

Project: Women and the city

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SEXISM AND THE CITY

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50.8% of the world population are women and girls but this number is not having its weight when it comes to public space planning, a discipline still being dominated by men. Women under represented at all levels of government with less than 15% worldwide women as mayors and up to 36% women representation in European councils and regional assemblies¹. This article is trying to trace and articulate the problems as well as the potential change triggers, point out the advantages with equality for all public space users and suggest ways to apply equality into the exist urban infrastructure/situation.

Statistic shows that the majority of violent victims are men (victimised by other men) and in cities where the data is available, as in the Netherlands, it shows that most violent crimes take place in the street². At the same time, sexual related violent victims are mostly women.

*"In a multi-country study from the Middle East and North Africa, between 40 and 60 per cent of women said they had ever experienced street-based sexual harassment (mainly sexual comments, stalking/following, or staring/ogling), and 31 per cent to 64 per cent of men said they had ever carried out such acts."*³

Equality is not women only problem. Looking broadly at the accompanying effects, the phenomenon of inequality in the city or in general, affects the society as a whole. Inequality in the city includes other minorities in the society such as disabled who struggle with physical infrastructure barriers and cultural based discrimination towards people with different looks, colour, religious and sexual affiliation but also, about half of them are as well-women.

Equality also refers to a sense of security for all. Where it comes to street violent, the chance that a member of the named minorities will be physically attracted by a woman is very low to non-exist. So, the base assumption is that a public with many/only women, is a safer space for all.

¹ urbact.eu

² *Fewer women than men fall victim to violence.* www.cbs.nl

"Approximately half of all violent crimes committed against men are street crimes; among female crime victims, 43 percent of crimes are street crimes."

³ *Facts and figures: Ending violence against women* out of unwomen.org

Safe public space generates healthy street life for the city dwellers at all age and also to the tourist in general and women travellers in specific. When in turn, thanks to diversity originated in the attraction of people from all over the country and the world, the city become a creative hub, which improves the urban lifestyle in the city for all.

To generate a safe and healthy public space, we must differentiate between 2 aspects. One is *culture* and the other is *infrastructure*. While the first can't be changed by physical modification, the second allow the change if a woman would like to adopt it. As today, equality in culture is very location and/or tradition based and so the aim is not to change how women are perceived in one culture or another but simply to support their daily lives with the right infrastructure and this is where local adaptation to infrastructure is required as there is no 'one size fit for all' in this case. We seem to believe that infrastructure is the problem while in fact, infrastructure was shaped by the culture. What we could do at this point as planners is try and influence the culture by changing the infrastructure and thus the cultural reference

CULTURE

The year is 2020 and women are still the ones who are responsible for home/ child care even when working full time. In general, women earn up to 40% less than men, which doesn't compare same positions but a general gender perception problem. Many women take positions that are payed less (teaching, healthcare etc.) as they have children and they are the ones to care for the household and family what sometimes limits them when choosing training and career. With the COVID 19 women were the first to get the hit and they are the majority among the unemployed recorded since April 2020⁴.

Women are earning less money is a symptom with wider effect. The round about the age of 30 women start to have kids and from this point on the growth in pay is falling behind from the growth in pay of their fellow men. When it comes to culture, there is a tricky problem with the national ideology setting the employments rules and it doesn't always comply with the individual ambitions, short or long terms. So, the question of maternity leave is not always an individual question but a question of how is the collective culture and the national interest are supporting discrimination against mothers. In Germany for instants with 1.5% birth rate, the national motive is to encourage birth and this is reflected in the conditions of maternity leave that about two years. For the short term and maybe for some women it might sound like a dream. However, Germany has one of the highest gander wage gap of 30%⁵ so for some women- whose their specialisation relies on continuation, who are not

⁴ Women made up 49% of the overall workforce, but accounted for 55% of job losses in April.

After a Full Month of Business Closures, Women Were Hit Hardest By April's Job Losses/ Claire Ewing-Nelson

⁵ *Why do occupations dominated by women pay less? How 'female-typical' work tasks and working-time arrangements affect the gender wage gap among higher education graduates /* Kathrin Leuze and Suzsanne Strauß

interested with staying home so long and for those who are not interested with having kids- that is a problem. As when an employer wants to fill a position, one that takes time to train and require continuation, he will have it mind when having to choose between a man or a woman. Most businesses, are small businesses⁶ (fewer than 100 people) and would be more influenced by the absents of a person for so long. So, to say- to encourage women to bring more kids to the world while assuming all wants to stay home is not helping with the long-term inequality issue. A better solution could have been to allow women to get back to work by improving the child care infrastructure and have it work proximity based rather than home based in the early first years. Examples for such child care exist and demonstrate advantages in performance⁷.

Earning less is also depending on the occupation. Female dominated occupations such administrative positions, teaching, nursing all female dominated and offer less income in contrast with male dominated occupations such software development, computer system and managing possessions in construction. One reason why women choose to work in such occupations at the first hand or to go through a professional transformation at one point is that it better fits to their reality where they are the main caregiver in the household and can't commit to the time table the male dominated-occupations (set by men) demands⁸.

Less income also translates into less women owning/using a private car and therefore are depended more on public transportation and cycling as means of mobility. Meaning, women do not only have to carry more duties for less money, but while doing so, they are using the public area more and so, safety in the public transportation system, walking in the street, riding bicycles or scooters at all times of the day are essential for them to manage their daily tasks at all minimum. As said, culture is not so easy to change nor the notion that working hours should be the same for all but if the cities could offer better infrastructure and improve the conditions that will give women leverage in daily the routine

Religion also play a significant role. The more traditional the society is, the deeper is the traditional gender role segregation and so the need for infrastructure modification is needed. As if women are still expected to be the main care giver in the family (care for the kids and the elderly) while often also to providing, they need the infrastructure to support their efforts by providing safe, efficient access that will allow them to manage their daily tasks using affordable means.

⁶ *Why Americans Are More Likely to Work for a Large Employer, in 20 Charts/ Wall Street Journal*

⁷ *Child care in the workplace/ Tracy Trautner, Michigan State University, Sep 14, 2016*

⁸ *Why do occupations dominated by women pay less? How 'female-typical' work tasks and working-time arrangements affect the gender wage gap among higher education graduates / Kathrin Leuze and Suzsanne Strauß*

INFRASTRUCTURE

In some cities in the world, exist gender separation in the public transportation by creating women only carriages and buses. Though, the concept is to give women a sense of safety and encourage them to use the public transportation, it perpetuates the problem and it is likened to treating the symptoms of the disease instead of curing the cause. Is the only way women will feel safe is by avoiding men? By keeping them segregated? It is an expression of 'victim blaming'⁹, marking women as the problem and highlighting them as potential victims. Important aspect to highlight is that law enforcement and zero tolerance towards manifestations of violence must be implemented at all times. Then, if men are the vast majority of perpetrators, they are the ones who should be afraid of the consequences of their actions and not women for their lives, bodies and mind due to others interoperating their cloths, their walk, their look as an invitation to attack them. When you put a bird in a cage - there is no intention to protect it but to own it, to restrict it - to deprive it of its freedom. Even if the cage is made out of gold, it is still a cage. In this case, the cage is sometimes pink and has the text 'for women only'.

The importance of equality designed city with the adjusted infrastructure is to allow a cultural change once one chooses it. To transform a struggle to an opportunity. Exclusion of women from the public space by not suppling proper infrastructure could also push women to prefer one location over another or exclude them altogether from public spaces where their presence is essential to everyone. After consulting women who had experienced attacks in the street, asking them about real situations, regular as well as irregular, here are some main key elements that come in mind and immediate actions that could take place to promote the presents of women in the urban public space and by that will generate safety and better lifestyle for all.

Public toilet. This seems to be the number one priority. Women will consider if to use a public space, many times if not all time, based on the existing of public toilets. Women in general, pregnant women, people with kids (mostly women but not only) people who suffer from metabolic issues and the elderly will avoid public activities, public areas such parks and playgrounds and engaging with the community if there are no public toilets they can rely on. Also, all mentioned above will many times prefer the mall over the street for errands, shopping and entertainment because of the public toilet issue.

In Victorian Britain, most public toilets were designed for the use of men. Women were expected to stay home and care for their husbands and kids. The absents of public toilet deprived women of the freedom to move freely or far from home. This unviable bladder capacity based zone got the very appropriate name 'urinary leash'¹⁰.

⁹ *Blaming the Victim*/ William Ryan 1972 Random House, Inc, NY, US

¹⁰ *The History of Women's Public Toilets in Britain*/ Claudia Elphick, Historic UK, historic-uk.com

Important elements where it comes to public toilet are visibility and inclusive. Visibility is important to reduce vandalism and increase safety feeling when using it by natural public eyes surveillance however, some sense of discretion is needed. Inclusive is referring to all type of potential users, disables, gender and also family booths allowing a parent help their kids regardless of their gender.

In Warsaw, Poland the urban activists group Miasto Jest Nasze (City Is Ours) executed a stunt to highlight the lack of public toilets. They created a fake app by the name of Airpnp calling people to offer their private toilets for money to the public. This action taken by City Is Ours, highlighted the need for public toilets while highlighting the duty of city council towards all residents as some things can't be left for the private sector and sharing culture¹¹.

In our research we tried to see if the 'urinary leash' still exist and to examine the relation to the safety level of a city. We took the first few cities ranked in the top and few cities from the bottom of the list for life quality ranking in the Mercer (www.mercer.de) and marked the public toilet location according to the information from Google. Part for the difficult task of finding a reliable source to detect public toilets (as sometimes the toilet marked on the map does not exist or is not for the use of the public) We realised that there could be a link between life quality/ safety to the present of well distributed public toilet. So, though we can't say what is the cause and what is the outcome, we can say that the public toilet system is a reflection of the society who lives in the city. In the experiment, in the higher ranked cities that are more public toilets with better distribution which encourages women to use the public space. Whereas, in the lower ranked cities, there are few public toilets if at all. In those cities the numbers of violent cases against women are higher or/and women states is not equal to men's status. The required answer is a better toilet system and a good, reliable source to find the public toilets and share information regarding their maintenance. (5 cities images here)

Seating arrangements in the public space. In the parks, in the street and in the plazas-seating furniture will be arranged most of the time along the path where sitting is oriented towards the passing crowd. It has the encouragement to look, examine and judge everyone who passes. Because comments are sometimes thrown by men at passing women (though rarely), women will mostly be aware and alert, maybe look down/ away and try to avoid passing by a group of men to avoid the possibility of a remark being thrown at them or even just that feeling described- feeling it is never simply walking, as it is for man. Even if nothing will happen - the fear exists and women should not feel as if they have been forced to be part of a show to the pleasure of the ones sitting in the street/ park.

¹¹ Toilet-sharing "app" AirPnP highlights lack of public bathrooms in Warsaw/ Notes From Poland, notesfrompoland.com, Sep 15 2020

Light. Lightning the streets and passages to increase visibility and deterrence of attackers so that they can be identified and / or seen by the public. The use of sensors may direct a more accurate and effective use of lighting by use and therefore it is not necessarily a larger financial outlay or significant environmental pollution than exists today when streets are lit for a fixed hour rather than by use.

Transport

Women in the city are more likely to use public transportation and bicycle over private cars as they do multiple journeys per day and they earn less than men. Whereas men are more likely to use a car for one destination a day¹². A study conducted in Stanford¹³ university in 2012 reveals that use public transportation differently than men due to the “mobility of care” factor, ‘Unpaid labor performed by adults for children or other dependents, including labor related to the upkeep of a household’. A study conducted in 2018 by the International Transport Forum¹⁴ explains that ‘women have more complicated travel pattern, (so) they tend to prefer more flexible modes’ the study highlights that though women are the main users of the public transportation most women still find it unsafe. Women are more likely to use shared mobility and give up driving altogether so if cities want to increase the use of public transportation they should care more for women safety.

The way from the station to the destination is often completed by other means such bicycle and shared transport means such motor scooters.

In Sweden, they realised that women use bikes more to get to work and manage their other care relating tasks so they invest in bike lanes. A study conducted in the University of Colorado Boulder¹⁵ found that the reason why women in the US are using scooters and bikes less has to do with safety. The ‘little vehicle is not the issue as the lack of safe infrastructure to ride on such proper roads. A survey in Germany¹⁶ with 2,000 smartphone users and examination of 228,000 social media mentions relating to e-scooters revealed that only 10% are using the e-scooters 20% are planning to use it and 70% are not using nor plan to use an e-scooter. What’s interesting is that among the e-scooters users 14% are men while only 4.4% are women.

The discussion found online around the electric scooters revolved around safety issues, regulations, economic and environmental influences but it seems to lack the discussion of women safety. The e-scooters concept fits to the flexibility women require and is a link between the public transport station to home, specially after dark. That brings us to the road

¹² urbact.eu

¹³ *Public Transportation: Rethinking Concepts and Theories*

¹⁴ *Understanding Urban Travel Behaviour by Gender for Efficient and Equitable Transport Policies/ Wei-Shiuen Ng and Ashley Acker, International Transport Forum, Paris, France*

¹⁵ *Shedding NHTS Light On The Use Of “Little Vehicles” in Urban Areas/ Kavin J.Krizek, Nancy McGuckin*

¹⁶ *Umfangreiche Studie:E-Scooter-Nutzung in Deutschland/ Michaela Vogel, Brandwatch.*

safety issue again and the claim that a proper infrastructure will make the city more accessible for women.

Child care There is no one system to relate to as each city is different. The common to all though, should be that there are enough child care solutions that matches the demographic demands and guarantee that each family will have a place for the kids in a walking proximity to their place of residence or working place.

The authorities can at all minimum encourage(Ranging from economic incentives to charging a permit)hi tech and industry hubs to include facilities child care- not only to the benefit of working mothers but to convey a message that child care is not a women task that should be managed by women only.

Lifestyle follows safety follows women welfare and starts with a change.

COVID19 seems to have pushed the status of women backwards after efforts and achievements collected over an entire decade. Today, more than ever it is necessary to improve women's lifestyle.

As to April 2020 women made up 49% of the overall workforce, but accounted for 55% of job losses. Women lost 54% positions in the hospitality and leisure sector. Women in the retail and trade sector who lost their jobs are 61% though women were only 48% of the workforce in total. In the education and health sector 83% of job losses belonged to women. That teaches us how society deals with the subject matter in fact still today. The numbers demonstrate that there was no significant extensive change. We can offer a base for the change by applying it in the public spaces as it might help to change the narrative once the .discussion about women and equality becomes visible and so tangible

An important lesson is that despite the social perception development over the years, the gloomy numbers and facts collected for this paper demonstrates the urge to have more women representation in key position in the public space planning and in the authorities in general so the change is fundamental, from the bottom up and is not a cynical use of women .designed to silence the consciences of the patriarchy

It goes without saying that changing the infrastructure is not the only solution, as the misogynic culture itself at most and indifference at least must change. However, the physical change that will shape the way we move around and use in the public space will influence that perception as it does 2 main things- first, admitting there is a real problem and second, showing that there is a real evident effort of fixing it.