designs included elements of beauty, such as colours, creative lighting, and greenery. They believed that improving the physical appearance of the area would counter parts of the negative media image. They also highlighted the need for social meeting spots and places to hang out in Fittja, as these were lacking in the area. So, they included places for games, reading and art, as well as different kinds of seating. They also created architectural structures such as a glass greenhouse with a cafe, radio station, and rooftop terrace (see Figure 4).

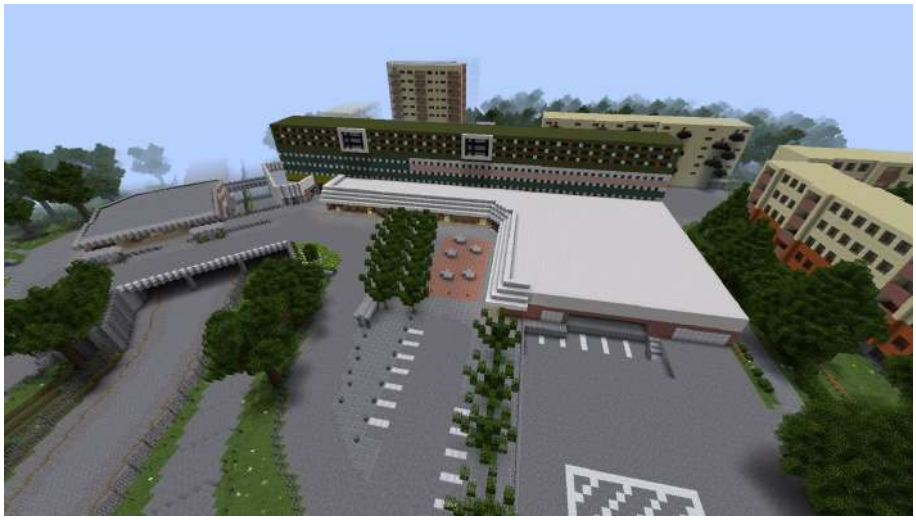

Figure 3. Overview of Fittja main square in Minecraft before redesigning. Source: Mojang 2019 [screenshot from play 2nd-3rd of February 2019]


Figure 4. Overview of Fittja main square in Minecraft after redesigning. Source: Block by Block, 2019

The radio was added as the girls believe that music, particularly hip hop, is a community builder and an important part of Fittja's social identity. They feel a strong sense of togetherness through music and art. By integrating elements of local culture into their designs, the girls aimed to enhance the communal feeling and intertwine the social and spatial identities of Fittja. The girls believe that when a place's identity is integrated and valued, it can challenge dominating power structures and stigmatisation norms. This is exemplified by the sign Fittja = Home on the rooftop of Fittja mall. When the girls presented their designs during the 4th workshop one of them said:

> *"It is also said that the sound from helicopters is the national anthem of Fittja, because police helicopters are always soaring above Fittja main square and Fittja in general, so when they do, they will know that Fittja is home and there will always be love here"*

Due to this, the design proposals may be described as efforts to break norm barriers created between Fittja and other parts of Stockholm. The girls have, through their designs, made it possible for residents of the area to spontaneously socialise, as well as invited outsiders to visit Fittja and re-evaluate their objective image of the place formed by the dominant media discourse. These efforts have socio-economic benefits as they enhance social cohesion both within the area and between Fittja and the rest of Stockholm, which in the long run may have the possibility to break segregation patterns. The designing process allowed the girls to challenge stigmatisation and power structures through their design ideas. The use of Minecraft as a method helped them visualise and materialise their meaning-making strategies for Fittja. This approach to placemaking challenges the negative stereotypes associated with Fittja and promotes a sense of belonging and openness amongst the participating girls. Observing the built environment from the perspective of the girls challenges planners to think about the concept of architecture and planning to be more than just material (c.f. Jarvis et al 2009). While their design solutions are specific to Fittja, the process used by the #UrbanGirlsMovement can inspire other urban development projects.

### *3.3 Participation: Meaning-making in participation processes*

The design proposals developed by the girls in #UrbanGirlsMovement symbolises and enhances the spatial identity of Fittja as experienced by the girls interviewed. Therefore, the actual designs are highly contextual and should not be generalised to how suburban areas should be renovated. However, there are aspects of the applied process in #UrbanGirlsMovement that could be generalised to other geographical and social contexts. According to the interviews, being part of an urban development process generated a positive set of values and meaning for the participating girls due to three aspects: (1) how the process was facilitated; (2) that they were only young girls participating; (3) and that they got to collaborate with adult professionals working with urban planning.

First, many of the girls were surprised by the attention they received during the workshops. One of the girls expected to be a listener rather than a speaker. This reveals a power asymmetry between speaking and listening, which can be related to gender and age categories, but also positions of power between planners and communities. Active listening, however, can challenge these power dynamics and empower marginalised communities (Wiberg, 2018). Wiberg (2018, p.28) stresses in her study of the practice of listening in urban consultation processes that:

> *"…by giving residents the opportunity to participate in political conversations, knowledge of democratic processes is developed, which can lead to residents gaining stronger political self-confidence and starting to engage and organise themselves".*

Due to this, the girls felt important and part of something bigger, which can be described as empowerment (Ortiz Escalante and Valdivia, 2015). Empowerment involves recognising and utilising women's capacities and providing platforms for decision-making (Ortiz Escalante and Valdivia, 2015). Hence, how the workshops were facilitated to put the girls in the forefront of urban development was a successful tool. It acknowledged and empowered the girls, allowing them to express their knowledge and experiences.

Second, the gender separation aspect of the #UrbanGirlsMovement had an empowering effect. By only including young girls from marginalised positions, the girls felt like the project provided them with a platform that was safe, without fear of judgement or criticism. The girls described that the project encouraged them to utilise their own power and challenge societal gender roles and expectations they had upon themselves.

Third, the collaboration between young girls and adult professionals had transformative effects. The presence of adults from various companies and organisations inspired the girls and made them feel heard and acknowledged. This collaboration with adults gave them a sense of legitimacy and allowed them to develop their own abilities. The transformative impacts on power structures created by the age difference between the girls and the adult professionals were identified as long as the adults had an indicative role.

The facilitation, gender separation, and adult collaboration aspects of the process complemented each other and had a cohesive relationship. The girls believed that the #UrbanGirlsMovement could inspire other places to implement similar processes, as it empowered them and made them feel heard. One could argue that their participation in the process has societal values beyond the project itself, including developing political self-confidence and encouraging younger generations to make a difference in society. One of the girls, Princess, points to one of several positive externalities created involving girls in an urban development process:

> *"I also think that there are other younger people who check this out and think that these are suburban girls who try to make a change - if that does not happen then they will not try. If they see that we are trying to change something and notice that it is working, others may follow and try to improve society."*

Princess expressed that citizen engagement may encourage the next generation to engage in societal change. Many hoped that their participation in #UrbanGirlsMovement will make younger girls realise that it is possible to make a societal difference when and where needed, creating citizens that are aware of their democratic rights and have the power to use them. This would be a socioeconomic benefit for society as a whole in the long run.

The #UrbanGirlsMovement serves therefore as an example of gender-inclusive urban planning. However, such tools and techniques tested during #UrbanGirlsMovement are not without challenges and limitations. For example, these techniques require significant time and resources built into the processes of urban planning. According to Cornwall (2003), analysis and tools alone are insufficient; rather, successful gender-transformative planning necessitates advocacy, persistence, and influence. Gender and power structures should be addressed early in the urban development process and carried through to the final stage. To do such, strategic work that considers power dynamics

and agency is deemed essential. The combination of facilitation, gender separation, and adult collaboration may prove inadequate in effectively transforming intersectional structures and enhancing the experiences of girls and young women in socio-economically deprived neighbourhoods. Strategic advocacy that considers women's unique experiences and knowledge of urban livelihoods is also crucial.

## 4. Conclusion

The outcome of #UrbanGirlsMovement may not be generalised to other spatial contexts, albeit aspects of the process have the possibility to be universalized and normalised in planning processes. Based on observations and analysis of #UrbanGirlsMovement as a case, an urban development process including girls and young women creates meaning and empowerment to those participating in the process. For the girls in #UrbanGirlsMovement the process enabled the girls to recognise their own abilities. Additionally, redesigning a familiar place made it possible for the girls to regenerate the meaning of the urban public space around Fittja main square to mirror their own subjective spatial identities and connections to Fittja. Hence, planning policies and practices can impact the identity formation processes of young women if they facilitate a platform to re-define the meaning of space and express their own subjective spatial identities, leading to empowerment. This in turn, challenges set norms of gender, age, class, and space.

Due to this, #UrbanGirlsMovement shows that a planning process is more than the physical designs of the built environment, it is as much a tool for enhanced democracy, equality, and justice in cities. Nevertheless, for planning processes to be used as a vehicle for enhanced social and spatial values, there is a need for intersectional planning tools that transform spatial power and oppression. Awareness of normalised power structures forming young girls' ever-day lives should be a requirement for all actors involved in urban development processes, as it enables them to target this specific societal group tactfully. There are aspects used in #UrbanGirlsMovement that are important to highlight in this regard: facilitation, gender separation, and adult collaboration. These aspects are cohesive as they have proven to challenge inherent gender and age power structures when applied in conjunction with one another.

This article has contributed perspectives and insights of how a gender-inclusive urban planning approach positively impacts girls inhabiting an especially vulnerable area. These insights are particularly valuable in contemporary Sweden, when large building complexes produced towards the end of the 1900s are in dire need of renovation. Through implementing a clear gender perspective founded in the local social and cultural context throughout the planning processes, these renovation interventions have vast opportunities to facilitate a much-needed transformation towards a more socially sustainable Stockholm. We have an opportunity to not only renovate the built environment and ensure adequate housing for all, but to challenge gendered power structures oppressing and excluding women from many of our cities' services and decision-making arenas. Involving women in urban development converts the city to a support system, instead of a barrier.

However, supplemental research is required to fully comprehend the impact of policy and planning in identity formation processes and how a transformative change of the planning discourse might positively impact society at large. Longitudinal research of this

sort will most likely show behavioural changes within areas implementing gender-inclusive urban planning techniques. The girls showed signs of increased societal trust as a consequence of taking control over their ambient environment. This might lead to socio-economic benefits of increased educational levels and better work opportunities, as well as reduced mental illness and societal exclusion. This increases the economic value of the area, enticing businesses to settle, as well as increasing the revenue of the properties. Hence, this would not only positively influence girls and women of the area, but there are clear signs indicating that the type of planning process declared in this article would benefit all parts of society. However, additional projects implementing a clear gender perspective are necessary, and they need to include a comprehensive follow up and evaluation. At the moment we lack methods to efficiently calculate both the business values and socio-economic benefits of a more equal and just urban planning process. Further multidisciplinary research needs to be conducted on how alternative values in the urban planning process can be quantified and incorporated into the planning processes already in place, as they are regulated by political and economic policies. Deeper knowledge of how to ensure social sustainability is crucial if we are to achieve international goals of e.g. the 2030 Agenda, the New Urban Agenda, as well as the Paris Agreement – we have the possibility to ensure a sustainable development right here and now by questioning the planning discourse and implementing alternative gender-transformative urban planning techniques on a large scale.

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# (Wo)Man-Made Public Space.
## The Design Changes Needed to Create Gender-Inclusive Cities

Michelle Moonen
*Eindhoven University of Technology, Netherlands*
*michellemoonen@outlook.com*

**Abstract**
Women experience limitations in public space regarding their safety, comfort, and accessibility, which might be mitigated by urban design. This article addresses the question: How can public space become more gender-inclusive through the implementation of design principles focused on meeting the needs of women? It draws on existing literature combined with empirical observations and interviews, to establish a framework of eight design principles (safety cues, informal surveillance, legibility, spatial appropriation, representation, diversity, slow modes and ease of use) to make public spaces more gender-inclusive. The principles are applied in an exemplary design case focused on a public street in the city centre of Heerlen, Netherlands, which currently faces many of the issues that are especially limiting to women. Active public spaces, meaning spaces that encourage user engagement and interaction, often already contain some elements outlined in the framework, leading to easier fulfilment of the design principles. The application of the principles is limited to one design case, and the focus is restricted to women's experiences. When applying the principles in other cases or typologies, the implications of the proposed design guidelines need to be carefully considered.

**Keywords:** Feminist urbanism, public space, gender-inclusive, urban design principles, Netherlands

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## 1. Introduction

The fight for gender equality has been fought in many facets of our society, most famously through feminist activism in the 20th century, and includes the right to the city (Beebeejaun, 2017). When it comes to the design and use of public space, not everyone experiences the same degree of freedom or comfort. Public spaces are often designed for an anonymous standard user. As underscored by existing literature this standard user is usually an able-bodied, white, heterosexual man (Kern, 2019, p.89). It is hypothesised that by designing public spaces for a standard user, the needs of users outside this standard profile are frequently neglected. Sex and gender are often a determinator of how someone uses and feels in (public) space; different bodies have different needs and follow different gendered roles. However, current practice for public space design rarely considers sex or gender as an effective element of the way public space is used. As a result, it is argued that women are restricted in their behaviour in public space.

Internationally, research has consistently shown that women feel less safe than men in public space, adjust their behaviour more often, and avoid certain places or activities out of fear or discomfort (Vera-Gray and Kelly, 2020). Despite their adjusted behaviour, defined by Vera-Gray and Kelly as 'safety work' (2020), women are more likely than men to experience street harassment. For instance, a 2018 survey of people living in Amsterdam found that more than half of the female population (51%) had experienced verbal or non-verbal sexual intimidation in the street, compared with 30% of men (Beek and Smeets, 2019, p.4). Other studies illustrate that women spend more time feeling anxious in public space, affecting their psychological well-being and comfort (Weisman, 1992, p.69). Moreover, research has demonstrated that the way people relate to space is influenced by their gender and the associated upbringing. For example, girls' spatial range of activities is smaller than boys (taking up less space), they stay closer to home, and they are less likely to actively manipulate their environment. (Franck and Paxson, 1989, p.127). These behavioural patterns are instilled in girls from an early age as they are taught to be careful and ‘decent’ while playing (Young, 1980, p.153). As a consequence of this upbringing women feel less comfortable in space, spending more time assessing safety cues and territorial control (Weisman, 1992, p. 69). Hence, due to different types of socialisation, women and men end up feeling and acting differently in public space. Consequently, when public space is designed without women’s experiences, this reinforces spatial, sociocultural, and psychological limitations on use, for example, through a lack of public toilets, good seating options, and accessible pavements and lighting, making public spaces less accessible to them.

This research explored how women experience limitations in their behaviour in public space, and how this might be mitigated through design. The issues of safety, comfort, and accessibility emerged as consistent themes in the reviewed literature. In addition, field research comprising observations and interviews, were conducted in Heerlen (Netherlands); to validate these themes in a contemporary European context. Heerlen is the fourth least safe city in the Netherlands (Lare, 2019), facing issues of shrinkage (Verwest and Dam, 2010, pp.35-46), vacancy, and an ageing population (Stadsregio Parkstad Limburg, n.d.). In addition, the former industrial city has strong ties to stereotypical gender roles, rooted in its history, making it a relevant case study for this research. Eight key principles for gender-inclusive design were distilled from the evaluated literature and were subsequently applied to a design case to answer the

question: How can cities become more gender-inclusive through the implementation of design principles focused on meeting the needs of women?
This article will first elaborate on the three themes followed by an overview of the design principles. Next, the methods are described, followed by the results of the field research and analysis of the case study location. Lastly, an example of the implementation of the design principles is provided in an exemplary design case.

## 2. Literature Review and Design Principles

The relevant literature spans the fields of urban geography, feminist urbanism and public space research. The scope of the review focussed on the way the design of public space affects women, as well as gender-based differences in the use of public spaces. Within the reviewed literature the themes of safety, comfort and accessibility were recurring and used to structure this section. This section provides an evidence-based framework for the implementation of eight design principles (written in cursive throughout the article) presented at the end.

### *2.1 Safe space*

Women are often limited in their behaviour in public space due to perceived feelings of unsafety, which, rather than actual crime rates, dictate their actions and have fostered specific survival or coping strategies in them. For example, research by Gardner (1995) and Madriz (1997) both outlined seven strategies women used in response to men's intrusions (as cited in Vera-Gray and Kelly, 2020). The strategies used by women are broadly separated into 'avoidance behaviours' and 'self-protective behaviours', which "can both be seen in the changes women make to where and how they move in public" (Vera-Gray and Kelly, 2020, p. 269). Similar results are found in research by Valentine, who adds that "by adopting such defensive tactics, women are pressured into a restricted use and occupation of public space" (1989, p.386).These forms of gendered 'safety work '(Vera-Gray and Kelly, 2020) are shaped by women's differential experiences in public space; their personal space and privacy are often invaded by unwelcome interactions like whistles, comments, or unwanted touching and assault from strange men (Weisman, 1992 p.68; Kern, 2019, p.89; Beek and Smeets, 2018, p.4). According to Valentine, not being able to choose with whom they interact, as a result of these invasions, "profoundly affects [women's] sense of security in public" (1989, p.386). Women's perception of safety in public space is generally far lower than that of men, which goes beyond urban design in that it is "related to their sense of physical vulnerability to men, particularly to rape and sexual murder" (Valentine, 1989, p.385). Dutch national census data shows that 23% of men compared to 40% of women sometimes feel unsafe in public space (Portegijs and Brakel, 2018). While crime rates offer one measure of safety, it is women's perception of safety, influenced by past experiences, that shape their behaviour. Consequently, perceived safety is a more meaningful measure for designing inclusive spaces.
The perceived feeling of safety in public space is generally linked to certain cues, including signs of incivility like vandalism, litter, or graffiti, which signal that inappropriate behaviour is permitted in that space, as also argued by Wilson and Kelling's Broken Window thesis (1980). Meanwhile, signs of neat litter-free streets are perceived as safer (Valentine, 1989, p.388). Design and maintenance are important parameters in the

perceived safety of public space, yet spaces that are considered unsafe are usually approached by hardening the environment through additional security such as lighting, cameras, signs, and police controls (Danes, 2016, p.9). While research shows that this can be effective in some cases, such as installing cameras to prevent property crime and lighting to prevent violence, there is no stable or well-determined effect of security measures on the perception of safety (Custers and Dubbeld, 2008, p.34). Moreover, 'too much security' and policing can foster insecurity and fear (Zedner, 2003; Barker, 2013). Instead, offering spaces that are soft and humane invites respectful behaviour. *Safety cues (#1)* incorporated through design features can convey a sense of security and are 'welcoming', for instance; an open door on a nice day, and display or sales tables on the street (Danes, 2016, p.9). Thus, a more effective way to increase the perception of safety in public space is through the presence of local shopkeepers, acquaintances, or other people, who carry out *informal surveillance (#2)* over that space (Jacobs, 1961). Furthermore, while the presence of safety cues and informal surveillance help the perception of safety, Valentine states that "the social relations within a space and the group(s) who control that space socially are more important influences on how safe women feel than its design" (1990, p. 301). Her research found that public spaces were perceived as dangerous when the behaviour of the controlling group was unpredictable and uncontrollable. In addition, women's sense of security was strongly tied to how well they knew the place and the people in it, concluding that familiar, and thus more predictable, places were experienced as safer and more comfortable (Valentine, 1989). Public spaces feel safer when they are predictable, as such they should be easily *legible (#3).* Spaces that include 'soft' corners, offer visibility into doorways and are free of obstructions at the eye level are often experienced as more legible (Valentine, 1990). In addition, spaces become more legible if people can recognize and orient themself in them through the presence of unique buildings and landmarks, for example monuments, brightly coloured buildings or murals. The recognisability of entrances and exits and the presence of clear signage, street names, and maps also help people recognize and feel in control of space. Enhancing the visibility within a space aids in recognition of space throughout the day and at night and can be achieved by using light colour paints and white lighting that mimics the light of day (Kalms, 2019) Likewise, spaces become more orderly and legible by avoiding narrow walkways or tunnels, sharp corners, and thick vegetation (Valentine, 1990).

*2.2 Comfortable space*

Feeling safe is the first and foremost condition for a comfortable use of public space. However, even if women feel safe, they still deal with physical and psychological discomfort while using public space and are often inconvenienced (World Bank, 2020). For example, women move out of the way of traffic more often, are touched without permission more often, and avoid eye contact and stiff body posture when approached (Mozingo, 1989; Weisman, 1992). Women tend to subconsciously look for more social or territorial cues on whether their presence in public space is allowed or welcomed (Danes, 2016, p.11). As a result, they may be less likely than men to occupy or appropriate public spaces in which these cues are not present. Furthermore, women tend to look for more private spaces to occupy, like seating out of the path of traffic, where they do not feel 'on display', away from possible intrusions on their privacy (Mozingo, 1989). Yet, even after taking these precautions, they endure more frequent intrusions of

their personal space, making them feel uncomfortable or distressed. It is therefore not surprising that women tend to form groups in public (Mozingo, 1989, p.45).
The different way in which women and men behave in public space can in part be attributed to the relationship they have to their bodies, and the way they are socialised based on their gender (Young, 1980, p.153). Girls are taught from an early age to behave in a restricted manner when in public. They are taught to be careful not to get hurt or dirty and to limit their movements by walking and sitting 'like a girl'. Consequently, as adults, women move less freely, keep their arms closer to their bodies, cross their legs, and stand in more enclosed ways (Young, 1980; Mozingo, 1989). These restrictive behaviours stem from a learned psychological discomfort with using their body in a certain way and limit women from moving comfortably through, and appropriating, space, as confirmed by Mozingo's study in San Francisco (Mozingo, 1989).
*Space appropriation (#4)* is defined by Graumann as "the act or process of taking something as one's own or making something one's own" (cited in Rioux, Scrima and Werner, 2017). This can be achieved by being present in and exploring space through occupation, using objects, manipulating or altering spaces, as well as by recognizing or ascribing meaning to places (Rioux, Scrima and Werner, 2017, p.61). Space appropriation is the process of forming a connection between user and space. The right to take up space and the right to private space are issues women historically and presently deal with as Weisman states that they are "taught to occupy, but not control space" (1992, p.24). Additionally, women express a stronger need for a sense of security and a desire for control over their surroundings in public spaces to feel at ease. (Danes, 2016, p.10). Women spending time alone in public space may be presumed to be available to men, be it through being gazed at, interrupted, touched, or other means of proprietor interaction coming from men. Kern states that, "to enjoy being alone requires respect for personal space, a privilege that women have rarely been afforded" (2019, p.88). This demonstrates why women feel they need an excuse for being in public (Franck and Paxson, 1989, p.130), be it reading, eating, or talking to friends; as long as it signals that they are occupied.
Research indicates that women tend to be more attracted to places frequented by other women (Danes, 2016, p.2). By recognizing themselves in public space, women feel more comfortable appropriating it; the extent to which that appropriation is possible plays a big part in how accommodating a space is to women. The degree of control over space and female *representation (#5)* within a space can in part be facilitated by offering *diverse (#6)* options of use and interactive spaces, for example, by including moveable furniture (Project for Public Spaces [PPS], 2008) or providing public spaces for practising music or art. Designing designated spaces to appropriate gives users the opportunity to influence the way space looks or functions, giving them a sense of control. Designing spaces in such a way that they allow appropriation by a wide user audience means that a range of activities and options of use need to be incorporated into that space. The more people feel comfortable and familiar with using a space, be it only temporarily, the more inclusive it becomes. Making spaces with a great variety of options for activities and seating creates spaces that are sociable and have a higher level of publicness. Additionally, Franck and Paxson argue that this does not mean endless options need to be available everywhere, but rather suggest a balance in which diverse

options of use are tolerated and encouraged, stating that "no single public space can or should meet the needs of all users at all times" (1989, p.131).

*2.3 Accessible space*

Safety and comfort are two key conditions for the accessibility of space. Furthermore, how accessible a space is has to do with how well people can access, move through, and stay within it in addition to the types of functions it includes. First of all, access to public space is linked to the mobility patterns of women and men, which differ in a few ways. The most notable distinction found is that women tend to travel less by car compared to men. The works of Franck and Paxson state that this is possibly due to families owning only one car typically used by the main breadwinner, often the man, for commuting to work. (Cichoki, 1981; Pickup, 1984, cited in Franck and Paxson, 1989, p.127). Similar patterns are found in Dutch women's travel behaviour as women tend to work closer to home and travel by car 29% of the time compared to men who travel by car 41% of the time (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2019b). Another distinction is found in women's larger involvement with other people while travelling. They also have more secondary purposes, especially related to childcare, regardless of their mode of transport (Frank and Paxson, 1989, p.127). In addition, Dutch census data shows that women are more involved in 'service, personal care, and shopping or errands' (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2019a). While women and men spend a similar amount of time in traffic, women's journeys are more complex, cover less distance (32 km/day compared to men's 42 km/day) and are more often carried out by foot or public transport (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2019b). It can therefore be argued that women are more reliant on these modes of travel, thus prioritisation of public transport and *slow modes (#7)* of traffic is an important principle in creating gender-inclusive cities.

Second of all, women are more actively involved in care work; they visit spaces with children or elderly persons more often and spend more time walking with a wheeled object (a stroller, buggy, wheelchair, or shopping trolley) (Moonen, 2022). In addition, they are more likely to develop balance issues as they get older which can lead to tripping or falling due to uneven pavements, steps lacking handrails, and visually indistinct edges (Danes, 2016, p.3). Consequently, these obstacles, as well as exceptionally steep or crowded spaces limit women's *ease of use (#8*) while moving through public space, particularly while using a wheeled object. Research by Jensen et al. defines these factors, among others, as design qualities that influence the walkability of streets (2017, p.80). The same research found that, compared to less walkable streets, the streets that were classified as more walkable had almost twice as many female visitors (Jensen et al., 2017, p. 86). In addition, Scarponi et.al. (2023) assessed the walkability for women based on the criteria usefulness, comfort, safety and attractiveness, in which safety proved the most relevant factor influencing women's walking experience (Scarponi et.al., 2023). The walkability of streets as well as the informal surveillance over them increases when a human scale is applied, for example by creating small blocks with a limited building height, as described by Sim in his book Soft city (2019, p.77). Besides walkability, women's spatial orientation and their sense of direction differ and, as a result, they rely on a different method of wayfinding. The main difference is that women rely on landmarks to orient themselves while men also use geometric information (i.e., the position of the sun) (Lawton, 2010, p.329). By

incorporating landmarks as well as street signs and maps, different forms of wayfinding are accommodated.
A third point to consider is that women follow certain gender-specific social norms and trends (including fashion choices such as skirts or heels (Mozingo, 1989, p.47)) and need more toilet breaks (Mueller, et al, 2005). Besides the previously mentioned factors, this means their prolonged stay in public spaces depends on the availability of basic amenities like public restrooms and childcare facilities. However, freely accessible, clean public toilets are rarely incorporated in public space (RTL Nieuws, 2017), which not only limits women, but also parents of young children from visiting public spaces. Incorporating these basic amenities, on top of including varied seating options in shaded and sunny areas, in more and less private space, and in proper lighting are important to create the right conditions for prolonged stay.
Lastly, where commercial functions are welcomed and necessary for the informal surveillance of the space (Jacobs, 1961), having to pay to be in public can be a limiting factor. As women are less likely to be financially independent (Portegijs and Brakel, 2018, p.42); this has a greater impact on their access to public space. Hence, a mix of commercial functions (terraces, shops, café's, carnivals, and markets) and non-commercial functions (parks, plazas, libraries) needs to be incorporated to generate activity throughout time and attract a diverse user audience. Good examples of non-commercial public spaces that should be available in any city are parks, squares, and libraries. These spaces welcome users without fee, allow people to bring their own means of entertainment, food, and drinks and offer the right amenities for them to remain in that space for an extended period. By creating flexible spaces that allow for temporary functions, spaces become more diverse. Attracting different user demographics, for example through events and activities, allows a broader audience to familiarise themselves with a place.

*2.4 Design principles*

Based on the literature study, eight design principles are defined, which illustrate design choices that can be implemented to enhance the relatively abstract concepts of safety, comfort and accessibility of space. The principles are interrelated and not mutually exclusive, thus some of the suggested design choices benefit more than one principle, and some principles strengthen others.
*Safety cues (#1)* are signs that indicate the public space is safe, and that people's presence in it is welcomed and accepted. Neat litter-free and unbroken spaces, public greenery and water, and welcoming signs (i.e. terraces, display tables) signal that a space is safe. In addition, attracting a diverse user audience makes it more likely for people to recognize themselves, signalling that their presence is welcomed and accepted, enhancing both the comfort and the accessibility of that space.
*Informal surveillance (#2)* is achieved by increasing the number of 'eyes on the street' (Jacobs, 1961), or the number of people engaging with and staying in space. This can be achieved by circulating people through space for example by strategic placement of flagship stores or touristic hotspots, incorporating a mix of functions, and ensuring facades are active (meaning people are engaging with them) throughout time. Designing spaces with a human scale, as described under legibility, and placing residential entrances on public streets also increases the number of eyes on the street.

*Legibility (#3)* is about how well space can be recognized and manoeuvred. Ensuring human scale, visibility of entrances and exits and an overview on eye-level make space more organised and clearer. Incorporating landmarks, signage and maps and ensuring continuity in street furniture make space easier to recognize overall. Additionally, choosing light coloured paint for facades and lighting mimicking the light of day make it easier to recognize space at night.
*Spatial appropriation (#4)* can be encouraged by creating a public space with diverse seating options and activities that offer a comfortable option to everyone. In addition, providing options for artistic expression (busking spots or legal-graffiti walls for example) and encouraging personalisation of space (for example by allowing planters near front doors) help make spaces easier to appropriate. Creating a sense of belonging in space, which can be done through spatial appropriation, but also through representation, makes people feel more comfortable to use it.
*Representation (#5)* can be achieved by encouraging events focused on groups that are currently limited from using the space and thus lack recognition. In addition, actively fighting street-harassment and preventing sexualized images of women in advertisement and public art.
*Diversity (#6)* means space is visited by a diverse user audience because it offers a range of choices and options of use that cater to their needs and interests. Incorporating a range of seating options, signs and maps at multiple heights and both commercial and non-commercial indoor and outdoor public spaces provides users with different options of use, making space more accessible. Ensuring mixed functions within space, providing a range of activities and events and encouraging temporary use all aid in attracting a diverse user audience.
*Slow modes (#7)* refer to the prioritisation of public transport, pedestrians and cyclists over car traffic, for example by using zebra-crossings instead of traffic lights or offering adequate bicycle parking. Furthermore, implementing flexible public transportation at night and ensuring short routes to and from public transport stops. Lastly, Spaces should be designed to be walkable by ensuring a human scale, and providing accessible pavements and wide tunnels, alleys and walking paths.
*Ease of use (#8)* has to do with how well people can use space and can be improved by using accessible materials and measurements, incorporating ramps and rails at stairs and steep slopes and providing resting spots along long slopes or stretches of pavement. It should be noted that the measurements in this case should not follow the standard user but should instead be adjusted so they are accessible for a range of users. In addition, when designing tunnels or alleys, they should be as wide and short as possible, ensuring there is adequate visibility on and in the space. Lastly, the availability of amenities in public space, like water-tap points, toilets and childcare facilities, as well as the presence of playgrounds for different ages are important design choices that make space more accessible.
Most of the design principles are strengthened by a public space that is active, meaning people interact with and use the space, and that offers a diverse set of activities and options of use. Vice versa, by implementing the design principles, public spaces become more active and enjoyable to a wider user audience. It should be noted that most design choices related to the principles do not have specific quantities associated with them; instead, careful analysis and observation of the location should be leading in the choices on how to implement the principles defined in this article. Not all principles need to be

applied in all locations, and not all locations have the same needs or face the same issues. The principles are a guideline in taking a more gender-sensitive approach in the design process, leading to more inclusive spaces overall.

## 3. Methods

This article draws on the research conducted for the author's masters' thesis, titled '(Wo)man-made public space; The design changes needed to create gender-inclusive cities' (Moonen, 2022). It established a framework of eight design principles for gender-inclusive design based on the literature review. While this article demonstrates the benefits of the design principles on the gender-inclusivity of public spaces, it is important to note that the literature review predominantly draws on American sources from the late twentieth century. Consequently, the influence of technological advances (e.g. mobile phones), or cultural differences were not considered in the formulation of these principles.

To contextualise and validate the framework within a contemporary European context, observations and interviews were conducted in the city centre of the case study location Heerlen. This approach aimed to further develop the framework and gain insight into the daily functioning of Heerlen. The observed locations were selected based on a spatial analysis, which considered historical, building, public space and traffic analysis of the case study location and found six key locations. Of these six locations, the location of an exemplary design case was selected based on the results of the observations and interviews and its performance relative to the established framework of design principles. Specifically, two locations were identified as underperforming compared to the other four. Consequently, these lacking locations were chosen as the exemplary design cases, wherein the existing baseline situation was redesigned in accordance with the framework to achieve a more gender-inclusive space.

More details on the methods used in the observations and interviews are outlined in this section, and the results are discussed in the next section. All observed locations are referred to with a letter, and all other locations are referred to with a number, both are related to the letters and numbers used in the figures throughout this article.

### *3.1 Observations*

Based on the spatial analysis, six locations along the two main axes of the city centre were selected for observations, to understand the daily functioning of these spaces. The observations followed the methods of counting and tracing as described by Gehl and Svarre in their publication How to study public life (2013), and were conducted in the following locations (see figure 1 under mobile interviews);

A: Bongerd
B: Pancratiusplein
C: Trainstation, centre side
D: intersection Saroleastraat & Dautzenbergstraat
E: Promenade, park (South-West side)
F: Promenade, playground (North-East side)

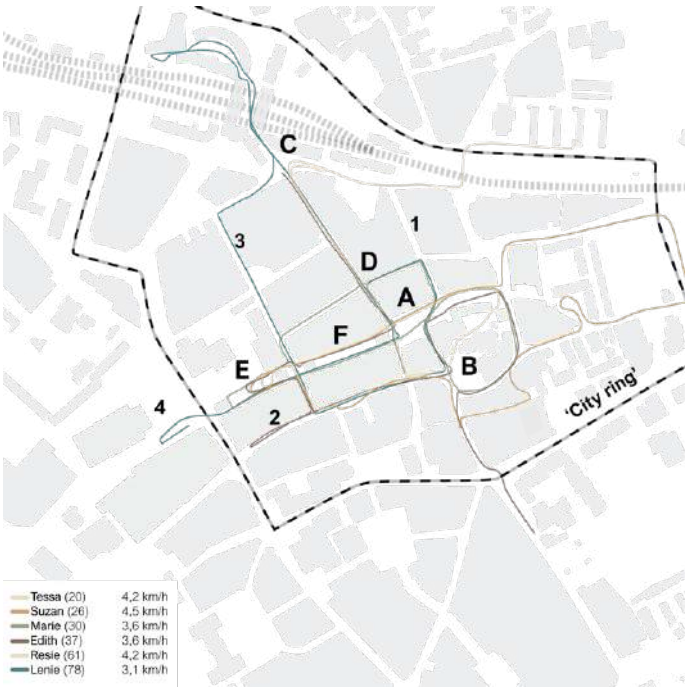


Figure 1. Interview routes.

Observations took place in one week at the end of June 2021, in three different time blocks, namely, morning (10:00-13:00h), afternoon (14:00- 17:00h), and evening (19:00-22:00h). It should be noted that the observations were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic in a period with relatively few restrictions, which might have caused fewer people to visit the space or some people to behave differently to keep their distance from other users.

*3.2 Counting*

During the counting method, each location was observed for a 10-minute interval in every time block on a weekend day (Saturday evening, Sunday morning, and afternoon), Tuesday (market day) and Wednesday (weekday).

Data was collected on gender, age, and company, as well as visitors' involvement in certain activities. A more detailed overview can be found in (Moonen, 2022, pp.80-85). The visitor's age is estimated and categorised as youth (0-25), adults (25-65), and elderly (65+) and their company are based on whether they are alone, in a same-sex duo, different-sex duos, or groups of more than 3. Lastly, people on bikes, with dogs, involved in care work, or using a wheeled object are counted. Care work is defined as adults supervising minors of middle-school age or younger. The use of a wheeled object, which includes strollers, wheelchairs, baby buggies, and luggage on wheels, is counted as the person controlling the wheeled object.

*3.3 Tracing*

The tracing method, as described by Gehl & Svarre (2013, p.28), was only conducted on the weekday, observing each location for 5-minute intervals during the aforementioned timeslots. During these intervals, the walking paths of pedestrians were traced on-site using printed maps and were later digitised for legibility (Moonen, 2022, p.86).

*3.4 Mobile interviews*

Mobile interviewing (Chaumont & Zeilinger, 2012, p.7) was used to conduct respondent interviews with six women of various ages and backgrounds to form a more comprehensive understanding of their experience in the research area. The women were recruited in advance and selected to represent a healthy mix of users varying in level of education, occupation, age, and whether they were from the city or not. The interviews were semi-structured taking a pedagogical stance emphasising respondents' personal opinions and experiences and used a mix of generative questions on the themes safety, comfort and accessibility and tour questions focused on the location (Tracy, 2020). The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed to text, and the walking pace and routes were tracked using a smartwatch as indicated in figure 1. All interviews lasted roughly 30 to 45 minutes.

This study was conducted as part of my masters' thesis, due to the limited scale of the study, ethical approval was not requested. Prior to the interviews informed consent was verbally obtained from all participants and the research objectives, recording and information processing methods were explained. Pseudonyms have been used to preserve anonymity and quotations have been translated from Dutch to English.

## 4. Case Study: Heerlen (Netherlands)

To give a more concrete example of how the principles defined in the theory section can be applied to the design of public space a case study and exemplary design case have been developed. The case study focussed on the city centre of Heerlen (Netherlands), which historically developed through its booming coal mining industry (Langeweg, 2011). The strong focus on the mining industry led to a monotone, male-dominated job structure that made it difficult for other industries to establish themselves in the region (Schaap, 2011) , causing a rise in unemployment and substance-abuse when it collapsed in 1965 (Kasper et al., 2013, p.16). After this collapse the region was rebranded as Parkstad (Park-city), and most reminders of the mining period were removed, leaving Heerlen's inhabitants feeling scared and discontent with the loss of identity it entailed (Hermans, 2016, p.112). Heerlen's renewal started in 2002 with the project 'Operatie hartslag' (Operation Heartbeat) (Verouden, 2004), aimed at restoring the city to a clean, unbroken and safe state. Subsequently, in 2013, the focus shifted to establishing a distinctive urban identity and rejuvenating the city centre through the IBA (Internationale BauAustellung) Parkstad program, (IBA Parkstad, n.d.). Despite these efforts, Heerlen remains the fourth least safe city in the Netherlands (Lare, 2019), has a below average economy (in comparison to the Netherlands) (Stadsregio Parkstad Limburg, n.d.) and faces issues of shrinkage (Verwest & Dam, 2010, pp.35-46) and, vacancy (Stadsregio Parkstad Limburg, n.d.) that create additional challenges for the design of public space.

*4.1 Spatial analysis and observation*

The spatial analysis and observations were conducted to gather insight into the functioning of the city centre in order to determine a suitable location for the exemplary design case. Based on the historic development of the city two streets can be appointed the main streets. The first is the *Saroleastraat (D)* which connects the old centre to the train station. The second is the *Promenade*, built during the height of the mining industry, which was originally designed to connect the city centre to the newly

built shopping mall *T' loon*. The city centre is defined by a city ring with a high traffic intensity within which most commercial activity is confined. Taking the *Bongerd (A)* as the central point and looking at the fastest routes of arrival by foot from a (bike)-parking or public transport stop indicates that the *Saroleastraat*, *Promenade (E,F)* and *Bongerd (A)* are expected to be the most used pedestrian routes, as indicated in figure 2. Analysis of the building functions indicates most retail and restaurant functions are clustered around these three streets and the *Oranje nassaustraat (1)*. Most vacant buildings are located along the edge of this retail cluster, as indicated in figure 3.

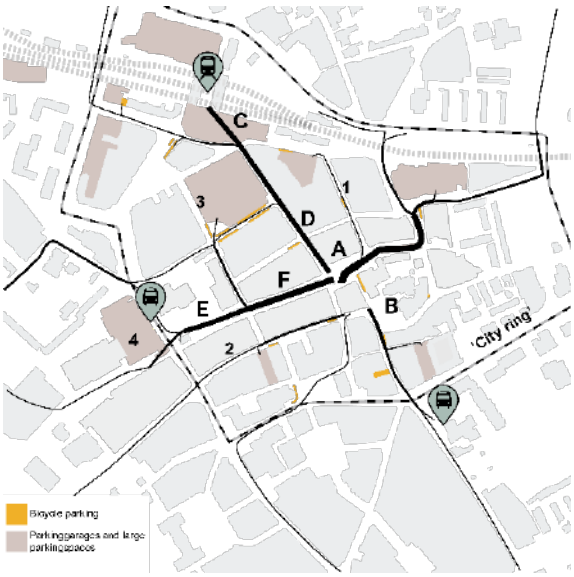



Figure 2 (left). Mobility and walking routes.
Figure 3 (right). Commercial centre and vacancy.

From the observations it became evident that the Saroleastraat (D) indeed functions as the main street of Heerlen, attracting the most visitors while the other main street, the Promenade (E, F), surprisingly attracted the least visitors. However, the tracing method indicated that more visitors stayed in the Promenade (E) for an extended period than in any other observed location. There were usually more women visiting the observed locations, except at night when the percentage of women dropped to under 50% in all locations. Fewer women visited the locations alone, and more women were involved in care tasks or in the use of a wheeled object (Moonen, 2022, pp.81-85).

*4.2 Interviews*

The goal of the interviews was to form a more comprehensive understanding of women's experience in the case study location in relation to the themes of safety, comfort and accessibility. During the interviews, the women were asked to visit certain places they liked or places they visited often. Examining their walking patterns, indicated in figure 1, it was noticeable that most women kept to the city's main streets (Promenade (E, F) and Saroleastraat (D)), as well as part of the Honingmanstraat (3) and Geleenstraat (2).
In regards to safety, most women indicated they did not feel comfortable using certain

spaces alone out of fear of being approached or because of the presence of strange men, instead they felt more comfortable in busier spaces, with more 'eyes on the street', as they considered those spaces to be livelier. In addition, all women except Lenie (aged 78), mentioned using tactics of avoidance to ensure their safety, Tessa (aged 20) mentioned: "I really avoid [the supermarket north of the train station (C)] in the evening, there are really strange people there too, people who actually approach you or something. Suppose I go shopping, then I have to go there, but then I always walk via the bus terminal because otherwise, I have to pass those people". In addition, most women mentioned some strategy for self-defence, Marie (aged 30) mentioned sometimes holding keys between her fingers or pretending to be on the phone. While most women deemed these types of behaviour normal, they offer an example of the routine safety work carried out by women on a daily basis.

In general, more active places within the city, often those places with a higher level of informal surveillance, were experienced as more enjoyable and safer. By contrast, spaces that had a lot of vacant buildings or times where shops and amenities were closed were experienced as less enjoyable and less safe. For example, Edith (aged 37) mentioned; "when things [restaurants or shops] are open it feels safer, because if there is a lot of vacancy or if it is quieter in the street, then I'm also more observant of the condition of the street". The proximity of the police station also aided in respondents' perceived safety. For example, as Suzan (aged 26) stated that "you can always just go somewhere [when you feel unsafe] and the police station is close by and so on. But there are also always people on the street that you can go to if something is really going on." She elaborated that this was true for her, since she knew many people living in the city, but that this might not be true for other people who are less familiar with the city.

In terms of comfort, most women agreed there is a need for more green space in the city and all of them walked towards a temporary green space along the Promenade (E). In addition, most women indicated they felt more comfortable in familiar places and would prefer additional seating options. When asked what strategies the women had for choosing where to sit, Lenie (aged 78) stated "I would, for example, sit on a bench on which my back faces the tree like that one [intersection Honingmanstraat (3) & Promenade (E, F)], but a three-person bench not, because then there is too much space left over, another person could easily come to sit next to you". This confirms the need for privacy and control over who sits next to her.

One issue that was remarked upon often related to lighting or lack thereof, as Tessa (aged 20) stated that she was "not too fond about this place [Promenade (F)] at night, I don't feel very comfortable in it. Just because like, there's usually weird people sitting on the benches, and at night it's empty and the trees make it dark and there is barely any light. So it's not a very nice place to walk at night. Also, [my friend her] bike was stolen here once." This indicated the lack of legibility and informal surveillance, in part caused by the large number of vacant or inactive buildings, and the importance of social relations in a space, both making the Promenade less comfortable to use.

Lastly, regarding accessibility, none of the women indicated they have had trouble accessing the city, though all of them mentioned some minor nuisances they faced when using the city. For example, Edith (aged 37) stated "What I don't like are those cobblestones, that are used here and there. As a woman, I don't like that, because it already prevents me from putting on heels, for example, so I always go to the city in flat

shoes. And it's not nice with the baby buggy either", illustrating the importance of surface-materials to women and caregivers.
Mapping the opinions the women expressed during the interviews indicated generally well-liked areas (Saroleastraat (D) – Bongerd (A) – Pancratiusplein (B)) and generally disliked areas (Burgemeester van Grunsvenplein (4) – Promenade (E, F) - Geleenstraat (2)). The generally liked areas were visited most, as observed in the counting method, had more (commercial) functions to interact with and a higher level of informal surveillance. On the other hand, the disliked areas overall attracted less visitors, and had less interactive features. In addition, the facades looked messy and incoherent and there was a lack of adequate lighting in the space, making it less legible.

## 5. An Exemplary Design Case: Promenade, Heerlen

It is evident from the historic development and spatial analysis that the Promenade (E,F) should function as one of the main streets of Heerlen, and provides one of the primary routes of access to the city centre. However, observations and interviews indicated that it is underused, and perceived as uncomfortable and unsafe, especially at night. Therefore, the Promenade (E,F) was selected as the exemplary design case. The design case was developed as part of this research and primarily showcased how the eight design principles can be implemented in different spatial typologies. In addition, it follows the existing ambitions defined by the municipality and IBA Parkstad. The municipal plans for Heerlen's centre state the ambition to create a compact commercial centre and develop a greener housing space along the south side of the Promenade (E, F) (BoschSlabbers Landschapsarchitecten, 2018). In addition, the IBA Parkstad project has the ambition to further develop Heerlen's urban character, for example through graffiti art or urban sports (IBA Parkstad, 2017, p.36). These ambitions, along with the framework of design principles, inform the concept and spatial design.
The proposed design includes both urban and green spaces, forming an example of how the design principles can be applied to different types of public space. To briefly elaborate on the implementation of the design principles an isometric illustration, depicting the semi-urban location F, has been included in figure 4. An example of the implementation in other typologies can be found in the original thesis (Moonen, 2022). The exemplary design case showcases how different interventions can contribute to a more gender-inclusive public space. The design interventions have been indicated with a number in figure 5, and are elaborated here in relation to the eight design principles. *Legibility* is ensured by creating an overview at eye level by limiting the height of seating elements (3) and planting to 90 centimetres and ensuring trees are trimmed below 2.5 metres. In addition, using lighting that mimics the light of day (12), and incorporating signposts (14) and landmarks (5&2) to function as points of orientation, make the space easier to navigate. Ensuring *diversity* in seating heights and types (3), in events and activities, and in playground typology (4) attracts a *diverse* user audience, ensuring more people feel welcome or at ease in the city.
Encouraging temporary use and *space appropriation* may be achieved by including semi-private space (9) in front of shops and offering *diversity* in seating options and seating heights (3). In addition, non-commercial spaces for urban sports (2) and artistic expression like busking (6) or graffiti art (5) are facilitated. *The informal surveillance* is enhanced by replacing inactive shop windows with small businesses (10), creating a mix of

functions to ensure activity over time and circulating people through space through strategic placement of hotspots (11). Other *safety cues* are represented by incorporating welcoming signs like terraces (9), lighting (12), wastebaskets (13), playgrounds (4), and green space. Implementing a human scale (1) and making spaces more walkable, attracts more users, benefitting the *informal surveillance* while also prioritising *slow modes* of traffic.

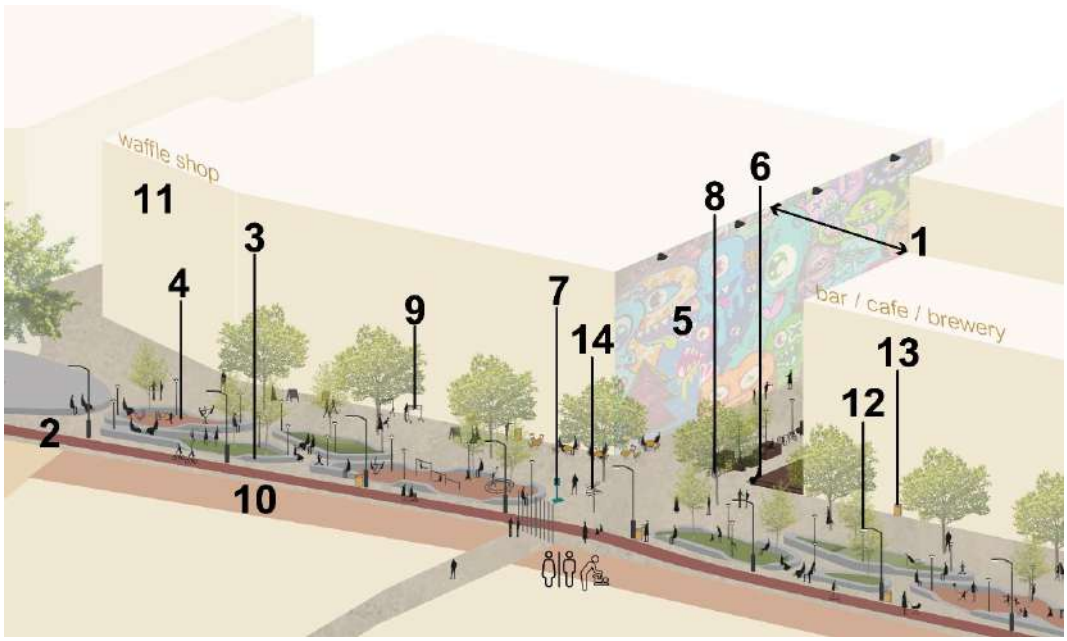


Figure 4. Isometric of location B as depicted in figure 4. The following design choices have been highlighted: (1) splitting up large blocks, (2) bike path, (3) diverse seating, (4) playgrounds, (5) graffiti wall, (6) platform, (7) amenities, (8) bike parking, (9) semi-private space, (10) small retail space, (11) strategic placement hotspot, (12) lighting, (13) wastebasket, (14) sign-post (Moonen, 2022).

To further encourage the use of *slow modes* of traffic sufficient bicycle parking (8) is provided, and a multifunctional broad bike path (2) is included. The bike bath is intended for bikes at night, increasing the number of people in space. In addition, by prohibiting cyclists during the day, the path increases the *ease of use* for people using a wheeled object or wearing heels. Furthermore, the *ease of use* and prolonged stay within the space is increased by ensuring wide tunnels and alleys (1), providing basic amenities (7) like public restrooms and water-tap points, seating (3) along long stretches of pavement and playgrounds (4) for different ages. Lastly, encouraging events focused on minorities, actively fighting street harassment and prohibiting the sexualization of women in public art, while also providing positive examples of women in street names, statues or other public art contribute to the *representation* of women. However, these are mostly achieved through less tangible interventions and policy making. The design interventions mentioned in this article discuss only a small part of the overall design. Hence, for more information on the design as a whole, the reader is referred to the original thesis (Moonen, 2022).

## 6. Conclusion

Public spaces are often designed according to a male standard user. As a result, women experience limitations regarding safety, comfort and accessibility when using public space. This research identified these limitations and explored how they can be mitigated through gender-inclusive urban design. By combining existing literature with observations and mobile interviews, this study developed a framework of eight design-principles: safety cues, informal surveillance, legibility, spatial appropriation, representation, diversity, slow modes and ease of use. Most of the design principles are strengthened by an active public space that offers a diverse set of activities and options of use. Vice versa, by implementing the design principles, public spaces become more active and enjoyable for a broader user audience.

This article contributes to existing literature by offering a practical, evidence-based framework that translates feminist urbanism theory into actionable urban design principles. While existing literature focussed on the gendered nature of public spaces and has demonstrated women's safety-concerns, this study advances the debate by providing clear design solutions aimed at addressing the issue.

It bridges the gap between theory and practice by demonstrating the practical implementation of the design principles through a case study and exemplary design case set in the Dutch city of Heerlen, which faces challenges such as a shrinking population, high vacancy rates, and limited economic activity. Based on a spatial analysis and observation of the city, it became evident that the Promenade (E, F) was designed as one of its central axes, but is now underused and deteriorating. Using the Promenade (E, F) as an exemplary design case, this article has demonstrated how the design principles can be applied in practice in the context of a mid-sized European city. In doing so it showcased how the implementation of the proposed framework may contribute to transforming public space into a more vibrant, safe, and inclusive environment that better serves all its visitors, particularly women.

The research was limited to women's experiences in urban places; the experience of women in places with a different typology, or the experiences of men were beyond the scope of this research. To ensure that all spatial needs can be considered in future public space design, it is recommended that similar studies are conducted on the experiences of people of different genders, ethnic backgrounds, religions, sexualities, and social classes, all carried out in the same spatial typologies, to assess the differences in behaviour and experience. Moreover, the exemplary design relies heavily on the creation of an active public space in a central location, however, not all spaces can be active, and neither should they be. Therefore, more research is needed to define how other spatial typologies (i.e., a suburb, larger city, village) can be designed to be safe, comfortable, and accessible. Lastly, the defined framework should be considered a guideline and not a set of rules, and it is important to remember that public space design alone does not make a space gender inclusive. Considering women as equal participants of public life should therefore be at the basis of decisions on the planning and design of public space.

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# Her City Weimar.
## A Gender-Sensitive, Participatory Study of a Mid-sized German Town

Lia Zinngrebe
*urbanista.ch, Switzerland*
*zinngrebe@urbanista.ch*

Lisa Maßel
*Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, Germany*
*lisa.massel2796@gmail.com*

**Abstract**
The global Her City initiative provides a framework for gender-sensitive urban planning, which seeks to create inclusive and accessible public spaces that meet the needs of all residents, particularly women and girls, who have often been overlooked in traditional urban design. This paper presents the results of Germany's first Her City initiative in Weimar— a city rich in cultural heritage with a vibrant tourism sector that strongly influences its public spaces. It contributes to existing studies in this field by providing an innovative methodological analysis of Weimar's public spaces through gender-sensitive, data-driven, and participatory processes, with the aim of identifying strategies for improvement. The Her City Toolbox was utilised and extended through a participatory citizen science approach with 18 young women and the collection of gender-sensitive data regarding public space usage. Data collected from two city walks, three workshops, open space assessments as well as measurements of people's movements and stationary activities were triangulated to reveal five thematic fields that highlight how public spaces are failing to meet the needs of women and girls. These include (1) Facilities & Furnishing, (2) Representation & Appreciation, (3) Security & Social Control, (4) Mobility & Accessibility, and (5) Visibility & Appropriation. Collaborations with local stakeholders combined with communication platforms and media contributed significantly to the project's impact. The paper concludes by emphasising the necessity of adopting a gender-sensitive, participatory, and data-driven approach to urban planning to address the diverse needs of all city dwellers.

**Keywords:** gender-sensitive urban planning, inclusive public spaces, citizen science, participatory urbanism, data-driven design

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## 1. Introduction

### *1.1 Context*

By 2030, 2.5 billion women will reside and work in cities that were predominantly planned and built by men (Czaja & Schechtner, 2021). This poses a significant problem, as planners frequently design from their own perspective, neglecting the diverse needs and living contexts of different demographic groups, including women, children, non-binary individuals, the elderly, or people with disabilities (Terraza et al., 2020). Consequently, their ability to fully utilise public spaces in its entirety is constrained (Kern, 2021). Global urbanisation (Szmigiera, 2021) exacerbates this, highlighting the crucial importance of creating accessible public spaces for everyone. To date, planning and design decisions have been driven by economic efficiency, often at the expense of social considerations (Labbé, 2023).

Additionally, the growing threat of the climate crisis underscores the need for inclusivity and resilience in addressing emerging challenges (Wuppertal Institute, 2016). However, contemporary planning decisions rarely address these challenges holistically. Many lack comprehensive sustainability measures, well-developed infrastructure for active mobility, integrated public transport, and designs that enhance health, well-being, and quality of life for all residents (Allianz der freien Straße, 2022). This paper emphasises the importance of inclusive urban planning, advocating for a gender-sensitive approach that puts people and their diverse needs at the centre of planning decisions.

The open source Her City Toolbox—designed to facilitate participatory design projects globally (Fabre et al., 2021)—provided the methodological framework (see section 2.1) and was applied as a case study in Weimar, Germany. It draws inspiration from the global Her City initiative, which follows the principle "Plan a city for girls, and it will work for everyone" (Fabre, 2019). Established on International Women's Day in 2021, Her City is a collaboration between United Nations Habitat and the think tank Global Utmaning (Fabre et al., 2021). The initiative aims to foster urban development from the perspective of young women and girls, who constitute the majority of historically marginalised groups (Criado-Perez, 2019).

Weimar is a medium-sized city in the eastern German state of Thuringia with a population of approximately 65,000 inhabitants, 7% being students (Stadtverwaltung Weimar, 2011). Like many European cities, Weimar is experiencing demographic change, with an increasing proportion of elderly residents (Stadtverwaltung Weimar, 2011). The town is renowned for its rich cultural heritage, with large parts of its city centre designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site. The town has played a pivotal role in German history on several occasions, serving as an epicentre of Weimar Classicism with famous representatives such as Anna Amalia, Goethe, and Schiller. In 1919, the first German National Assembly convened in the German National Theatre in Weimar and adopted the constitution of the Weimar Republic. Simultaneously, a group of revolutionary artists founded an art school that became the birthplace of the influential Bauhaus movement. Attracting a considerable number of tourists every year, tourism is one of the city's most significant economic sectors. Despite its compact structure, which amplifies planning and spatial conflicts, residents' interests are often overshadowed by thriving tourism and heritage-related concerns. Other important urban improvements, such as better lighting or the creation of barrier-free paths through the city centre, have been neglected.

### *1.2 Literature Review*

In the 1960s, Jacobs addressed the issue of safety in public spaces. She posited that the lack of human presence and limited opportunities for appropriation and personalization can lead to feelings of exclusion, vandalism, and insecurity (Jacobs, 1961). Considering this, Gehl demonstrates how data-driven analysis and design methods can create people-centred urban spaces that reflect the needs and behaviours of residents. Gehl (2018) developed a set of twelve quality criteria and a methodology for evaluating public spaces based on observations of movement, user groups, and behavioural patterns (Gehl Architects, 2018). Despite the success of their progressive approaches, they did not consider the specific needs of different user groups. In contrast, gender-sensitive urban planning promotes inclusivity and equity, encompassing additional aspects such as safety, accessibility, transport infrastructure, and the distribution of green spaces (Buchmüller, 1993). It integrates elements from various academic disciplines, including urban planning, social sciences, and gender studies, challenging the historically male-centric orientation of urban development (Vu, Niemeyer, and Spitzner, 2019).

The United Nations support this notion with their Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 on Gender Equality and SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities (United Nations, 2024). Goal 11.7 explicitly promotes "universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities" (United Nations, 2024). As an example, the Crowd4SDG initiative demonstrated how to implement these SDGs in a citizen science project (Crowds4SDG, 2020).

Kail's work in Vienna integrates gender mainstreaming into urban design, underscoring how urban planning shapes human behaviour and promotes the development of liveable, green, and safe cities (Kail, 2021). In an interview, Kail (2019) posited that "spaces do not exist in isolation; they support particular everyday contexts or create barriers." She emphasises the importance of integrating the perspectives of women and marginalised groups in urban planning processes to ensure the safety, accessibility, and social justice of urban environments and puts forth a participatory methodology that incorporates feminist perspectives into urban planning (Kail, 2019).

Public spaces often fail to meet the diverse day-to-day needs of users, particularly women, children, non-binary people, older adults, and people with disabilities (Terraza et al., 2020). Criado-Perez (2019) illustrates how the gender data gap in urban planning leads to systemic discrimination against women, limiting their safety and mobility. The male as default mindset extends to science, where men's experiences and bodies are frequently regarded as universally valid (Criado-Perez, 2019).

In Weimar, Germany, the initiative Frauen planen Stadt set a precedent for feminist urban planning in 1997. It was formed with the objective of addressing urban development issues relevant to women ('Unsere Stadt - Frauen planen Stadt', 1997). In 2021, Reckewerth (2021) examined the everyday experiences of women with caregiving responsibilities in Weimar's public spaces to highlight the impact of spatial conditions on care work and the link between urban design and women's everyday lives. Although both projects offered valuable insights based on individual experiences, they lacked representative data. This underlines the necessity for comprehensive, gender-specific data collection to better inform and enhance urban planning in Weimar.

### *1.3 Research question and objectives*

The literature review reveals a solid theoretical foundation for gender-sensitive urban planning. Nevertheless, the topic is underrepresented in academic research and the practical work of urban planners in Germany. There is a paucity of relevant gender disaggregated data and case studies particularly those involving marginalised groups like women, to guide decision-making and change. While people-friendly urban design approaches exist in different forms, many lack gender differentiation.

This research sought to address the question: "How can the public space of a medium-sized German city be evaluated through gender-sensitive, data-driven, and participatory processes?" The principal objectives are: first, to enable participation and provide a voice for women in urban planning by adopting a citizen-science approach to the Her City Toolbox; second, to collect gender-sensitive data on public space usage in Weimar; and third, to raise awareness and facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of gender-sensitive urban planning. Although the project explicitly focuses on women, it is anticipated that the findings will resonate with other groups with similar experiences, including men in caregiving roles, as postulated by Buchmüller (1993).

The paper is structured into four sections. Section 2 outlines the methodological framework. Section 3 presents the results of the collected quantitative and qualitative data, the derivation of five thematic fields for gender-sensitive urban planning in Weimar, and the platforms and media utilised for raising awareness. Section 4 sets these results in a broader context, highlighting the project's key findings. Section 5 concludes that combining citizen-science with data-driven methods proves essential for evaluating urban environments from a gender-sensitive perspective.

## 2. Methodological framework

The research design comprised five complementary methods (see Fig. 1). First, the Her City Toolbox served as the fundamental framework for the project's overall approach. Second, Participation and Citizen Science methods engaged interested individuals, particularly young females, to collaborate in scientific research. Third, Data Collection and Evaluation substantiated findings through quantitative data, surveys, and Public Space Public Life measurements (PSPL). Fourth, Communication and Public Relations raised awareness about gender-sensitive urban planning. Lastly, Networking and Collaborations forged partnerships to expand the project's reach.


Figure 1. The complementary methods of this project. Illustration by the authors, 2021.

While participants of the citizen survey were able to discuss issues considering the entire city, the site assessments were limited to seven selected public spaces within the historic city centre: Frauenplan, Herderplatz, Marktplatz, Platz der Demokratie, Poseckscher Garten, Seifengasse, and Wielandplatz (see Fig. 2). The study was conducted according to the ethical standards and procedures of the author's institution. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who consented to be photographed and filmed in the framework of this research while contributing with data collection and personal experiences.

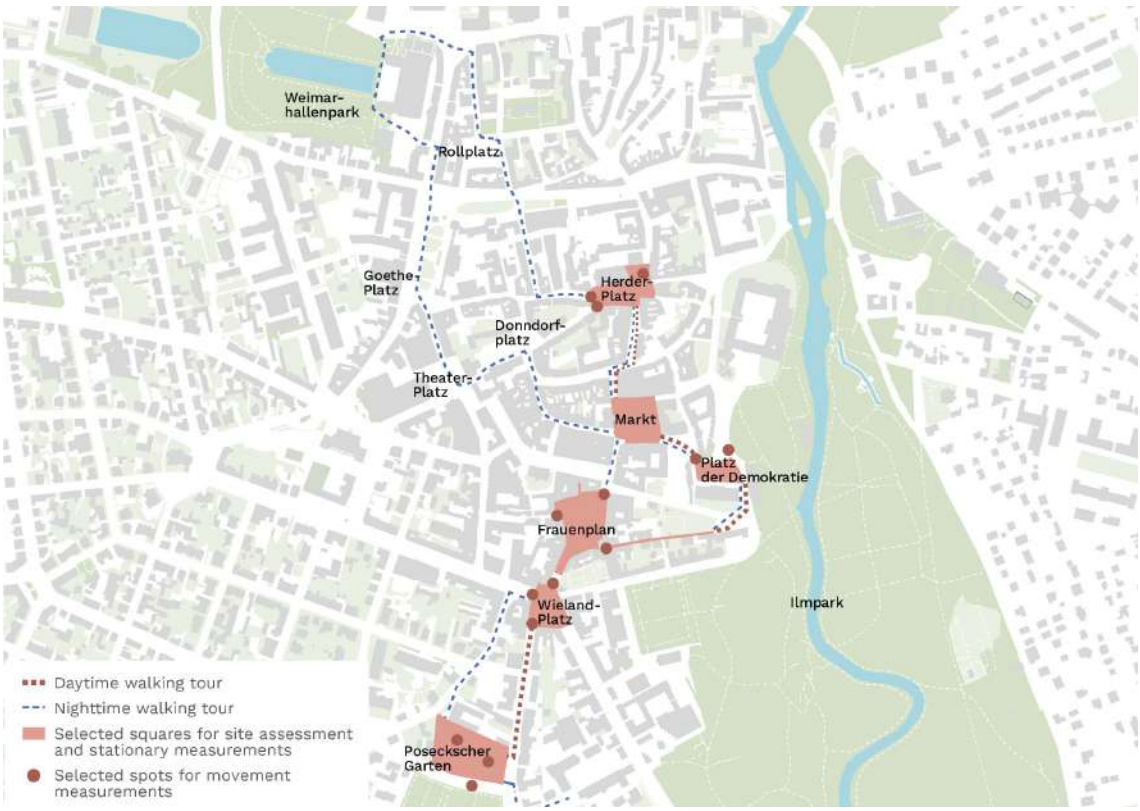


Figure 2: Overview of the project's research area. Illustration by the author, 2024

### *2.1 Her City Toolbox*

The Her City Toolbox emphasises participation, communication, and networking. Following this approach, young women were engaged in city walks to assess public spaces. Their experiences of navigating the city were analysed and recommendations developed during joint workshops. The toolbox's focus on communication and networking facilitated knowledge-sharing (see section 2.4), leading to partnerships with Weimar's civil society and engagement with local stakeholders, including city representatives (see section 2.5). Nevertheless, the toolbox was adapted to align with the specific requirements of this research. The participatory approach was expanded into a citizen-science framework that involved participants in collaborative research endeavour (see section 2.2). To triangulate the findings, quantitative data were gathered through a citizen survey and an app was utilised to collect data on public space usage (see section 2.3).

### *2.2 Participation and Citizen Science*

The participation process was divided into two distinct parts. The first part involved the public, with engagement primarily occurring through a citizen survey (see Section 2.3). The second part adopted a citizen science approach, involving young female participants in walks, workshops, public space assessments, and PSPL measurements (see Section 2.3), where they had two different roles: research subjects and collaborators.

To reach as many young women as possible, an Instagram channel was launched as an essential component of the one-month long recruitment process. Moreover, a considerable number of flyers were distributed throughout Weimar's city centre and educational establishments, e.g., schools and sports clubs, and the university's communication platforms were utilised. Participation in the local International Women's Evening proved to be a suitable strategy for reaching non-German-speaking women. 18 women out of originally 31, aged between 17 and 31, with different life situations and backgrounds finally actively participated in the workshops (see Fig. 3). They were comprised of two pupils, two English-speaking migrants, and two mothers, with the rest being university students. The primary language of communication was German, with English translations provided.

Figure 3. Voluntary participants at the walking tour in September 2021. Photo by Sophia Fahl, 2021.

At the beginning two walking tours were conducted: one during daytime and another at night (see Fig. 2). The daytime walk involved evaluating selected urban spaces using Gehl's 12 Quality Criteria (Gehl 2018), focusing on protection, comfort, and social aspects. The evaluation form is straightforward to use and requires no prior knowledge

of public space assessment. At request of the participants, an additional night walk was organised to explore questions such as: How does peoples' behaviour in the city change at night? What causes these changes, and how can conditions be improved? Is the issue of unsafe spaces and insecurity still relevant in Weimar?
The collected data was thoroughly discussed in workshops, prioritising an environment where participants openly shared their opinions and experiences. In the initial workshop, the findings from the public space assessments were analysed. The second workshop focused on exploring participants' needs and privileges in public spaces using the Method Kit (2021). In the third workshop, ideas for implementing solutions and raising awareness about gender-sensitive urban planning were developed. Across these sessions, five thematic fields emerged that highlight significant shortcomings in local urban planning from a gender-sensitive perspective (see section 3.2).
Subsequently, two discussion rounds were conducted with representatives of the city of Weimar. The initial round involved the officers for Building and Urban Development, Equal Opportunities, and Children and Youth. This session included the presentation of the research results, followed by a debate on the issues of urban design and policy changes. The relevance of gender-sensitive planning was demonstrated by illustrating the potential for Weimar. In the second discussion round, possible implementation options were explored with the representative for Building and Urban Development, the Equal Opportunity's Officer, the Cultural Director, and the Head of the Urban Development.

### *2.3 Data Collection and Evaluation*

In accordance with the Her City methodology, existing and openly accessible spatial and statistical data pertaining to Weimar was gathered and analysed. Given the city's status as a non-metropolitan area with limited urbanistic studies, this data was supplemented through a citizen survey and PSPL measurements.
The citizen survey was initiated to assess participants' diverse needs and their utilisation of Weimar's public spaces. Intending to generate data and facilitate a comparability based on various demographic specifications, including age and gender, the survey was open to everyone. The survey, available in both German and English, was administered via the online platform SoSci Survey (SoSci Survey GmbH, 2021). It was widely publicised through the project's Instagram account, the local newspaper Thüringer Allgemeine, local Facebook groups, the university's communication platforms, as well as through the distribution of flyers. The survey comprised 27 questions addressing residents' requirements regarding public spaces, including furnishings, stationary quality, and specific preferred or disliked locations.
Gehl's PSPL app ('Public Life App', 2021) was utilised together with the participants to gather data on the movements and stationary activities of individuals in the selected locations. The data collection period spanned a total of five time points, distributed across two days: one weekday and one weekend day. The data collection was conducted at the following times: 9:00, 12:00, 15:00, 18:00, and 21:00. In the analysis of movements patterns, individuals were classified according to their mode of transportation, i.e., pedestrians, cyclists, users of micro-mobility devices (e.g., e-Scooters or skateboards), motorised vehicles (cars or buses), and those requiring the use of a mobility aid (e.g., strollers or wheelchairs). In addition, a detailed stationary assessment was conducted, including the observation of age, gender, body position, and dwelling activities, e.g., conversing, eating/drinking, and playing in public spaces. The

gender of everyone was estimated as either female, male, or unknown. The age groups were categorised as follows: younger than 4 years, 5-14 years, 15-24 years, 25-64 years, and older than 65 years. During the observations five distinct body postures were classified: standing, sitting on a public bench, commercial sitting, informal sitting, e.g., on a stair or on the ground, and laying down.
The substantial dataset derived from the citizen survey and the PSPL measurements was subsequently analysed by using Tableau software. A specific evaluation was conducted to examine gender specifications, focusing on the differences between the participating and observed women and men.

### *2.4 Communication and Public Relations*

Open and transparent communication with the local community was crucial for Her City Weimar. To facilitate this, various communication platforms and media were utilised to reach a wide segment of Weimar's citizens as well as a broader audience. The project employed accessible language and visually appealing graphics with the objective of engaging a wider public effectively, beyond experts in the field.
Initially, an Instagram channel was established, serving as a platform for engaging with interested individuals, facilitating discourse on local urban planning issues, disseminating feminist perspectives, and documenting the project's progress. To facilitate further dialogue with Weimar's residents, additional media such as podcasts and an interview with a local radio station have been employed.
In the run-up of International Women's Day 2022, a series of events was organised to further engage with Weimar's citizens. These included a feminist city walk and a poster campaign, both of which were organised in collaboration with local partners (see section 2.5). To extend the project's reach beyond Weimar's citizenry and to ensure accessibility to all, the bilingual website www.hercityweimar.eu was published in the end (see Fig. 4). The website presents the collected research findings and their process in both German and English.


Figure 4. Project page of the Her City Weimar initiative, showing the participants advocating for a gender-sensitive city. Screenshot of project page by the authors, 2024.

### *2.5 Networking and Collaborations*

Establishing an extensive network and collaboration with local and municipal stakeholders was imperative for the project's success. At its inception, a collaboration was initiated with the global Her City initiative and several departments of the Bauhaus-Universität, including the offices for Equal Opportunity and University's Communication. The collaboration with the UN's Her City initiative enabled it to expand the project's scope beyond German-speaking countries. This entailed disseminating its progress on the global initiative's Instagram channel and incorporating it into the organisation's annual Her City report.

Furthermore, a partnership was established with the city's Equal Opportunity Office and a local women's organisation. In collaboration, events were organised, and advocacy was undertaken for the appropriate recognition of women in public spaces. Furthermore, collaborations were forged with the regional association of the political Green Party and with local shops and restaurants to present the poster campaign.

## 3. Results

This chapter presents the results of the gender-sensitive study of Weimar's public spaces, divided into four subsections: 3.1 disaggregates survey data by quantitative gender differences; 3.2 outlines thematic fields identified in site assessment; 3.3 details these thematic fields; 3.4 focuses on raising awareness about gender-sensitive urban planning.

### *3.1 Disaggregating Survey Data by Quantitative Gender Differences*

246 people filled out the citizen survey, two-thirds being women and one-third men. Due to the small number of non-binary participants (5), their data was not analysed in detail. The age average of the participants was 37 years, ranging from 13 to 82 years, with around 90% being German citizens. The survey analysis focused primarily on gender differences, but also considered age, highlighting derivations of over 10% between women's and men's responses. Overall, the gender-disaggregated survey data revealed fewer gender disparities in the needs and utilisation of Weimar's public realm than anticipated. More female participants preferred taking the bus, whereas male participants preferred the car. Furthermore, location-specific factors offered reasons to avoid specific public spaces, evidenced by 60% of participants noting that the noise level is a decisive reason for avoiding a location. Moreover, 56% indicated an uncomfortable atmosphere as another concern for avoidance, with two-thirds of women and one-third of men indicating this.

Approximately one-third of female participants compared to only 12% of males, reported actively avoiding specific locations in Weimar such as Goetheplatz, the area around the central bus station, and Wielandplatz, depending on the time of the day. Additionally, 42% of women stated that they avoid these locations because they lack adequate lighting, while only 23% of men expressed this concern (see Fig. 5).

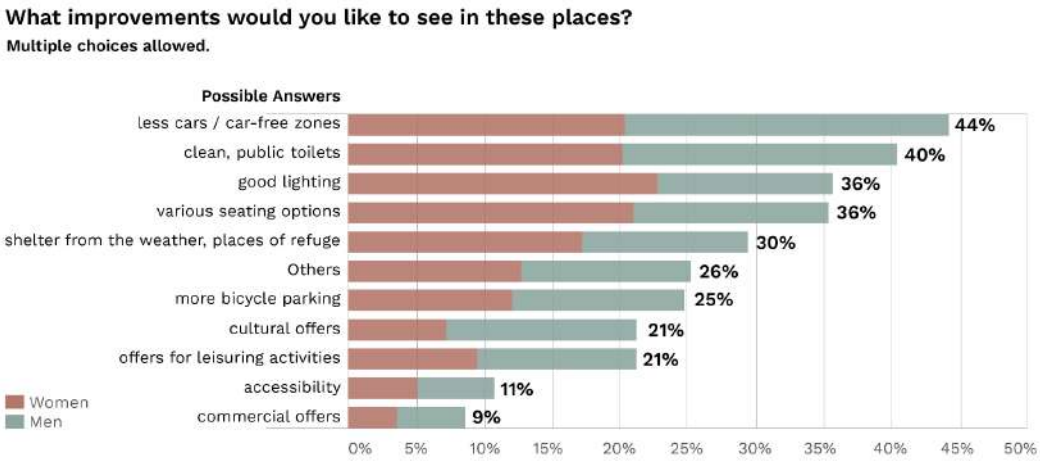


Figure 5. Citizen survey: Places that people avoid. What improvements would you like to see in these places? Illustrations by the authors, 2024.

### *3.2 Identification of Thematic Fields from the Data Collected at Site Assessments*

The utilisation of Gehl's 12 Quality Criteria for assessing selected public spaces heightened participants' awareness of Weimar's public realm and informed the development of thematic fields. The seven public space site assessments and city walks clarified perceptions and highlighted well-functioning and appreciated public squares such as Frauenplan, Herderplatz, and Marktplatz, influencing the development of the thematic field Facilities & Furnishing.

Additionally, the assessment revealed issues like inadequate lighting at Seidengasse and the intimidating, seigneurial statue causing discomfort at Platz der Demokratie. Prompted by this patriarchal statue, an analysis of female statues and an investigation into street names were conducted. In particular, the proportion of streets named after male and female personalities was quantified. This investigation built the basis for the thematic field Representation & Appreciation.

The night walk provided an opportunity for the participants to share their experiences and perspectives in public spaces after dawn. Besides discussing the lack of lighting in parks and public spaces, the participants revealed that they typically walk faster at night and frequently prefer using their bikes to move more quickly and independently without relying on public transport. All participants employed strategies to enhance their sense of security, regardless of their overall feeling of safety in Weimar. The night walk laid the groundwork for the thematic field Security & Social Control.

The PSPL measurements resulted in a comprehensive quantitative database of people's movement patterns and dwelling activities (see Fig. 6). Over two days with mild and sunny weather conditions, approximately 9,500 movement patterns and 1,200 stationary activities were recorded. In contrast to initial expectations, fewer people, bicycles, and cars were counted on Saturday compared to Thursday. In Weimar's historic centre, walking is the preferred movement mode, with approximately 65% of observed individuals walking, 25% utilising motorised traffic, and 8% cycling. The low percentage of bicycle usage may be attributed to a lack of dedicated bike lanes, the presence of cobblestone pavement, and restrictions on cycling in some areas of the

inner city, e.g., Frauenplan. For similar reasons, there were only few people with mobility disabilities, as supported by the citizen survey. The movement observations constituted the foundation for the thematic field Mobility & Accessibility.

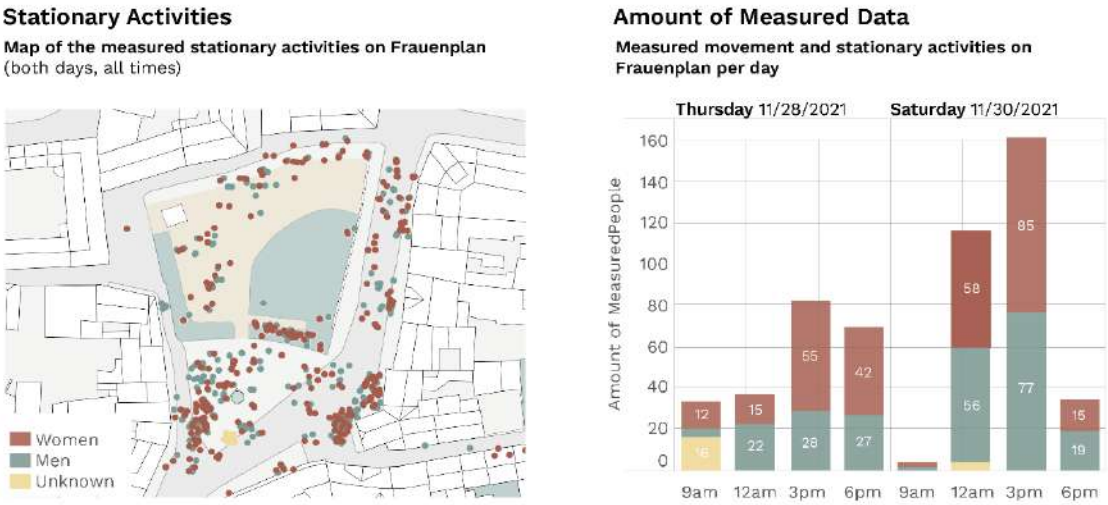


Figure 6. Measured stationary activities (map) and amount of movement and stationary activities at Frauenplan (diagram). Illustrations by the authors, 2024.

The observation of the stationary activities revealed that most individuals, with more women than men, were either standing and conversing or sitting commercially. The abundance of restaurants and cafes contributed to a significant amount of commercial sitting, with 50% of individuals observed sitting in this manner on Frauenplan. A high percentage of individuals was standing due to a lack of seating opportunities, particularly at Platz der Demokratie (96%) and Seifengasse (84%). All observed locations exhibited similar patterns of sitting or standing behaviour among women and men of all age groups. A notable presence of teenagers was observed at Wielandplatz and Poseckscher Garten. In the latter, one-quarter of the observed individuals were playing, most of them children. Here, over two-thirds were females, given the prevalence of care work among women and the presence of a playground. This tendency of more women engaged in care work towards children, or the elderly was observed across all locations. This gender-specific data and its findings were not only discussed in workshops but also with city officials. It quickly became clear that further investigations were necessary. The city officials appeared to have limited knowledge of gender-sensitive urban planning but showed openness to how such approaches could enhance public spaces for women, benefiting all citizens. These sessions highlighted the scarcity of women in decision-making positions and underscored the importance of public relations and awareness-raising for gender-sensitive urban planning. This gave rise to the thematic field Visibility & Appropriation.

### *3.3 Thematic Fields for Gender-Sensitive Urban Planning in Weimar*

The analysis identified five essential thematic fields for gender-sensitive urban planning (see Fig. 7) that indicate shortcomings in Weimar's public spaces: (a) Facilities &

Furnishing; (b) Representation & Appreciation; (c) Security & Social Control; (d) Mobility & Accessibility; (e) Visibility & Appropriation. Their development was shaped by a strong interplay between the findings from the collected data, the participatory processes, and the discussions with city officials.


Figure 7. Overview of the thematic fields. Illustration by the authors, 2024.

a. Facilities & Furnishing: The Basic Needs of Women in Public Spaces

In Weimar, the diverse requirements of all groups of people are not adequately addressed. The citizen survey revealed that 97% of female and 95% of male respondents encountered obstacles when attempting to utilise public spaces. A notable absence of public, non-commercial seating that encourages social interaction and is constructed from appealing materials like wood is evident. 67% of female respondents expressed a clear need for comfortable seating and shelter from inclement weather, particularly in winter. Without this, the full utilisation of public spaces is impeded for several months of the year.

Additional deficiencies in public facilities include the lack of public toilets (see Fig. 8), access to free drinking water, and opportunities to care for young children. Almost one-quarter of the surveyed women aged 25 to 40 highlighted the absence of facilities for changing diapers, feeding, or breastfeeding children in public spaces. In this age group, the need for clean public toilets was above average, with 86% of respondents indicating this as a priority. Therefore, caregivers are often compelled to rely on commercial, private offerings, making it more challenging to perform care work in public spaces. The drugstore chain dm, for instance, provides essential amenities for free, including changing tables with diapers and care wipes, as well as breastfeeding corners (Reckewerth, 2021). In contrast, most public restrooms are currently fee-based, poorly maintained, and not barrier-free. As a result, most people utilise the sanitary facilities of public institutions and restaurants. This situation leads to stress in the everyday lives of Weimar's residents.

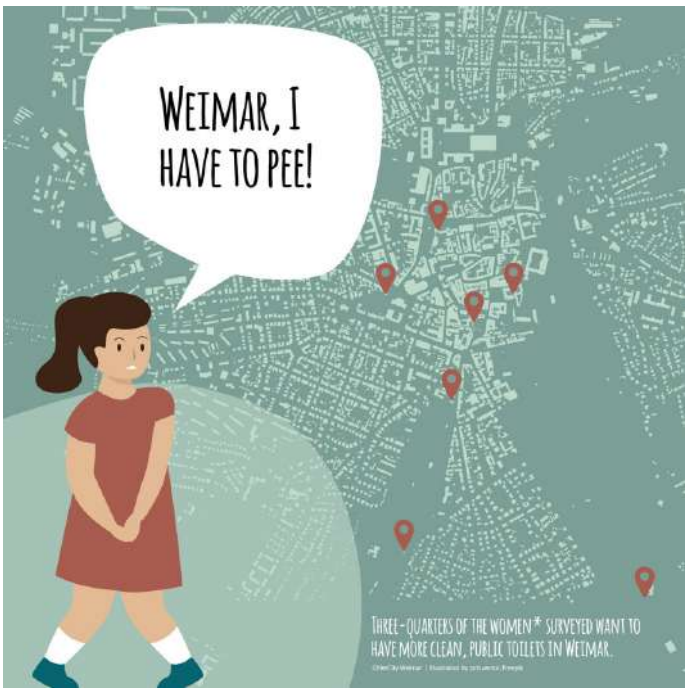


Figure 8. Facilities and Furnishing: Three-quarters of the female respondents of the citizen survey wish for more clean, public toilets in Weimar. Illustration by the authors, 2021.

b. Representation & Appreciation: The Importance of Recognizing Women's Contributions in Public Spaces

Weimar's public spaces reflect an imbalance in the culture of remembrance, conveying an outdated image of society. The equestrian statue on Platz der Demokratie, for example, stands in stark contrast to the nameless sculpture of a mother in Donndorfplatz, a symbol of the historically idealised distribution of roles that no longer reflects today's societal values.

Of the over 200 streets named after public figures in Weimar, only 20 honour significant women, representing less than 10% of the total (see Fig. 9). Furthermore, the nomenclature of the streets often leads to confusion regarding the individuals they commemorate. For instance, Schopenhauerstrasse is named after the writer Johanna Schopenhauer but is commonly mistaken as being dedicated to her son. The current list of new and renamed streets in Weimar is dominated by proposals bearing male names, with only one woman represented among the 21 entries, indicating no forthcoming improvement (Stadt Weimar, 2021).

Moreover, Weimar has only one monument dedicated to a female public figure: the Käthe Kollwitz statue in a residential neighbourhood. Notably, this statue has a flat base, placing the viewer at eye level with Kollwitz, in contrast to the elevated male statues on Theaterplatz and Platz der Demokratie. In the city walks, the participants noted the absence of a monument on the pedestal on Goetheplatz, leading to the conception of a temporary monument to honour Weimar's female residents on International Women's Day 2022 (see section 3.3).


Figure 9. Representation and Appreciation: Of more than 200 streets in Weimar less than 10% honour significant women. Illustration by the authors, 2021.

c. Security & Social Control: Women's Perception of Safety in Public Spaces

In Weimar, a significant proportion of the population faces restrictions on the safe and self-determined utilisation of public spaces. The citizen survey revealed that over 90% of women do not feel comfortable in certain public spaces at specific times, with approximately 91% avoiding these areas after dawn. Around 50% of the surveyed women deliberately took detours to avoid parks like Ilmpark or Weimarhallenpark, squares like Wielandplatz or Goetheplatz, and busy, unlit streets like Schubertstrasse (see. Fig. 10). Notably, 40% of female residents reported inadequate lighting as a reason to avoid public parks, compared to only 20% of males. Inadequate lighting and poor visibility present significant risks of accidents and influence perceptions of safety. Because of this, women develop strategies such as taking alternative routes, using faster modes of transportation, e.g., bicycles, sharing locations with friends, or carrying keys as a defensive measure. One participant observed that individuals must choose between traversing a poorly lit, secluded bicycle path in the park, or sharing the road with speeding vehicles. Moreover, the street lighting in Weimar is designed primarily for cars, with pedestrians and cyclists being the secondary consideration. Positioning the street lighting centrally above the street leaves pedestrian and bicycle paths in darkness.

In the end, 20% of the surveyed people reported that their need for safety and protection in public spaces is not being met, nine women and one man have expressed a desire for enhanced security. The online platform Catcalls of Weimar collates reports, predominantly from women, of microaggressions and derogatory remarks. These, though not legally punishable, significantly impact their sense of security. A quarter of the residents have either witnessed or been victims of violence in Weimar's public spaces.

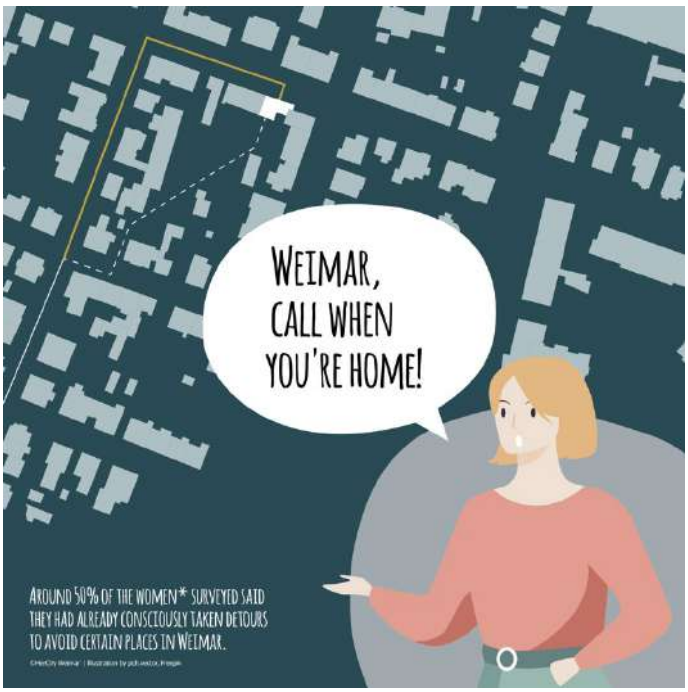


Figure 10. Security and Social Control: Approximately 50% of the female respondents reported to consciously taking detours to avoid certain locations in Weimar. Illustration by the authors, 2021.

d. Mobility & Accessibility: Enhancing Self-Determined Mobility and Barrier-Free Design in Public Spaces

In Weimar, there is a significant lack of accessible transportation options and a disregard for the diverse needs of all community members. Nearly half of the respondents advocated for reduced traffic and the expansion of car-free zones (see Fig. 11). However, current traffic planning predominantly prioritises automobiles over cyclists and pedestrians. The redesign of Sophie Stiftsplatz in 2022 exemplifies the omission of bicycle lanes from urban planning. Similarly, the redesign of Wielandplatz prioritised vehicular traffic flow, adding a turning lane for cars at the expense of a planted green strip. Both decisions highlight the city's focus on vehicular mobility over other modes of transportation.

Furthermore, Weimar has only five marked cycle paths, each approximately one metre wide and constructed with a white strip on the right streetside. They indicate a clear deficiency in the provision of safe and accessible cycling routes. A survey conducted by the city of Weimar in 2015 revealed that over 50% of respondents felt unsafe while biking , with approximately 11% reporting a complete lack of safety (Dunkel, Bellmann and Harder, 2017).

Pedestrians also face challenges due to the existing mobility infrastructure, such as inadequate traffic light timing. For example, the traffic light at Wielandplatz is green for eleven seconds only, insufficient for children, senior citizens, and pedestrians with limited mobility. The primary benefit of such short traffic light phases is the increased traffic flow for cars. Weimar's public transportation system fails to meet the needs of such groups and individuals with multi-stop-routes, as the routes, ticket options, and schedules are not tailored to their requirements. From 11 p.m. onwards, the public transportation system effectively shuts down (StadtWirtschaft Weimar, 2024), impeding

independent and individual evening planning. The presence of cobblestones hinders the accessibility of the city centre, creating a barrier for individuals with limited mobility, cyclists, and families with strollers. According to 80% of the survey respondents' people with disabilities are less visible in Weimar's public spaces.


Figure 11. Mobility and Accessibility: Nearly half of the female survey respondents wish for less traffic and more car-free zones in Weimar. Illustration by the authors, 2021.

e. Visibility & Appropriation: The Essential Role of Women's Participation in Shaping Public Spaces

In Weimar, there is a conspicuous absence of societal diversity at all levels, manifested both by the physical homogeneity of public spaces and the lack of diversity in decision-making processes. Figure 12 shows that only 14 out of 43 voting city councillors are women (Stadtrat Weimar, 2022), indicating a clear gender disparity. Despite the city's extensive administrative apparatus, there is only one single official, dedicated to promoting gender equality and handling reports of discrimination (Stadtrat Weimar, 2022). However, this Equal Opportunities Officer holds an advisory role only.
Another concern is the homogeneity of individuals in public spaces. In particular, the city centre is primarily designed for tourists, with the key objective of maintaining a tourist-friendly image reminiscent of Weimar's Classic era to boost the local economy. In this context, appropriating public spaces is difficult: A survey response prospectively described the city centre as an "open-air museum", where everything appeared untouched and sterile. The workshop participants echoed this sentiment.


Figure 12. Visibility & Appropriation: Of the 43 city council voting members, only 14 are women. Illustration by the authors, 2021.

### *3.4 Raising Awareness for Gender-Sensitive Urban Planning*

Given the apparent lack of comprehension among municipal representatives, Her City Weimar efforts were deliberately focused on public relations and awareness-raising campaigns. The initiative aimed to ensure that the city's development considers the diverse needs and perspectives of residents through open dialogue and citizen engagement. By leveraging the established network, substantial awareness for gender-sensitive urban planning was raised among Weimar's citizens through various platforms and media. Publishing the research findings on a website increased the initiative's reach across Germany and beyond. This included 750 Instagram followers and 1,200 visitors from 49 countries on the Her City Weimar website.

The launch of the @hercityweimar Instagram channel at the outset and the hercityweimar.eu website towards the conclusion were essential in extending the project's reach. To facilitate open access, the entire process, collected data, and findings were disseminated on this website with the intention of raising awareness and inspiring similar projects. Publishing content in both German and English across these platforms ensured broader public access. The website incorporates an animated video published on YouTube that provides an accessible and understandable overview of the entire project.

Moreover, a series of events and activities were organised around International Women's Day 2022 to educate residents about local urban planning challenges from a gender-sensitive perspective. First, a feminist city walk was conducted in collaboration with the local Green Party, presenting the thematic fields and discussing current challenges and opportunities with the participants. Second, in collaboration with a local theatre and the women's organisation an event was organised at Goetheplatz. It drew

attention to the underrepresentation and lack of appreciation for women in Weimar's public spaces and allowed female passers-by to ascend an empty pedestal via a temporarily constructed stage to set themselves as monuments.
Furthermore, a poster campaign was initiated in collaboration with local stores, restaurants, and institutions in the city centre. The posters, also available for download on the project website, pinpointed the local planning issues of the thematic fields. Each poster featured a QR code that directed citizens to the initiative's website. At the events, various materials and brochures promoting significant women of Weimar were distributed.
In collaboration with the local women's organisation and the Officer for Equality, a campaign was initiated to install an additional street sign at SchopenhauerStrasse, honouring Johanna Schopenhauer, an author and renowned Saloner from the Weimar Classic era (see Fig. 13). The sign was unveiled on International Women's Day 2022, alongside city officials and Weimar's mayor, correcting the misconception that the honour was bestowed upon her son. To address the shortage of female street names and lack of public remembrance of women in Weimar, a brochure was published with a local cultural scientist, the women's organisation, and the Officer for Equality. This brochure identified 40 significant women who have received little recognition in public spaces. In addition, a list of notable women and queer personalities from Weimar was compiled, along with a public petition, and submitted to city hall for consideration in future street naming.


Figure 13. The unveiling of the additional street sign for Johanna Schopenhauer.
Photo by Sophia Fahl, 2021.

The publication of several articles enhanced the project's visibility. Additionally, the initiative participated in a digital exhibition organised by the university's Equal Opportunity Office and was referenced in numerous articles, including one by University Communications. Since its start, the researchers have continued collaborating with UN-Habitat's global Her City Initiative, contributing to discussions on Her City projects worldwide and sharing insights at various meetings. Her City Weimar was recognised as an exemplary project in the initiative's first-anniversary report, published in 2022 (Fabre, Martinuzzi and Levonen, 2022).

## 4. Discussion

This project integrated the Her City Toolbox with a citizen science approach and systematic data collection within the participatory process. Although the dataset is specific to Weimar,the thematic fields and methodological approach reveal relevance for other urban contexts. Citizen science projects deepen participants' understanding and foster greater ownership of the research outcomes (Kaptan et al., 2023), as exemplified by the sustained interest in the Her City Weimar project. Combining these qualitative insights with quantitative data mutually validates findings (Kelle, 2006), facilitating the uncovering and identification of the thematic fields.

a. Facilities & Furnishing:

In urban areas, the absence of public seating can result in reduced time spent in public spaces or the utilisation of commercial seating alternatives. This underscores the necessity for a greater quantity of non-commercial seating (Fussverkehr Schweiz 2015) with an adequate design, material, and comfort (Gehl 2018). Therefore, measurements of public space usage are crucial for evidencing the quality and time spent in public spaces.

The lack of public toilets and caregiving facilities in public spaces increases reliance on commercial, private offerings. This highlights the necessity of clean, publicly accessible toilets as a fundamental need for all, particularly vulnerable people such as homeless women (Maroko et al., 2021). Additionally, the absence of caregiving facilities frequently leads parents to retreat to designated areas like playgrounds (Reckewerth, 2021). Designing urban environments that facilitate daily activities and requirements of individuals acknowledges the importance of care work in public spaces.

b. Representation & Appreciation

The underrepresentation of women's contributions in public spaces perpetuates their marginalisation in societal consciousness. Bake (2015, p. 6) confirms this, emphasising that "street names are integral to a city's collective memory", potentially shaping perceptions of gender roles and social inclusion. As such, actively promoting the recognition and commemoration of women's contributions in public spaces through street names, monuments, installations, and exhibitions might promote gender equality.

c. Security & Social Control:

Poor lighting and visibility in urban areas can negatively impact the perception of safety in public spaces for all individuals, especially women. The City of Vienna (2024) concurs with this observation, noting that "a sense of security is an important criterion for

women and girls in particular when using public space". Women are frequently socialised to feel apprehensive in public spaces, particularly at night or around strangers, potentially restricting their use of these places (Kern, 2020). Integrating safety considerations into urban planning and promoting mixed-use neighbourhoods may mitigate security concerns and enhance public space utilisation for affected user groups.

d. Mobility & Accessibility:

The absence of a secure and adequate cycling network fosters insecurity while cycling and hampers independent, self-determined mobility. Macmichael (2021) emphasises the importance of such cycling infrastructure for women, children, and seniors, as safety concerns are their primary barrier, evidenced by the increased proportion of female cyclists after installing additional bike lanes in Paris. Prioritising accessible, affordable, and user-friendly modes of transport like cycling and walking significantly enhances independent movement for women and children (Norcliffe, 2017) while promoting physical activity.

The car-centric transportation system fails to cater the diverse needs of city residents, causing stress for vulnerable groups such as caregivers, individuals with limited mobility, children, and the elderly. Reckewerth (2021) corroborates this, noting that car-centric public spaces and traffic routes complicate caregiving tasks, contributing to stress. Kail (2023) argues that expanding pedestrian, bicycle infrastructure, and public transport, benefits all, particularly the vulnerable and those with limited financial resources. Implementing traffic calming concepts such as the 15-Minutes City or Superblocks potentially reduce vehicular traffic, improve public space ambiance, and enhance perceived safety (urbanista, 2024).

e. Visibility & Appropriation:

The design choices of urban planners are significantly influenced by their personal experiences and circumstances. Consequently, the lack of diversity in planning teams and decision-makers creates obstacles for those whose needs are unmet or overlooked. Kern (2021) posits that urban environments are shaped by decision-makers who frequently overlook the barriers faced by women. Decisions made by predominantly male decision-makers often lack understanding or concern for their impact on women (Kern 2021). Through accessible and inclusive participatory formats that actively engage vulnerable groups, different perspectives are considered in planning.

Raising awareness of gender-sensitive urban planning through dissemination

The establishment of a campaign to raise awareness of gender-sensitive urban planning successfully stimulated a public discussion on the topic, as evidenced by the high number of followers on social media and project website visitors. The utilisation of social media proved an effective strategy for reaching young people. Moreover, the project's success was facilitated through podcasts, newspapers, and events, as well as the existing networks and collaborations within the context of Weimar. This resulted in city officials and political parties becoming interested in the project. To achieve long lasting change, there is a necessity to further enhance public awareness of this topic through inclusive language and visually appealing graphics.

Nevertheless, the project encountered several challenges, including a tight timeframe and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Limiting participation to young women in Weimar and finding accessible workshop schedules to accommodate participants at

different life stages were particularly challenging, leading to higher student involvement. Greater diversity and intersectionality in terms of age, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds would have enriched the discussions and broadened perspectives.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper presents the results of the Her City Weimar project. It features a methodology that integrates marginalised groups, such as women, into urban planning by combining a citizen-science approach with the Her City Toolbox. It complements this qualitative approach by collecting gender-sensitive data on public space usage, addressing the lack of relevant gender-disaggregated data. As a result, this paper identifies five thematic fields for gender-sensitive urban planning, namely (1) Facilities & Furnishing, (2) Representation & Appreciation, (3) Security & Social Control, (4) Mobility & Accessibility, and (5) Visibility & Appropriation, providing concepts to examine existing cities and design inclusive urban environments. Disseminating these insights through various communication platforms was essential to raise awareness of gender-sensitive urban planning in Weimar and beyond.

The article has identified a critical need to transform the self-image of urban planners – who presume to be aware of residents' needs – toward participatory processes that actively solicit the real needs of city dwellers. Developing inclusive and resilient cities demands focusing on historically overlooked population groups in planning decisions. This project underscores the necessity of a gender-sensitive and needs-oriented approach to urban planning, addressing the diverse realities of individuals. Grounding planning processes in data and facts is essential. Only through inclusive, data-driven approaches can urban environments be created that truly reflect and serve the needs of all inhabitants (see Fig. 14).

Figure 14. A gender-sensitive urban planning meets the needs of all residents.
Illustration by the authors, 2021.

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# The Relationship between Access to Safe Water and Sanitation and Women's Health in the Self-produced Settlements.
## A Case Study of Mathare in Nairobi

Angela Dominguez
*University of the Basque Country, Spain*
*angeladominguezsanchez@gmail.com*

**Abstract**
Access to safe water and sanitation in self-produced settlements is a significant societal problem. Yet, there is a notable gap in understanding and evaluating the impact on women's health, and how this intersects with public space. In Sub-Saharan Africa, nearly half of the urban population lives in self-produced settlements. These are complex environments that are continuously growing and are home to almost two-thirds of the population in cities such as Nairobi. Mathare, one of the largest self-produced settlements in Nairobi, exhibits notably poor health outcomes, with women experiencing diarrhoea at twice the average rate of Nairobi. In such a precarious context, the health of its inhabitants requires a specific approach. This paper devises a multidimensional framework for analysing and evaluating the key spatial and socioeconomic factors affecting women's health in these self-produced settlements. It connects women's health and well-being to broader structural disadvantages, such as insecure tenure, poor housing conditions, low monthly income and a lack of access to basic services. This case study emphasises the critical importance of access to safe water and sanitation. Women's daily routines often revolve around water, exposing them to heightened risks of waterborne diseases such as diarrhoea or typhoid fever. Moreover, many women can only access water and sanitation in public spaces in Mathare, where they are particularly vulnerable to violence. This research also concludes how these risks perpetuate a cycle of poverty and vulnerability among women in these communities and emphasises the critical importance of implementing multidisciplinary policies and tailored approaches to enhance the health and well-being of women living in self-produced settlements.

**Keywords:** self-produced settlements, women's health, slum health, access to safe water, access to adequate sanitation

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## 1. Introduction

By 2050, around 3 billion people will live in self-produced settlements globally (UN, 2016). This paper focuses on Sub-Saharan Africa, where roughly 238 million people live (UN, 2022). The rise of self-produced settlements represents a major issue for health promotion in cities of the Global South, as they harbour profound health disparities (Corburn & Riley, 2016). In the African context, the health challenges posed by self-produced settlements are particularly acute in places such as Kenya and its capital Nairobi. Approximately 65% of Nairobi's population live in self-produced settlements, representing only 5% of the city's residential land (Corburn & Riley, 2016). The health of women living in these settlements is influenced by factors such as economic status, educational level, and the conditions of the built environment.

In Kenya, lack of access to safe water and inadequate sanitation was the second leading cause of death in 2009 (Ministry of Health, 2014). In addition, women in self-produced settlements remain neglected compared to the rest of Nairobi and Kenya, as mortality rates are higher in comparison to middle- and high-income areas (APHRC, 2014). This article aims to deconstruct and explore the relationship between access to clean and safe water and sanitation and the health of women in self-produced settlements, illustrating intersections with the public spaces significant to these debates. It develops a multidimensional framework alongside a set of indicators for the analysis and evaluation of the key physical and socioeconomic dimensions of health, addressing them in relation with the main risks affecting women in self-produced settlements. This paper analyses the case study of Mathare, one of the largest self-produced settlements in the city of Nairobi (KNBS, 2019), where the incidence of diarrhoea reported by women and girls double Nairobi's average (Corburn & Karanja, 2016).

Although the gendered division of unpaid labour is a global phenomenon, women in the Global South are most often responsible for water supply, cooking, hygiene and small-scale productive activities, many of which take place in the public sphere (Matamanda et al., 2024). Where access to safe water and adequate sanitation is not available, this results in a great investment of women's time and energy. Furthermore, it increases the risk of water-related diseases and intensifies women's exposure to violent incidents such as sexual abuse and is linked to the perpetuation of their poverty (West et al., 2013; Matamanda et al., 2024, Harris et al., 2015; Sultana, 2020; Anwar et al., 2020). The direct and indirect violence women face in public spaces (Chant, 2013) hinders their safe access to water and sanitation as well as their active participation in urban life. The threat of experiencing violence often leads to women's withdrawal from social networks due to feelings of shame or social stigma (Heise et al., 2002). Consequently, this undermines their right to access resources and shape the public spaces that fulfil their human needs in the city (Harvey, 2008). Safe water is a vital element in the interaction between the dwellers of self-produced settlements and the State. Its absence evinces their marginalisation and lack of recognition as citizens and deepens their feelings of exclusion and precariousness while eroding their capacity to sustain livelihoods (Sultana 2020, Anwar et al., 2020).

Hence, it is crucial to develop an intersectional approach for understanding the nexus between the right to the city, gender, access to water and health (Matamanda, 2022). To explore the relationship between access to safe water and sanitation and women's health in self-produced settlements, this paper begins with a literature review to characterise these urban contexts and understand the particularities and factors

impacting health, especially among women. Secondly, drawing on existing literature, the paper develops an analytical framework with key indicators that defines measurable physical and socio-economic dimensions related to safe access to water and sanitation in these settlements. Thirdly, this paper presents an overview of the context of the case study, assessing the influence of colonialism in the creation of spatial inequality that ultimately affects the quality of public space and women's health. The fourth section applies the aforementioned analytical framework to the case of Mathare using data collected from local rigorous studies. Finally, the conclusion highlights the impact the precarious supply of basic services such as water and sanitation have on the health of women in Mathare, and its reciprocal interaction with the socioeconomic context, to undermine women's right to the city.

## 2. Literature review

*2.1. Characterisation of self-produced settlements*

Existing research deploys various terms, such as "slum" or "informal settlement" (Nuissl & Heinrichs, 2013), to characterise the socio-spatial concentration of urban poverty, each laden with subjectivities and varying by geographical context. However, these expressions fail to convey their true significance or the economic and cultural contributions they make to the cities in which they are located (UN Habitat, 2006). On one hand, the term 'informal' perpetuates the exclusion and discrediting of its residents, proving insufficient to capture its complexity while obscuring the responsibility of institutions in producing informality as they perpetuate power relations (Abad, 2020). On the other hand, the more common yet equally controversial term is 'slum', which continues to carry a negative connotation of poverty, unsanitary conditions, misery, and insecurity (Nuissl & Heinrichs, 2013).

In this paper, the concept of 'self-produced settlements' is employed to restore agency and legitimacy to the population (Roy, 2011; Nuissl & Henrichs, 2013; Abad, 2020). This approach analyses 'the urban' from a subaltern perspective, eschewing the false dichotomy of formal/informal (Yiftachel & Mammon, 2022; Miraftab, 2009) and encouraging citizens to challenge normalised power relations and define their own terms of engagement (Miraftab, 2009). This is especially pertinent in the context of such colonial heresy as Nairobi. Additionally, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat) has defined a 'slum' as a spatial context with "inadequate access to safe drinking water, inadequate access to sanitation and other infrastructure, poor structural quality of housing, overcrowding and insecure residential conditions" (UN Habitat, 2003, p.12). However, self-produced settlements are not homogeneous, and inhabitants do not have equal access to space production and its associated services, with exclusions often based on income, gender, ethnicity, and other factors (Corburn & Riley, 2016)." Moreover, Corburn and Riley (2016) highlight the broader structural forces that contribute to the formation and persistence of self-produced settlements, including political corruption that benefits from urban poverty, neoliberal pressures that weaken or privatise services and a lack of institutional investment in infrastructure and housing. This, in turn, demands a critical look at the histories of colonialism and the 'export' of urban planning decisions from the Global North to the Global South, failures in wealth redistribution and corruption, of housing policies and other national and urban policies (Corburn & Riley, 2016; Ezeh, 2017; UN Habitat, 2003).

*2.2. 'Slum health': Health in self-produced settlements*

Determinants of health in self-produced settlements require specific attention, as interventions effective in other urban contexts may not be applicable to these areas (Ezeh, 2017). Corburn and Riley (2016) define 'slum health' as the ongoing advancement of well-being, living conditions, access to services, and life-affirming opportunities, coupled with the mitigation of risks, disabilities, hazards, and diseases, particularly in the Global South. They argue that certain resources and technologies essential for improving slum health, such as municipal wastewater treatment, necessitate large-scale investments most effectively managed by governmental entities, whereas other resources can be more efficiently provided by local communities (Corburn and Riley, 2016). Dwellers of self-produced settlements cope with multiple overlapping problems, such as entrenched poverty, overcrowded housing and tenure insecurity, and these issues contribute to health inequalities, for example, increased risk of exposure to environmental pathogens causing infections and communicable diseases (Corburn and Sverdlik 2017). Insecure tenure results in a lack of investment in housing improvements, such as the provision of latrines or improved electrical and structural systems, increasing the potential for accidents or exposure to climatic events. In addition, overcrowding is associated with the development of respiratory diseases and the spread of tuberculosis, influenza, meningitis and other diseases (Corburn & Riley, 2016; Mitullah, 2002). Moreover, diseases such as cholera, typhoid, numerous bacterial diseases, malaria and other enteric diseases flourish in conditions where people have inadequate access to water and sanitation and where stagnant water is contaminated (ONU Habitat, 2003, Winter et al., 2018). Self-produced settlements are unhealthy places with particular risks of infection and injury alongside shared environmental risks such as poor sanitation (Ezeh 2017). Indeed, Corburn and Sverdlik (2017, p. 5 state that residents of self-produced settlements "increasingly face the 'triple threat' of infectious diseases, non-communicable conditions (e.g. diabetes, cardiovascular disease and mental illness) and injuries due to violence or road traffic accidents".

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) attach central importance to access to water and sanitation across several SDGs. Of particular note are SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). The latter include specific targets and indicators that foster universal access to water and sanitation and consequently the health and well-being of all people, particularly women and girls.

*2.3. The case of women*

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by inadequate water and sanitation, poor housing, high crime rates and frequent sexual violence in self-produced settlements. Women often serve as the chief earner; they frequently work multiple jobs with minimal support from law enforcement given the risks of violence they face. These harsh conditions severely impact their safety, health, and quality of life (FAWCO, n.d., Amnesty International, 2009).

Women in self-produced settlements also bear disproportionate responsibilities for unpaid work including water provision, cleaning, and cooking, exposing them not only to mental stress but also to health risks related to waterborne diseases and musculoskeletal issues such as arthritis from carrying water over long distances (Matamanda, 2022). Additionally, poor sanitation practices during menstruation contribute to health issues such as vaginal

infections and urinary tract infections (UTIs) and complications like haemorrhoids are common (Winter et al., 2018).
Women also face increased vulnerability to violence while fetching water in the public space or using public sanitation facilities after dark (West et al., 2013; Sultana, 2020). This threatening scenario leads many women to opt for practices that avoid the use of public sanitation points, but which pose a risk to both their individual and collective health. Some of these alternatives include not drinking liquids, inducing constipation and UTIs, and also using so-called 'flying toilets' (Winter et al., 2018). This latter practice consists of defecating in a bag that is then thrown into public space, greatly impacting community health as it contaminates and stagnates surface water and aquifers, increasing the risk of malaria and other diseases spread by mosquitoes and other vectors, such as dengue fever (Winter et al., 2018; Corburn & Karanja, 2016). Additionally, these areas become breeding grounds for viruses and bacteria, leading to common illnesses among women, such as typhoid fever and diarrhoea (Corburn & Karanja, 2016). Furthermore, long-term sustained exposure in early life to excreta-related pathogens such as helminths or worms, can limit cognitive brain development and decrease immunity to disease (Corburn & Karanja, 2016).
Additionally, diarrhoea is prevalent among women in Mathare, with 90% of cases attributed to faecal contamination of drinking water and food (Corburn & Karanja, 2016), severely impacting health by hindering nutrient absorption. This poses a critical concern for the 12% of Nairobi's self-produced settlement residents affected by HIV, as diarrhoea reduces the effectiveness of antiretroviral treatment (Madise et al., 2012). In addition, women in these settlements face a 38% higher HIV prevalence than men, primarily due to lower socio-economic status, higher rates of violence, and a lack of quality services and infrastructure (Madise et al., 2012; Corburn & Karanja, 2016; Amnesty International, 2010; West et al., 2013).
Further, inadequate water and sanitation services impose a significant economic burden on families in self-produced settlements. They incur costs for preventive measures such as purchasing uncontaminated water, using public latrines, and buying fuel for boiling water. Beyond that, they face medical expenses for treatment and lost wages due to illness, particularly when women must care for children during episodes of diarrhoea (Corburn & Karanja, 2016). Poor health outcomes also lead to economic losses at the national level, with sanitation-related diseases costing Kenya 0.9% of its GDP in lost productivity (WSP, 2012).

## 3. Analytical framework

Drawing on existing literature, an analytical framework for the determinants of women's health, alongside a set of measurable indicators, has been developed. The dimensions and sub-dimensions of the analytical framework, presented in Table 1, are drawn from those presented in "The Challenge of Slums" (UN, 2003). The physical determinants include (i) access to safe water, (ii) access to safe and dignified sanitation, and (iii) housing and environment. Socio-economic determinants include (iv) security of tenure, (v) income, and (vi) health status.

| **A. PHYSICAL DIMENSIONS** | |
|---|---|
| **1. Access to safe water** | |
| **Key Indicators** | **Recommendation** |
| **1.1. % of households with piped water inside the dwelling.** | 100% of households with piped water (UN, 2015) |
| **1.2. Distance ( metres) from any household to the nearest water point.** | 300m maximum to the nearest water point (Sphere Association, 2018). |
| **1.3. No. of people per water point.** | 250 people maximum per water point (Sphere Association, 2018). |
| **2. Access to safe and dignified sanitation** | |
| **Key Indicators** | **Recommendation** |
| **2.1. % of households with private sanitation.** | 100% of households have private sanitation (UN, 2015). |
| **2.2. Distance (m) from any household to a latrine.** | Maximum 30m distance between a household and a functioning latrine (see Note below). |
| **2.3. No. of people per latrine.** | 20 persons maximum (Sphere Association, 2018). |
| **2.4. % of households served by a waste collection system.** | 100% of households served by a waste collection system (UNHCR, 2024) |
| **2.5. Location of latrines and sanitation facilities in at-risk areas.** | All excreta containment facilities are at least 30 m from any surface or groundwater source (UNHCR, 2024). |
| **3. Housing and environment conditions** | |
| **Key Indicators** | **Recommendation** |
| **3.1. Sufficient usable area per person for private and public outdoor activities (This includes streets, health facilities, sanitation, public transport facilities, etc.).** | 45 m² of usable area per person (Sphere Association, 2018) |
| **3.2.Square metres of living space per person, excluding service areas (cooking space, bathing area and sanitation facilities).** | Minimum 3.5m2 of living space per person (excluding cooking and bathing space) (Sphere Association, 2018). |
| **3.3. Location of dwellings and facilities in at-risk areas.** | Dwellings and facilities located in safe areas, mantaining adecquate buffer zone from or avoiding known hazard zones such as flood plains, landslide-prone areas. near industrial sites or hazardous facilities and ensuring accessibility (Sphere standards, 2018). |
| **3.4. % of dwellings with permanent construction.** | 100% of the dwellings with permanent construction (UN, 2015). |
| **B. SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS** | |
| **4. Security of tenure** | |
| **Key Indicators** | **Recommendation** |
| **4.1. % of households/individuals who have a document guaranteeing security of tenure for their housing option.** | 100% of the households with a document guaranteeing security of tenure (UN, 2015). |
| **4.2. % of households with legal electricity connection.** | 100% of the households with legar electricity connection (UN, 2015). |
| **5. Economic income** | |
| **Key Indicators** | **Recommendation** |
| **5.1. Average monthly income** | Minimum montly salary: 13,471 KSh (Country Economy, 2012) |
| **5.2. % of residents dependent on the informal sector.** | 0% of residents dependent on the informal sector (ILO, 2015). |
| **5.3. % of income spent on purchasing water for basic services (access to drinking water, water for domestic hygiene and sanitation).** | Less than 5% of monthly income dedicated to basic services (Sphere Association, 2018) |
| **6. Health status** | |
| **Key Indicators** | **Recommendation** |
| **6.1. % of women reporting good health.** | Minimum 75% of the people reporting (Ministerio de Sanidad, 2020; Organización Panamericana de la Salud, 2018) |
| **6.2. % of women reporting illness related to water and sanitation** | 0% of the illness reported might be related to water and sanitation (UN, 2015) |
| **6.3. % of mothly income dedicated to access healthcare services** | 0% of monthly income dedicated to healthcare access (UN, 2015). |
| **6.4. % of the population that can access a primary healthcare centre walking less than one hour from their dwellings.** | Minimum 80 % (Sphere Association, 2018) |

Table 1. Key indicators and recommendations of the dimensions of women's health. Source: Author. Note: The Sphere standards (2018) recommend 50m; author reduces to 30m due to the dense environment.

For each sub-dimension, the existing policy literature has been reviewed to identify key measurable indicators with (minimum) recommendations. Specifically, the indicators presented draw on the Sphere standards (2018), Sustainable Development Goals and targets as well as other relevant documents.
Data collection[1] relating to Malthare case study and the minimum recommendations for each of the key indicators is based on a literature review of documentation related to this research work such as UN Habitat, NGDOs and reference groups of local self-produced settlements such as Slum Dwellers International, especially the study "Mathare Valley Collaborative Upgrading Plan" (MuST, Slum Dwellers International, University of Nairobi & University of California Berkeley; 2011). This study was conducted in collaboration with the MuST and the Department of Regional and City Planning and the School of Public Health of the University of Berkeley, which has academic experts on health in the self-produced settlements and has thoroughly analysed the issue in Nairobi. In addition, census documents and other demographic reports such as the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS) developed by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2015) and the Nairobi Urban Demographic and Health Surveillance System (Nairobi Urban HDSS-NUHDSS) have also been reviewed.
Moreover, efforts have been made to incorporate the voices of Kenyan women as much as possible, including in the bibliography works by Kenyan authors as well as through testimonies collected by other studies, from women in Nairobi's human settlements.

## 4. Case study: Mathare (Nairobi)

The colonial past and the segregation policies in Nairobi greatly shaped the challenges of the self-produced settlements of Nairobi. The declaration of Kenya as a British colony in 1920 led to the denial of political participation for Africans and Asians (until 1944), the expropriation of local lands in favour of settlers and the exploitation of the region's resources (Vecino, 2020). The city of Nairobi was founded due to its strategic location during the construction of the railway that would connect Mombasa and Kampala, to transport resources easily (Vecino, 2020). Europeans settled in the higher, fertile parts of the city to avoid tropical diseases, and colonial policies enforced the separation of Europeans from Indians and natives (Corburn & Riley, 2016). Segregation policies in Nairobi allocated 80% of the city's land to only 10% of its residents, contributing to the establishment of Mathare, one of Nairobi's oldest self-produced settlements, resulting from colonial displacement (Anyamba T.J.C., 2006; Abad, 2020). This historical exclusion persisted after independence, worsening housing shortages and rising prices driven by speculation, pushing many into informal sectors despite Nairobi's population doubling since 1990. Despite self-produced settlements occupying just 5% of residential land, they accommodate more than half of Nairobi's population, highlighting the disparity in access to formal housing, services, and infrastructure (Corburn & Riley, 2016; Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019).This stark contrast is set against the backdrop of Nairobi's broader socio-economic landscape, where the city, home to 4.4 million people, faces

[1] Refer to the cited studies for more details on data collection. Despite the difference in year of data collection, it is assumed that the context has changed little enough for the different data to be cross-referenced.

growing class inequality, making it one of the continent's most unequal cities (Dianova, 2017).
Notwithstanding poor living conditions, Mathare as well as other self-produced settlements keep attracting rural migrants seeking job and housing opportunities (Ren et al., 2020; Mitullah, 2002). Furthermore, the female population in the self-produced settlements of Nairobi has increased from 20.4% in 1948 to 50.1% in 2019, yet women remain politically underrepresented (KNBS, 2019; Kinyanjui, 2014). In Mathare, women constitute 48,4% of the total population (KNBS, 2019) and more than half of them are unemployed. Among those who are working, only a few had jobs with non-relatives, while others were either self-employed or engaged in family businesses (Darkey, 2013). However, in Mathare as in the rest of the self-produced settlements, women dominate markets. They often work as street vendors in there and peri-urban areas and as maids in wealthier neighbourhoods. This trend has led to the growth of self-produced settlements near these areas, mirroring patterns in other parts of the world. These jobs are crucial for household economies and provide social benefits and self-esteem and mobility is essential for their economic participation, but limited access and freedom of movement marginalise them in public spaces (Kinyanjui, 2014).

## 5. Analysis and Evaluation of Mathare

This section presents an analysis of how the Mathare case study meets the recommendation minimums for each of the key indicators presented in Table 1. The results are contextualised and supported by other relevant data to help understand the relationship between the different dimensions in the analytical framework.

### *5.1 Results of the indicators*

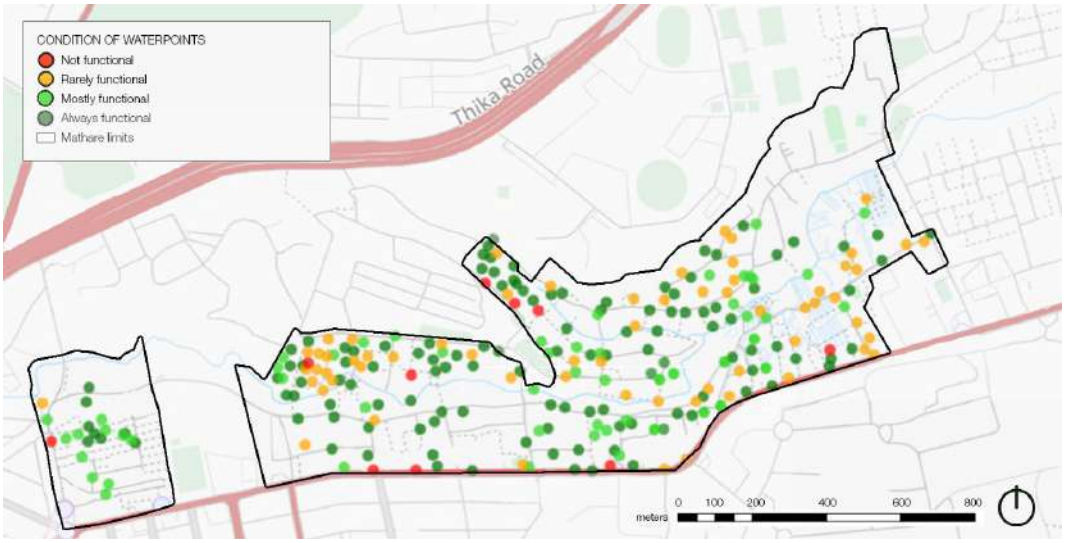
a. Access to safe water

*a.1. Percentage of households with piped water inside the dwelling*

In Mathare, only 10% of households have piped water at home (MuST et al., 2011); a figure that is far from the 100% recommended to ensure basic household habitability. Most households without piped water rely on public and backyard taps or purchase water from tankers (MuSTt et al., 2011) making public spaces crucial for accessing this basic commodity.
Furthermore, as Map 1 shows, the quality and reliability of water is variable. The infrastructure suffers from frequent contamination due to vandalised pipes, over-demand and supply cuts. Women and children, in particular, face long waits to access water. Moreover, community water points are controlled by cartels, resulting in price increases, especially during droughts (MuST et al., 2011).

*a.2. Distance (metres) from any household to the nearest water point*

The geographical distribution of water points in Mathare is uneven, heterogeneous as shown in Map 1. Relating this to the analytical framework, the scenario is positive as 100% of households are within 300 m of the nearest water point (UN Habitat, 2020).



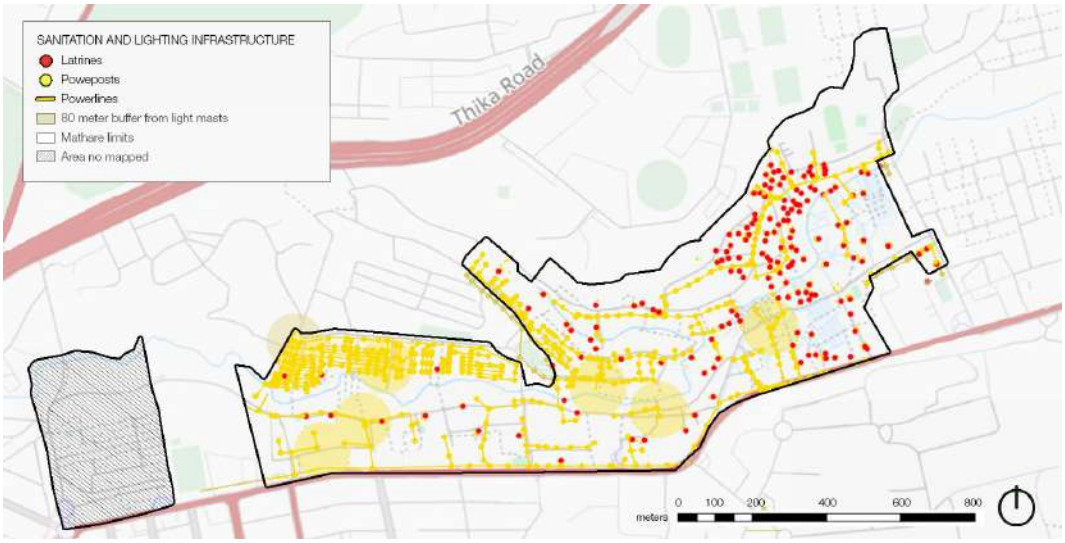

Map 1. Map of the reliability of the functioning water points in Mathare. Source: Author. Data from UN Habitat, 2020.

*a.3. No. of people per water point*
The total number of water points (taps) is too low to serve communities adequately and effectively, as each water point covers, on average, 315 people (MuST et al., 2011). This is 65 people above the recommendations of the Sphere standards (2018).

b. Access to safe and dignified sanitation
*b.1. Percentage of households with private sanitation*
Only 17% of households in Mathare have private sanitation infrastructure (Corburn & Karanja, 2016). The remaining 83% use public toilets which vary greatly in type and spatial distribution. Most of these 'functional' sanitation blocks are not connected to the wider sewerage system, leading to wastewater discharge into streets, rivers, and even the households themselves, polluting the riparian area and posing health risks, especially during floods (MuST et al., 2011).

*b.2. Distance (metres) from any household to a public latrine*
Only 29% of households live within 30 metres of a functioning public latrine block (MuST, 2011), as shown in Map 2. This is particularly problematic for women and girls who are forced to walk long distances in unsafe public spaces at night with no or insufficient lighting in order to use a public toilet or latrine. This distance poses significant safety risks for women and girls who face risks of violence and sexual abuse when accessing these facilities (Winter et al., 2018).

*b.3. No. of people per latrine*
The number of users per latrine varies widely, from 17 people per latrine to 232 depending on the district, with an average of 70 people per latrine (MuST et al., 2011). This exceeds three times the Sphere Standards recommendation referenced in the analytical framework.




Map 2. Map of location of public sanitation points and street lighting. Source: Autor. Data from: MuST, 2011.

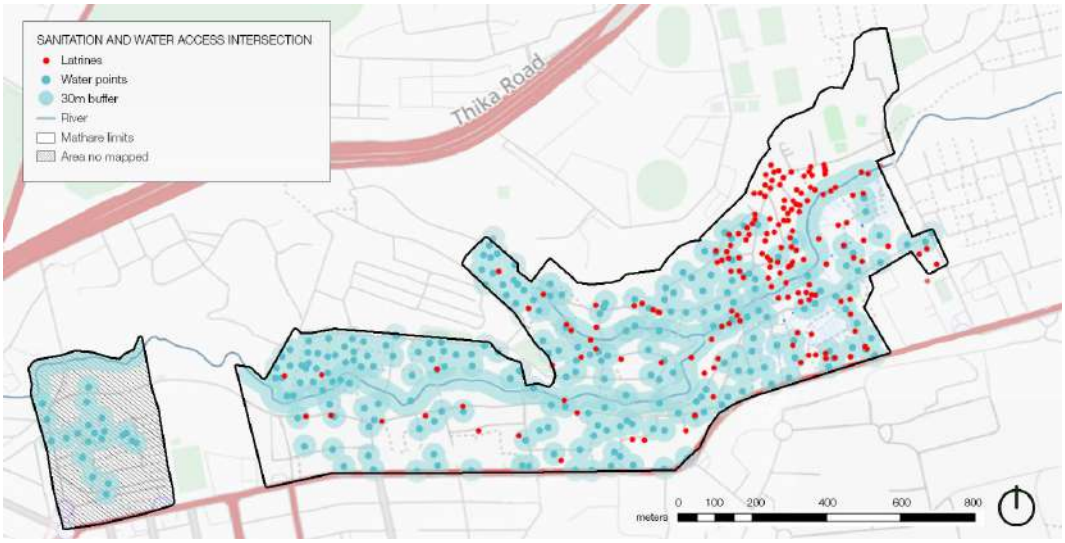
*b.4. Percentage of households served by a waste collection system*

Only 28% of households have waste collection services (formal or informal), resulting in widespread waste dumping and burning in public spaces. Corburn and Karanja (2016) estimate that 86% of households dump wastewater on the streets, posing health risks, especially for children (MuST et al., 2011). In Nairobi's slums, poor waste management leads to environmental hazards like water and air pollution, blocked drainage causing flooding and waterborne diseases, and accumulated waste fostering disease vectors and soil contamination affecting food security (The New Humanitarian, n.d., UN Habitat, 2007).

*b.5. Location of public latrines and sanitation facilities in at-risk areas*

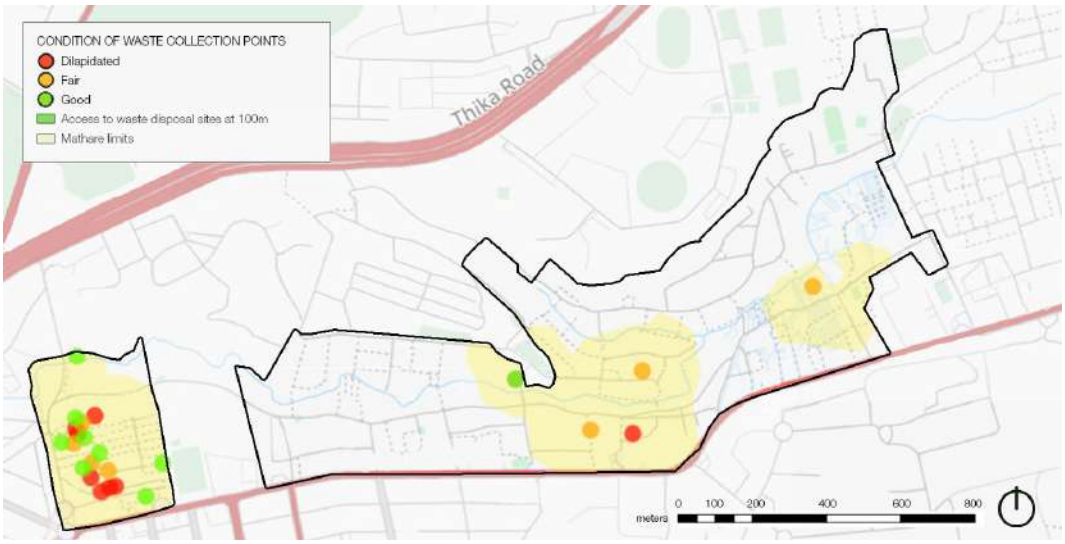
The Mathare River significantly affects the infrastructure and health of the neighbourhood. Located in a valley, Mathare experiences frequent flooding during the rainy season and receives pollutants from surrounding areas. Furthermore, its past industrial activity has left the soil without topsoil, preventing water seepage. Although limited, there are agricultural and livestock activities along the riverbank that further pollute the river ecosystem and wastewater. Lastly, the poor waste management creates exposed dumps, increasing bacterial concentration and affecting residents' health (MuST et al., 2011).

In this respect, the situation in Mathare is assessed negatively, based on the analytical framework. On the one hand, as shown in Map 3, the excreta containment facilities have not been located in suitable areas or at an adequate distance (at least 30 metres) from water sources, either surface or groundwater; what increases the likelihood of disease outbreaks, as contaminated water and soil become breeding grounds for pathogens (Bird et al., 2017; Population Matters, n.d.).




Map 3: Map of latrines and water points. Source: Author. Data from UN Habitat, 2020.

On the other hand, as shown in Map 4, the urban centre is surrounded by several solid waste collection and disposal points, 70% of which are open dumps (UN Habitat, 2020) and therefore do not comply with health recommendations.



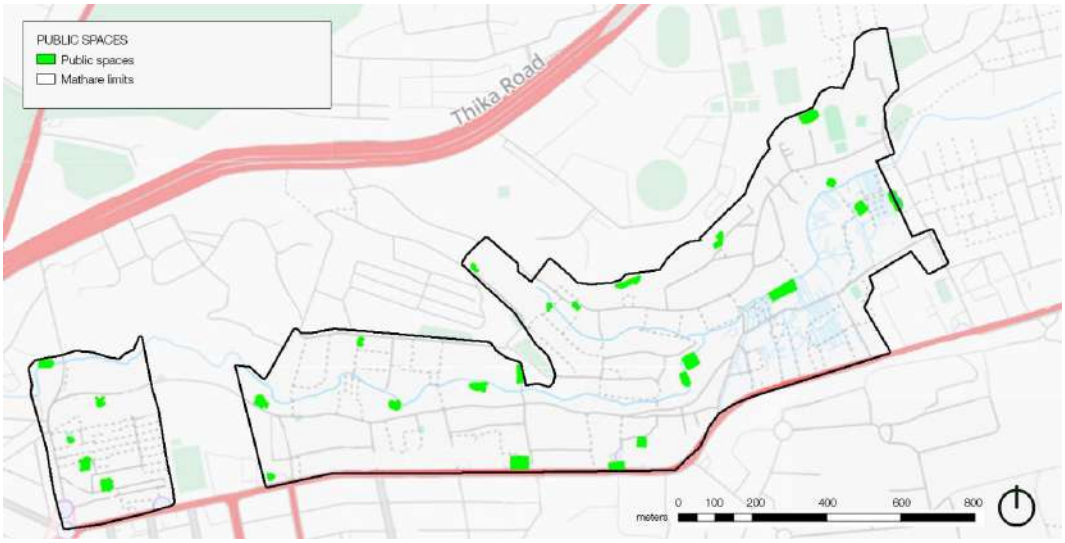

Map 4. Map of waste collection points. Source: Author. Data from UN Habitat, 2020.

c. Housing and environment

*c.1. Sufficient usable area per person for private and public outdoor activities*

Mathare houses around 200,000 people, being the densest (68,940 people per km²) of Nairobi's 180 settlements (Mwau, 2020). Its attraction lies in its proximity to the business centre, which has led to an increase of the built-up area from 76% to 82% since 2009, reducing open space from 12% in 2003 to 3.8% in 2019 (Mwau, 2020).

As shown in Map 5, less than 2% of Mathare's area is now public open space, far below the recommended 15-20% (UN Habitat, 2015). Additionally, public open spaces are small, averaging 350 m², with the largest around 1,200 m² (UN Habitat, 2015).
Mathare's extreme density hampers services like public latrines and water pumps and strains public services and facilities, especially schools, health centres, and markets (Mwau, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated this situation, with high population density and limited infrastructure facilitating disease spread (UN AIDS, 2020).



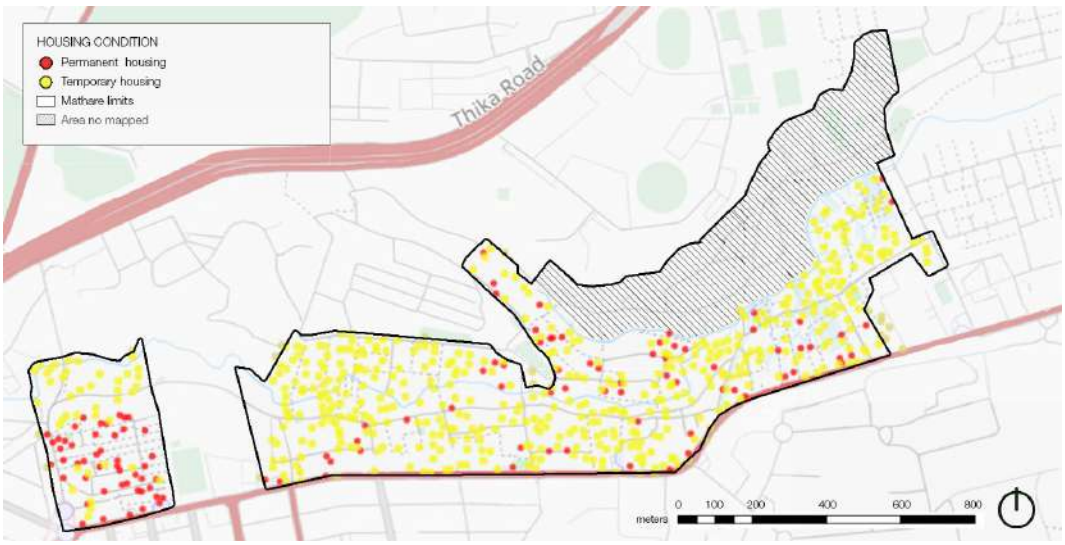

Map 5: Map of public open spaces. Source: Author. Data from UN Habitat, 2020.

*c.2. Square metres of living space per person, excluding service areas*
A typical Mathare dwelling is 3x3 m, which often accommodates about 5 people (Kamau & Njiru, 2018). This is 1.8m2 per person including cooking area; again considerably less than the 3.5m2 recommended per person (excluding service areas) reflected in the Sphere standards. This overcrowding seriously impacts women's health, as it greatly increases their exposure to various diseases, especially respiratory diseases, due to cooking with charcoal (Corburn & Hildebrand, 2015).

*c.3. Location of dwellings and facilities in at-risk areas*
Planning and interventions in Mathare have aggravated erosion and conditions in the valley, especially along the riverbanks, which are prone to flooding and pollution. Although the settlement is bordered by two major roads, internal access is challenging, hindering movement between districts and adversely affecting social and economic interactions and security. Streets are narrow and few are accessible to vehicles, making emergency management difficult. In addition, steep slopes and river crossings are dangerous, especially for children and the elderly. For all these reasons, the location of housing in Mathare is considered unsuitable (MuST, 2011).

*c.4. Percentage of dwellings with permanent construction*
Housing in Nairobi's self-produced settlements is generally precarious, with a lack of security of tenure leading to a sense of temporariness and reducing the safety and quality of

public space. In Mathare, 53% of residents live in floor structures and 80% of houses lack permanent sand construction walls (MuST et al., 2011) as shown in Map 6. Most homes have corrugated steel roofs, corrugated steel or mud walls, are supported by wooden posts and have poor ventilation. These single-room houses, measuring 3x3m, serve as the bedroom and living room-kitchen for entire families (APHRC, 2014; Kamau & Njiru, 2018). The precariousness of their construction makes them very vulnerable to collapse, especially during heavy rains or winds, and have a high fire risk due to their construction with flammable materials and inadequate electrical connections (Obermayr, 2017) that can also spread the fire and affect the surrounding houses and public space (MuST, 2011). Common fuels for cooking and lighting are paraffin and charcoal, with negatively impact on the health of the occupants of the house, especially the women (Dianatli et al, 2019), especially in terms of respiratory diseases (Corburn & Hildebrand, 2015) and the environment (UN Habitat, 2006).




Map 6: Map of the temporality of housing construction in Mathare. Source: Author. Data from: MuST, 2011.

d. Security of tenure

*d.1. Percentage of households/individuals who have a document guaranteeing security of tenure for their housing option.*

Residents of Nairobi's informal settlements face significant challenges due to insecure tenure, leading to frequent forced evictions. In Mathare, a majority of households rent their homes, with only 17% being homeowners, typically residing in the same house for an average of 8 years (MuST, 2011). This insecurity disproportionately affects women, discouraging investments in home improvements such as private latrines or better electrical systems, which impacts their health and well-being (Cities Alliance, 2021; MuST, 2011).

*d.2. Percentage of households with legal electricity connection*

In Mathare, electricity access is severely limited, with only 9% of households having formal connections, while 68% rely on informal connections and 22% have no access at all (MuST et al., 2011). The prevalence of illegal connections, which are expensive and

unsafe, exemplifies the poverty penalty in these contexts (UN Habitat, 2003). This precariousness in electricity provision also impacts public safety and health, as informal connections erode public lighting. The lack of adequate lighting in homes increases darkness, heightening the risk of aggression, hindering mobility, and contributing to accidents, thereby damaging social cohesion (Amnesty International, 2010; Sakketa, 2023).

e. Economic income

*e.1. Average income*

The average monthly household income is KSh 8,500 (€70)[2], which falls below Kenya's minimum wage of KSh 13,471 (€111) in 2012 (MuST et al., 2011; Country Economy, 2012). This income level is considered insufficient according to the analytical framework, highlighting widespread economic challenges. Additionally, women in Mathare are disproportionately paid below the minimum wage compared to men (Country Economy, 2012).

*e.2. Percentage of residents dependent on the informal sector*

In Kenya, 83% of labour is informal Statista, 2022). In Mathare, 87% of residents are casual workers or have informal businesses (MuST et al., 2011), often in public spaces, running small stalls. The analytical framework assesses this negatively, since labour informality profoundly impacts the health and food security of families. When work is scarce, resources have to be divided between food, water and medical care (MuST et al., 2011).

*e.3. Percentage of income spent on purchasing water for basic services*

The WHO recommends 50 litres of water per person per day for basic needs. For a family of 5 in Mathare, this translates to 250 litres per day, costing approximately KSh 750 per month if purchased from private vendors at KSh 2 per 20-litre jerry can (MuST et al., 2011). Additionally, the cost of using a latrine is around KSh 5 per use (Corburn & Karanja, 2016), amounting to another 750 KSh monthly assuming one use per family member per day. Consequently, households need to spend at least 1,500 KSh monthly on water and sanitation, which constitutes 17% of their average monthly income, significantly exceeding recommended expenditure levels. This disparity, where the most vulnerable urban households pay 10 to 20 times more for water of poorer quality than wealthier residents, is referred to as the poverty penalty (UN-Water, 2019).

f. Health status

*f.1. Percentage of women reporting good health*

Only 45% of women surveyed during a study in Mathare reported good health, compared to 62% of the men surveyed (Corburn & Hildebrand, 2015).

*f.2. Percentage of women reporting illness related to water and sanitation*

As shown in Table 2, seven of the nine diseases most frequently reported by women in a study of Mathare are directly related to water and sanitation: violence (68%), diarrhoea

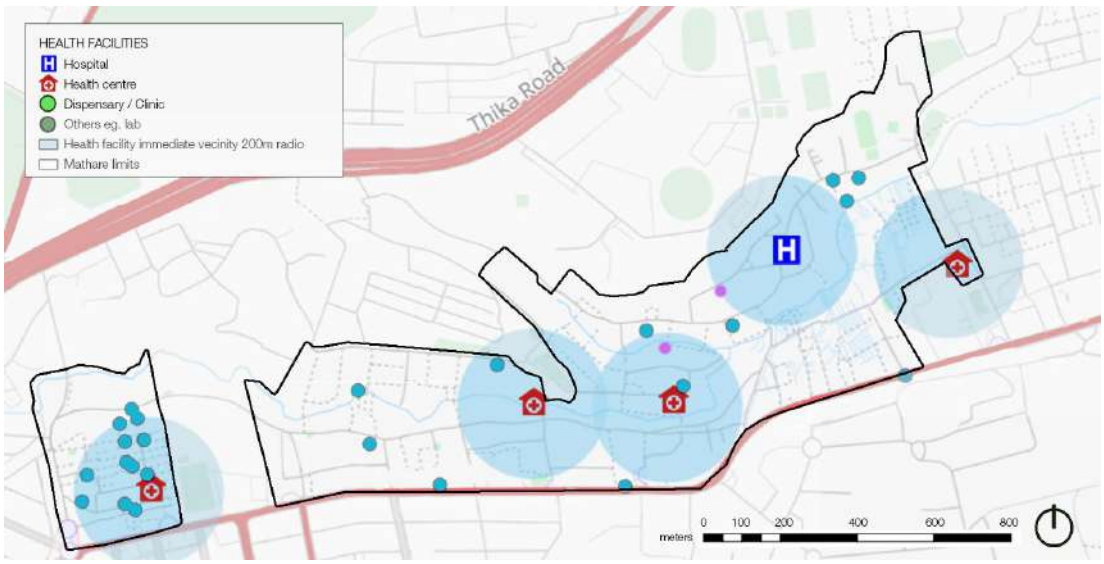
[2] The Ksh-Euro exchange rate in the document has been updated with the official rate as of 13 September 2022.

(30%), fever (22%), malaria (23%), typhoid fever (17%), rash (15%) and HIV (14%), as stated by Corburn and Hildebrand (2015).

| Women's physical condition | Frequency (% of total women in Mathare sample that reports) |
|---|---|
| Violence | 68% |
| Respiratory disease (cough) | 46% |
| Diabetes | 33% |
| Diarrhoea | 30% |
| Fever | 22% |
| Malaria | 23% |
| Typhoid Fever | 17% |
| Skin rash | 15% |
| HIV | 14% |

Table 2. Physical condition reported by women in Mathare. Source: Corburn & Hildebrand, 2015.

*f.3. Percentage of the population that can access a primary healthcare centre within one hour's walk from their dwelling in Mathare*, based on the observation of Map 7, 100% of the dwellings are less than one hour's walk from a primary healthcare centre, as a distance of 1 km (as shown in the graphical legend) takes approximately 15 minutes.




Map 7. Map of healthcare facilities in Mathare. Source: Author. Data from UN Habitat, 2020.

*f.4. Percentage of income dedicated to medical expenses*

SDG 3 targets universal free healthcare, as indicated by the analytical framework. However, a Mathare household spends on average 6% of monthly income on health care according to the MuST (2011) study. Government health centres, though affordable, often lack supplies and over demand means long wait times, which drives residents to more expensive private clinics (Mitullah, 2022; MuST, 2011).

*5.2 Summary of the evaluation*

Diagram 1 provides a graphic visualisation of the analytical framework's main dimensions and sub-dimensions of health as they apply in the case study of Mathare. Each symbol in the diagram relates to one of the dimension indicators of the analytical framework.
It shows that except for the proximity to a water point and proximity to a health centre (green), all the indicators are below the recommendation (red), shaping a greatly negative scenario for Mathare's women's health condition.

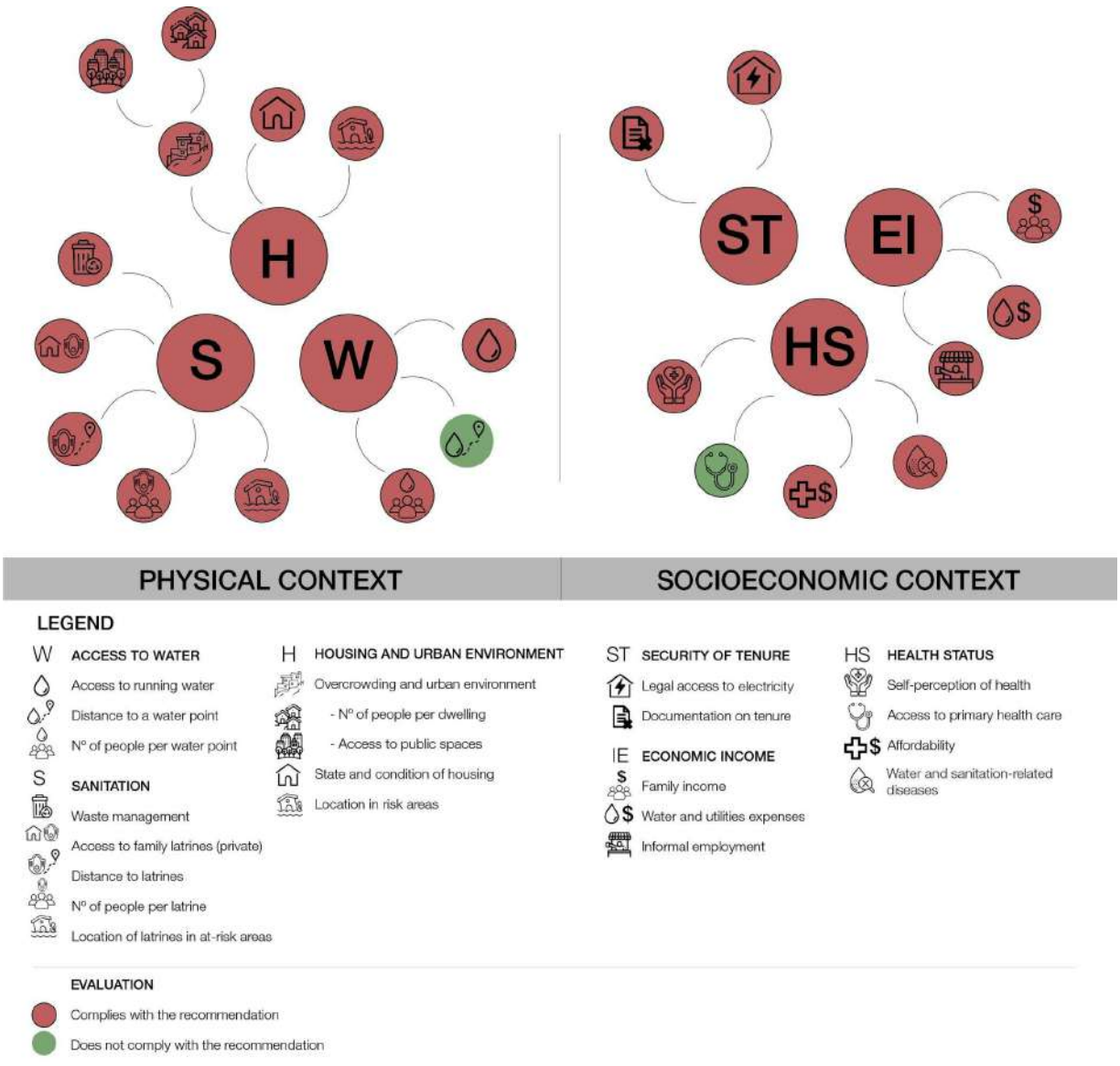



Diagram 1. Graphic representation of the analytical framework Prepared by the author.

*5.3 Cross-checking data*

There is a strong interconnection between the defining dimensions of the Mathare context and the self-assessment of health outcomes of women and other vulnerable groups. While women report good health in just 45% of cases compared to 62% of men (Corburn & Hildebrand, 2015), other discrepancies are shown according to variables in which women are generally discriminated against.

As shown in the previous section, just 10% of households in Mathare have piped water at home (MuST, 2011), forcing the remaining 90% to use unreliable public yard taps. This severely affects health as only 12% of those using an unreliable tap declare good health (Corburn & Hildebrand, 2015), compared to 72% of those who use a reliable tap. Similarly, the analysis shows how only 17% of households have a private toilet, with 37% of those reporting good health. However, only 7% of those lacking privacy in sanitation blocks and 12% practising open defecation (a common practice among women in Mathare) declare good health (Corburn & Hildebrand, 2015). Furthermore, only 33% living more than 30m from a sanitation block report good health, compared to 92% living within a 30m radius (Corburn & Hildebrand, 2015). Given that only 29% of the people in Mathare live less than 30m away (MuST, 2011), this precarious situation greatly impacts the health of thousands, especially women, who face higher risks of sexual violence when accessing public toilets.

Additionally, in Mathare, only 28% of households are served by a waste collection group (MuST, 2011). According to Corburn and Hildebrand (2015), 82% of those served by organised waste management report good health, in contrast to 47% of those not served. Thus, the built environment and the characterisation of some public spaces have a significant impact on the health of the inhabitants of self-produced settlements.

From a socioeconomic standpoint, we can also find illustrative results. In Mathare, only 17% of households are homeowners (MuST, 2011), with 87% of those reporting good health (Corburn & Hildebrand, 2015). Conversely, only 19% of renters report good health (Corburn & Hildebrand, 2015). Lastly, 58% of those who earn less than 10,000 KSh/month (82 euros/month) and 71% of those who earn more than that report good health (Corburn & Hildebrand, 2015). With average monthly income below the minimum wage (KSh 8,500 or €70) and women often paid below minimum wage, low income greatly impacts women's health in Mathare, highlighting the importance of socioeconomic conditions on health status."

## 6. Conclusion

This article has discussed the significant challenges confronting self-produced settlements in Sub-Saharan Africa and their impact on women's health, with Mathare serving as a key case study. While previous studies have examined factors affecting women's health in similar contexts, this research contributes to an understanding of the interconnected nature of these factors by analysing in detail how access to safe water and sanitation intersects with the other dimensions and their relationship with the nature of the public space. It reveals the complexities of discrimination against women and emphasises the crucial role these factors play in their health and well-being. By providing new evidence on their intersectional impacts, the study advances the debate on equitable access to the city and informs policy recommendations aimed at improving urban health outcomes. The article has endeavoured to underscore how the extreme urban density and acute

shortage of space exacerbates the provision of essential services such as public latrines and water pumps (Mwau, 2020) and how lack of tenure security prevent families from investing in home improvements to reverse this situation (Cities Alliance, 2021; MuST, 2011). These challenges stem from inadequate urban planning and discriminatory policies, which underscore the neglect faced by the population. This study concludes that failure to uphold the "right to the city," particularly in relation to access to safe water and sanitation, significantly affects the health of residents in self-produced settlements. Particularly women, who bear primary responsibility for household caretaking duties, are therefore more vulnerable to waterborne diseases and violence. In Mathare, those who cannot afford regular access to clean water and sanitation, or live far from access points, report poorer health and a higher incidence of diseases related to water and sanitation (Corburn & Hildebrand, 2015). The article has also explored the coping mechanisms women have to avoid the risk of violence in public spaces, as women experience public space differently than men and are more vulnerable to sexual abuse (Chant, 2013). In this regard many women reduce liquid intake or use "flying toilets", which contaminate surface water and aquifers and pose great threats to individual and collective health (Winter et al., 2018).

The analysis conducted illustrates how the lack of adequate water and sanitation services places a heavy economic burden on households, perpetuating their poverty and/or vulnerability. The economy of most households in Mathare is precarious, with monthly household income below the minimum wage and high levels of informal employment. In this regard, deteriorated health condition poses a double threat to women's economic status, as they must bear the extra costs of care and treatment, that of not working. Additionally, poor health status of the population also has consequences for a country's economy through lost productivity (WSP, 2012).

This study concludes, firstly, that women's health in self-produced settlements is affected by several spatial and socioeconomic determinants, with access to safe water and sanitation being one of the most relevant ones. Secondly, it highlights the primordial need of adopting multidisciplinary policies and a specific perspective to improve women's health and wellbeing in self-produced settlements.

Further research could expand the analytical framework by broadening the dimensions of analysis and incorporating updated, gender-disaggregated data for each indicator, providing a more nuanced understanding of the impact on women. This additional study could also include a comparative analysis across different neighbourhoods. Additionally, a longitudinal follow-up study is recommended to evaluate the indicators over time, particularly in relation to the impact of potential slum upgrading programs.

Only with an intersectional and multidisciplinary approach will it be possible to address the structural causes that perpetuate inequality and precariousness (WHO & UN Habitat, 2010), ensuring access to basic services without putting the lives of the most vulnerable at risk every day and achieving Sustainable Development Goals for all.

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# Making Spaces for Girls.
## Their Right to the Public Realm

Susannah Walker
*Make Space for Girls*
*susannah@makespaceforgirls.co.uk*

**Abstract**
The paper explores the exclusion of teenage girls from public spaces, particularly parks and recreation grounds. It reveals the multiple challenges faced by teenage girls in accessing and utilising these spaces and the impact this has on their well-being and sense of inclusion in the community. The fundamental problem is that parks are not designed with the needs of teenage girls in mind. Facilities intended for teenagers, such as skate parks, Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGAs), and BMX tracks, predominantly cater to the interests of boys, contributing to inequality of opportunities. Moreover, the design and dominance of these facilities by boys can further discourage girls from participating in outdoor activities, impacting their physical health and mental well-being. Consequently, teenage girls perceive public spaces as unwelcoming and unsuitable for their use. Safety emerges as a critical concern, with teenage girls reporting feeling unsafe in public spaces due to various factors, including sexual harassment. The paper highlights the broader definition of safety for girls, encompassing not only physical security but also the sense of welcome and acceptance in a space. This is important not just because girls have a right to public space. The barriers they face also impact their physical and mental well-being to a significant degree. Drawing attention to the intersectionality of these challenges, the paper advocates for the active engagement of teenage girls in the design process, recognizing their diverse perspectives and needs. While the paper identifies emerging principles for effective engagement with teenage girls, it calls for further research and larger-scale practical projects and a need to evaluate the impact of inclusive design on the ground. Ultimately, the research contributes to a growing discourse on gender-inclusive urban planning, advocating for a paradigm shift that prioritises the needs and voices of teenage girls in shaping public spaces.

**Keywords:** teenage girls, public space, parks, inclusive design, engagement

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Make Space for Girls (MSFG) is a UK charity which campaigns for parks and public spaces to be designed with the needs of teenage girls in mind. This is a simple statement, but one which reveals a significant disadvantage which has been hiding in plain sight. For many years, girls and young women have been effectively designed out of parks and other public spaces. When we speak to teenage girls, they tell us that parks and public spaces are not for them and there is nothing provided that they want to use. This happens for a range of reasons which include safety, facilities and spaces dominated by boys, and the absence of provision like toilets and lighting. But most of all it happens because the voices of teenage girls are rarely heard at any stage in the commissioning, design or management of these places.

We know that this problem begins in adolescence, when children start to visit parks on their own. Beyond that, it's hard to quantify the extent of the issue as very little research has been done in the UK about how older children and adolescents use parks – or don't. Work in Europe has found that boys are more than twice as likely to play outdoors than girls and that boys dominated the play areas to the extent that in some parks in Sweden, the users were 80% boys (White Arkitekter 2017). American research has also demonstrated that while there is a general drop off in park usage in the teenage years, this is much more pronounced in girls (Baran et al., 2013).

Girls are aware of the issue – one study shows that 72% of older girls think that boys use parks and other outdoor spaces the most (Yorkshire Sport 2022). What is also clear is that one of the problems for girls is the fact that the boys dominate. They will often avoid areas where boys are present and go at times when facilities are empty; their use of space is regulated by the absence or presence of boys. Research has also shown that girls are less active when there are groups of boys present[1].

## Facilities

A significant factor is the facilities on offer. Where something has been provided 'for teenagers', this is usually either a skate park, a MUGA (aka fenced pitch or cage) or a BMX track. When Make Space for Girls surveyed 91 councils across the UK, these three types of equipment formed 90% of provision for teenagers[2]. And all of these are dominated by boys and young men. Data gathered via a citizen science project demonstrated that users of these three facilities were 90% boys and young men (MSFG 2023a).

These facilities are predominantly geared to the interests of teenage boys, who make up 90% of grassroots football teams and 85% of skateboarders (MSFG 2023a). Sports and leisure pursuits which tend to attract more girls, such as netball and roller skating, do not tend to be provided for at the same level, if at all. Again, girls have noticed this. 68% in one study said that there was nothing for them in parks and that the equipment was for boys (Yorkshire Sport, 2022).

As a result, boys dominate these spaces. This has been demonstrated particularly in the case of skateboarding. Here, academic research is clear that skate parks are territorialised by boys (Stoodley et.al, 2024; Paecheter et al 2024; Carr 2017; Backström, 2013). An informal survey in a park in York found that 90% of girls who

[1] A fuller review of the literature on this subject is provided in our Research Report (MSFG, 2023b).
[2] 1060 MUGAs, 366 skate parks, 89 BMX tracks, 112 shelters and 53 other facilities. (MSFG, 2023a).

liked skateboarding did not feel comfortable in the skate park. This is borne out by engagement with teenage girls who talk about physical and verbal abuse, and who often choose to use the skate park at inconvenient or less optimal times (e.g. after rain) to avoid the boys.

The impact of this dominance goes beyond just the skateboarders. The presence of a 'male space' can actually deter girls from using the park at all, as demonstrated by research in the US which found that while girls were generally more active the closer, they lived to a park, but this was not the case if that was a skate park. Then their activity levels were below average, suggesting that they preferred to avoid the space (Cohen, 2006).

Figure 1. MUGA ©MSFG.

MUGAs can also be territorialised by boys, but their enclosed design also deters girls who do not feel that the space is safe. The vast majority of facilities have high fences and a small number of narrow entrances, which are usually either chicaned or obstructed by the goal. In addition, they tend to contain large groups of boys, who were 92% of users in our survey (MSFG 2023a). As a result, teenage girls see them as potentially unsafe spaces which they are very reluctant to enter.

The design of both MUGAs and skateparks can also be problematic in that they tend to be organised as one single large area. If this ends up being monopolised by boys, the girls end up with nowhere else to go. Design work in Europe, specifically Vienna and Malmö, has demonstrated that, where space is broken up, girls are more active and feel more able to participate (Chambaudy and Jing, 2014; Hellgren, 2019).

A further issue for girls in parks and recreation grounds in the UK is the preponderance of pitches, which are often stipulated in planning regulations. Yet a survey of council documents reveals that on average only 10% of users are girls and young women (MSFG, forthcoming) but this inequality is not acknowledged, nor are alternative facilities provided. Our engagement work with girls has also found that they see pitch lines as a form of exclusion and so perceive these spaces as not for them (Walker et al., 2023).

Together, these facilities can often combine to create a landscape in parks and other recreational areas which not only offers little to teenage girls but can also feel off-puttingly male, and so one where teenage girls end up feeling that they are not wanted.

**Safety**

As the discussion of MUGAs reveals, safety is a particularly important consideration for teenage girls and can be a key reason why they do not use parks and other public spaces (Barker et al., 2022). As this is being considered elsewhere in the issue, this article will simply note some specific findings for teenage girls.

At present teenage girls do not feel safe in public space. Over 80% of girls and young women feel unsafe when they are out on their own (Girlguiding UK, 2020) and young women under 21 are three times more likely to feel vulnerable when out on their own than boys (Marshalls, 2022).

Teenage girls describe the ideas of safety and security more broadly than adults: this is not just freedom from being attacked or assaulted, it is about feeling safe and welcome in a space. The issue comes up repeatedly in engagement work (King, et al. 2022b), and research during the pandemic found that only 20% of girls in Glasgow felt comfortable in the park they had chosen to use (YWCA Scotland, 2021).

Girls can often feel judged for what they are doing. In the absence of any play facilities meant for them, they use swings and other equipment designed for younger children, resulting in the disapproval of parents. And their desire to talk to their friends can be contrasted negatively with active male activities such as football (R.E.s.P.I.R.E, 2022).

Sexual harassment is also a particular barrier for teenage girls – and one of the reasons why they prefer to avoid spaces such as the skate park and MUGA. 86% of 18–24 year-olds have experienced sexual harassment in a public space (UN Women, 2021) while a recent report also concluded that teenage girls under 18 suffered more harm from violence against women and girls than adult women (Knight, 2023).

## Impact

All these barriers have a significant impact on the lives, health and well-being of teenage girls and young women. Being able to use public space is a right and is crucial in establishing a sense of belonging to the community (Vargas and Merino, 2012). At present the message that girls get from these spaces is that they are not part of public life and that they should stay at home. It's also worth noting that Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes a right to play for everyone under the age of 18.

The lack of provision also has implications for the health of teenage girls. Their activity levels relative to boys have been an area of concern for health authorities for some time. At the onset of adolescence, activity levels drop significantly in girls (Women in Sport, 2018; Corder et al., 2016). This is particularly important because this is a time when the pattern of exercise in adult years is usually set, so the decline can have lifetime impact (Telema et al., 2005; Tammelin et al., 2003). However, the connection is rarely made between this and the lack of free-to-use, outdoor provision for teenage girls.

It is also becoming clear that there is a significant impact on mental health. A recent literature review found a link between young people's use of green spaces and improved mental wellbeing, including a reduction in depressive symptoms (Bray et al., 2022). This is particularly important for girls, who are much more likely than boys to suffer from anxiety and poor mental well-being. This is clearly an area of much potential interest, and one where more sex-disaggregated data would be helpful.

## Engagement

The first stage in addressing the inequality has to be engaging with teenage girls and centring their voices in any process of change. Young people in general are not considered in the overall development process, with 89% of young adults aged 16-18 saying that they had never been consulted about their neighbourhood (King, et al. 2022b), and the situation is even more pronounced for girls. But they want to be asked – 82% of girls said that they wanted to be more involved in designing parks and open spaces (Girlguiding UK, 2019).

At present, there is only a small amount of academic research in this area[3] but an increasing amount of engagement work is taking place in the UK in order to discover both what successful methodologies would look like and what specific interventions would encourage teenage girls to use parks and other public spaces[4].

Some clear principles are emerging for what good engagement with teenage girls might look like.

- It should be a two-way, ongoing process which creates a sense of shared ownership of the project. Co-design is ideal wherever possible.
- It's important to seek out a diverse group of girls, not just focussing on current users of the space.
- Engagement needs to happen from the start of the project, and should also be considered as part of shaping the initial brief.

[3] See Seims et al., 2022 for a summary

[4] Examples include King et al, 2022; King and Theocharides-Feldman 2022; Walker 2023; Barker et al., 2022.

- Because girls have not in the past been provided for in public spaces, they need sufficient time and support to develop their own ideas of what they want to see.
- The value of the participants' time and input needs to be recognised.
- Providing facilitators who are relatable role models for the participants enhances their sense of agency.
- Consider giving participants input into the engagement process as well as the design.


Figure 2. Engagement work here ©MSF.

In terms of what teenage girls want to see in public spaces, the results are quite consistent across a diverse range of groups and also correlate quite strongly with previous work in Europe. Some common themes include:

- Dividing up spaces so that they can be used by more than one group simultaneously.
- Better lighting.
- Circular paths.
- Social seating which allows girls to face each other and talk
- Swings and hammocks.
- Gym bars.
- Performance spaces.

- Access to nature and wildlife.
- Good quality toilets.

**Intersectionality**

The disadvantages that girls face in the public realm are affected by a range of other factors including ethnic background, religion, disability, socio-economic status and gender identity among others.

These factors have a significant effect on both access to parks and activity levels, and how usage changes in adolescence. Girls from non-white background are also more likely to be the victims of sexual harassment and more general racial discrimination, which in turn affects their use of public space (MSFG 2023b).

These experiences mean that it is very important that engagement with a representative and diverse group of teenage girls takes place for every individual location. While their desires and wants may be very similar, their experiences and how these impact on their use of space may vary enormously, and this will determine what changes need to be made.

Figure 3. Image of ideal park © MSFG/Isabel Fox/Harry Groom.

## Next steps

While it is becoming clear how to engage with teenage girls and what they want to see in parks and other public spaces, what is not currently known is what interventions are most effective and what change looks like on the ground.

A few co-designed interventions have now been built, but these are mostly small scale. The next stage needs to be a wider range of built projects and other interventions, and for their impact to be systematically evaluated.

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# Locating Young Women in Public Space.
## A Feminist Spatial Researcher-in-Residence Model

Olivia Theocharides-Feldman
*Social Place, United Kingdom*
*otheofeld@gmail.com*

Julia King
*Social Place, United Kingdom*
*julia@julia-king.com*

**Abstract**
Young women have largely been left out of public space design and planning processes. There is a need for meaningful knowledge production to be centred on, and grounded within, this group. In this viewpoint, we propose and evaluate our feminist spatial researcher-in-residence methodology for engaging young women in design and planning processes. We developed this model for a series of peer research projects on gender and perceptions of public space, with individuals who identify as girls and young women in the UK from April 2022 to October 2023. We first give an overview of our method which focuses on peer research – notably the researcher-in-residence model – and subsequently go on to discuss two central aspects: (un)learning and visual methods. We argue that such approaches contrast traditional methods of doing research with young people (e.g. surveying), by giving us ways of exploring the banality (eg. benches) and complexity (feelings of safety) of young women's experiences of the public realm; and by allowing research participants to have greater agency in representing their own lifeworlds. It is our view that this methodology makes the case for why it is essential to value the tacit knowledge that young women and girls have in meaningful and attentive ways if we are to create an inclusive public realm.

**Keywords:** peer research, feminist methodologies, gender, public space

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## 1. Introduction

In a discussion with some young women in Crewe, we asked: '*does it matter who researches public space?*' One twenty-year-old young woman responded:

> *"If research and who researches into public space isn't inclusive, how can we expect the public spaces, and the changes that are made to them, to be inclusive too?"* (Crewe, 25 July 2022)

Her astute observations are ones certainly reiterated by feminist methodologies, postcolonial scholars, and those working in the Global South (see Said, 1989; Spivak, 1988; Tayob, 2018; Haraway, 2013; Browne et al, 2017). They warn that there is a lack of diversity within knowledge production, with that of urban design and planning being no exception – in terms of age, gender, race, geography, class, methodologies and so on. Consequently, our current spatial realities are forged by the (overall homogenous) knowledges that those who plan, design, and implement space either have, have access to, or make use of (Kern, 2021).

Young women are one particular group who have found themselves left out from spatial knowledge production. While young women use and value public space greatly, 89% of young people in the UK have never been consulted about their local areas (Grosvenor, 2020). Young people may sometimes be engaged in urban development processes but such inclusions are often tokenistic or extractive: short-term processes fulfilling consultation requirements for planning, without providing meaningful exchange (eg. payment, skill building) nor committing to actual results (Young Foundation, 2020). In academia, this engagement issue has to some extent prevailed in research methods. Morrow (2008) and Cele (2016), for example, found that over 75% of research methods used with young people from 2015 to 2020 in the UK have been 'traditional' (interviews, surveys and focus groups) which do not value the different competencies, strengths and communication methods of young people as research participants (Young Foundation, 2020). This does not only disempower young people but also negatively impacts the accuracy of research findings (Tayob, 2018; Larkins et al, 2021; Morrow, 2008).

Young women's limited inclusion within spatial knowledge production may stem from the reality that teenagers are often, and problematically, considered a 'hard to reach', disinterested or less competent demographic for planning and research purposes (O'Toole, 2003; Morrow, 2008). Such conclusions are not only highly inaccurate but serve only to excuse us (researchers, planners, developers, etc.) from adapting our engagement methods to young people, and from addressing the barriers to their engagement. It is also particularly problematic for young women who consistently seem to have their spatial experiences and needs overlooked (Skelton, 2000). For example, a number of studies show that young women have significant unaddressed safety concerns in public space (see Barker et al, 2022; Girlguiding, 2022; YWL, 2021; Cosgrave et al, 2020); and public provisioning for teenagers (predominantly skate parks, football pitches, basketball courts, and BMX tracks) have been shown to be severely underused and appear unwelcoming for women and girls (see Bradley, 2010; Rowntree Park, 2021; MSFG, 2023).

In this viewpoint we suggest that to respond to these concerns and to build more inclusive spaces for girls and young women, it is necessary to gather an evidence base of what girls and young women's spatial experiences are; and for this knowledge collection

to be done meaningfully by working with, learning from, and involving those within whom that experience resides. More specifically, we suggest that using non-traditional research methods may better capture the lived experiences of young women, by focusing on two aspects of our feminist spatial researcher-in-residence methodology: (un)learning and visual methods. This methodology was developed for a series of peer research projects on gender and perceptions of public space, with 16–27 year-old individuals who identify as girls and young women in the UK from April 2022 to October 2023. We argue first, that (un)learning, or the process of learning new and questioning existing knowledge, offers ways of exploring the banality (e.g. benches) and complexity (e.g. feelings of safety) of young women's experiences. And second, that visual methods allow research participants greater agency in representing and exploring their lifeworlds. Whilst there are certainly important contributions made by using traditional survey and interview methods, we argue that because young women's experiences have been ignored and that these experiences are complex and multilayered, there is a need to think of alternative ways in which to bring this demographic into view. Without this, planners, designers and architects continue to risk proliferating exclusionary spaces.

Of importance, while our paper addresses individuals who identify as 'women', women's experiences are not homogenous nor is gender a binary. Instead, this framing recognises that asymmetrical relationships based on gender binaries exist, even as this imperfect categorical framing shifts and changes (McCall, 2005). In addition, while we primarily discuss age and gender, other characteristics such as class, race and disability also contribute to individuals' inclusion within knowledge production and the public realm (Massey, 2008).

## 2. What did we do?

This paper draws on two peer research projects, *Making Space for Girls* (April to August 2022) and *The Young Researchers-in-Residence* (October 2022 to October 2023) run by the authors, Dr Julia King and Olivia Theocharides-Feldman, both researchers at LSE[1]. We hired 29 people aged 16-27 as young researchers-in-residence (also referred to as Researchers) – our colleagues at LSE Cities[2] and partnered with the charity Make Space for Girls[3].

Peer research "...recognises that individuals within any community being researched are themselves competent agents, capable of participating in research on a variety of levels, including as researchers" (Higgins et al, 2007, p. 105). The researcher-in-residence model within our peer research method specifically recognises that researchers "bring expertise which is different from but potentially complementary to that of other team members" (Marshall et al, 2014, p. 803). In our case, the Researchers brought their embodied and lived experiences of identifying as young women in our geographic areas of focus and investigated: *'(how) have young women been designed out of public space?'*. Researchers were recruited via an application process through various settings, including schools, youth centres, community and residential groups. We requested that

[1] Julia and Olivia have since writing this piece left LSE and now run a design consultancy.
[2] LSE Cities is an urban research centre based at the London School of Economics.
[3] Make Space for Girls campaigns for better provisioning for teenage girls in parks and public spaces.

applicants submit a paragraph detailing their motivations to participate, be aged 16-27 and identify as women[4].

We structured the programme as open-ended, flexible, site-specific and paid. We did so to empower and incentivise young women to feel that they are essential to spatial conversations, to overcome some of their participatory barriers and therefore to include a greater diversity of voices within the project, and to demonstrate to participants that their insights and time are valued. The Researchers were paid London Living Wage, LSE's starting band for researchers for hours worked. We worked with the Researchers to contribute to their CVs as, for many, this was their first job. The engagement was responsive to the Researchers' availability as a group in each location, unfolding over just a few weeks or longer term often with only evening meetings. We suggested weekly hours capped by our budgetary constraints, which they all largely followed.

We also designed a bespoke intersectional urban theory and design learning programme centred on learning and (un)learning, based on feminist methodologies. We assigned weekly readings, activities, lectures or podcasts and held discussion sessions through Zoom, all hosted on an online whiteboard (Miro). Their weekly activities included photography, ethnographic methods (e.g. participant observations), mapping, drawing, and written reflections; and technologies such as Instagram were used to document activities. We also ran in person discussions as well as site visits, workshops (e.g. collaging) and mapping sessions. The content and structure of the programme changed in response to the site, its geographical complexities and demographics. For example, in Clapham and Brent discussions around race and ethnicity were much more deeply embedded than in sites and with participants where these tensions were less prevalent.

Feminist methodologies aim to "re-position communities, activists and others as not simply subjects of research, but as central to the solution of social problems" (Browne et al, 2017, p. 1378). They can challenge the inherent power asymmetries between researcher and researched (the passive research subject) and encourage feelings of inclusion; give participants valuable work experience, training, and wages; build personal, professional, social, and emotional skills and knowledges; and give rise to more attuned and grounded data (Young Foundation, 2020[5]; Larkins et al, 2021[6]). Larkins et al (2021) note that using peer research may be particularly valuable at addressing the research competencies of young persons. MacKinnon (2021) notes that paying peer researchers may help balance the power relations between peer and academic researchers and address extractive concerns (Ibáñez-Carrasco et al, 2019).

Nonetheless, participatory research has not been without criticism and the inherent power asymmetries between academic researcher and peer researcher has a history of critique, especially in postcolonial and development contexts and where it has been deployed as an extractive process (see Kindon et al, 2007; Kesby et al, 2007; Foucault, 1982; Boano and Kelling, 2013; Said, 1989; Spivak, 1988; Tayob, 2018; Cooke and Kothari, 2001). In our own work, there were certainly power asymmetries too. We are two foreign queer cis white women, aged 28 and 40, and upper middle-class academics working in and around London entangled in a multiplicity of power relations, and whose

[4] The exception is Ashmere, where a specific gender identity was not a requirement for participation and four young men were recruited.

[5] See desk review of peer research projects in the UK by Young Foundation.

[6] See review on peer research by the centre for Children and Young People's Participation.

experiences of race, class, gender, and so on do not necessarily map neatly onto those with whom we work (Haraway, 2013). The points below, show how we tried to overcome some of these problematics while acknowledging that such power dynamics can only be lessened and never effaced: "There is no discipline, no structure of knowledge, no institution or epistemology that can or has ever stood free of the various sociocultural, historical, and political formations that give epochs their peculiar individuality" (Said, 1989, p. 205).

## 3. (Un)learning: Exploring Banality and Complexity

> *In Hemel Hempstead, when we asked the Researchers 'do you feel safe in your local area?' they all responded: 'yes'. When we followed this with conversations their answers seemed incongruous. In many cases they felt safe because they were taking precautionary measures to avoid feeling unsafe. This exercise revealed to us that when you allow people the time to share their lived experiences with you, rather than answer tick box survey questions, you get very different results.*

When the Researchers were given the time, tools, space and power to reflect and collaborate we were able to develop a shared language of trust wary of not projecting notions of (particularly gendered or racialised) marginality on them. This facilitated them to unravel and reveal internalised, banalised as well as complex experiences, particularly with issues around gender, race, and age and themes like harassment or judgement. A key element of this was focusing on learning and unlearning in our discussions and curriculum.

First, by assigning work and hosting discussions that centred on complex themes, like racial inequalities in gentrification and gendered inequalities within transport infrastructure, it seemed that relevant experiences could emerge. For example, in Clapham, while reflecting on an assigned reading on racial discrimination in a park, one young woman explained that this reminded her of her own experience at the Lidl where she felt uncomfortable and villainised because the security guard there would follow her and her boyfriend around the shop. She was not sure whether this was because she and her boyfriend were young, black or a combination of the two. After the above Researcher had shared her experience in the Lidl, another Researcher felt comfortable sharing her own conflicts around race and public space. Prior to this neither had openly shared how race was significant to their spatial experiences.

Second, by taking the time to discuss and assign activities, readings, and lectures that encourage young people to reflect critically about their own experiences, we were able to unpick internalised and banalised facets of their public lives. In Clapham again, a reading on teenage spaces had led another young woman to formulate her own experience: "My female friends and I constantly struggle to find places where we can relax and have peace. It never occurred to us before that there are no places specifically designed for teenage girls" (Clapham, 3 May 2023). Furthermore, in Hemel Hempstead, we asked the Researchers: *Do you think the state has a responsibility to provide amenities for teenage girls?* They all answered *no*. Many had internalised the belief that young women should not have spaces for them, even though they recognised that young men did. However, when taught that there are in fact accountabilities towards them for safe

and playful spaces, this was empowering to them and they began making 'suggestions' for change like wanting swings or trampolines instead of football pitches. In all our sites, dialogue and communication became 'the main prompt of a process of co-determination whereby different types of knowledge are exchanged in order to create an inclusive space' (Caretta and Riaño, 2016, p. 259).

## 4. Visual Methods: Representing one's own lifeworlds

> *In Clapham, after reviewing existing examples of spaces designed explicitly for teenage girls, the Researchers designed a local amenity 'for them'. One Researcher's design suggested simply adding an armrest to a low brick wall on her estate that she and her friends were already using as a bench (Figure 1). Her design exposes that visual methods may allow individuals to express their lifeworlds in novel ways which celebrate unheroic spaces.*


Figure 1a (left): 'The Brick Wall',
Figure 1b (right): 'The arm rest', photograph and drawing by a Researcher, Clapham.

A large part of our programme consisted of Researchers engaging in visual methods such as mapping, photography, drawing, site analysis, and using digital platforms such as Miro and Instagram. Many academics suggest that using digital or visual methods may give rise to more attuned and grounded practices (see Causey, 2017; Awan and Langley, 2013; Berger, 2008), and provide a more suitable research methodology for working with youths (Morrow, 2008; Young Foundation, 2020); and for people to express their lifeworlds (Caudwell, 2018; Tayob, 2018).

First, sing visual methods allowed the Researchers to work in approachable, familiar and playful (e.g. Instagram; photography) ways that were also fun, collaborative, and modal (e.g. Miro), while enabling them to have greater agency over their representation. Tayob (2018) suggests that drawing may offer a more attuned way of 'telling' the spaces of subaltern populations, thereby granting 'the researched' greater agency in their life stories. Caudwell (2018), who studies trans-swimmers' narratives of self, notes this is

particularly the case when topics centre around complex feelings such as judgement, safety and surveillance. In our work, the use of Instagram enabled the Researchers to easily capture daily moments by using a familiar tool. One Researcher in Trowbridge used Instagram to illustrate how a lack of maintenance (rubbish) is a central deterrent for her from using public space, and a contributor to the safety concerns she encounters taking a shortcut home (Figure 2). Visual methods also allowed Researchers to "choose how to express themselves" (Morrow, 2008, p. 56) and better captured the experiences of more timid Researchers who could simply, quietly, put together their maps, drawings, reflections and photos. Furthermore, while the Researchers have little control over how we write about their lifeworlds (certainly a limitation of our work and much peer research), they are the sole authors of their maps, drawings, and designs.


Figure 2: 'Analysis *through* Instagram'

In a second sense, visual methods allowed Researchers to reflect differently on their spatial experiences and offer alternative readings of space that are not represented by typical maps (e.g. feelings of safety) (see Figure 3). In Awan and Langley's (2013, p. 229) mapping of migrant territories they note that mapping can be "a critical practice that questions easily held assumptions regarding the use and value of city-space." Similarly, Corner (1999, p. 213, 217) describes that, "mapping acts may emancipate potentials, enrich experiences and diversify worlds" and that "by showing the world in new ways, unexpected solutions and effects may emerge." For example, through mapping, one Researcher realised that she avoided part of her town centre because the density of barber and betting shops in the area meant that men loitered and dominated use of that space. Another Researcher described that it was through mapping the businesses that had disappeared in her local area: the New Look, Poundland and Costa and the "bougie" ones that had replaced these, that she understood why she no longer felt welcome on the high street. By engaging with photography, drawing, and mapping, researchers may seize an opportunity to advance understandings of young people's

public realm experiences and fill gaps in peer research, and creative research methods (Young Foundation, 2020).

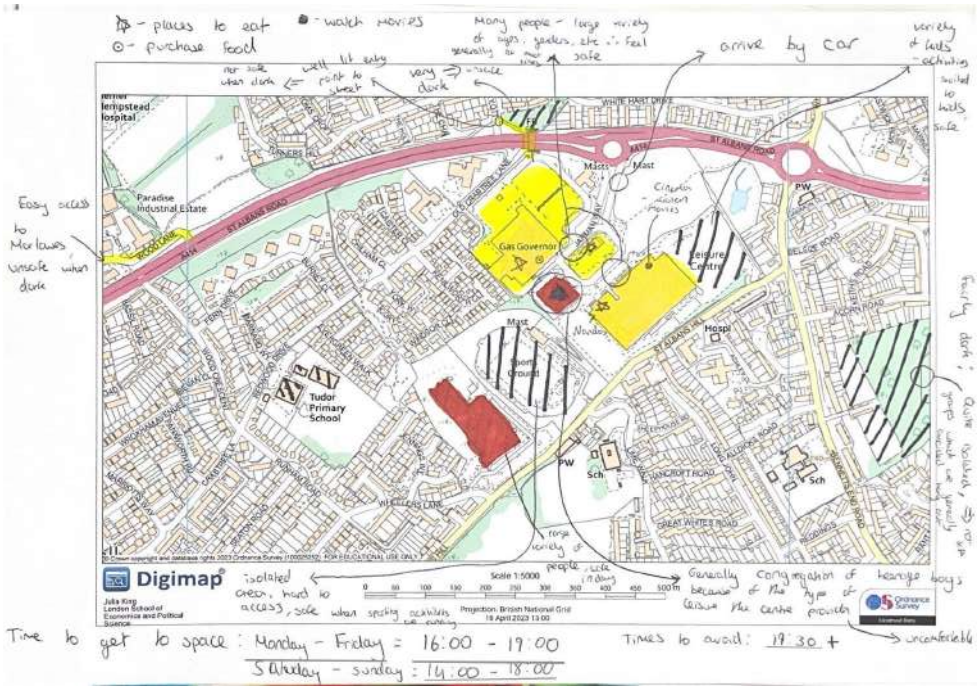


Figure 3: A Researcher's map of the local leisure centre in Hemel Hempstead (hatched lines: don't use but want to; red: don't use; yellow: use regularly)

## 5. Conclusion

Our viewpoint has sought – at the very least – to interrogate – and hopefully – to address: Why and how might we conduct spatial research with girls and young women? And how can a feminist researcher-in-residence methodology offer a compelling way to address young women's experiences of public space?

We suggest the peer researcher-in-residence method as an innovative feminist approach to urban research. Crucially, it may attentively allow researchers to value the tacit knowledge that young women and girls have in ways that are not extractive but that foster an exchange of skills, resources, knowledge, and accreditations. We further believe that without this methodology the same findings would not be gleaned: findings on complex and banal themes like judgement and fear, and the importance of an armrest. While we have developed this method to work with young women, we believe it can – and would – benefit from being adopted with other groups, notably ones that may too be marginalised from the built environment and its processes.

By adopting this view, we are not suggesting that traditional methods such as surveys are futile. On the contrary, large-scale data sets are often the most compelling way to reveal the scale of problems and by consequence the scale of the solutions, particularly when seeking political and policy change. Instead, a feminist spatial researcher-in-residence model can help frame the way these methods are first approached, to develop the right language to engage with this audience whose take on issues will have

sensitivities and subtleties that are not always obvious; and second to contextualise, qualify, and nuance any findings gleaned through more traditional methods.

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# Public Spaces are Failing Girls and Women.
## How Feminist Planning Can Learn from Social Innovation

Emelie Anneroth
*Sweco, Sweden*
*emelie.anneroth@sweco.se*

Sara Ferlander
*Mälardalen University, Sweden*
*sara.ferlander@mdu.se*

Tanya Jukkala
*Mälardalen University, Sweden*
*tanya.jukkala@mdu.se*

**Abstract**
Public spaces are often failing girls and women, with male dominance and a lack of representation being prevalent issues. The 2030 Agenda emphasises the need for safe and accessible public spaces for women, children and other disadvantaged or marginalised groups. Nevertheless, women and girls tend to be neglected in the development of urban areas, and their specific needs and risks are not fully considered. Hence, there is a need for feminist urban planning. Feminist planning aims to understand, challenge, and change power relations in public spaces, by involving the experiences, needs, and desires of marginalised groups in the planning process in order to create more equal cities. This approach recognises the individual and collective power that women and other disadvantaged groups already possess. Social innovation is an innovative practice for meeting social needs and shares a common goal with feminist planning of promoting social change and increasing power for disadvantaged groups. However, whereas feminist urban planning – and urban planning in general – tend to end when a project has been planned and executed, social innovation has a stronger and more explicit focus on results or impact of the process or project. This is an aspect where feminist planning can learn from social innovation. By addressing the specific needs of marginalised groups and focusing on results and actual change, feminist planning can contribute to positive social change and empower women and girls in urban development processes. This viewpoint argues that feminist planning can learn from the focus of social innovation on results (i.e. output, outcome and impact of the planning), which has the potential to change planning practices and challenge gendered social norms in order to create more equal, just and socially sustainable public spaces and cities.

**Keywords:** feminist planning, intersectionality, marginalised groups, social innovation, social sustainability

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## 1. Public spaces are failing girls and women

> *"What makes me not want to hang out in Fittja centre is because I don't see other girls doing that, so I don't feel represented. Why would I go there if only guys are there?"*
> (18-year-old girl from Fittja, cited in Anneroth, 2019, p. 44)

This quote illustrates why many girls avoid the public square in Fittja centre, a marginalised suburban area in Stockholm. Local girls have described that specific space as "a grey transit-area mainly dominated by boys" (Wrangsten, Ferlander and Borgström, 2022, p.11). Male dominance, including a general lack of children and women, has also been observed in other public spaces in Sweden and elsewhere (e.g. Andersson et al., 2020; Haas, 2023).

Despite – or because of – that situation, the 2030 Agenda is calling on us to create cities for everyone and to leave no one behind. Women and girls constitute a disadvantaged group at risk of being left behind in the development of more sustainable cities and communities. According to a recent UN report (Luchsinger, 2023), the world is failing girls and women in relation to many of the sustainability goals of the 2030 Agenda. It is argued that their needs and specific risks are not considered enough or fully in the rapid growth and development of urban areas. In Sweden, for example, it has been emphasised that the risk to be left behind is particularly high for girls with various vulnerabilities that overlap and intersect (Statistics Sweden, 2020). The importance of using intersectional feminist approaches (Crenshaw, 1991) in urban planning to combat inequalities and segregation have therefore been stressed in the literature (e.g. Beebeejaun, 2017; Listerborn, 2020). One of which is feminist planning.

This viewpoint argues that feminist planning can learn from the focus of social innovation on results (i.e., output, outcome, and impact of the planning), which has the potential to change planning practices and challenge gendered social norms to create more inclusive, just and socially sustainable cities and public spaces.

## 2. The need for feminist planning

Many cities worldwide are becoming increasingly segregated. Van Ham and colleagues (2021) describe a global trend of urban segregation caused by rising levels of income inequality. The most severe and persistent inequalities in cities appear where different inequalities intersect, and these intersections require most attention. For example, many women in marginalised urban areas face multiple layers of discrimination as gender intersects with age, ethnicity, class and space (Anneroth et al., 2022; Anneroth, 2024).

Urban segregation, to some extent, is also a consequence of how our cities have been planned. As early as the Middle Ages, cities were divided into different quarters. The wealthy lived in the city's core and the poor in the city's periphery. Different parts of the city were thus accessible to different groups. Some researchers argue that today's segregation and inequalities are partly a result of cities primarily being planned based upon men's needs. This has for instance been expressed in terms of "patriarchal urban planning" (Molina, 2018) and "the unsustainable male city" (Greed, 2019), concepts used to emphasise patriarchal structures in urban planning and their consequences in urban and public space.

Patriarchal structures are characterised by male dominance. According to bell hooks (2004), a patriarchy is characterised by male dominance and power over oppressed groups, especially women, both outside and within the family sphere. The patriarchy is held together through language, codes of conduct, and legislations, which, in terms of gender, determine what activities and behaviours are desirable. The city is, in many ways, an expression of these dominant gendered social norms and values. Due to the patriarchal system, urban planning has traditionally been grounded in masculine norms that prioritise men's needs, especially white, cis, educated males, while the needs of women, and other disadvantaged groups, have been overlooked (Dutton et al., 2022). Leslie Kern (2020) argues that we live in a man-made world and that our public spaces are not made for women, which for instance lead to young women struggling to find places to 'hang'. Women often perceive public spaces as places of threat rather than places of social cohesion. When the design of cities and public spaces does not consider a diversity of needs, it often leads to domination by men's needs, and those of other privileged groups. That is why we need feminist planning.

## 3. What is feminist planning?

To challenge the gendered norms that have determined what characterises a "good" city, feminist planning processes enable the contribution from women and other disadvantaged groups. It aims to understand, challenge and change the power relations that characterise cities and their planning processes (Andersdotter Fabre, Anneroth and Wrangsten, 2019).

In feminist planning, everyday experiences, needs, and desires of marginalised groups are considered an important source of knowledge in the planning process. Feminist planning furthermore involves considerations of the systematic impacts of urban development on different groups of people (Dutton et al., 2022). Rooted in feminist theory (Snyder, 1995), feminist planning includes an intersectional understanding of urban planning. For example, a group of adolescents in a public space is not homogeneous from an intersectional understanding, but needs to be broken down into subgroups, such as girls; girls of non-national origin; girls of non-national origin who are wheelchair users, and so on. The more norm-breaking characteristics a person has, the greater are the risks of being subjected to exclusion, discrimination and reduced life chances. Feminist planning thus moves beyond the gender power order, towards the inclusion of more power structures related to, for example, place of origin, ability, age, religion, etc., to answer the question of whose needs are most urgent to address. An issue, however, is how this is realised in practice. We argue that social innovation theory is important for understanding and monitoring the results of feminist planning processes, in terms of actual changes in the built environment, as well as for the different social groups involved in the process of planning and designing public space.

## 4. Learning from social innovation – through a focus on results

Social innovation can be defined as "new ideas that work to meet pressing unmet needs and improve people's lives" (Mulgan 2007, p. 7). Similarly to feminist planning, it deals with a theoretical tradition and practices within innovation that have systematically obscured the specific needs of women and other marginalised groups (Cornwall, 2003).

However, within the field of social innovation, there is a strong emphasis on results and actual change. The primary purpose of social innovation is a change in behaviour due to the innovation itself (Franz, Hochgerner and Howaldt, 2012). Researchers also argue that social innovation strives for inclusion and well-being through improved social relations and increased empowerment (Moulaert et al., 2013). Empowerment involves the ability, knowledge and confidence to influence one's own everyday life and access to societal resources, both as an individual and together with others (Ravazzoli and Valero Lopez, 2020). In this context, it does not mean that someone should be given power, but rather to be aware of, and acknowledge, the individual and collective power that women, and other disadvantaged groups, already possess (Ortiz Escalante and Gutiérrez Valdivia, 2015).

Common to both social innovation and feminist planning is thus a pursuit of social change towards more equal relations through increased power for marginalised groups. In practice, however, the questions of when or whether social change has occurred are not necessarily self-evident. Here, looking at the field of social innovation with its tradition of analysing development processes based on their consequences and results (Howaldt et al., 2017), is helpful. The results, both short- and long-term, of social innovations (and feminist planning in our point of view) can be analysed through three parameters (Millard, Holtgrewe and Hochgerner, 2017):

- *output* is what is created in connection with the activities carried out within the framework of the social innovation, in the form of a new product, service, working method, or other.
- *outcome* is the benefits or changes that occur for the participants during or after the activities.
- *impact* is the long-term consequences that arise as a result of the innovation's implementation.

Research shows that the success of social innovations depends on how user involvement and collaborative structures enable co-creation and empowerment, as well as how innovations change societal structures through influence on institutions, cultural values, behavioural patterns and social awareness (Howaldt et al., 2017). In our view, this is also important to incorporate into planning processes, as they tend to end when a project has been planned and executed, with small considerations of how the new infrastructure then impacted the place socially and spatially. A stronger focus on the effects or results when planning and launching feminist planning processes would create more sustainable solutions.

Let us now return to the young woman who did not want to hang out in the centre of her living area because there were only guys there. This young woman was part of a feminist planning project – #UrbanGirlsMovement – in relation to which the importance of actual change and impact became evident (Anneroth, 2024). The young women who participated in the project used Minecraft to design a public square in their living area (i.e. output). From interviews with the participants, we learned that while they described an increased empowerment as a result of their participation in the project (i.e. outcome), they also clearly indicated that this increased empowerment was conditioned by whether the project would lead to any actual change in the physical environment of their living area (i.e. impact).

## 5. Closing reflection

Focusing on results and actual change is an important learning from social innovation that can strengthen feminist planning in the quest of more inclusive, just and sustainable cities. Needs and ideas identified in feminist planning processes should be translated into practical and real change in the built environment. It is important to consider how needs identified in feminist planning initiatives can be addressed in practice. This requires user involvement, collaborative structures, and a consideration of both short- and long-term results of a project's implementation. When the results are utilised, they can ensure that the effects have an impact in the form of positive social change. Such a driving vision can strengthen the implementation of feminist planning practices to create more socially sustainable cities.

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# Empowering Young People in Shaping an Intersectional Future for Public Spaces

Rozina Spinnoy
*BIDs Belgium, Belgium*
*rsp@bids-belgium.com*

Romina Rodela
*Södertörn University, Department for Environment, Development and Sustainability Studies, Sweden*
*romina.rodela@sh.se*

Tiisetso Mofokeng
*IIE Vega School Cape Town, Interior Design Department, South Africa*
*timofokeng@vegaschool.com*

Atousa Sarmast
*University of Tehran, College of Fine Arts, Iran*
*atousa.sarmast@ut.ac.ir*

**Abstract**
Public spaces, such as squares, urban parks, and communal areas are arenas that reflect societal values and power structures, influencing who has access and how they engage with these spaces. This viewpoint explores the application of intersectionality—considering factors like gender, race, and socioeconomic status—in understanding how diverse identities shape the lived experience of young people in public spaces. More specifically, it focuses on girls, and it reflects on the intersectional challenges girls face in four different contexts to include Belgium, South Africa, Iran, and Sweden. The analysis reveals the complexities of safety, accessibility, and inclusion girls face across all cases. This viewpoint underscores the value in using an intersectional lens in designing inclusive public spaces and highlights the pivotal role of young people as advocates for change.

**Keywords:** public space, intersectionality, young people, gender, urban planning

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## 1. The potential of an intersectional perspective to study public space

Public space includes places where diverse people can meet, interact, and engage in various forms of exchange and dialogue on matters of shared interest (Bravo et al. 2020). Examples of public spaces include parks, squares, and communal areas. But public spaces are not just physical locations; they are dynamic social arenas that hold profound importance, shaping societal values while also fostering a sense of community. Public space is where social groups can assert their right to the city, its infrastructure, and its resources (Mehta and Bosson, 2021). For this reason, it often reveals the nature of the urban fabric—who has access, and who does not.

Studies that critically examine public space acknowledge the diversity of urban injustices that characterise contemporary spaces (Anguelovski et al. 2020; Apostolopoulou and Liodaki 2021; L'Aoustet and Griffet, 2004). These studies are important because, by mapping and discussing who has access, in what ways, and to what types of public amenities, they contribute to a thoughtful examination of various forms of injustice and how these are shaped by power structures (see: Anguelovski et al. 2020).

In this regard, of interest is how different social and political identities—such as gender, race, age, and religion—intersect to shape experiences of discrimination or privilege in urban environments. Intersectionality includes the notion that individual experiences are not defined by a single axis of identity but is influenced by a number of factors such as gender, race, socioeconomic background, and more. Applying the intersectionality lens to the study of public spaces allows us to develop a more nuanced understanding of the diverse and often divergent ways people engage with and inhabit these shared environments. The intersectional analytical framework (see: Crenshaw, 1989) holds great potential for deepening our understanding of how young people access and use public space.

In dissecting the relevance of intersectionality to public spaces, one must first acknowledge that these spaces are not neutral grounds. Instead, they are imbued with societal norms, biases, and power structures that manifest through the various identities present—or absent. The intersectional lens enables us to recognize that an individual's experience in public spaces is shaped not only by their gender or race but by the convergence of these multifaceted identities. For instance, a woman of colour may navigate a city square differently than a white man due to the intersection of her gender and race, revealing the layers of privilege and discrimination at play.

The impact of intersectionality on public spaces becomes especially evident when considering the diverse identities that converge within them (Garcia and Zajicek, 2022; La Barbera et al., 2023). Gender dynamics, for instance, significantly influence perceptions of safety and accessibility. Women, particularly those from marginalised communities, often experience heightened concerns about personal security, which in turn affects their freedom of movement within these spaces (Day 1999; La Barbera et al., 2023). This is an intersectional struggle where gender intersects with race and socioeconomic status, shaping experiences in ways that a singular lens cannot fully capture.

Race introduces layers of complexity in the public sphere. Studies have shown that people of colour, particularly Black individuals, often face heightened scrutiny and stereotyping in public spaces, which affects their sense of belonging and comfort (Powers et al., 2020; La Barbera et al., 2023). The intersectional lens helps us understand how the experiences of racial minorities are intertwined with other aspects of identity, such as

gender or economic background, and the challenges they face in navigating public environments.

Socioeconomic status is another dimension that intersects with gender and race to shape experiences in public spaces (Potter et al., 2019). Economic disparities often manifest visibly in the accessibility of certain spaces, with individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds frequently encountering barriers to entry or a sense of exclusion (O'Brien et al. 2012; Potter et al., 2019) The intersectional lens emphasises that economic inequalities do not exist in isolation; they intersect with other facets of identity, creating a layered and often unequal tapestry within public spaces.

Young people, with their fresh perspectives and inherent sense of activism, play a pivotal role in reshaping the narrative around public spaces from an intersectional standpoint. Their unique ability to challenge norms positions them as catalysts for change. Through advocacy, activism, and innovative initiatives, young individuals are actively contributing to the transformation of public spaces into environments that truly reflect the diverse tapestry of society.

In the following four cases, the experiences of young girls in public spaces across different urban contexts are introduced from an intersectional perspective. Each case offers a unique opportunity to reflect on and consider questions of inclusivity and how our urban environments address the needs and aspirations of young girls.

## 2. Case 1: Empowering Women, Public Space and Climate Change, Belgium

During the pandemic, in 2021, BIDs Belgium[1] launched a novel initiative titled *Empowering Women, Public Space and Climate Change* with the aim to empower women and girls by learning self-defence, and to help them to feel more confident and safer when moving in the city alone as women or girls[2]. The initiative to begin with brought together women active in teaching self-defence in their respective regions and countries during the International Women's Day in 2021. It was followed by a call for action directed to policy makers and city leaders to design safer cities for women and girls. Later this initiative evolved to include other interdisciplinary topics such as the disproportionate effects of poverty, conflict and climate change on intersectional women, and today brings together international experts and practitioners.

Recognizing the intersectionality of the matter of women or girls moving in the city alone is important. Women of marginalised backgrounds and in particular women of colour, migrant women, and those from low-income districts, who are resident in socioeconomically marginalised communities are often experiencing lower levels of safety and security in their own neighbourhoods. This impacts them in different ways. For instance, they might tend to spend less time outdoors, be less inclined to socialise in nearby public space and use less parks and other facilities (Bantham et al., 2021; Popkin et al., 2008). Today, the initiative brings together international experts and practitioners to address these interconnected issues and advocate for inclusive, equitable urban environments.

[1] The initiative was launched by BIDs Belgium (Business Improvement Districts), a think tank focused on managing and enhancing commercial areas while creating inclusive, sustainable cities and communities through creative design thinking, social innovation, and community empowerment.

[2] BIDs collaborates with Kaarvan Crafts Foundation https://kaarvan.com.pk/

## 3. Case 2: Intersectional Identity in Designing Public Spaces in a Township with Girls, Cape Town, South Africa

Public spaces are intended to be accessible to all, symbolising democratic and communal life (Kaur, 2020). However, in many African contexts, societal expectations often confine girls and women to domestic roles, excluding them from outdoor activities. This exclusion allows boys and men to dominate urban public spaces, engaging in activities such as car washing and playing street soccer, while women and girls face harassment, leading them to take longer routes or use distractions like headsets to avoid uncomfortable situations.

This case acknowledges that the lack of safety in public spaces is a global concern for women and girls. Our research finds that factors such as race, culture, age, and class significantly influence how girls from different backgrounds navigate and avoid public spaces in their neighbourhoods (Stassen, 2023). Further, girls who already have other barriers like limited access to higher education, traumatic family situations, and societal peer pressure were found to face particular challenges in accessing public space. The 'Girls Make The City'[3] (GMTC) project is aimed at these girls, who are striving to improve their lives and set positive examples for the youth.


Figure 1a. Workshop activities (Nov 2023).

To understand the local context, the GMTC project team made of five researchers and social entrepreneurs, conducted a workshop with local organisations in Langa, a black township in Cape Town (Western Cape). Elderly women were invited to map out unsafe areas both affecting women and girls, providing valuable insights into the community's challenges. Local organisations also assisted us in recruiting 17 girls aged from 16 to 25 years. For this we used specific nomination criteria to ensure that the selected participants represented the intended population of girls who showed qualities of:

[3]Girls Make the City (GMTC) is a project launched by Wetopia and managed by Open Design Afrika (ODA) with support from Cape Town-based partners. The initiative tackles the critical issue of safety for girls and women in South Africa's urban public spaces. Wetopia collaborates globally with local communities to build inclusive societies, fostering unity and striving for more inclusive cities. Rooted in the African humanist philosophy of UBUNTU, ODA promotes democratic participation, knowledge sharing, and equips communities with future-oriented life skills through creative experiences that nurture Creative Intelligence in participants of all ages.

changemaker by nature, leadership skills, passionate and driven to make a difference, eager to learn, empathetic by nature, community-driven, innovative, problem solver, solution seeker, quick thinker, between the ages of 16 and 25, driver of change, punctual, responsible, team player, collaborator and finally aspirational. With this project we aimed to add depth of analysis and further understand the gap between local public safety statistics and the need for gender-sensitive urban planning, especially in marginalised townships.


Figure 1b. Quotes from two workshop participants.

During the workshops, the girls expressed pride in their township's cultural history but also voiced concerns about the lack of public spaces that accommodate young mothers and also of those girls who prefer nighttime activities (Figure1a). Many felt that existing public spaces failed to meet their needs such as visiting a park freely with their children and allowing them to wear what they want without feeling like they would be cat-called, forcing them to worry about childcare or safety as public spaces are unmaintained and do not accommodate for such activities to take place in the context of Langa. We thus used a bottom-up approach to understand how the insights provided from local residents could inform interventions, comparing academic theories with the everyday experiences of those using these spaces.

The girls proposed creative and authentic interventions to reclaim public spaces. Some of the suggestions included creating a sister hike trail marked with pink footsteps to symbolise their presence and designing memory walls with local artists to honour female icons from the community. By the time we completed the third workshop, the participating girls showed significant growth in confidence and determination, emerging as leaders and advocates for safer, more inclusive public spaces in their neighbourhood and African townships (Figure 1b).

## 4. Case 3: Participatory Mapping with Teenage girls of Meeting Places and Public Spaces in Södertälje, Sweden

Public spaces and meeting places where young people can gather, socialise, and spend time outdoors greatly affect their mental and physical health (D'Haese et al. 2015; Spruijtenburg et al. 2024). While municipalities commonly invest in public infrastructure such as sports fields, skating parks, and outdoor gyms, these facilities often cater primarily to the needs and interests of boys and young men. In contrast, it has been noted by

activist groups how teenage girls' needs and interests are seldom met by such facilities, and what is generally available (see: Make Space for Girls[4])

Our research in vulnerable districts in Södertälje (Sweden) found constraints on young people's engagement[5] in outdoor activities and recreational pursuits, including concerns about safety, lack of access, and stigma (Buijs et al. 2024; Rodela at al. 2021). In July 2021, with the support of the Ronna Youth Centre, we conducted a participatory mapping activity[6] with five teenage girls residing in and near the Ronna neighbourhood. The objective was to gather qualitative data on access and use of public spaces and meeting places, and better understand their lived experiences as residents of that area classified at that time as having low levels of safety and security by Swedish Police Authority. Educators at the Ronna Youth Centre played an active role in the recruitment process. The activity lasted about 1 hour and 30 minutes. We began by focusing on their lived experiences, mapping places they liked and disliked. We then opened up a discursive space for them to raise questions and issues of concern, which the researchers subsequently presented for discussion at a stakeholder workshop (see: Rodela at al. 2021). The session was facilitated by a female colleague, while three other researchers took notes and collected observational data. The activity provided in-depth insights into teenage girls' experiences of safety, stigma, and the gendered nature of access to urban green and public spaces, as well as discrimination and community dynamics.

Of particular interest is how the data collected helps us to understand aspects related to intersectionality of the teenage girls and how that influences their use and perception of public spaces. As children of immigrant parents in Sweden, the girls expressed a strong sense of belonging to Ronna, which they described as "home" and a supportive community. But they also listed a number of challenges they face daily due to the negative stereotypes attached to that particular neighbourhood that the media describes as a "criminal hub." They saw harm in that narrative: it was directly affecting them. When asked the group explained to us how it creates stigmatisation which they experience recurringly when interacting with people from outside the community. The girls emphasised that these stereotypes not only misrepresent their lived reality but also affect their access to and freedom in public spaces, where they often feel judged or marginalised. These experiences reflect a broader intersection of identity, where being young, female, and from an immigrant background shapes their everyday use of urban spaces, often creating certain barriers. Despite these challenges, the girls demonstrated optimism, rejecting the negative labels imposed on them and sharing their aspirations with us during the session, for their professional futures in fields like medicine, education, and law. This complex intersection of identity and public space reveals the gendered, racialized, and socio-economic dimensions of urban life. The activity revealed how public spaces are not equally accessible for all in Ronna, and particularly for teenage girls.

[4] Make Space for Girls, Parkwatch (makespaceforgirls.co.uk).

[5] Research funded by the National Research Program for Sustainable Spatial Planning, grant number 2019-01887 and by an Internal Departmental Grant by Södertörn University.

[6] Research approved by the Swedish Ethical Board (ID: 2019-05938). All participants received information in written form and orally by one team member, including how collected data will be handled in anonymous form and ways it will be used. Informed consent was obtained by the participants who were at that time aged above 15 years.

The girls expressed discomfort with a nearby urban forest (i.e., Ronna Forest), which they perceived as dark, unsafe, and associated with potential dangers due to negative activities like alcohol consumption and related behaviour by older youth.

Figure 2. Participatory Mapping Activity with Girls

During the mapping they also reported on how their experiences in public places come to be shaped by gender and age (Figure 2). This group of girls reported on how, when they gathered outdoors, older women or other community members might feel entitled to patronise them about their behaviour. They experienced, when gathering and sitting on benches at the Ronna Multisport facility, being asked by adults, or boys, to leave or to be quieter. This, they contend, does not happen to boys, who have broader access to most public spaces, and are allowed to be loud. Which is interesting and it appears as the adults are reinforcing 'traditional' gender norms of who can go where and what they are allowed to do, and how to behave (loud associated with masculinity while being quiet and polite with femininity).

The workshop activity provided a unique opportunity to understand how age, gender, and immigrant status intersect to shape girls' perceptions of safety, belonging, and interactions within their community. Recognizing and further investigating these intersections is crucial to developing a more comprehensive understanding of young people's lived experiences in vulnerable communities, which is necessary to plan, design, and build more inclusive spaces that cater to the diverse needs of youth in Södertälje, and elsewhere in Sweden.

## 5. Case 4: Participating in post-disaster recovery in Sarpolezahab-Qasreshirine, Iran

After the Sarpol-e Zahab earthquake in Iran in 2017, several young women and other educated youth came back from school and college to help with the disaster recovery

work (Preliminary Report of Mw7.3 Sarpol-e Zahab, Iran Earthquake ECHO, 9 Apr 2019). Young women from disadvantaged backgrounds in cities often want to go back to their hometowns after they finish education, even though they face few chances because of poor infrastructure and resources.

The involvement of young educated women in rebuilding their communities after disasters showed how their identities as women, youth, and members of less privileged groups overlapped. They made key contributions to many areas, like city planning, rebuilding homes, and setting up temporary shelters. Their unique position gave them special insight into their communities' varied needs. This highlighted how being both community members and professionals allowed them to push for recovery plans that were more inclusive and focused on what people needed.

Despite this, young women faced barriers due to gender-based rules and weak disaster recovery plans. Public spaces following disasters often reflect societal views on safety and unequal power for women. Gender-based social rules and recovery plans limit women's access to resources and opportunities. For example, many women reported feeling unsafe in public spaces, despite their participation, because recovery planning overlooked their specific needs.

A notable example of overcoming these problems occurred in Qasreshirine. There, members of the university[7] and government[8] teamed up with young women to get them involved in planning and rebuilding after a disaster. This project is regarded as one of the most significant initiatives following the Sarpol-e Zahab earthquake in Iran. The contributions of these women played a crucial role in shaping post-disaster policies, resulting in more inclusive planning and design.

When these young women became involved, they challenged traditional ideas of gender roles and demonstrated their ability to influence major decisions. They helped create community-led plans that advocated for policy changes, aiming to enhance safety and create public spaces that everyone could use.

Understanding how these young educated women contribute to rebuilding areas after disasters is essential to creating sustainable recovery plans. Their identities as women, youth, and individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds provides them with a unique perspective on the needs of the community, even in the face of religious and cultural constraints. This example underscores the importance of empowering women to play a role in post-disaster efforts, ensuring that we can build inclusive cities capable of addressing future challenges more effectively.

## 6. Conclusion

Understanding questions of access and inclusion in public spaces greatly benefits from an intersectional viewpoint since that allows us to shed light on aspects that are less understood when it comes to the lived experience young girls have with these spaces. In this viewpoint we discussed how young people come to access and use public space in four cases and how intersecting identities may have impacted on that. Specifically, aspects related to inequality have merged and proved to be quite present in all four cases.

[7] University of Tehran recover and social science team and sharif university of Tehran rebuild and structure team.

[8] Housing Foundation of Islamic Revolution and their sub institutions in collaborating with resident citizens.

A commitment to resolving gender-based inequalities is central to the creation of inclusive public spaces. The influence of young people on this front is evident in their advocacy and there is a need to integrate novel methods and tools which can open up urban planning and governance to different groups. We would like to end this viewpoint by suggesting that the intersectional perspective on public spaces is an idea but also a call to action—one that young people are answering with determination. Their contributions go beyond being mere users of these spaces; they are advocates for a future that celebrates diversity, champions equity, and prioritises sustainability.

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# Fostering Gender Transformative Cities around the World

Thomas Melin, Tove Levonen
*Shared City Foundation, Sweden*
*thomas.s.melin@gmail.com | tove.levonen@sharedcity.se*

**Abstract**
In the context of rapid urbanisation and the effects of climate change and conflicts, social inclusion and stakeholder engagements remain a low priority for most decision-makers in shaping the future of cities. The urban development initiative Her City intends to mainstream gender and age perspectives in urban planning and design decision-making processes. Her City offers a toolbox for municipal professionals, urban actors, and local decision-makers to involve girls and young women in urban planning and design processes and challenge exclusionary practices and social inequalities. This viewpoint asserts that integrating girls' perspectives leads to more responsive urban planning and the creation of inclusive and economically viable public spaces across the world. Applying an intersectional approach to urban planning, in a multitude of urban settings with different social, cultural, political and economic prerequisites, have proven to be an efficient shortcut to sustainable cities, Additionally, the initiative's success is underscored by its alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), delivering resilient cities for all. This viewpoint presents lessons learned from the application of Her City in Peru, Jamaica, Mozambique, Uganda, Palestine, Thailand, and Italy. These localised projects in various regions demonstrate how Her City can deliver tangible outcomes, such as the revitalisation of public spaces, community empowerment, and the promotion of gender equality, while fostering social cohesion, economic empowerment, and environmental sustainability. By championing gender-responsive urban development, Her City offers a blueprint for creating inclusive, resilient, and sustainable cities globally.

**Keywords:** Her City, gender, intersectionality, participatory urban development, sustainable cities, community engagement

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## 1. Introduction

Urban areas are facing challenges worldwide, with issues such as inadequate infrastructure, overcrowding, and environmental degradation. One critical aspect of these challenges is the exclusion of women and girls from urban planning and decision-making processes. This exclusion often results in cities that do not provide for the needs of all residents as well as perpetuating gender inequality. By involving women and girls in the planning and design of cities, it is possible to create safer, more equitable, and resilient urban environments that benefit all residents (Kern, 2020).

Research shows that when consulted in urban planning and design processes, girls and young women express social responsibility and environmental concern, by addressing pressing urban planning issues such as crime prevention measures, ecosystem services, transport solutions, access to education, housing and healthcare (Escalante & Valdivia, 2024). Additionally, girls and young women, traditionally having the role of main care provider of patriarchal society, often integrate the needs of a variety of urban dwellers such as children, youth, elderly and disabled people among others. Since cities traditionally have been planned by and for white, car bound middle aged men, engaging this demographic in urban development processes provides new perspectives and enriched insights. In turn, enabling informed decision-making and fostering inclusive, economically viable public spaces catering to diverse stakeholder needs (UN-Habitat, 2010). Well-planned public spaces accessible for all regardless of ethnic origin, ability, sexual orientation, age or gender, have a community building effect as well as provide a democratic forum for citizens and society (Kern, 2020).

Digital solutions are beneficial for initiatives such as Her City since they offer innovative tools for inclusive and participatory urban development. These solutions enable broader engagement by providing platforms for women and girls to voice their needs and ideas into the planning processes. Digital tools such as mapping software and online surveys, facilitate data collection and analysis, helping to identify and address gender-specific urban challenges efficiently. Furthermore, digital platforms can enhance transparency and accountability, ensuring that urban development projects are responsive to the community's needs.

Her City was launched in 2021 as a joint initiative between the United Nations agency for Human Settlements, UN-Habitat, and Shared City Foundation. Financial support for its establishment was provided by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the Swedish Innovation Agency (Vinnova), and the independent think tank Global Utmaning. Her City encourages urban actors to integrate the gender and age perspective into long-term strategies for building equal urban societies and accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Her City initiative applies an intersectional approach to civic engagement and public space development, and challenges exclusionary practices and unequal social structures.

Her City Toolbox provides a digital and open-source platform with methods and tools for engaging groups at risk of marginalisation such as girls and young women while planning and designing public space. The toolbox was co-developed by a multi-stakeholder team, including representatives from the public, private sector, academia and civil society. Started in 2017, the team has studied tools and methods available that address public participation of girls and young women in urban design processes. Following, the team identified best practices and organised them into a step-by-step

methodology, articulated into nine incremental blocks that cover the three main phases of a traditional urban development process: assessment, design and implementation. In the first phase, assessment, a stakeholder mapping is conducted to identify relevant local actors and engage the primary target group. Once the multi-stakeholder team is mobilised, city wide and site-specific public space assessments are executed to gather qualitative and quantitative data using digital tools such as Kobo Collect[1] and Inhabit Place[2]. During the phase two, design, the spaces and user needs are analysed and addressed into design proposals, using design thinking and visualisation tools such as MethodKit[3] and Minecraft[4]. The third and last phase, implementation, provides guidelines on how to formulate recommendations for action, disseminate and validate the design proposals with the community at large, and implement it. Finally, after six months from the implementation the multi-stakeholder team evaluated the impact of the interventions.

The Her City initiative provides a theoretical framework for the implementation of local projects and catalyses positive change on a global scale, approaching systemic challenges in local settings by fully utilising the expertise of girls and minorities. As of March 2024, the toolbox registers 1250 users from 430 cities in 120 countries, forming 350 independent initiatives. Meanwhile, the Her City team has supported 25 partnership projects spanning five continents with 13 fully implemented project sites (Her City, 2023).

Her City has the ambition to contribute to a range of the development goals, including health and well-being (SDG3); gender equality (SDG5); reducing inequality (SDG10); sustainable cities and communities (SDG11); peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG16); and partnerships (SDG17). Additionally, reports from projects carried out since 2021 have shown that the process also contributes to local implementations of the other SDGs.

In what follows, we present a few examples of the application of the Her City Toolbox in South America, Africa, Asia and Europe, to illustrate the importance of gender-focused urban development (UN-Habitat, 2024).

## 2. Peru - Her City Lima

> *"It is a sign of change, with benefits for both boys and girls"*
> Flor and Patricia, neighbours in Lima, Peru

The project "Female builders of an inclusive and resilient city-wide system of public spaces in Lima" aims to boost resilience and promote social cohesion in two marginalised neighbourhoods in Lima, Peru. The project addresses urban issues in the areas by revitalising public spaces working in close cooperation with partners Avina Foundation, Ocupa tu Calle, Mano a Mano, and the Block by Block Foundation. The major challenge is the vulnerability of pedestrian pathways located on hillsides, which are prone to both landslides and crime. Meanwhile, some of the public spaces remain

[1] https://www.kobotoolbox.org/
[2] https://www.inhabitplace.info/
[3] https://methodkit.com/
[4] https://www.minecraft.net/en-us

underutilised due to issues like informal parking and drug-related activities. To address these problems, local women, particularly unemployed single mothers who lost their livelihood during the Covid-19 pandemic, are engaged as "Female Builders" to transform these spaces. Utilising their knowledge of the area and the experience of partner organisations on public space improvement, the multi-stakeholder team contribute to making Limas public spaces safer and more accessible. In collaboration with the Her City initiative, the project has empowered residents and transformed abandoned spaces. Digital tools like Minecraft and Inhabit Place facilitated the co-design process, allowing residents to reimagine and redesign the spaces according to their needs. The project has impacted over 5,500 people in the neighbourhoods that benefit from the revitalised spaces, a majority of whom are women and girls.

Figure 1. Children contributing to the public space design proposals in Lima, *Perú* © Ocupa tu Calle.

The project emphasises the importance of active community participation, especially from women and girls, in the design and construction of public spaces. The success of the project already serves as inspiration for further initiatives across Lima and has the potential of influencing public policy to prioritise inclusive urban development. Through collaboration and community engagement, the project demonstrates how gender-responsive approaches can transform urban spaces and improve quality of life for residents (UN-Habitat, 2024).

### 3. Jamaica - Her City Montego Bay

The Canterbury Community Center and Public Space project in Montego Bay, Jamaica, led by UN-Habitat and funded primarily by the Sandals Foundation represents a transformative approach to urban development. Montego Bay grapples with the consequences of rapid urbanisation, with more than half of its population residing in informal settlements characterised by inadequate infrastructure, environmental hazards, and limited access to basic services. Despite its strategic location, Canterbury faces challenges, including violent crime, high unemployment rates, flooding and waste management issues that further intensify the community's vulnerabilities. In response,

the Canterbury project aims to strengthen community resilience by transforming the area into a vibrant social hub, fostering social cohesion, skills development, and entrepreneurship.

Figure 2. Young women analysing public space challenges using MethodKit in Montego Bay, Jamaica © UN-Habitat.

Through inclusive decision-making processes, residents, particularly women, youth, and children, are actively involved in all stages of the project, from design to implementation. This participatory approach not only creates a sense of ownership and pride but also ensures that the project addresses the unique needs and aspirations of the community. The outcomes of the Canterbury project are multifaceted, spanning through the social, economic, and environmental domains. The establishment of the community centre and the public space serves as a catalyst for social and economic development, creating sustainable livelihoods, enhancing employment opportunities, and contributing to the local economy. Moreover, the project focuses also on environmental improvements, such as drainage enhancements and green space creation, which promote ecological resilience and improves overall quality of life. (UN-Habitat, 2024).

## 4. Mozambique - Her City Pemba

The Her City Project in Pemba, Mozambique represents a clear example of transformative urban development, addressing the complex challenges faced by internally displaced groups and host communities, with a particular focus on empowering women and girls. Partnering with local stakeholders and supported by UN-Habitat, the project seeks to strengthen the resilience of displaced and host communities, particularly women and girls, through participatory planning, infrastructure improvements, and capacity building. Through a collaborative effort involving local activists, residents, and municipal authorities, the project has initiated a comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing the needs of vulnerable populations.

Figure 3. Validating GIS spatial maps with youth and women in Pemba, Mozambique © UN-Habitat.

Situated in the Mahate neighbourhood, the project confronts a myriad of challenges stemming from rapid urbanisation, including limited access to basic services, environmental degradation, and safety concerns. The project's participatory approach has given valuable insights into the lived experiences of residents, as well as their aspirations for a more inclusive and resilient urban environment. By engaging community members in Gender-Focused Walks of Active Observation of Public Spaces Diagnosis, the project has identified priority areas for intervention, ranging from road safety improvements to sanitation initiatives and environmental conservation efforts. In addition to tangible interventions, the project is instrumental in building institutional capacities and fostering community empowerment. Through collaborative planning processes and capacity-building initiatives, local authorities and community members are equipped with the tools and knowledge necessary to advocate for their needs and shape the future development of their neighbourhoods. The project aims to leave a lasting impact on Pemba's urban landscape, with outcomes ranging from improved living conditions and increased community engagement to strengthened institutional capacities and enhanced resilience. (UN-Habitat, 2024).

## 5. Uganda - Her City Kampala

The Her City Project in Kampala, spearheaded by the women-led organisation HADE (Holistic Actions for Development and Empowerment) with support from Dreamtown and DANIDA, focused on transforming urban spaces in the informal settlement of Kamwanyi. With the Her City Toolbox, a rooftop in Kamwanyi was designed together with young women and girls from the community, aiming to address unequal access to urban space and promote inclusive urban planning and design. Despite challenges such as land ownership disputes and illiteracy among participants, HADE successfully empowered women and girls through training and workshops, leading to the creation of a green space with amenities like seating areas, water taps, and a library.

Figure 4. Young women sketching their design ideas for inclusive public spaces in Kampala, Uganda © HADE.

The project has raised awareness and empowered participants, resulting in spin-off initiatives such as the Her City Market Corner, "Juice-preneur" ventures, and savings groups, showcasing the catalytic effect of engaging young women in urban development. The project also shined a light on how difficult the negotiation process for land access can be, especially in a context where land is scarce and privately owned. The team had to get creative and get access to a rooftop that was then re-designed and re-purposed into a public space. Creating layers to the cityscape.This initiative has significant effects beyond the project itself, fostering economic opportunities, social cohesion, and community resilience. By investing in the potential of women and girls, the project creates a foundation for sustainable urban development and inclusive growth (UN-Habitat, 2024).

## 6. Palestine - Haya joint programme

(Note: the project referred to as Her City Gaza was implemented before the situation escalated October 2023)

The Haya joint programme, a collaborative effort led by UN-Habitat and UN Women in Palestine, represents a comprehensive aspiration to prevent the pervasive issue of violence against women and girls in public spaces across the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Embracing a holistic approach, the initiative employs participatory planning methodologies and robust community engagement strategies, harnessing the collective expertise of local authorities, architects, and marginalised communities, with a particular emphasis on empowering women and girls. The challenges faced in Palestine regarding violence against women and girls in public spaces are multifaceted. They stem from social, cultural, and political factors, creating barriers to women's participation in public

life and hindering their access to safe and inclusive spaces. The Haya programme acknowledges these complexities and addresses them through innovative initiatives and partnerships. One of the key objectives of the programme is to improve the quality and safety of public spaces for women and girls.

Figure 5. Girls and boys utilising the videogame Minecraft to co-design public spaces in Khan Younis, Palestine © UN-Habitat.

This involves redesigning urban areas to make them more accessible, welcoming, and secure. By engaging with local authorities, architects, and community members, the programme identifies areas in need of intervention and develops specific solutions to address them in five cities of Palestine, Bethlehem, Jenin, Jericho, Khan Younis and Nablus. The project endeavours to not only improve the quality and safety of public spaces but also cultivating youth leadership and fostering inclusive urban development practices that honour cultural heritage and promote social cohesion. By amplifying voices, advocating for gender-responsive policies, and facilitating capacity building efforts, the Haya project aims to pave the way for sustainable transformation, ensuring that safe and inclusive public spaces become a cornerstone of resilient and equitable urban environments throughout Palestine. (UN-Habitat, 2024).

## 7. Thailand - Her City Chiang Khong

The project in the Chiang Khong district of Thailand aims to assess and analyse public spaces, focusing on gender equality, human rights, and inclusive urban environments. This project, titled "Neighborhood Assessment and Analysis on Community's Views On Gender Equality," was a joint effort between UN-Habitat and UNFPA Thailand. The participants comprised a diverse group, including local adolescents, youth from ethnic minority backgrounds, women across different age groups, local administrators, NGO

representatives, municipal officers, architects, urban designers and Chief Security leaders. In Chiang Kong District, women encountered significant barriers, ranging from limited access to basic services to gender-based violence and underrepresentation in decision-making processes. The initiative aimed to tackle these issues through a comprehensive neighbourhood assessment, delving into themes such as climate change, safety, and social inclusion. By amplifying the voices of marginalised groups and fostering partnerships, the project sought to lay the groundwork for sustainable urban development. It included a public space mapping phase to identify deficiencies in infrastructure and green areas, proposing solutions for creating safer, more inclusive spaces.


Figure 6. Girls presenting their public space ideas to local authorities and urban practitioners in Chiang Khong, Thailand © UNFPA.

> *"The girls and women in turn get to acknowledge that people from other parts of the world are interested in importance of them. Some have never experienced it before."*
> Thitipa Lamsri, Wiang Chiang Khong municipal public relations

Moving forward, Her City Thailand plans to expand its impact by partnering with UNFPA Thailand, developing online curricula, conducting demographic data training, and regenerating public spaces using innovative design approaches. Through collaboration and collective action, Chiang Kong has the potential to become a model for inclusive urban development, inspiring positive change in other communities in Thailand facing similar challenges (UN-Habitat, 2024).

## 8. Italy - Her City Corvetto

The Her City project in Corvetto, Milan, Italy, launched in April 2023 promotes gender equality by revitalising public spaces in multicultural neighbourhoods. Led by Dare.ngo and supported by UN-Habitat, this initiative seeks to address longstanding urban challenges in Corvetto, a neighbourhood plagued by neglect, discrimination, and insecurity. With a population of 35,900, Corvetto has struggled with its reputation for distress and degradation, compounded by a lack of adequate lighting, maintenance, and cleanliness. The project aims to empower multi-ethnic residents, particularly women and girls, by involving them in decision-making processes and urban transformations. Through a series of participatory workshops and activities, residents have identified Gabriel Rosa Square as a priority intervention area due to safety concerns, especially for women. Proposed solutions include the installation of surveillance cameras, solar lamps, and road emergency buttons to enhance security, as well as the introduction of green spaces and amenities to improve liveability. Additionally, community-led initiatives such as chess games and physical activity courses aim to foster social inclusion and repopulate the square. By actively engaging citizens in urban planning and design, the Her City project promotes active citizenship and participatory democracy. Through dialogue and exchange, residents from diverse backgrounds learn about each other, reducing discrimination and fostering a sense of belonging.


Figure 7. Dare.ngo presenting the Her City Toolbox to residents of Corvetto in Milano, Italy © Dare.ngo.

The project's goal is to transform Corvetto into a vibrant, inclusive hub that connects the city centre with nearby parks. By empowering the community and enhancing public spaces, Her City aims to create a safe, welcoming environment free from violence and discrimination. Lessons learned from the project emphasise the importance of community engagement and inclusion in urban development. By realising their ideas and

proposals, residents develop a sense of ownership and pride in their neighbourhood, contributing to its long-term sustainability and resilience. The Her City project in Corvetto exemplifies the transformative potential of grassroots initiatives in creating more inclusive, vibrant, and sustainable urban environments. Through collaboration and collective action, communities can reclaim and revitalise public spaces, fostering social cohesion and empowerment for all residents (UN-Habitat, 2024).

## 9. Conclusion: Driving gender transformative development

Gender-transformative urban development serves as an important tool in the quest for gender equality within urban landscapes. As cities expand and evolve, it becomes increasingly important to ensure that the benefits of urbanisation are equitably distributed, without leaving any community behind. This mindset lies at the heart of the Her City initiative. Embedding gender considerations, as well as intersecting dimensions of identity such as age, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, and socioeconomic status, into planning and design processes, cities can proactively address systemic inequalities and promote social inclusion. Her City provides the opportunity for urban stakeholders to integrate youth, gender, and socioeconomic perspectives into the development processes. Her City, with its multifaceted projects set in a variety of contexts, have endorsed innovation in urban planning and design, thereby challenging conventional paradigms and fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptation.

The first five years of Her City has shown the values of including underrepresented perspectives in local decision-making processes and physical planning and design of urban spaces. Each partnership project showcases the variety and complexity of urban issues that can be addressed when applying a gendered lens to planning and design (UN-Habitat, 2024). The Her City process itself is scalable and applicable in all urban contexts due to its community centred approach. The project teams often face similar challenges independent of where their project is set –lack of funding and political hesitancy. However, when given the opportunity, community driven local initiatives play a role in driving new-thinking and much needed change in the development process to obtain inclusive and resilient cities. A bottom up and community centred approach builds trust and foster engagement while navigating complex social structures and norms with cultural understanding. Leveraging the deep knowledge of local contexts, such projects pinpoint specific community needs, advocating for tailored solutions that resonate with residents and gain broad acceptance. Local champions foster a sense of ownership and accountability within the community, promoting the long-term sustainability of projects as well as bridging the gap between communities and decision-makers, and driving positive transformations towards more inclusive, resilient, and vibrant urban environments (Koleth et al, (2021).

As urban landscapes evolve, Her City remains at the forefront, driving the transition towards a more sustainable and inclusive urban world. By embracing underrepresented perspectives and amplifying marginalised voices, Her City paves the way for more inclusive and resilient urban environments, where the needs and aspirations of all residents are recognized and valued.

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