

Working Towards Ending Discrimination by Design

An essay exploring how Architects and Urban designers need to work in the public realm to contribute to gender equality in design.

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1 Introduction

The majority of today's existing cities are not designed with young girls and women in mind. Despite dealing with this struggle, this social group also battles with major exposure to discrimination, non-equal distribution of opportunities and resources and social exclusion. In addition, today's rapid urbanisation creates even more major challenges and concerns to one of society's most vulnerable groups and this is the reason why we as architects need to be a strong voice and a movement that brings great change to the table.

Gender equality and norm criticism are two very important, but almost always forgotten ingredients that should be explored when designing in the public realm. These perspectives should be active and found throughout the whole design process, otherwise there is a major risk that the urban space designed would chiefly be appropriated by normative groups and thus be exclusive to others (White Arkitekter, 2018). How our cities and the general urban space is planned is crucial to human health, quality of life, and it can in particular increase young girls' and women's opportunities for a better life, education and social security. Additionally, a city that plans and works after women's needs will benefit the whole population and society at the end, meaning today's patriarchal model that dominates modern urban planning is neither sustainable nor favourable for all residents (#UrbanGirlsMovement, 2017).

“What defines a character of a city is its public space, not its private space. What defines the value of the private assets of space are not the assets by themselves but the common assets. The value of the public good affects the value of the private good.” (Projects for Public Spaces, 2012). This is a quote by Joan Clos, UN-HABITAT's executive director. Public space matters and it is very important to make it accessible for everyone because a successful city should always cater for all social groups, and a conscious driven society should work for equality between the genders in the urban space. Also, adapt to different people's socio-economic needs.

The use and distribution of public space in neighbourhoods became a subject of interest of mine after a field trip to Metro Manila in the Philippines. Interviewing women, both young and old, and listening to their stories made me want to write a research piece that aims to create more understanding and dialogue about women's and girls' needs in the city but also a contribution that works as a small

step towards change. Because obtaining access to the city's public space is not only a necessity but a human right.

2 Literature Review & Discussion

Urbanisation

When thinking about Manila, urbanisation and density comes straight to mind and it is not a coincidence since Manila is the capital and the second largest city in the Philippines but also the world's most densely populated city with around 42,900 people per square kilometre (World population review, 2020). People tend to draw themselves in to the urban parts of the country from the outskirts, including the other 16 cities that comprise Metro Manila to find better opportunities for livelihood and a better way of life (Correa, 1973).

Today in 2020, Metro Manila is facing a major urbanisation crisis with a population of 14 million people and an increasing amount of urban challenges over the last 20 years. These challenges are, among others, urban growth, increasing number of slums and informal settlements, planning inequality and the lack of urban services. The rapid urban growth in the cities has limited the land use and made it significantly harder to plan for the public and create quality urban spaces because there is not enough space and most of the land is being used to build housing for the growing population. Another issue is that these major challenges connect to more and newer trends that also need to be addressed, like climate change, exclusion and rising inequality as well as international migration (UN Habitat, 2016). Therefore it becomes forgotten and way more challenging to address equality and the importance of creating quality space when planning. But also, the cruciality of understanding and addressing equity and to not exclude groups in society for their differences, but to embrace the differences and use them to create a more equal city. This is the reason both of these strategies cannot work without one another and both need to be used in an effort to produce fairness. "*Equity* is giving everyone what they need to be successful. *Equality* is treating everyone the same" (Sun, 2014).

Inequality and Exclusion

The gap between the rich and the poor has become the highest in the last 30 years and inequality is an emerging urban issue specifically in such a rapid growing country like the Philippines (UN Habitat, 2016). While visiting Metro Manila as a

part of my Urban Shelter course at LTH, I could clearly see and come to the conclusion that the wealthy parts have incomparably better-quality urban spaces and healthier environments. It was a crushing reality because I believe quality-providing and inclusive urban spaces should be for everybody no matter where you live or your economical background. It is a human right. But of course, the real world does not operate like that. The contrast is huge and almost uncomfortable between the wealthy parts of Metro Manila and the less so wealthy. Bonifacio's spotless streets and carefully designed parks are very independent and unrelated to for instance, the neighbourhoods that were designed to be inhabited by informal settler communities. This urban divide is dangerous because it stigmatizes and excludes large groups of the population from a socially and economically productive life. Also, excludes them from benefitting from opportunities in the society at large (UN Habitat, 2016). Furthermore, these inequalities and exclusions result in even more issues for other marginalized groups within the bigger community. It is mainly because lack of interest and an unfair political game from people in higher positions, not enough economical- and educational resources, not enough knowledge or demand and the need of a new urban agenda as well as acceptance between different economical groups.

While interviewing families living in low-income neighbourhoods about the common space situation in the area, it was mainly women who were unhappy or felt like they did not have a space designed for them or their needs. "I always stay inside" Christine living in NGA told us. "I mostly use the area inside of my unit and sometimes the hallway, but I do not go outside in the neighbourhood" said Niomi living in Bistekville #2. The men were happy with their basketball courts, but the women felt like they didn't belong or that they could not use the current spaces as much or as freely as the men. Overall these neighbourhoods lack quality spaces but it is way worse to feel excluded than to have a low-quality space designed for you.

Gender planning and Gender roles

Gender roles are structures that have been in practice for a long time and today they still effect the everyday life, in some places more than others. Many gender roles are making life harder for many women because they categorize them and create a boundary that is hard to break, especially since these roles are being practised as norms and create a set of societal expectations for behaviours for

women to follow. For instance, women are expected to act and conform to particular stereotypes like being timid, agreeable and to not engage in energy craving physical labour. This is one of many reasons to why women's use and control of public space is shrinking or not as strongly present and visible as men's (Begault, Gardner, 2019).

Gender roles also relate to the structure of low-income households, especially the division of labour within them. Women and men have different positions in the household in many areas in the world and these positions are put because of strong connections to gender roles, this also creates different control over resources and also different roles in the society overall (Moser, 1993). The issue is that generalized assumptions are always created about women's needs based on the gender roles that are being practised which makes it harder to plan for their actual needs because they are either being forgotten or not discovered and discussed. The generalization of how people operate according to gender roles makes it harder to think outside the box and recognize other and newer needs.

There is an issue with the common rhetoric of "planning for people" because in much of the current policy and practice, it is always based on Western planning theory despite the planning context and reality. Assumptions are made about the household like for example the stereotype of viewing the man of the family as the "breadwinner" and the woman as the "homemaker" (Moser, 1993). There is not always a clear division and planning needs to overlook the stereotypical idea about low-income households but at the same time recognize that these structures are still in practise in many contexts but needs deeper understanding.

"The development of gender planning as a planning tradition in its own right is the consequence of the inappropriateness of current planning stereotypes" (Moser, 1993). There are many planning stereotypes that do not satisfy the needs of women in the urban realm, they exclude them and make it harder for women to be a voice in planning especially when it comes to the question about equality. This is one of the strong reasons to why gender planning got introduced as a concept.

The European Commission defines gender planning as "an active approach to planning which takes gender as a key variable or criterion and which seeks to incorporate an explicit gender dimension into policy or action" and it refers to the process of planning and designing programmes, projects and implementation phase of policies from a gender perspective (EIGE, 2018). Integrating a gender perspective in design is crucial since it recognizes structural gender inequalities,

gender gaps and different gender needs and then try to work towards formulating appropriate approaches to achieve them. In this case the needs of public urban spaces for women and how one could make existing spaces more inclusive. Gender planning is a concept that recognizes the different needs, opportunities, control and resources of different groups and how to distribute them equally within the public realm (EIGE, 2018).

Gender planning works in four different steps (EIGE, 2018):

1. Defining the problem – What is the issue?
2. Defining the policy/programme/project – What is the approach and solution?
3. Legitimacy and operational design – A more detailed approach and definition is formulated.
4. Defining the budget – What are the resources and budget?

The potential with gender planning is that it opens up a door for discussion and adaptation of appropriate participatory methods. It is important to include a forgotten community in the design that will be catered for them. Participatory design can take place in different ways and stages such as monitoring, research, evaluation and workshops and all of these ways make it possible to identify the issue way quicker and it also identifies the needs and expectations of the community. Including the community also increases their trust in public institutions, empowers them and allows for a better understanding to gender related issues and needs related to policy measures and control (EIGE, 2018).

Women and young girls need to be a part of every stage and have their voices and experiences heard and taken seriously. Participatory design lowers the risk of unexpected results, conflicts and it increases the effectiveness of the project when the affected parties are involved. It is also very important to fight the knowledge gap and understand what women want and need instead of assuming, this could easily be backed up with relevant research and data related to other things than gender like age, ethnicity, disability and class (URBACT, 2019).

There needs to be an understanding about women friendly and women only spaces and the importance of having both. Safety is a big issue when it comes to designing for a vulnerable group, therefore it is important to create safe spaces but also make current spaces accessible and safe for all. Women experience various

types of sexual and non-sexual violence in public spaces which creates fear and reduces their freedom of movement but also limits their access to services and the ability to take part in public life. UN Women's Global Flagship Initiative "Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces" is a strategy that was developed by the UN about how one can tackle this issue. This could happen by implementing strict laws and policies against violence, investing in the safety and economic viability of public spaces, working towards changing attitudes and behaviours and promote women's rights (UN Women, 2020). Safety is very important when creating spaces that will be used by women as well, this could be through crime-prevention design strategies but also by making women's typical use and pattern of the city more convenient. It is important to represent women and make them heard by voicing their own lived experience because it can change the way others perceive space (Begault, Gardner, 2019).

Placemaking

"Every place needs a variety of reasons to be there!" (Gulati, 2015). This is very important because public places need to be rich in variation and have many uses that serves different people like for instance different programmes, amenities that come to life during different times of the day and night. If the space only caters for one group or has a few uses, then it only becomes a transition point and a place with no reason to stay and linger around. Public spaces can serve many different functions and activities; they could be a stage for life and activity, comfortable spaces to sit and gather, spaces that are safe and easy to enter and leave, flexible and diverse spaces with different programmes and even spaces to create opportunities to make a living (Gulati, 2015).

Placemaking is a strategy that can create a strong community and build ownership and engagement among people. It is where design serves function and human needs are met and fulfilled for the goal to build and plan for the better. This strategy gives the experts role to the community and empowers and engages them in a way the traditional planning process doesn't. Instead of relying solely on urban designers and architects, placemaking uses the skills and assets of a community to enrichen the process. Strong and local partnerships are important to create dynamic and the context is also something deeply looked into; societal norms, climate and traditions must all be taken into consideration (Project for Public Spaces, 2012).

Successful Sources

Jämställda Platser in Malmö is a project that started after the success of "Rosens Röda Matta" – an outdoor activity area in Rosengård, planned and led by young girls. Jämställda Platser is a contribution between the project stakeholders and teenagers to develop three different active meeting areas in Kroksbäck, Lindägen and Nydala. All three meeting areas have different functions; one is active, one is green, and one has the concept of increasing the social level in the neighborhood. This project was a success because it gave the 25 teenagers a lot of knowledge in equality, anti-discrimination and sustainable urban planning but it also gave the stakeholders and Malmö municipality a lot of knowledge in participatory design and in the needs of young girls and teenagers overall. A handbook was also published (Boverket, 2018).

KRUT is a new section for youngsters at Malmö city library that was developed by White Arkitekter with the concept of equality where they had a diverse group of teenagers participate in the design process of this "inner public space". The idea is that norm critical and equal design can lead to the creation of an including and engaging environment where everyone feels welcomed. It was a success and they even developed a handbook that answers important questions; How can you identify an including and equal public space? How can one create such an environment indoors? (White Arkitekter, 2018).

Sometimes it doesn't have to be a design of a whole public area or a building but an object that leaves a statement. #Tjejtrappan which translates to girls' stairs is located in Helsingborg and it was a successful collaboration with many actants; Tengabom, Helsingborg municipality, police, scientists, the girls at Wieselgrensskolan and the school itself. The design was a pink staircase with different statements written on it, it was placed in Gustav Adolfs torg during the summer of 2018. The statements written on the installation came from discussions among 15 young girls about important topics like equality and justice. The placement of the object was not random, it was placed in a square where girls don't dare to hang out usually. The staircase is also an object where you can stand and scream out your frustrations and thoughts (Tengabom, 2018).

4 Urban Shelter Design

I want to propose a strategy and design policies that will help in the design process for vulnerable groups in the society, especially women.

1. Strategy

The absence of women and young girls in the urban planning process is a huge problem because it creates a knowledge gap that results in excluding public spaces. Instead, we need to include women from the very beginning and create a better participatory dialogue and process because that is the key to inclusive and equal design. In any project, the group that the design is being designed for needs to be present and have the right to participate and share their ideas and concerns. Rebecca Rubin of White Arkitekter reported that during the research project Places for Girls, they had learnt a lot from the girls who came into the studio and collaborated with them because they were the experts and had the most knowledge about this topic (Kneeshaw, 2018). Which makes sense, who would know more about being a young girl in the city than a young girl herself? Therefore, **participatory processes** are a must in designing for equality.

Placemaking is the follow up of the first strategy. After including the targeted community and getting their input which is essential in the placemaking process, the collective work starts within and with the community. By strengthening the connection between people and their relations to the public spaces they share, placemaking gives these communities the opportunity to collectively reimagine and reinvent their spaces in order to maximize the value of space. “Placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution (Project for Public Spaces, 2007). With community-based participation at its centre, placemaking becomes a very effective process that promotes trust, strong sense of connection to the space, quality spaces, health, happiness and well-being while creating a more equal design.

“(Placemaking) is crucial and deeply-valued process for those who feel intimately connected to the places in their lives, Placemaking shows people just how powerful their collective vision can be. It helps them to re-imagine everyday spaces, and to see a new potential of... neighbourhoods... and public buildings” (Project for Public Spaces, 2007).

2. Policies – Crucial point to follow when designing for Equality

- Training and Education

It is very important for architects and urban designers – people who are seen as the experts – to actually be educated and properly trained and fitted to work with communities in different contexts, especially vulnerable and low-income communities who need support and understanding.

- Research

Doing appropriate research before working with different communities is very helpful and important because something that many planners and designers do is to assume or follow stereotypes which results in a weak project. Do research, gain knowledge and learn more about the context and people you are designing for.

- Amplifying the Conversation

The work cannot start without starting the conversation because communication and discussion is key to understanding and collaborating with different people. A conversation can bring a lot to the table; needs, issues, positive input, ideas and thoughts, feedback, experiences – both good and bad. It is important to take the first step and reach out to these communities.

- Community Participation in Design

Include the community in every process for the very start! It is important to get their input on everything since the project is catered for them. Therefore, it is crucial to have them collaborate from the beginning.

5 The Role of Architects

”As designers, it’s important for us to think about who we represent and how and rely more on representation and engagement to ensure good intentions don’t lead to rather stereotyping or tokenizing, undermining the success of interventions meant to make vulnerable groups visible” (Begault, Gardner, 2019). Education is crucial because even though architects have academic education, we still need to research and educate ourselves on different cultures, contexts and communities in order to work as efficiently as possible and be able to see things from different perspectives. Architects need to be brave and start with amplifying the conversation for change, bring together and include relevant partners who can bring knowledge and elevate the conversation. We need to bring together stakeholders and, in this case, women’s voices to create change and more awareness over the long term that can lead to better design and planning and more equal cities. It is our responsibility to get their voices heard and start the conversation from within our profession and outwards. Design and planning culture need to be more open-minded and developed to serve today’s issues and trends, no matter where and when.



Picture by Tengbom

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