

Equal Access in Urban Spaces:
Gender Mainstreaming in Urban Planning

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Abstract

More than half of the world's population currently lives in urban areas. As agricultural production becomes more irrelevant in an evolving world economy based on service and technology, rural residents are migrating to urban areas in increasing numbers. City governments are having difficulty providing adequate housing, transportation, and social services, and quality of life in urban spaces is quickly declining. One population most affected by the deterioration of city spaces is women. Women's changing roles as both producer and reproducer require her to rely on the resources of the city; when these resources aren't there, women are forced to move to slums on the periphery of the city, increasing their chances of violence and crime perpetrated against them. Additionally, if urban housing is available, cities are built in such a way as to cater to the traditional gender-based needs and roles of men, limiting women's participation in and access to the opportunities a city offers. This paper will discuss the issues women face when confronting a male-built city and the importance of building inclusive environments with purposive strategies such as gender mainstreaming. It will consider the successes of Vienna, Austria, in gender-sensitive planning. Finally, it will discuss the effects of real-estate, government intervention, and the global economy in perpetuating exclusion in urban space and creating equal access.

Introduction

Today's world is an urban one. At the beginning of the 21st century, more than 3 billion people were living in urban spaces. This number is expected to increase to 5 billion—or 60%—by 2030 (Gottdiener, Hutchison, Ryan 2015). Urbanization is truly a phenomenon because for the first time in human history, the majority of the world's population is located in compact, densely populated living spaces. Rural residence is quickly declining as more and more people move to metropolitan areas. This massive influx in population to metropolitan areas brings with it many consequences, both positive and negative. Among the positive consequences are greater economic opportunities and diversified social connections. The negative consequences, however, are lengthy and complicated. Due to the sheer magnitude of people concentrated in metropolitan areas, violence, crime, and poverty are disproportionately high. Additionally, because women and children make up the majority of the world's poor, they suffer most from these social ills. Lack of affordable housing, safe public transportation, and accessible public services further disadvantage this already marginalized population.

Because women are moving into metropolitan areas for employment in numbers higher than men, they in turn are contributing to the economy—whether formal or informal—more than ever before. If cities wish to succeed economically, they must focus on enabling an ever growing population of female workers; this can be achieved through gender mainstreaming in urban planning. Gender mainstreaming is “a globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality... [it] is not an end in itself but a strategy, an approach, a means to achieve the goal of gender equality” (“OSAGI Gender Mainstreaming”). In urban planning, this strategy seeks to build a thoughtful, inclusive, and purposive environment that will minimize violence, crime, and poverty by creating public spaces that serve both men and women equally. This paper will focus

on the issues surrounding women in urban spaces and the impacts of gender-sensitive planning on women's empowerment.

Literature Reviews

Space and the built environment have long been the source of discussion amongst sociologist and feminist scholars. Gender is both a cause and a consequence of spatial dynamics and the reinforcement of patriarchal power systems. Chant and Mcilwaine (2013) delineate the intricate relationship of gender and urban development by discussing the issues women face in urban areas in the global South. "While at one level the contemporary 'urban transition' in the Global South offers scope for advancing gender equality...with expanded economic, social and political opportunities for women, barriers to female 'empowerment' remain widespread, especially among the urban poor and/or those who reside in slums" (Chant & Mcilwaine, 2013).

Global patriarchal social and political relations and the barriers this creates for women in rural areas contribute to women's migration to metropolitan areas. Females as urban household heads, as a result, have increased by 9.8% since 1980 due to "greater access by urban women to employment and independent earnings, and to land and property, and lessened control by patriarchal kinship systems" (Chant & Mcilwaine, 2013). However, women constitute two-thirds of adult illiterates worldwide and are less likely to receive extensive education than men. As a result, they are employed in low-paying manufacturing or labor-intensive jobs. Low income forces women—especially single mothers—to seek shelter in deteriorating, dangerous slums in the metropolitan periphery. Frequently, these slums lack affordable public transportation, restricting women's access to better job markets or public services. Women are also at higher risk for gender-based violence (GBV) in urban areas (particularly slums) for a number of reasons. Inadequate street lighting and social services as well as weak community networks perpetuate the prevalence of violence against women. Chant and Mcilwaine's (2013)

most important point pertains to female mobility in male-built environments: “Women’s mobility is constrained by male-biased transports planning which prioritizes travel...to city centers during ‘peak hours’ and ignores women’s dominance in non-peak ‘trip chaining’ (multi-purpose excursions which relate to domestic labor, care work, and informal, part-time employment).”

In addition to the issues enumerated above, the global market creates barriers to equal access and participation of women in urban areas. Walker, Frediani, and Trani (2012) discuss urban development and gender in the Global South as determinants of residents’ likelihood to obtain a quality standard of living. While private developers purchase cheap slum land for conversion into higher cost residencies, former slum residents become displaced or relocated to government housing projects. Government housing fails to take into account the needs of certain social groups, including women, due to gendered assumptions about the roles and needs of men and women. As a result, this housing does not provide adequate space for women—often single mothers—to conduct informal business inside their homes. Additionally, the peripheral location of housing inhibits carrying out the many identities and roles women have adopted in the face of globalization. “This kind of spatial segregation in planning is underpinned by a division of the domestic and public spheres, reinforcing gendered assumptions about women’s and men’s roles that conform to a traditional male breadwinner/female housewife pattern” (Walker et al., 2012). Finally, systems of entitlement to housing are strongly gendered because they are determined by tenure rights, “such as rules that specify the ‘household head’ as the signatory as opposed to joint tenure systems; inheritance laws and practices that favor male heirs; or patrilocal residence patterns that mean that married women live with their in-laws... [These systems] conspire with gendered economic inequality” (Walker et al., 2012). The authors argue that environment is too

frequently built upon gender role assumptions that do not take into account women's changing identities as both producers and reproducers in the global economy.

The issues surrounding women's placement and movement within the built environment are many and varied. However, the foundation of these issues is fairly straightforward. In her book *Gender Planning and Development* (1993), Moser asserts that inequality in urban areas originates with adherence to assumed traditional gender roles and needs by urban planners. Creating inclusive cities, then, immediately becomes a political discussion of conflict. Moser offers insight into the structural transformation that needs to occur in order for gender mainstreaming (planning) to take effect in urban areas. "The goal of gender planning refers ultimately to changes in the relationships between groups in societies, more specifically between men and women... [Hence] the political nature of the planning tradition is explicit" (Moser, 1993). The political economy approach to gender mainstreaming criticizes the state as a non-neutral actor in distributing resources in order to preserve its own interests. Moser proposes that the state should instead adopt a political agenda of redistribution of power and resources between men and women to minimize women's subordination to male space and needs. Gender planning does not rely on only technical strategies, meaning planners cannot simply redistribute resources, power, and space to achieve equality. Rather, it is largely political, requiring societal transformations of what it means to be male or female in any given space. Moser proposes that this can be done by negotiation and debate of six principle concepts that indicate what planning strategies need to be implemented where, how, and when. "Consequently, many of these tools are essentially performance indicators, designed to measure the changing processes rather than technical interventions" (Moser, 1993). Assessment of performance indicators include gender roles, gender needs, equal intra-household resource allocation; balancing of roles; the relationship between WAD/GAD roles and needs; and equal control over decision-making in the

political/planning domain. (Moser, 1993)

In response to the performance indicators listed above, feminist and sociologist scholars and urban developers have created conceptual strategies to minimize the marginalization of women in urban areas. Jaeckel and van Geldermalsen (2006) discuss the current situation of urban infrastructure and its problematic exclusivity and inconvenience in their essay “Gender Equality and Urban Development: Building Better Communities for All.” The problems identified in this piece are excellent, real-life examples of the ways in which Moser’s indicators of gender equity within an urban environment can be measured. These include sprawl of urban environments and services only accessible by extensive motorways and public transportation; the lack of mobility for the elderly and children due to sprawl and increased automobile use; gentrification of neighborhoods and their resulting mono-cultural environments that lack social or community cohesion; a loss of collective community responsibility resulting in increased privatization of family life and segregation in house and childcare duties between the sexes; and increased informal economic participation by women as a result of globalization of the economy. Each of these issues largely impact women, as they participate in direct care-giving work within both the home and community. “As such, women are central to urban planning and development, both as key users of urban space in their role as home managers, and as key producers of residential environments in their role as community leaders and initiators of neighborhood networks” (Jaeckel & Geldermalsen, 2006).

The authors of this essay suggest a different approach to urban governance and suggest that “community problems may be the result of institutional dominance rather than institutional weakness” (Jaeckel & Geldermalsen, 2006). They emphasize the importance of community-based governance, facilitation of self-help, and strengthening of citizen involvement in the affairs of their communities. Operating from the community level not only allows for greater

inclusivity due to increased sensitivity to the particular community's needs, but more accountability and social cohesion amongst residents. Success in this approach to community is absolutely contingent upon women's participation. It is common knowledge that when women participate in local government, significant advances are made in social inclusiveness and political efficacy. Women tend to focus on long-term solutions to community and individual based needs rather than quick-fix acquiescence to powerful members of society. Finally, Jaeckel and Geldermalsen offer policy suggestions that will support gender-sensitive, participatory urban environments. These range from improved public infrastructure for greater mobility of children and the elderly, channeling public resources to grassroots community actions, and promoting and supporting women's participation and leadership in urban governance and community development. (Jaeckel & Geldermalsen, 2006)

So far, this paper has discussed barriers to women's equal access within urban areas in regards to effects of patriarchal governance systems and the global economy on the built environment, and theoretical and practical solutions to minimizing hardships for women and marginalized groups within these spaces. Fortunately, these discourses amongst scholars have inspired reshaping—literally and figuratively—of urban areas. Quite recently, these theoretical concepts of gender mainstreaming in urban planning have experienced real-life application. In Vienna, Austria, the Municipal Department for Promotion and Co-ordination of Women's Issues staged a two-phase project anchored in the principles of gender mainstreaming. The first phase focused on integrating “gender in parks, housing design, pedestrian friendly design, public transport, etc, as well as developing and implementing projects geared to women's specific needs” (Khosla, 2012). Public services such as better street lighting, wider sidewalks, inclusive parks, and increased availability of public transportation were implemented within the city. Additionally, policies on gender-responsive budgeting consider the living situations and needs of

both women and men and respond to financial needs accordingly. The first phase was so successful that nineteen additional departments within Vienna's City Administration implemented gender mainstreaming policies. Many of the departments focus on gender in urban planning, housing, public health, youth, and parks and gardens. This phase utilized Moser's technical aspect of the planning tradition by distributing resources and allocating power evenly throughout the city by promoting equal access to and utilization of services. (Khosla, 2012)

The second phase of the gender mainstreaming initiative involved consciousness raising and a transformation of social interpretations of gender, including roles and needs. The principles applied to this phase include gender-sensitive language, gender-specific data collection and analysis, equal involvement of men and women in decision making, and equal treatment of men and women in management and gender budgeting. "Posters and advertisements are designed to raise awareness for gender mainstreaming" (Khosla, 2012). Citywide images of women holding traditionally male employment positions or men performing traditionally female caregiving duties have made the concept of gender mainstreaming more tangible for Vienna's citizens. (Khosla, 2012) The active role of Vienna's government in implementing such policies illustrates the power of the political factor in Moser's discussion on gender planning.

Discussion

Applying core sociological concepts to the analysis of gender and urban development is essential to unpacking this intricate relationship. The sociospatial perspective allows for a better understanding of "how everyday life in the multinucleated metropolitan region is affected by the political economy of urban life—the interplay of cultural, political, economic, and social forces both within and outside of urban communities" (Gottdiener et al., 2015). Elements of this

perspective such as real estate, government intervention, and the global economy provide a conceptual framework when talking about gender and urban development.

One of the pull factors in urban development is government intervention and participation in real estate. As this paper clearly illustrated, poor housing and public transportation are two of the most important barriers to women's success in urban areas. Due to Western influences and the promotion of capitalist ideals worldwide, real estate and development of public space is becoming increasingly privatized. Land speculators, developers, politicians, and corporations all participate in the development of space due to the vast amount of profit it provides. Unfortunately, due to the inherent individualistic nature of capitalism, real estate investors have created urban environments solely for the acquisition of profit rather than social well-being. Disregarding the needs of the urban population cripples the city's economic, cultural, and social success and exacerbates issues such as poverty, homelessness, and crime. Due to their conflicting roles as reproducers and producers, women suffer when cities focus on capital accumulation rather than social wellbeing.

Government intervention also impacts gender and space. The built environment is socially constructed because it revolves around negotiations between politicians and government planners, private investors, and citizen groups who all contend for equal participation and opportunity in urban space. Politicians are intimately involved in real estate development, not necessarily for increased public revenue and growth, but for profit. Additionally, groups within the community have their own interests to fulfill that are manifested in politics. "They [community groups] often join in coalitions to push for some version of growth while opposing other coalitions that have their own vision of the future" (Gottdiener et al., 2015). Here, one can see the importance of intersectionality in gender planning and how this approach to development works to include and improve living conditions for all groups within a particular community.

Finally, the importance of the global economy must be discussed in terms of gender and urban development. Globalization has far-reaching effects on both the public and private spheres of life. Participation in the global economy means decreased localization of business, impersonal relationships between consumer and producer, and the prevalence of giant corporate networks that dominate particular markets and even certain spaces (i.e. Silicon Valley). Transportation of U.S. manufacturing overseas affects employment, in turn changing movement of people in space as they migrate both nationally and transnationally in search for employment and better quality of life. The transition to the service economy, however, is creating employment issues worldwide despite the high numbers of manufacturers overseas. Because of this, women are participating in migration in search of employment outside the home and contributing to the formal economy now more than ever before. Yet poverty, language barriers, and conformation to traditional gender roles continues to push them to the periphery of the city where they earn low wages and suffer from the social ills of the slums. Finally, women constitute a vast majority of the informal economy in the wake of the global economic crisis. Their economic invisibility in this sector reinforces gender roles and needs, resulting in public policies that overlook the multiple identities women have adopted in the face of globalization.

Conclusion

Globalization and the increasing population of metropolitan areas worldwide are changing the nature of urban spaces. Gender roles and needs within these spaces, however, are not keeping up with these changes and serve to disadvantage women. In light of this, I believe the state cannot reside as a neutral power over urban dynamics if it wishes to support and sustain a healthy city economically, politically, culturally, and socially. Gender mainstreaming in urban planning will help to minimize the effects of harmful gender roles and stereotypes by including those most in need to discourses of social betterment.

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