Safer Cities metholodogy: public space as the medium

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT

Public spaces are a means for realising gender equality, not to mention wider inclusion within cities. In urban planning there is an emerging body of knowledge that conceptualizes public space as spaces of economic, social, cultural and political action and reaction. By understanding public space as a Bourdieusian *field*, urban planners can conceptualise these spaces as sites of transformation. Indeed, public spaces act as thresholds to the public sphere –a space often reserved to men. Consequently, designing gender-sensitive public spaces is fundamental to gender equality in the city, because these spaces represent points of access to the public sphere. This paper suggests that the implementation of the Safer Cities methodology can transform public spaces, by facilitating women's access to and participation in the public sphere.

Keywords

Terms defined

Bourdieusian field: a setting wherein persons and their social position are located. These positions are determined by the interaction of: the rules of the field, a person's *habitus*–socialization—and a person's economic, political and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1980) (Bourdieu, 1977) (Bourdieu, 1985).

Gender equality: the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same, but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.

Public space: these spaces are independent of ownership; therefore, it includes all land to which the public has access, forming a crucial common property resource within cities (UN-Habitat, forthcoming 2016). These exist in various forms; open public spaces: beaches, parks and other natural spaces or squares; closed public spaces: libraries, museums or heritage sites; other spaces of public use: transport interchanges, sports grounds and recreational facilities; ubiquitous and flexible public spaces: streets, informal markets or sidewalks (Safer Spaces, 2015).

Reproductive labour: the diverse activities relating to the production of human beings. Activities range from biological reproduction to support of the processes of socialisation within a society. In short, care work, child rearing, domestic chores and household and community management–mostly unpaid, yet essential to the social fabrics of communities.

Women's empowerment: the core of empowerment is to ensure that women play a pivotal role in the management of their own affairs (Ndulo, 2015). Empowered women must not only have equal rights, capabilities, access to resources and opportunities, but must also the agency to use these so as to make strategic choices and decisions.

INTRODUCTION

"The problem with gender is that it prescribes how we should be, rather than recognizing how we are."
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie[1]

For the moral and political theorist, Mary Wollstonecraft, the condition of the female sex was the site whence to depart in understanding human relations within societies. Like her contemporaries, Wollstonecraft recognized that power, be it economic, political or social, was restricted to the public sphere; a sphere, she noted, exclusively reserved to men. Ultimately, for Wollstonecraft, access to the public sphere was crucial to the empowerment of women and to, eventual, gender equality (Wollstonecraft, (1792) 2004).

Within urban planning there is an emerging body of knowledge that conceptualizes public space beyond spaces of mere recreation. While recreation is one of the purposes of public spaces; spaces of recreation can exist as privatised space. Restricting public space to recreation ignores the mechanisms, aspirations and negotiations at work within societies. In fact, as the Lago de Ladrino case[2] illustrates, continuing to plan and/or retrofit human settlements with this understanding of public space ignores the more complex reality that public spaces are spaces of economic, political, cultural and social power and concession. In short, we need to conceptualise public spaces as a Bourdieusian *field*: spaces in which persons and their social, economic, political and cultural capital are located and negotiated.

This paper does not make the over-simplified claim that the design of the urban environment, or indeed, more specifically that the design of public space is the silver bullet to achieving gender equality. Public spaces, mobility and cities, are by no means the panacea for overcoming gender inequality. Undeniably, gender equality requires a number of policy, political and cultural innovations beyond the built urban environment. Rather, it is the intent of this paper to explore how the design of public spaces can take on the responsibility of bringing women and girls into the public sphere; therein facilitating women and girls access to political, cultural, social and economic power and fulfilment.

This essay goes beyond documenting trip patterns, reliance, and public transport in the urban context. A number of studies have already successfully undertaken these analyses. Instead, it argues that the data revolution–in particular, virtual real-time safety audits–is a means through which to ensure participatory methods in public space design (Sachs, 2015).

The structure of this paper is as follows: first, an introduction to the emerging conceptualization of public space as a Bourdieusian field; second, a discussion of gender in public space, in particular how these spaces represent thresholds to the public sphere; third, a discussion on the importance of mobility in the discussion on public space and the presentation of the Safer Cities methodology as a means for planning gender-sensitive public spaces; finally, the suggestion that the data revolution should be embraced by the Safer Cities methodology so as to ensure a participatory approach to public space planning.

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[1] (Adichie, 2012)
[2] (Grundström, 2005); described on page 7.

PUBLIC SPACE

Public space is vital to the character of a city: networks of public spaces form the basis for social, political, cultural, and economic structures. For decades urban planning ideologies have prioritized traffic over people (MacKenzie, 2015b). The fall-out: the reduced priority of the economic, political, cultural and social roles of public space (UN-Habitat, forthcoming 2016). In fact, post-war city planning has been characterized by urban sprawl, deliberately designed and organized around the private automobile (Clos & Ilaský, 2015).

Social values and demographics have evolved dramatically since Le Corbusier—pioneer of modern architecture—yet the principles for planning and retrofitting cities have not (MacKenzie, 2015b). Some approaches have led to privatization of public spaces with restricted access, for example, the development of gated communities, commonplace in Latin America and Africa. The reality is that where public space is absent, inadequate, poorly designed or privatized, the city becomes increasingly segregated: causing polarized cities where social tensions are more likely to flare up and where social mobility and economic opportunities are stifled (UN-Habitat, forthcoming 2016).

GENDER AND SPACE

"Gender inequality is deeply rooted in economic and social structures and mindsets that have become entrenched over centuries and generations. Until we develop strategies to transform societies by changing the conditions that are midwives to the ills we seek to eradicate, our efforts will continue to yield less than satisfactory results."
Muna Ndulo[3]

Gender and urban development are intimately interrelated. The recognition that space and the built environment are constitutive of gender has long been established in the feminist analyses of the city (Chant & McIlwaine, 2013). Women's access to different spaces in the city–especially public space–is generally more limited than that of men, not only due to domestic-based time and resource constraints associated with reproductive labour, but also because of strong symbolic dimensions surrounding gender constructions, which may require certain modes of dress and/or behaviour to render women *invisible* in the public sphere (Jarvis, Cloke, & Kantor, 2009).

Understanding public spaces through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the *field* emphasizes the fact that public spaces are not only positive spaces, but also, contested spaces. Within every *field* there is a conflict between the outsider, and the dominant—who battles to maintain monopoly of the space. *Fields* are maintained by both the dominant and the outsider playing by the specific rules of *field*, and while acting out their *habitus*—socialization (Bourdieu, 1980; 1977; 1985). Therefore, in order to transform the *field* (public sphere), there must be a change in the rules of the *field* (public sphere): a change that brings women and girls into spaces where the public sphere manifests, namely, public spaces.

Gendered division of labour and economic empowerment

The use of space is related to the gender organisation of a society and to power relations between women and men. In short, space is gendered. In all societies, but to varying degrees, the private sphere

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[3] (Ndulo, 2015)

is female and the public sphere is male (Wollstonecraft, (1792) 2004). On the one hand, the public sphere is the site of economic, political, cultural and social power. On the other, the private sphere is none of these. However, these two spheres are not mutually exclusive, and often intersect. Indeed, as the case study of Lago de Lindora demonstrates women often bridge these two spheres in order to exercise economic power.

Case Study: Lago de Lindora[4]

Lago de Lindora consists of 385 houses on the outskirts of San Jose, Costa Rica. The urban plan is a strict grid plan with single, detached houses. All houses have water and electricity and there is a small school for younger children built on the initiative of the community. Also there are a number of small workshops, beauty shops, food stores and small kiosks.

The urban plan incorporated an effort to include a number of green areas in the design, as a result almost half the land of the housing area consists of public space such as streets, commercial zones, parks and a playground. The playground was put in order by the community, but was vandalized and is longer in use. Although there is a lot of public space the quality is low and the space is not used by the inhabitants for their social, recreational and/or economic activities.

At present, due to poor quality of current public spaces, both women and men use their homes for income-generating activities. On the one hand, women produce different types of food, like bread and salads that they sell in the community. They also sell services like childcare and beauty treatments where a part of the house is used as a nursery or hairdresser. On the other hand, men use their houses as production units for their businesses such as an artisans' work-shop or a car repair shop. Housing is also income generating through letting out rooms or parts of the house to tenants.

In Lindora, women who work with both productive and reproductive activities in their homes have made changes so that they have their working space in part of the living-room to facilitate contacts with clients who visit them.

Except for the economic activities that are ongoing in people's homes there is no other work-place in Lindora, the only public space used for economic activities is the street. Whereas the houses are used by both women and men, street vending is done only by men and boys. Street vendors come to the area on foot, by bike or by pick-ups to sell fruits, vegetables, eggs and clothes, going from house to house with their products.

In Lago de Lindora, women have restricted access to public spaces; therefore, in order to conduct their economic activities they have converted private space in their home, while men and boys are able to directly access public space markets and streets. Public and private spaces are used differently as a result of gendered division of labour: women often undertake the reproductive labour in private space, and men undertake productive labour in public space. Understanding how different activities are valued and positioned in relation to each other is a fundamental in analysing the built environment with a gender-sensitive lens (Grundström, 2005).

Geographies of fear
Safety from fear and violence is the most basic of human needs. Reducing women's personal insecurity must be treated as intrinsic to the development process. In addition, violence against women is a major

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[4]Source (Grundström, 2005) with edits.

barrier to women's participating fully in the economy and the lives of their communities (African Development Bank Group, 2015).

Women are clearly not the only victims of violence in urban areas. Men are also at risk, and may face premature mortality, especially in slums where becoming part of a youth gang – often associated with drugs and turf wars – is the only viable means of livelihood (Chant & McIlwaine, 2013). However, women also particular face *street violence*, as evidenced in the alarmingly high rates of abduction, rape and/or murder in cities such as Ciudad Juárez, Mexico (Jarvis, Cloke, & Kantor, 2009). In many cities, risk of violence, is aggravated by lack of simple infrastructure such as adequate street lighting. However, although, public space underlies most discourses of *safer cities* for women, it should also be recognised that there are connections and continuums between the public and private spheres (Tankel, 2011), which often make women more vulnerable to violence in their own neighbourhoods than in cities at large (Chant & McIlwaine, 2013).

Fear of violence can be as significant as actual violence and is usually associated with public space. Violence and fear of crime hinders people's ability to participate fully in urban life, as well as, achieve a basic quality of life. Violence and fear of violence creates feelings of insecurity, discomfort, anxiety and helplessness. The fear of crime and violence reduces women's mobility in the city; contributes to social isolation; prevents full participation in urban life; impacts on how members of communities interact and inhibits the creation of communities where people feel safe, respected, supported and valued (Chant & McIlwaine, 2013).

The design, planning and management of the urban environment can reduce the risks of crime and injury. Poor physical design of public spaces can create vantage points from which assailants can attack or evade detection. Women may feel vulnerable in poorly lit or isolated spaces. Equally women may be placed in danger when they are expected to walk through areas dominated by activities associated with men. Gender roles and stereotypes may be perpetuated and reinforced when the urban environment is designed with little consideration for specific, gender-based needs and when women are not publicly acknowledged as equal members of society (UN-Habitat, forthcoming 2016)

To become more sustainable, towns and cities need to develop as places where everyone feels safe and secure, free from violence and fear of it; where the needs of women and men are recognised and met and where people can access facilities or earn a living. Addressing violence against women is about more than changing the built aspects of the urban environment. It is also about planners having an awareness of and addressing the social aspects of violence against women in public spaces (MacKenzie, 2015a) (UN-Habitat, forthcoming 2016).

STREETS AND MOBILITY

Streets are our most fundamental shared public spaces, but they are also one of the most overlooked. Today, and for most of the last century, we have taken for granted the idea that our streets are primarily areas for cars, parking and the transporting of goods. Making streets safe for all modes of transport—

automobile, public transit, bicycle, pedestrian—is the first step in turning streets into inclusive public spaces (MacKenzie, 2015a; 2015b). In order for streets to truly function as public places, they have to do more than allowing people to safely walk or bike through them: they have to be safe. When streets are safe places, they encourage people to linger, to socialize, to trade, etc. (UN-Habitat, forthcoming 2016).

Mobility, public space and gender meet at the junction of safety. The ability of women and girls to move autonomously and safely through their urban environment is a fundamental building block of gender equality and gendered participation in spheres of education, employment, politics and recreation (UN-Habitat, forthcoming 2016). Restricted female mobility can seriously jeopardise women's prospects of completing school, entering the labour force, accessing healthcare and social networking. On top of this, women's mobility is constrained by male-biased transport planning which prioritises travel from peri-urban areas to city centres during peak hours, and ignores women's dominance in non-peak multi-purpose, multi-stop excursions which relate to domestic labour, care work, and informal, part-time employment in non-centralised zones (Kunieda & Gauthier, 2007). Enhanced walkability of urban areas is an amenity, which benefit all and enhances the liveability of a city, but it is of particular relevance to gendered participation, as women and girls typically rely on trips made by foot to a greater extent than their male counterparts. This interplay in the urban context is broadly recognized, however the narrative is an evolving one as new factors enter the arena and new learning emerges (UN-Habitat, forthcoming 2015).

SAFER CITIES

There is a direct relationship between safer cities methodology and public space (UN-Habitat, forthcoming 2016). Upgrading and increasing the quantity and quality of existing public spaces can help improve urban safety, as it creates spaces of and for inclusion (Safer Spaces, 2015). Indeed, truly achieving gender equality requires policy, political and often cultural innovations beyond the built urban environment. Women and girls themselves are the main agents of change in realising their own equality; however, designing public space with safety and accessibility in mind, will facilitate their access to public spaces, where they can be the agents of change. Therefore, this essay proposes the implementation of the Safer Cities methodology as a means for facilitating women's and girls' presence in public spaces, and thus the opportunity to participate in the public sphere and access economic, social, political, and cultural power.

A safety strategy[5] is the framework that guides Safer Cities methodology in a particular city or community. Violence against women and girls neither has one cause, nor one solution. The first step is to develop a safety strategy that addresses this complexity. A safety strategy is based on careful assessment of the multitude of factors influencing women's safety in the city. This knowledge then informs plans for interventions to promote the safety of women and girls. In assessing safety and developing a plan for interventions to promote the safety of women and girls, there are five key areas to work in:
1. Define and analyse the specific local problems;
2. Assess existing policies and programmes contributing to safety/unsafety;

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[5] (O'Leary & Viswanath, 2011)

3. Create partnerships with stakeholders (local authorities, municipalities and the community);
4. Plan and implement joint interventions;
5. Monitoring and evaluation.

The data revolution

Nothing is important until it is measured. Data helps to establish baselines, which leads to meaningful interventions. However, today's planning practices do not overtly recognise the value of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in improving public space inclusion and wider safety in cities. In fact, as Sachs (2015) has argued, the data revolution should be a driver to accelerate progress toward promoting social inclusion. ICTs are already changing the face of health care, education, governance, banking and emergency response. Indeed, this revolution could bring an end to expensive paper-based participatory methods, lags in information, while significantly improving the quality of the data. Rather, than relying surveys, conducted every few years, the data revolution can produce real-time information. For example, the use of mobile phones could bring down the cost of surveys by up to 60 per cent in some East African countries over a ten-year period (Sachs, 2015). Dense ecosystems of technologies that collect information in multiple ways: remote sensing and satellite imagery, biometric data, GIS tracking, facilities-based data, social media, crowd-sourcing and other channels (Sachs, 2015) can become the basis for establishing safety and inclusion in cities, as the case of Safetipin demonstrates.

Case Study: Safetipin[6]

SafetiPin is a map-based mobile safety app which works to make communities and cities safer by providing safety-related information collected by users and professionally trained auditors. The app builds on the premise that community participation and engagement will make our cities safer. Users can set up "Circles of Interest", which could be their own neighborhood, place of work, or place where a loved one stays. A post can be a safety audit, a place, harassment or a hazard or even a feeling. Users can agree with posts, put up their own comments, and even post it on Facebook.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has introduced the emerging re-conceptualization of public space as an integral part of cities, since these function as thresholds for access to the public sphere. Indeed, as Wollstonecraft noted the public sphere is the space of economic, political, and social power (Wollstonecraft, (1792) 2004). In recognizing this reality, urban planning must to conceptualise public spaces as a Bourdieusian *field*: spaces in which persons and their social, economic, political and cultural capital are negotiated. It has discussed how the gendered division of labour impedes women access to public spaces and their eventual economic empowerment, with the illustration of the Lago de Ladrino case study. It explored the importance of mobility as an issue to be considered in public space. It suggested that UN Safer Cities methodology is a viable means for planning gender-sensitive public spaces. Finally, it point toward the importance of the data revolution as a means to ensure participatory methods in planning projects.

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[6] http://safetipin.com/

It is the responsibility of urban planners, governments alike to bring women and girls into the public sphere; therein allowing them access to political, cultural, social and economic power and fulfilment. Finally, this paper was not interested in bargaining for gender equality. Ensuring women's and girls' true and full involvement in the public sphere should become that which defines this époque of history.

In the end we cannot accomplish the goals of gender equality without involving local communities and men; they need to be brought onboard the struggle for a just and equal society. Equality is ultimately a principle of human dignity for both men and women at all levels of political, economic, cultural, and social organization and structure. On our journey to the world of equality that we seek to establish, we need leadership at local, national, and international levels who share in the vision of a transformed society that celebrates inclusiveness, fairness, and the equal worth of men and women (Ndulo, 2015).

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