

# SEPARATE BUT EQUAL?

## Understanding Gender Dynamics and Its Implications for Gender-Inclusive Design

**Ar. Trishla Chadha**  
M. Arch. (Urban Design)  
The Bartlett School of Architecture  
University College London UCL  
United Kingdom  
trishlaachadha@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

*Architecture is an artistic field that creates a spatial system in a specific social context, with a distinct identity, the causes and effects of which are still unclear. To embed architecture with spatial identity, it should have a social dimension. The tense relationship between architecture and gender is not new, but it is a topic that has been investigated since the 1960s. Through the diverse behaviours and experiences of its inhabitants, the city is gendered. It shapes us differently, not only because of physical differences but also because of growing differences in gender roles that shape how we need, use and perceive the city. This may be accomplished by creating a safe and inclusive environment enabling women to pursue their individual aspirations. This paper examines the current literature regarding the gender-sensitive approach to urban planning and management of public spaces. The objective was to determine the vulnerabilities and impact of gender on spaces through existing research focused on historical and contemporary women domains governing the spatial perceptions and explore potential planning interventions. The methodology follows an inductive research approach and uses the arbitrary method for analytical research through scholarly writings. The argument for this consequence makes the statement that people's behaviour and accordingly, the way in which spaces are utilised is shifting and that this results in gender-based urban development.*

**Keywords:** Gender-based Development, Environmental psychology, Space syntax, Inclusive cities, Attention economy, Cyber-feminism.

## INTRODUCTION

Following economic liberalization, cities in India have undergone constant remodelling to keep up with the unprecedented urbanization. The rapid expansion essentially exclusive in character has opened a whole new chapter of experimentation, drawing linkages between urban growth, governance and communities. Along with this wave of urban expansion, there is an underlying trend that marginalized groups in society are becoming more vulnerable and isolated. These groups have historically faced discrimination due to their gender, class, age, or sexual orientation.

Cities have long been envisaged as liberating, collaborative and idea-generating environments. The current situation is such that, while cities offer many opportunities to both men and women, whereas, the nature of urban development have led to an increase in exclusion, specifically from marginalized sections; it has reinforced the already existing framework of gender-based discrimination. This vulnerability is demonstrated by the difficulty these disadvantaged groups have navigating the city, which negatively affects their quality of life. They are thus excluded from or unable to take advantage of the city's resources. Gender is one of the main categories of discrimination and exclusion among many others. Several factors influence women's access to the city. In a framework that extends beyond the most obvious and immediate manifestations of violence and includes concerns with infrastructure, urban design and governance, gender-based intolerance and safety are now being dismantled.

In terms of their safety and security, women in India—who represent half of the population—are now the section most at risk. We see multiple headlines about

rapes, trafficking, sexual assault, molestation and other acts of violence against women in public places while we go through the newspaper. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, there were 228,650 crimes against women in 2011, including murder, rape, kidnapping and sexual harassment. In the same year, India was ranked the fourth-most hazardous nation in the world by an international poll, only behind Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Goldsmith & Beresford, 2018).

Women experience violence in both public and private settings, which is frequently impacted by decisions made about urban planning and the organization of public facilities. They encounter a higher degree of insecurity which limits their 'access' to and 'use of the city' (Newman, 1973). In times of war or social instability, conditions like poor street lighting, insecure public spaces, inefficient neighbourhood policing and unreliable public transportation can make gender-based violence far more likely to happen.

Initiatives by the government and the police to address the issues of safety and violence against women in a cohesive way have not been very effective. Technologies like panic buttons and GPS tracking have a limited ability to enhance public safety. Although these programs deserve praise, their main flaw is that they keep out women who lack access to such technology. Even in a broader sense, urban planners consider user groups of varied age groups, the disabled population, etc., but there are just a few instances of gathering data and considering the design of women-friendly urban areas. The prime way to resolve the issue is to create and implement a new paradigm for the house, neighbourhood and city that begins to explain the physical, social and economic design of places which encourage women's activities rather than restricting them. The research aims to throw new light on gender inclusion and makeshift modes of life on the margins, which are rarely considered or extensively studied in terms of their potential to produce alternative urban futures.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology explores the historical and contemporary facets associated with gender and public spaces. Twenty-five scholarly writings were chosen from approximately 450 sources acquired using EBSCO Host, Google Scholar and internet searches. Articles were selected on the basis that they were reliable research sources, relevant to the public space contextual analysis, including the gender dimension and published in the last three decades. The author reviewed the selected literature, resulting in those appearing in this review paper. The study would be supported by inductive reasoning to arrive at an action research plan.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF FEMINIST MOVEMENTS AND THEORIES

The feminist movement's evolution in the West is typically depicted as 'waves of change,' reflecting the movement's peaks and troughs (Andrews & Biggs, 2006). The first wave of feminism began in the late 1800s and early 1900s with the primary goal of ensuring women's



Figure 1: The feminist movements during the 1960s – 70s (Source: <https://www.femcrunch.com/tracing-history/>)



Figure 2: The stepwells of India, Rani ki Vav in Gujarat (Source: Flickr)

voting rights. The second wave began in the 1960s, propelled by a growing sense of self-awareness among minorities (Bryson, 2016). The concept of 'universal femininity' was demolished in the third wave, which focused on individual rights rather than social goals (Connell, 1987). According to narratives of feminism's history, the Woman Liberation Movement of the 1960s codified a notion that women's personal experiences should serve as the beginning point for comprehending their conditions and taking potential action in response to them as seen in figure 1 (Eisenstein, 1984).

Feminist views emerged as a valid subject of study in disciplines such as sociology, geography, anthropology and political science during the 1970s and 1980s (Meyer, 1995). By questioning women's invisibility and stressing the androcentric or male-centred nature of previous systems, feminist viewpoints provided a fresh perspective on the world and refined social, political and economic relations (Greed, 1994). Despite being community-driven, feminist groups have historically lacked inclusion, often growing inside a constrained Western upper-class mindset, concentrating on their issues and wants (Little K., 1980). The background of these movements in the nineteenth century was built

by early feminist views. On the one hand, there were some who believed in biologically determined gender (Connell, 1987), and on the other, those who contended that while biology provides the primary difference between men and women, the difference is built upon and reinforced by societal roles, as stated in the Sex-Role Theory (Segal, 1990). The notion that gender relations are based on biology, on the other hand, is untenable.

Over the millennia, the position of women in India has seen significant changes. Their history has been dramatic, from a deterioration in their standing from ancient to medieval times to the championing of equal rights by various reformers (Brydon, 1989). Women were given distinct places from the general public in terms of architecture. In forts, like the Amer Fort, the *zenana* was the interior chambers of a home where the family's ladies lived. The *zenana's* vastness made it a community unto itself, which need methodical management to keep it running. The *mardana* is the exterior quarters for visitors and males, and it is the South Asian version of the harem for those who maintain purdah. Due to the severe limitations on access to the women's quarters, there are relatively few accurate records of their descriptions.

Through the imposing influence of wall planes, the shift in levels, confined entry, indirectness of movement patterns, sequence of gates and general opacity indicate visual thresholds to these realms. The palaces were frequently built on a hill, which changed the levels of privacy and the hierarchy of areas. Historical monuments frequently tell us stories about men, power, and battle. The Gujarat stepwells (figure 2) provide a pleasant counterpoint to this paradigm, as they convey stories about women, water and life.

The study suggests that women's needs, experiences and perceptions have been ignored by the built environment professionals from the beginning of feminism, according to activists and theorists using feminist analytical techniques (Whitzman, 2013). The built environment contributes to the production and interpretation of information that has a direct material impact on everyone's life.

### INTERSECTIONAL GENDER DOMAINS

The history of the feminist movement given above shows a minor but significant shift in how the 'issue' of men's and women's differing lived experiences has come to be understood (Bondi, 1990). The late-nineteenth-century discipline of urban studies exemplifies a very limited perspective, as it was unmistakably a male realm (Brownmiller, 1975). Not only has most of the writing about the city been androcentric (or male-conceived), but it has also been occidental-centric (or western-conceived) (Jones, 2016), failing to reflect the subjective reality of men and women in both the global north and south.

The twentieth century saw the emergence of pivotal men's studies and the publication of influential texts highlighting challenges and issues to masculinity-related to de-industrialization and male unemployment (Wieser, 2019) - and the diversity of masculine identities, including those reflecting cultural pressures to repress homosexual orientations or to 'come out' against dominant heterosexual norms (Connell 1995, Hoggart, et al, 1992; Mac an Ghail 1994; Robinson, 2005). Along with this shift toward the intersectional interweaving of gender and sexuality identities with other social inequalities, there was an increasing reluctance in some academic circles to utilize gender as an analytic category. This method demonstrates the vital development of a gender-conscious setting, presenting a new meaning in architecture. Intersectionality as a conceptual framework could be explored further, resulting in an excellent canvas for the 'intertwined' approach to an explicitly gendered urban theory aimed at inclusive design.

### ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY

While domestic and reproductive activities are frequently associated with women, they are involved in the other significant elements of home and community management. Feminists coined the term 'triple role' (see figure 3) to describe and appreciate women's labour, whether paid or unpaid. It's also supposed to separate labour from anything that's sexually determined and to emphasize those gender roles as we know them, are neither strict nor universal.

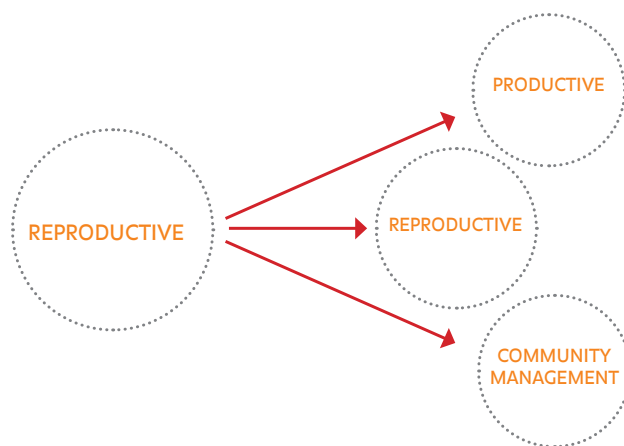


Figure 3: The role of women in the society  
(Source: <https://www.femcrunch.com/tracing-history/>)

To dissolve roles and work that is often muddled or devalued, gender, sex and development communities have developed the below categories:

- *Reproductive Role*: Child-bearing: rearing obligations, as well as home tasks, are essential to ensure the labour force's maintenance and reproduction. It encompasses the biological reproduction and the maintenance of the current workforce including male partners and working children as well as the future workforces such as school-going children.
- *Productive Role*: Both men and women work for remuneration in cash or in kind. It comprises market-based and exchange-valued production, as well as home-based production with actual use-value and potential exchange-value.
- *Community Managing Role*: Women's activities at the communal grade, primarily as an augmentation of the assigned reproductive roles, to assure the availability and upkeep of scarce collective consumption resources such as food, water, health care and education. It is therefore unpaid volunteer work done in 'free' time.

Women in community management roles are frequently competent and powerful, but their success is predicated on organizing within their own domain (Borden, 2002). If they choose to pursue a career in (male-dominated) politics, they may face considerable opposition and controversy, reaffirming gender stereotypes.

### ARCHITECTURE- A MAN'S PROFESSION

The discursively created world of architecture appears to be a world built for and inhabited by men. The idea that the 'typical' human is male indicates that not only is the human body that occupies architecture a male body, but that human subjectivity is also gendered masculine, as evidenced by the architect's inventiveness (Little K., 1980). Women's existence and agency, not only as designers but as inhabitants of constructed settings, are almost largely ignored in western architectural theory and practice (Janes, 1884). Women are effectively absent as protagonists in the history of architecture and appear in the discourse only as peripheral and marginal figures (Negami, 2018).

## MALE AND FEMALE OCCUPATIONS IN 2015

Larger circles represent more common jobs.

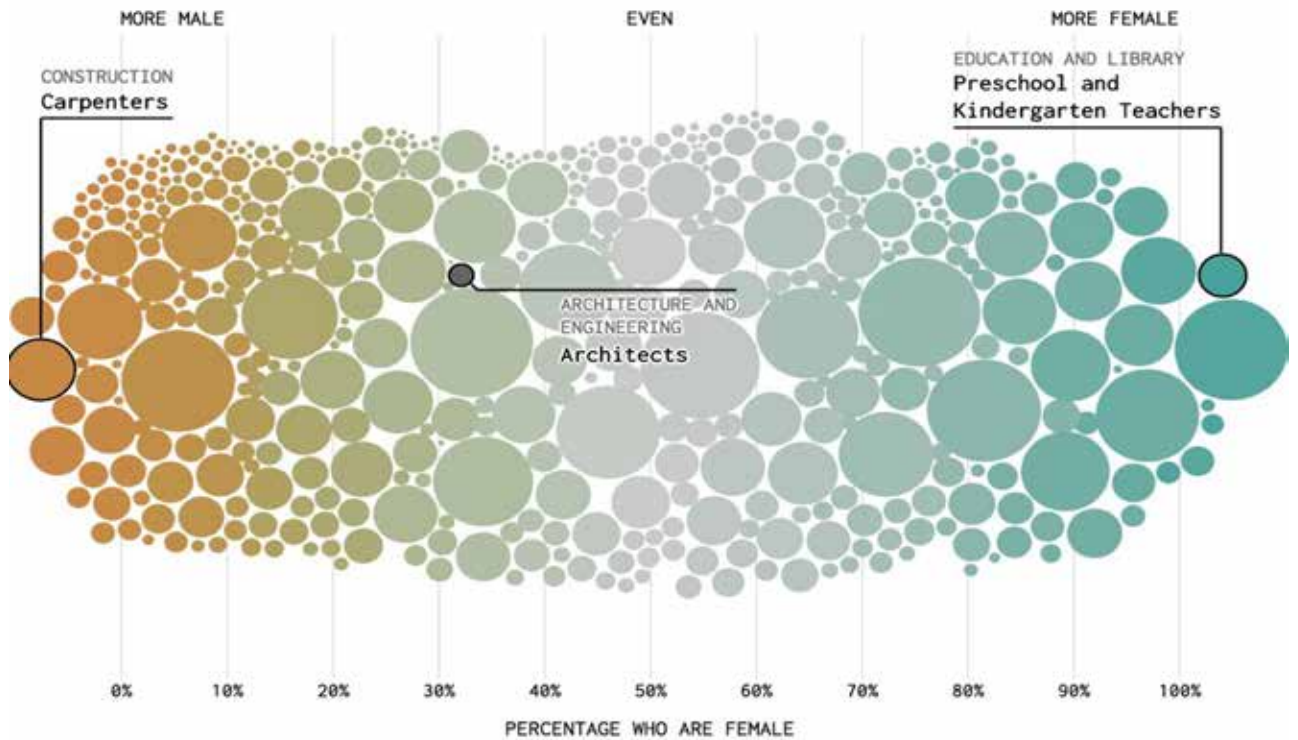


Figure 4: The differentiation between men and women in workforce (Source: Adapted from 'Women and Planning: Creating Gendered Realities', 1994)

The 'feminine' is called on only as support, foil, or muse to the masculine or as a symbolic figure for nature and the exotic (Segal, 1990). The built environment is a powerfully determining human creation that both reflects and conditions the life experiences of its inhabitants and the relationships between them (Proshansky, 1970). The vectors of inequality and difference are multiple- class, gender, race, culture, age and sexuality- which intersect in a complex matrix (Connell, 1987). The development of our cities and suburbs is influenced directly and indirectly by systems and mechanisms of power and control from which women have been and remain almost totally excluded as shown in figure 4 (Faure, 2003).

Since the advent of feminism, activists and theorists deploying the tools of feminist analysis have remarked on the generic neglect by the built environment professions of the needs, experiences and perceptions of women (Kusum, 1996). The built environment helps to produce and interpret direct material effects on the lives of all people (Warren, 1922). The built environment as 'ground' and architecture as 'figure' reflect and perpetuate class and ethnicity-bound social, cultural, and political imperatives and are specific to time and place (Janes, 1884).

### GENDER SPATIAL PERCEPTIONS

Men and women have varied perceptions of the settings they appreciate and experience. Their perspectives are shaped by biological differences, gender socialization, and previous experiences (Little, 1980).

Karen Franck identifies six characteristics that distinguish feminine or feminist ways of knowing and analyzing:

- 1) A yearning for inclusion as well as the ability to transcend conflicting dualities
- 2) A sensitivity to the interconnectedness of categories, as well as an underlying connection to others, objects of knowledge and the world
- 3) An 'approach to ethics' refers to the obligation to respond to others' needs.
- 4) An acceptance of subjectivity as a method of knowing and feelings as elements of knowing
- 5) A desire for and acceptance of complexity
- 6) A willingness and adoption of innovation and flexibility.

### GENDER INTEGRATED APPROACH

Gender role theory holds that traditionally men have done the most productive (paid) work in the public realm, whilst women have been provided a private sphere of 'reproduction', which is unpaid, domestic work and has a significant impact on their risk perception. The goal of this study is to investigate how women perceive risk in public places (Jacobs, 2020). It tackles impediments to women's access to public spaces, as well as the reality that men and women are exposed to different dangers, perceive risks differently, and respond to risks differently. It is an effort to introduce recommendations for architects and planners for the construction of gender-appropriate urban public spaces that would allow women to participate equally in the public realm and contribute to the benefit of society (McDowell, 2013).

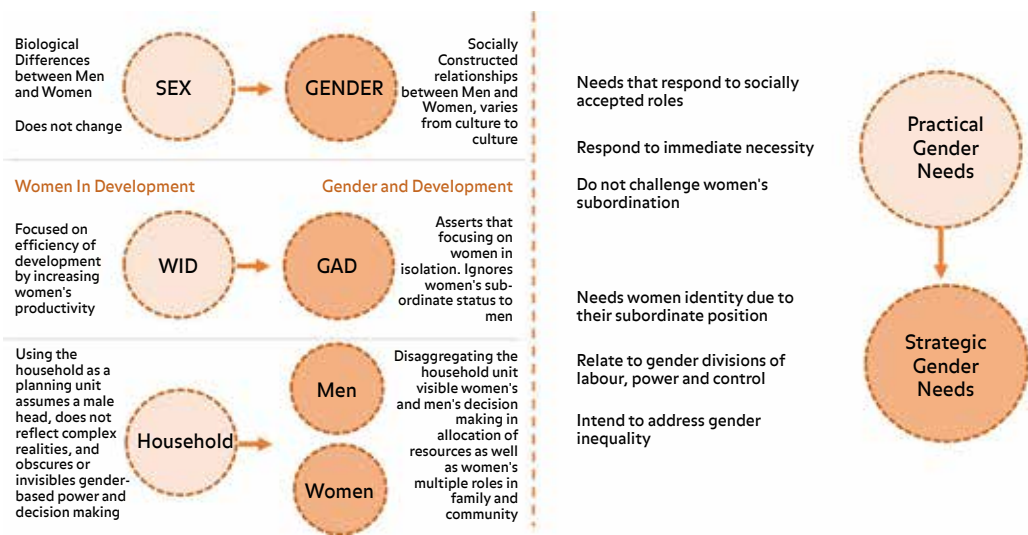


Figure 5: Sex vs. Gender (Source: Author)

The relevance of spatial planning authorities in altering the built environment with the introduction and operation of future development is becoming increasingly apparent (Newman, 1973). Women's needs are not given the same priority as men's in the establishment of such programs, according to studies, and a general, rather than a gendered, approach to mainstreaming dominates. Women's needs and interests as designers and users of the built environment, however, have not been fully incorporated into the development of policies and practices. The female principle is:

- More utilitarian than formal.
- More adaptable than rigid.
- Rather than being abstractly systematized, it's more naturally arranged
- More comprehensive than specialized
- It's more complicated than a one-dimensional model.
- More socially conscious than profit-driven.
- Takes longer to develop than it does to construct.

Feminist notions must be included in designers' academic and employment practices to alleviate historic and institutionalized bias against women (Habib, 2012). What important is if a designer acknowledges the existence and causes of inequality due to gender, understands the unique requirements of women because of this gap and is committed to reforming the current system on a professional standard (Benford & Snow, 2000).

In terms of feminist perspectives, while visible marginalization in the professional industry is declining, women must still 'work harder to exert their power and prove their abilities in an 'all-male' environment' and overcome stigmas associated with females on the construction site, as reflected/reported in the literature. One can tell when their views are being ignored in certain instances. This behaviour is exemplified by the female architect's exclusion from design talks and complaints of sexual misconduct on or around construction sites. The way you dress can frequently determine how seriously you are taken on the job (Steg, 2013).

The inference is that women are much more exposed to assault and harassment, restricting their use and

enjoyment of public spaces in cities. The extent to which ideas about a 'basic', 'essential' or 'biological' sex divide (see figure 5) have been embedded in the constructed world has also been thoroughly explored. According to much of the existing research, urban expansion has been built on traditional notions of masculinity and gender. It has been proposed that these models were based on idealistic gender relationships that had, and still have, dubious universal significance (Bryson, 2016).

**HOW IS DESIGNING AND CREATING SAFE PUBLIC SPACES FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS SIGNIFICANT?**

Because they provide public spaces where women and other users have an equal chance to be healthy, secure and joyful, women's and girls' safety planning and design are essential. According to this kind of planning, the physical layout of cities affects how women use and enjoy the public sphere in the following ways (Massey, 1994) :

- It raises consciousness of the idea that neutral spaces don't exist and that a place's design can either encourage or obstruct women's use, appropriation and welfare of public space.
- It recognizes that gender dynamics between men and women have a significant role in the structuring and growth of urban settings.
- It recognizes that the city exhibits certain social, economic and historical characteristics that are specific to the experiences of local women.
- It recognizes that urban areas reflect the dynamics of power that shape women's and men's behaviour and differences.
- It recognizes that a city's public spaces are often designed around a traditional family concept and a traditional employment division between men and women. It also supports efforts to change the spatial structure to reflect changing gender roles in society.
- It recognizes that women are aware of the places and situations in cities when they feel vulnerable as well as the reasons behind their concerns.
- It recognizes that if women and girls avoid utilizing public areas because they do not feel safe, these spaces will become more insecure for women, girls and other users, and it is a beneficial tool to improve the quality of urban and community life and to minimize women's fear and victimization.

Because of this, it's an excellent instrument for raising everyone's quality of life in cities and communities as well as lowering the fear and victimization of women. In order to create fair and sustainable cities and communities, it promotes women's and girls' rights to the city and citizenship.

### GENDER SENSITIVE PLANNING

Gender-sensitive planning is a new tradition whose goal is to ensure that women through empowering themselves achieve equality and equity with men in developing societies. The linkage between gender dimension and urban development is the subject of gender-sensitive planning.

Its significance stems from the fact that present development policies frequently discriminate against or overlook women, even when they are properly drafted, as a result of erroneous assumptions. The intellectual underpinning for important gender planning concepts may be found in many feminist theories and current discussions on women, gender and development.

Although they may overlap in almost all civilizations, the roles of gender distinction between the biological functions of the feminine and the masculine and define the duties of men and women in:

- social and economic activities
- access to resources
- decision-making authority

Caroline Moser (1993) demonstrates how such concepts are transformed into methodological methods, tools and approaches that are integrated into the planning process based on her considerable research and teaching expertise in gender-sensitive planning. She analyses institutional structures and operational processes to specifically incorporate gender into the project planning cycle, considering whether the execution of gender-sensitive planning is subject to technical or political restrictions.

The entrance points for these groups to advocate for the concerns of women at the domestic, civil society, national and international levels are:

- Identification of gender roles based on the gender roles described above
- Evaluation of gender requirements based on practical gender needs as opposed to strategic gender needs
- Planning for balancing the triple role to avoid unplanned overlaps of gendered tasks
- Disaggregating control of resources and decision-making at the household level to meet conventional assumptions of the family unit
- Intervention options and performance measurements
- Including women and gender-conscious groups in the planning process

### ALTERING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The built environment, as well as cultural norms for behaviour, have an impact on a woman's safety in public settings (Peake, 2020). Women's challenges are becoming more well-known, which may lead to a change in how women are regarded and appreciated in society.

Some key considerations were identified to alter the built environment and contribute to the existing literature:

- To minimize displacements and competition for usage, sufficient open area that may be appropriated should be provided at a reasonable distance.
- A wide range of appropriation and utilization forms should be encouraged.
- Ensure multi-functional use, such as a sports facility.
- Safety is a must-have. Open structures, visual connections to the environment, and supervision can all help to achieve this.
- Different population groups should have access to amenities. They need to be specified explicitly.
- Small-scale structures are required because a dominating, arena-like environment favours gender-specific appropriation.
- In addition, some protected spaces or times are required so that girls, particularly those in early puberty, can realize their full potential without being bothered, such as playing sports away from male gazes.
- While successful public engagement should be self-evident, gender-sensitive participation methods must be implemented.
- More flexibly designed interim usage projects must also be organized with better gender-sensitive considerations.
- Finally, a greater study into the effects of changing gender relations on outdoor behaviour is required.
- Buildings should be created with the human scale in mind. The size of the constructed form should be comparable to that of a user strolling along the street.
- Negative spaces should be avoided at all costs, with the greatest amount of space available for each place. It is best to plan time to avoid sharp, inaccessible corners that are hidden from view.
- Cluster development is preferable. A tight-knit community ensures the safety of all citizens.
- Street culture must be reestablished, since the ancient notion of street assured eyes on the street and continual activity on the sidewalks.
- A strong public transportation network must be established to link diverse locations. It guarantees that individuals may go from one location to another without difficulty, but special emphasis should be given to women to eliminate any travel concerns.

### ACTION RESEARCH PLAN

A recommended analysis (as shown in figure 6) concluded from the review that is evidence-based and addresses the needs of gender-based urban planning dimensions based on data-driven approaches: evaluation of the condition, creation of the action plan, assessment of the plan to assess its efficacy.

- *Evaluation of the condition:* The first phase aims to recognize women's needs by building data collection systems that are gender-segregated. These newly created methods of data collection will involve surveys and societal participation to gather as much information as possible about men and women, as well as how they use urban space. Once enough data is gathered, it will be possible to determine the challenges that men and women face daily in the built environment, as well as how these aspects contribute to inequality.

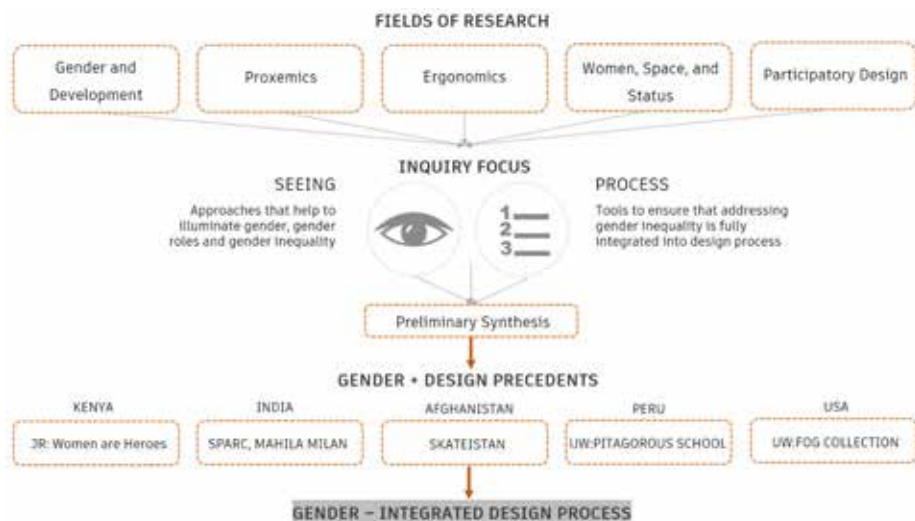


Figure 6: Action Research Plan  
(Source: Author)

- *Creation of the Action Plan:* Phase two involves the formulation of extensive objectives to determine the city's long-term goals after decision-makers have gained a better understanding of the problems and their core causes. Following that, each step's intended results are stated, and result measurement guidelines are created to evaluate the project's outcomes. Each procedure's human and financial resources, as well as the implementation timeline, must be planned on time. The execution timetable is used to assign responsibilities, set a deadline for completion, and guarantee that all stakeholders are kept informed. It's a step-by-step guide to achieving measurable results.

- *Assessment of the Plan:* The third phase is assessing the project's outcomes and efficacy. Understanding the variables that contribute to the barriers to attaining the objectives is critical for analyzing the project's development and application of guidelines. Changes may need to be identified as the project advances to allow for flexible delivery.

- *Review of the Plan:* Data will be evaluated regularly in Phase 4 to assess any changes over time and to comprehend the project's consequences on residents' lives. This will also entail an assessment of the project's principles and long-term goals with stakeholders to ensure the project's efficacy.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Effective gendered public spaces are significantly difficult to accomplish, as their complexity is rarely interpreted or observed. From the scholarly evidence and research, one can conclude various interventions that would be potentially effective in addressing gender-inclusive design:

- *The Community as an Expert*

Identifying the abilities and assets throughout the community is critical when establishing a proposal for any gendered public space. Individuals may provide historical context, useful insights into how regions function, a grasp of critical challenges, and what is meaningful to people in any community. Using the data at the start of the procedure will help to foster community ownership in this project, which will benefit both the project stakeholder and the community.

- *Public Space-making and not Design*

A design is not enough if your purpose is to make a space. To transform an underperforming space into a vital 'place' for everyone, physical elements such as seating with landscaping must be introduced, as well as changes in the pedestrian and vehicular circulation patterns. The development of more intense relations between the surrounding commercial and the activities taking place in the public spaces. The goal is to create a place with a strong feeling of community and a welcoming image that does not discriminate against any segment of society.

- *Have a Vision*

Each community's vision must be developed independently. However, a vision of the type of activities might be there in the space, a view that the area should be comfortable and have an empowering view, and that it should be an essential site where individuals want to be, and it should ingrain a sense of motivation in the people who live-work in the adjacent area are all crucial to perception for any gender-based public space.

- *Triangulate*

Triangulation is a technique in which an external stimulus creates a bond with the people and causes strangers to interact as if they knew each other. For example, if a chair, waste bin and a phone are put separately, they may receive relatively little use, but when combined with other amenities like a juice cart, they will promote human interaction and bring people together (or triangulate). On a larger scale, if a women's centre is positioned next to a park with activities of interest to women, there will be greater activity than if these are put separately.

- *Form and Function*

The concept for the space is based on the input of the community and possible stakeholders, an understanding of how places work, experimentation, overcoming barriers, and sceptics. While the outline of the design is vital, these other factors inform you what 'shape' you'll need to realize the future vision of the space.

- *The Scheme is never Finished*

The characteristics of ideal public places that adapt to the wide public, opinions, and continual changes necessitate attention. In an urban context, amenities wear down but need to be replaced, and other things happen. Ideal public spaces, cities, and towns are built by being open to the demand for change and having the managerial adaptations to implement that idea.



## CONCLUSION

Identifying the skills and resources within the community is crucial when creating a design for any gendered public space. According to the research that has been done thus far, the initial step in developing a gender-inclusive city is getting to know the women and girls who live there and accurately analyzing the requirements, issues and possibilities. Achieving a gender-based transformative change will be made possible by the gathering of gender-sensitive data to address regional imbalances and the political will to address these differences. The concept for a place is created with the help of the community's and possible partners' involvement, knowledge of how spaces work, experimentation, and overcoming challenges. Although the design is crucial, the other components demonstrate what planning level is required to realize a space's long-term goals.

The review suggests that our findings might be applied to evidence-based gender-inclusive urban planning and development and that intersectionality could be used as a promising lens to critically reflect the mysteries and paradoxes of gendered urban identity. These strategies should not be considered as alternatives but, should be complementary and parallel.

In delivering an evidence-based and comprehensive intervention, this review envisions fair-shared, safe, and sustainable cities with equality for both men and women.

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**Ar. Trishla Chadha** is currently pursuing M.Arch Urban Design at The Bartlett, UCL. Her personality is appended with professional experience across multiple scales and community-driven approaches. Her interests also lie in the field of architectural journalism, and her work has been published by various international digital platforms.