THE OTHER HALF IN THE CITY

What it means to be a woman in the contemporary city

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Abstract

Women have played a big role in propelling the transformation of societies globally. Through empowering themselves and pursuing their aspirations or earning an independent income, they inspire more women to empower themselves in the same way. Globalisation is one of the leading factors that allowed this to happen; increasing internationalisation and collaboration between economic sectors lead towards an increased demand for a female workforce, whether for high-valued employment opportunities in sectors fitting the image of globalisation, jobs that are "traditionally" perceived to be for women, or for low-skilled, low-valued employment. Regardless, this development has led to the increase of women's involvement in the public sphere of the city, no longer being confined to the private sphere of the household. The form and structure of the contemporary city is, however, threatening this advancement by perpetuating the "traditional" gender roles within society through the use of a city structure that makes it difficult for women to balance the time between societal gender expectations and their personal aspirational opportunities spatially. In this essay, I explore the implications of the historical development that allowed the normalisation, and paradoxically the hindrance, of women's involvement in the public sphere, and the possible socio-spatial factors in the city that hinder them from pursuing the opportunities for independence presented to them, concluding with tools that urbanists can use to promote gender equality in cities.

Keywords

Gender dynamics, time-use patterns, globalisation, spatial networks, social sustainability, urban design and planning

Introduction: the historical development of women's place in the city

Over the past 100 years, women's roles in the western city have changed dramatically. Going from being predominantly confined to the household, to becoming formally educated in large numbers and entering the mainstream workforce, women's lives quickly shifted from a private focus, being contained in the private realm of the household and community in the city, towards immersing themselves in the public domain (Hatem, 1985). 'Traditionally', women's main role in society was, and to a large degree still is, that of the primary caretaker (Ortiz Escalante et al, 2015; Silbaugh, 2007). As such, they would need to predominantly be around the house to take care of the household, with their public involvement being mainly limited to shopping, whether for leisure or for food (Roberts, 1998). Following this pattern, work for women was also limited to the private sphere of the city, centring around the kinds of employment opportunities they could manage from within the house or in enclosed spaces; essentially an extension of their household work, such as nursing, clothing trade, and so on (Emsley et al, 2018). Along with this, women were supporting the employed men in the household through their household production and farming; "far from being unconnected, the subsistence sector and the modern capitalist enterprise were shown to be articulated – but through a gender dynamic that veiled this articulation" (Sassen, 1998).

The 20th century marks the start of normalising women's involvement in the city and growing inclusion in the public domain and marking the massive shift of daily gender patterns in the city (Meece, 2006), defined by people's lifestyle, composed of the shifting societal views and expectations, and individual ambitions, thereby working as an invisible demographic shift in cities. With the dawn of the World Wars in the 20th Century, many women were left to not only care for the family as they had been, but also become the main source of income for the family while the men were off to war, thereby introducing women in large numbers into the formal production economy (Goldin, 1989; Dawood, 2014). This meant that women frequented the public domain in the absence of majority men, leaving them free to have access to and control public services and spaces (Dawood, 2014). As a consequence, women's patterns of travel and use in the city are also significantly changing over time; while they were earlier confined to a smaller range of use within the city, mostly within their direct community, they are gradually increasing that range for their employment and ambitions. This contrasts significantly with the lives of men, who have for a long time been well integrated in, or even the ones to define, the public domain and are seeing the increased numbers of women in their fields of study, their workplaces, and public spaces. The city was therefore used to divide and control the "'natural' division between the sexes" (Roberts, 1998) through its structure that rigidly defined public and private spaces; men's and women's spaces respectively (Kuhlmann, 2013), therefore bringing threats to women with their increased patronage, who were not considered in the design of public spaces as direct participants.

The relationship between the different genders and the city is a topic that has been thoroughly researched from a sociological perspective, thereby paying greater attention to the relationships between people, including gender roles, power relations, and governance structures in cities. How these societal relationships then reflect into space during the development and growth of the city form and structure is, however, not as thoroughly and extensively explored in a way that results in concrete conclusions and design interventions about gender equality in the networks of the city, as I believe is necessary. Meanwhile, with the increased frequency and use of communication technology coinciding with increasing trade, the process of globalisation is increasingly intertwining economies internationally, thereby also intertwining the demographics associated with them. In Saskia Sassen's book *Globalization and Its Discontents,* the relationship between globalisation and gender dynamics in the city is further explored.

This essay will investigate globalisation as one of the reasons for the changing patterns within the city, particularly the relationship between globalisation and gender dynamics in the city, analysing Sassen's book as the primary literature regarding this, and how this relationship can shed light on differences between the gendered use of the city. By introducing my position on the inclusion of women in the city and its relation to their quality of life, I aim to showcase the importance of sensitive city design for gender equality, rather than neutrality, considering factors beyond safety in the city. How globalisation can contribute to highlighting this and bring city planning further towards inclusivity is then discussed, concluding with directional possibilities for the future of inclusive city planning.

Globalisation, the city, and women

In Chapter 5 of her book *Globalization and Its Discontents*, Saskia Sassen speaks of the effects of globalisation on the economy of cities and what women's roles in these spatial economies largely become. Globalisation in cities is an ongoing trend globally, particularly in Capital cities, where global economies are increasingly becoming inter-dependent (Sassen, 1998, p.81). This process of global inter-dependence stimulates more economic advancement in particular sectors, while leading to the outsourcing of other sectors wherever they are better developed, such as the extraction and manufacturing of raw materials, or more economically attractive, such as mass underpaid factory production in 'poorer countries' (Sassen, 1998, p.84). This leads to large players in the market, with a tendency towards one specific demographic make-up, outsourcing parts of their production processes to other economic sectors that have their own demographic distribution (Sassen, 1998, p.86). The internationalisation of production led to what Sassen terms the "feminization of the proletariat" (Sassen, 1998, p.84, 91), as these low-cost manufacturing jobs are predominantly composed of a female workforce in countries with a large number of low-income demographics, despite these women not having engaged in industry prior (idem). This therefore meant that women are becoming more engaged in the working population of cities, whether in those with the more formal image of globalisation or the ones with the informal image of the outsourcing of globalisation, meaning that economic development in one country is also resulting in the encouragement for women to join the workforce in another country to contribute to the working population and income-earning role in their household. This reaches Sassen's conclusion that the process of internationalisation of economies worldwide leads to the increased gendering of the world economy (Sassen, 1998, p.83).

The higher interdependence of international economies leads to more opportunities for women to join the workforce, thereby allowing them to enter the public domain of society and the city in order to contribute to their households, communities and the local and global economy. Increasing internationalisation, Sassen notes, also allows a predominantly female demographic to engage in transnational labour (Sassen, 1998, p.84, 87, 88), allowing these women to gain further independence through both the autonomy that comes with being in a foreign context, and a relaxation of societal expectations (Sassen, 1998, p.91). Hong Kong, for example, is seeing a large extent of this through the high demographic of Filipina and Malaysian maids servicing the high-income locals (Cheng, 2018), an example of the notion of "serving classes" that Sassen refers to (pp.90-91). Through their large number, they form a large community of an independent female demographic mostly hidden in the urban fabric of Hong Kong, aside from on Sundays, where they dominate the public and semi-public space across the city centre, creating space for themselves in a city that did not consider the presence or needs of a large number of women using it at once in the design and planning of its existing public space (Au, 2015). It is important that the processes that enable the transformations in gendering, in the point of view of the women included in these processes and their notion of membership, are recognised (Sassen, 1998, p.84).

It then comes to light that, while women are increasingly welcomed into the public economic sector by those who strive for economic development in their respective cities, and can manage to gain a degree of independence through international migration and employment, the societies, cities, and the working culture are not expressing similar sentiments in various sectors (Sassen, 1998). Societally, women are not expected to let go of their assigned gender roles, whether in the household or out of it, making it more difficult for women to dedicate the extra hours in their fields of employment to attain a higher chance at furthering their career (Tacoli et al, 2013). Women with primary to secondary education employed overseas are expected to work in sectors that relate to an extension to their low-valued household work (Kuhlmann, 2013). Through the existing structure, design and culture of the city, women often run into issues regarding the lack of safety and long-winded networks that waste their time (ITDP, 2019; Tacoli et al, 2013). Finally, the working culture is based on the stubbornly persisting culture before women's introduction into it; what we see in the way with which the global economy functions, it is dominated with male-gendered "cultural properties and power dynamics that are associated with men of (some) power" (Sassen, 1998, p.82). By making the system with which people earn their livelihoods in the city based around one specific lifestyle, that is associated with one gender, and building the rest of the framework supporting that system accordingly, a system that is not only isolating and hindering, but also inefficient and dangerous, is created. These cultural and power dynamics in the fields of employment, bleeding into the urban fabric, create an exclusionary system for women and marginalised groups.

Therefore, while the economy and societal dynamics in cities globally are complex and diverse, a lot of this is hidden, particularly in cities that increasingly promote their economies as ones for a high-skilled labour force. This process is what Sassen refers to as a "narrative of eviction" in globalised cities, where the workers, firms and sectors that do not fit the "image" of globalisation are excluded from the way these cities economically promote themselves (Sassen, 1998, p.82, 87, 93), and are consequently excluded from plans for the development of the city. It is therefore apparent that the societal dynamics in the city are reflected into space; the cultural and power dynamics present in society that are led by men and predominantly exclude women, especially low-skilled, low-income women, affect the structure or the city (Sassen, 1998, p.84; Tacoli et al, 2013). The next step, Sassen notes, in the normalisation of the gendering and diversifying of the world economy, is to transform international economic development research to balance the heavy focus on men by recovering the role of women in these economies (Sassen, 1998, p. 83). To do this, we need to pay attention to the way women use and navigate the cityscape differently to men, and the spatial elements that women prefer or avoid.

What does it mean to be a woman in the contemporary city?

Cities are spaces of opportunity, where there is a higher range of prospects and aspirations for individuals to pursue than in semi-urban and rural areas (Tacoli et al, 2013). Women are therefore allowed to be more independent and are given more possibilities through the city, where they can experience "some relaxation of the rigid social values and norms that define women as subordinated to […] men generally" (Pepera, 2019; Tacoli et al, 2013). Not only can women participate in a wider range of educational and employment opportunities, particularly with higher demands for varying skillsets in various fields, there are also more opportunities for engagement with society outside the household in the different varieties of public and semi-public spaces present in the city. Even more so with increasing globalisation, cities have become spaces with endless amounts of things to do, see and experience, in both the positive and negative sense.

However, when it comes to the essence of the form and structure of the city, particularly relating to the networks and how these different spaces are linked with each other, I believe current urban

design practices have not gone far enough with accommodating women and adapting to the 'invisible' demographic shift mentioned earlier. Spatial design is still regarded with the same lens as before this change in people's patterns, and large problems that come with this lack of consideration are dealt with retroactively through measures of social isolation and induced fear of public space, that make the city increasingly less hospitable and riskier for women.

While this is true for many women, women are not a homogeneous group, so different women experience different degrees of these risks in the city based on factors such as their age, education level, and societally-assigned unpaid tasks formed around multiple factors (mainly age and role in the family), which lead to different schedules and experiences for the women striving to make the most out of the opportunities available to them in the city (Kuhlmann, 2013; Roberts, 1998; Sassen, 2015; Tacoli et al, 2013). While there are some that need to wake up in the early hours of the day to prepare, clear some tasks off their list at home, go out before sunrise to clear other tasks before heading to work, patterns that mean these women travel from home to work with detours across different areas of the city, there are also others that have this supportive role in their life, whether in the form of a caretaker or a hired worker who does the household chores for them, while they are able to make the most of the time they have in the day, spending it instead on long travel hours (ITDP, 2019), or long societally-supported work hours (Song, 2013). However, not all women have the resources or financial means necessary to hand these tasks over to others.

An example of where this is increasingly prevalent is in Cairo, a car-dominated city, where the lack of formal public transport means it is difficult to access many parts of the city, particularly universities and business districts, when one does not own a car. This results in people without a car having to plan their schedules around the different modes of transportation they have to take before reaching a metro station, and after exiting of the station nearest to their destination, in order to fit all their activities in the reduced time they have daily (ITDP, 2019). The increasingly popularised development of New Towns and gated communities, which end up not having access to public transportation, is another factor that contributes to this hindrance. This makes the residents reliant on other members of the household to drive them to the nearest public transportation stop, particularly when they cannot drive themselves to their destination immediately, thereby interlinking schedules further in a way that leaves these people tired before reaching their work or classrooms, and after arriving home as well (idem). Still having tasks to complete within these times of energy depletion discourages those whose schedule functions this way to engage in education or employment, and pursue their aspirations, when the time wasted to strive for it leaves them with a lower quality of life. This is not considering the safety and comfort issues that come with busy public transport or informal modes of transport, such as minibuses and taxis, which are becoming increasingly unsafe for women travelling alone due to the prevalence of stories of harassment and kidnapping, that incrementally deter women from using them out of fear (ITDP, 2019; Tacoli et al, 2013). This lack of a sense of safety in the public sphere and in public transport therefore keeps women from liberating themselves through income-based independence (El-Naggar, 2010).

Women's fear for their personal safety is a strong factor for their decisions to participate in urban life (Tacoli et al, 2013). Due to the higher risks of violence (from strangers, as McIlwaine (2013) points out), while women have a higher degree of autonomy in cities, it is again cut short by perceived fear of certain urban spaces, which can hinder them from pursuing the opportunities they aspire for; they are "vulnerable to the fear of harassment and attack and [...] this considerably limits their use and enjoyment of public spaces in the city" (Roberts, 1998). A lot of the fear perceived by women in cities is a result of certain land-use and accessibility patterns laid across cities, such as the aforementioned New Town planning and gated communities in Cairo, as well as a lack of visibility in public spaces

(Kuhlmann, 2013). Kuhlmann (2013) makes a point to note that women are not afraid of the places with bad lighting, lines of sight and visibility themselves, but are afraid of "becoming victims of crime while unobserved by social control measures" (Kuhlmann, 2013, p. 192). Looking back at the quote from Sassen 1998 on page 82, it becomes apparent that not only does the male-led culture and power dynamics in the global economy exclude the workers and sectors from the image of globalisation, but because of the covering of these majority-women economic sectors, the problems and inconveniences they encounter in their patterns through the city are also, in effect, hidden from the mainstream planning and design considerations. This results in the emergence of retroactive plans when the problems grow out of hand that push women further into the private sphere of the city despite them putting in the effort to enter the public sphere. A lack of visibility and therefore understanding of the systems at work in space results in these kinds inconsiderate spaces with heightened vulnerability for women (Sassen, 1998).

This is not necessarily a gendered problem of the city; individuals who live alone will also face the struggles of balancing house work with paid work, as the unpaid work for the household is necessary for the household to function, whether or not the women are the ones to be tasked with them. Some families have contributions done equally by both men and women, however, when it comes to the average household and larger families, where the individuals in question have to work to support those living with them, while taking care of others within the household in the meantime if they are children or elderly, and/or disabled, this task more often than not falls onto the "wife" in the family (Silbaugh, 2007; Tacoli et al, 2013). These women are consequently unable to manage enough time in the day to do housework, care for the household, travel, and pursue their ambitions, while also taking care of their physical and mental health. As the "tradition" was, the city is built by men, around the idea that a man goes to work during regular working hours, while his wife is at home taking care of the house and those living inside it; it is therefore built around stereotypical assumptions about masculinity and femininity in the city (Roberts, 1998). These men are not necessarily contributing much to the housework, as they have to focus on their jobs. Essentially, men go to work from 08:00 to 17:00 and return home to relax, while women are constantly working at home to compensate for it (Kuhlmann, 2013). Men can therefore afford time in their schedule to contribute to the social work culture of building better social relations with their co-workers to have a better chance at being promoted, while women who aim to pursue the same careers would not be able to easily integrate and contribute to this culture as their schedules are filled with unpaid work after working hours, meaning their culture and daily time-use patterns in the city are fundamentally different to that of men. Rather than saying the contemporary city structure is not women-friendly, it is not friendly to more than one type of lifestyle, resulting in a lower quality of life for those individuals who have to juggle the endless tasks tossed at them, the scheduling of these tasks, and the movement between the related spaces. These issues are ones more experienced by women, who are, by societal gender norms, given more tasks on their plate, but even more so by women in marginalised groups, where their disadvantages in space exponentially decrease their quality of life (Kuhlmann, 2013; Sassen, 2015).

As such, directing urban design and transformations towards being inclusive for women, will work to be more inclusive for the general population, including marginalised groups, and whomever is handling the unpaid care work for their household.

How can we progress from here?

Looking at the factors of globalisation that led to the increase of women traversing the networks of the city and the negative effects the current city structure has in promoting this shift into the spatial fabric of the city, it can be safe to say that the alteration of the core structure of the networks in the

city may be a key factor in welcoming women into the public realm of the city. Through altering the physical system around which people's schedules depend, it will make it easier for these people to have more time-efficient schedules within which they can complete the mandatory tasks set for them and have time left in the day for their aspirations and hobbies. From the earlier discussions, some of the elements of this physical system, that will have significant effects when altered, can be narrowed down to formal public transportation and road networks, zoning regulations, the spatial treatment of public space, and the treatment of the narrative of the city, meaning the space with which destinations are linked to each other. Through changing this physical dynamic in the city, it is possible the cultural and power relations within society could also see a shift towards higher acceptance of women in public space. People shape the city, but the city also shapes its people. Destroying the spatial systems that stemmed from the division of gendered tasks and the assigning of gender norms, may therefore be key to gradually dissolving these norms in society itself and increasing the quality of life for women in the city.

It is important, however, to note the opportunities for urbanists to meddle in these systems. Knowing at what stage the city and society is in before proposing the altering of the networks is crucial. If the networks in the city are altered without the consideration for creating foremostly safe and accessible spaces for women and marginalised groups, it will essentially be useless, as the women for whom this should cater would not be guaranteed comfort even while using these time-efficient networks. Assessing the current context of the location and opportunities for growth of the city and economy are, as I conclude from Sassen's discourse, key to assessing the direction with which lifestyles will evolve and thereby the way in which city networks should be arranged to allow ease and comfort for its users regardless of their gender.

Conclusion

Throughout this essay, we have seen how the division of public and private space in the city has been blurred consequential to the ongoing globalisation processes in cities, along with it the division between spaces for men and spaces for women. Societal gender norms, to this day, control how society behaves and what we expect of each gender, along with it the spatial manifestations of these expectations. By disintegrating the spatial manifestations, it may be possible to open the debate in the societies involved about equal distribution of tasks and resources in the city, allowing women in the city the freedom to pursue their aspirations in the most efficient manner possible.

What are the types of spaces in the city that women prefer to stay in and comfortably walk through? Much research has been done in this field from the perspective of the development of Safe Cities, however, a further step needs to be taken with regards to the provision of opportunities for women to confidently be able to pursue their aspirations. How the transportation and spatial networks of the city can be altered to suit this, while still providing women a sense of comfort and security needs further investigation due to its context-dependent nature. Time-efficiency and time-use planning are key in assessing the patterns people, regardless of gender, make to leap from one task to another in their schedules. Due to the nature of women's schedules in particular, they are more inclusive of the varying tasks that can be assigned to people in households and communities. By tackling the spatial manifestations and creating well-connected, safe public spaces, using transportation planning, cohesive urban policies, and well-thought spatial designs for safety, and through using participative processes to thoroughly understand women's needs, it can be said that a city structured to value women, that takes their rights to the city into account, is a city that is structured for opportunities for everyone.

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