Beyond the Blueprint

Harnessing Lived Experience in Participatory processes to address spatial inequalities of the Gendered City

Graduation thesis | Jikke Keizer

'Hanging with the Girls' © Tracy White Fitzgerald

Master Thesis - P5 Report
MSc Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences - Track Management in the Built Environment
Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment
Delft University of Technology

20th of June, 2025

Beyond the Blueprint. Harnessing Lived Experience in Participatory processes to advance Gender Mainstreaming and address spatial inequalities of the Gendered city

Graduation Lab: Civic Transformation, Innovation, Vision for Inclusive Communities

Jikke Keizer
Student number: 4668553

Supervisors
First Mentor: ir. Ellen Geurts
Second Mentor: dr. ir. Yawei Chen

Organization
C'MON - impactontwikkelaars en transitiemakers

C'MON DEVELOPMENT

TU Delft
BK Bouwkunde

Abstract

The concept of the Gendered City—urban spaces where individual experiences, access to resources, and safety are deeply influenced by gender—has emerged from the field of feminist geography. Lived experiences are inherent to the Gendered City as they expose the everyday spatial inequalities between men and women. As the concept of the Gendered City gains traction in academia and urban planning, research increasingly seeks to address these spatial inequalities. Gender mainstreaming, a strategy aimed at integrating gender perspectives into all aspects of planning, emerges as a key approach. However, top-down applications of gender mainstreaming often fall short, hampered by vague definitions and limited insights into the actual spatial needs of women. This lack of clarity prevents a tangible understanding of gender mainstreaming's impact on urban spaces. Meanwhile, emerging participatory planning processes offer potential for a grassroots approach and an opportunity for incorporating the lived experience of citizens into urban planning. However, the conventional participation processes often overlook equitable methods and fail to capture these nuanced realities. This research examines how gender mainstreaming can be advanced as a bottom-up spatial strategy through developing a citizen participation framework that addresses spatial inequalities of the Gendered City by centering lived experiences to. By employing an explorative approach from the field of participatory action research (PAR) qualitative research is conducted with experimental methods. The study examines the intersection of gender-based urban planning and participatory planning through expert interviews, workshops, exploratory walks, a case study and a quasi-experiment. The research identifies actionable strategies of to address gender issues in citizen participation which ultimately promote a more equitable urban landscape for everyone, regardless of their gender.

Key words | the gendered city, lived experience, gender mainstreaming, citizen participation, inclusive urban planning

"A feminist city must look to the creative tools that women have always used to support one another and find ways to build that support into the very fabric of our urban world."

Leslie Kern, Feminist City

Image 1 Women on the street

Table of contents

Motivation

Have you ever walked home with your keys in your hand? taken a longer route home to avoid certain places? have skipped your evening run because it is already dark outside? Or have been harassed on the streets in some way? 83% of women in the Netherlands will answer yes to these questions (plan international, 2023) and that is very concerning.

"*I deserve to feel safe in public places*" is on a protest sign during the annual women's march in 2024 in Amsterdam. It embodies what every woman has experienced herself: some sort of gender-based inequality that is enforced by the world around us. When we talk about gender inequality we often think of abortion rights, femicide or the gender-pay gap but less often we talk about how the worlds around us enables or restricts us in our capability to achieve gender equality even though we have all experienced it. A favorite quote from feminist Geographer Jane Darke states: "Our cities are patriarchy written in stone, brick, glass and concrete". Acknowledging this, we find that the built environment has been built by and for men for centuries and that also in this field the needs and experiences of women are still greatly overlooked.

For me, a 27-year-old woman, this thesis holds personal as well as academic and societal value. My commitment to gender equality has been long-standing and a driving force in my activism and everyday life, and I was eager to channel this passion into my research. This project feels like a natural progression of my motivation to challenge gender-based inequalities and to link that with my other passion: the built environment, and I hope the result reflects this commitment.

Jikke Keizer, June 2025

Image 2. The womens march in Amsterdam on March 8 2024 from Inkink (2024).

01 introduction

What is in this thesis understood as the challenge and what research questions are defined?

Image 3 Women posing in front of a bar © Barbara Krobath Archive

1.1 Introduction

The lived experience of the city | Have you ever considered how your daily commute shapes your perception of the urban environment? Someone who travels by metro each morning experiences the city differently than someone who cycles to work, even if both live in the same city. Today's cities function as complex, multilayered systems, where physical structures intertwine with the social, cultural, and experiential dimensions of urban life. The built environment—comprising streets, buildings, public spaces, and infrastructure—does not exist in isolation; rather, it shapes and is shaped by the daily interactions, movements, and experiences of those who inhabit it. To fully comprehend the urban environment, we must move beyond a purely physical or architectural perspective and consider the ways in which people engage with, navigate, and interpret these spaces. These personal interactions, often conceptualized as "lived experiences," provide critical insight into how urban environments influence and, in turn, are influenced by the diverse needs, behaviors, and identities of a city's inhabitants (Butcher & Maclean, 2018). However, these experiences are far from uniform—factors such as gender, race, age, socioeconomic status, and ability all play significant roles in shaping how individuals perceive and utilize urban spaces.

The Gendered City | Kern (2020) opens her book feminist city with an illustration: She asks her brother Josh if he ever had to walk home with keys sticking out of his fist or if he found that he took up too much space with a stroller, his answer was no. Going on she states that since they share the same skin color, religion, ability, class background and even a large part of their DNA, something else must be the cause of their differing experiences. Since the 1980s, a growing body of research has demonstrated that gender, in particular, profoundly affects the way people experience and interact with cities. Women, for instance, often encounter distinct challenges that differ from those faced by men, highlighting a persistent gendered disparity in urban accessibility, safety, and usability (e.g., Hayden, 1980; Jackowska & Novas Ferradás, 2022; Greed, 2005; Fenster, 2005). These challenges may not always be immediately visible, yet they carry profound consequences for women's mobility and engagement with urban spaces. Everyday urban inconveniences—such as the scarcity of public restrooms, the need to take longer or safer routes to avoid harassment, limited access to public transport, and insufficient lighting in public areas—are not merely inconveniences but structural failings that reinforce gender-based inequalities in urban life (e.g., Kern, 2020; Levin, 2019). While cultural and contextual differences exist across regions, many of these gendered constraints are strikingly universal, affecting women's ability to fully participate in and benefit from city life.

These inequalities are not coincidental; rather, they are deeply embedded in the design and governance of urban spaces. Feminist geographers, such as Jane Darke, argue that the built environment reflects the societal structures that created it. Given that contemporary societies remain predominantly patriarchal, so too are our cities—shaped by planning systems, policies, and infrastructures that have historically prioritized male experiences and expectations (Kern, 2020). This relationship is bidirectional: just as urban environments are shaped by social norms, they also actively reinforce existing hierarchies, exclusions, and power dynamics. The long-standing male dominance of urban planning and design professions has resulted in cityscapes that often fail to account for the diverse experiences and needs of women and other marginalized groups, effectively producing cities that cater predominantly to men. This gendered influence has given rise to what scholars refer to as the "Gendered City"—a term describing urban environments where access, safety, and opportunities are shaped by gender dynamics, often to the detriment of women and other marginalized populations (Fenster, 2005).

Gender mainstreaming | As awareness of the Gendered City has grown within both academia and urban planning, researchers and policymakers have sought strategies to counteract these embedded inequalities. One of the most prominent approaches is gender mainstreaming, which is aimed at integrating gender considerations into all levels of

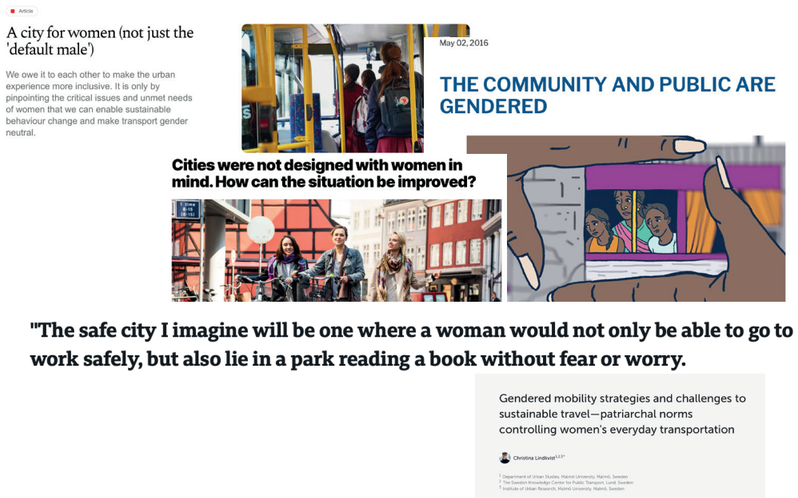


Image 4. Collage of headlines concerning the Gendered city, own work

policy-making, planning, and implementation. It tries to ensure that the different needs, experiences, and priorities of women and men are considered in the development of policies and programs, and thus also that of urban planning (e.g., Greed, 2003; Horelli, 2017; Rampaul & Magidimisha-Chipungu, 2022). This approach challenges the assumption of neutrality in urban spaces, emphasizing that all spaces are experienced differently based on gender and intersecting identities. Despite its theoretical promise, gender mainstreaming has largely been applied through top-down policy initiatives, that are still hampered with vague conceptual understanding and a lack of practical implementation (Horelli, 2017; Roberts & de Madariaga, 2013).

Citizen Participation | Citizen participation is increasingly recognized as a crucial element of urban development. In the Netherlands, the new Environment and Planning Act has even made participation processes mandatory. Its aim is to gather direct insights into the needs and priorities of citizens however, in practice, many voices remain unheard. Participation events, for example, are often attended by a small, highly engaged group, while many others—who will still be affected by urban developments— remain unreached. As citizen participation is still somewhat developing and continues to evolve, it is essential recognize its opportunity to get better insights in the lived experiences of citizens and to find ways to use this potential to address specific urban issues

The opportunity | By directly interacting with diverse voices and their lived experience, participatory planning offers a unique opportunity to capture and address issues of the Gendered City. It can enhance gender mainstreaming's effectiveness and offer practical implementations of the concept. By fulfilling the potential of participatory approaches, urban spaces can evolve beyond their historical biases, fostering cities that work for everyone—regardless of gender, identity, or background.

Image 5. Fontainapark, Brussel © Katrijn Van Giel

1.2 Problem statement

In striving to build more equitable cities, the concept of the Gendered City highlights the **significant spatial disadvantages experienced by women**. These spatial dynamics—rooted in women's lived experiences—shape how women move through and interact with urban environments, often limiting their access, mobility, and safety. As such, **lived experience** is not only a reflection of these inequalities but also a critical lens through which urban issues can be better understood. To be able to adress these spatial inequities targeted strategies that center the realities of those most affected are needed.

Gender mainstreaming offers a potentially powerful approach to integrate women's needs into urban development. However, it is often **vaguely conceptualized and deployed as a top-down policy tool, with limited impact on the ground**. Local authorities frequently struggle to apply gender mainstreaming meaningfully to the specific spatial realities of their cities, partly due to the lack of grounded, experiential insight—insight that lived experiences could provide.

At the same time, **citizen participation processes present an alternative**, engaging communities in shaping their own environments. These participatory processes are uniquely positioned to **surface and prioritize lived experiences**, particularly those of marginalized groups like women. Yet, **conventional participation models often lack an equity-centered framework**, failing to fully address gender-specific needs.

This disconnect represents a **missed opportunity**. The integration of lived experience into citizen participation can serve as a **bridge**, that contributes to gender mainstreaming from a bottom-up strategy rooted in the everyday realities of urban life instead of the top-down directive. Despite its potential, such a strategy remains very underexplored within formal planning systems.

This study, therefore, seeks to bridge the gap between the concept of the Gendered City and citizen participation by positioning lived experience as the key connector. In doing so, it aims to **uncover actionable strategies that embed gender considerations into participatory planning processes**, ultimately contributing to the practice of gendermainstreaming.

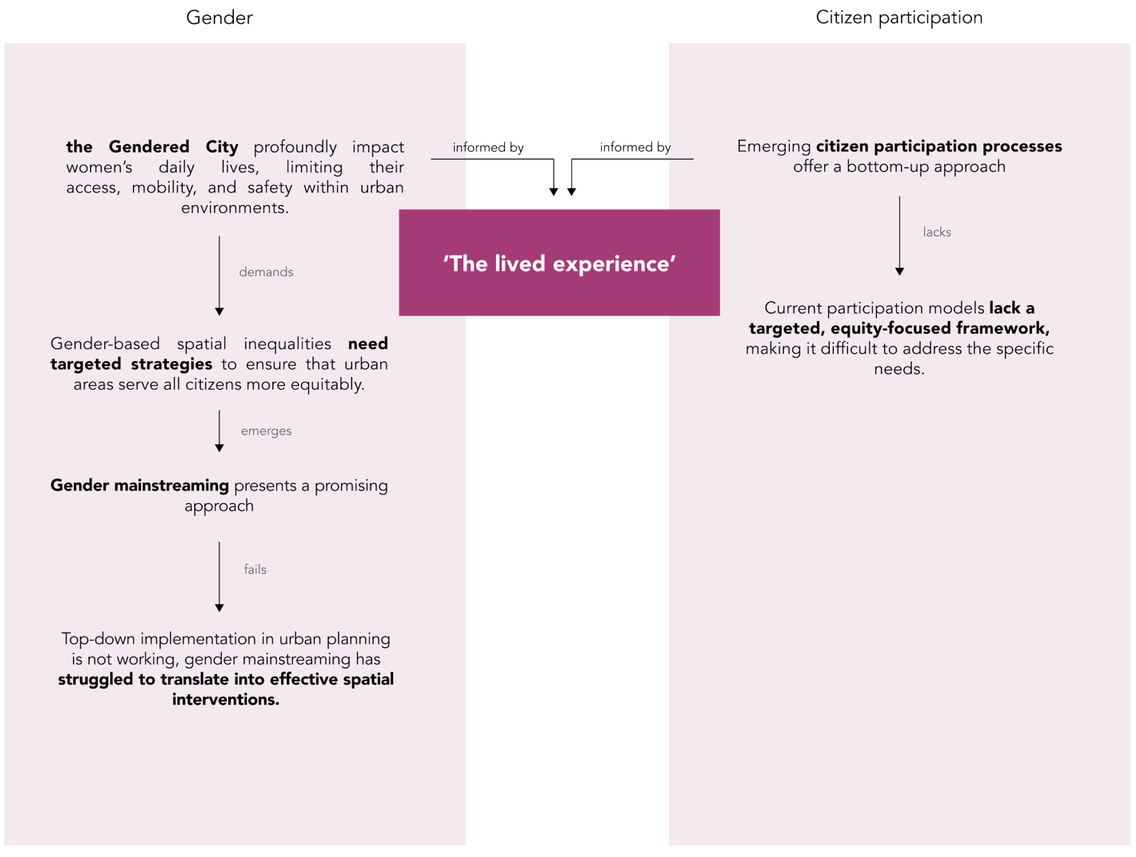


Figure 1. Problem framework, own work

1.3 Research questions

Aim | This research aims to find ways to address the spatial inequalities of the Gendered City, that currently limit and disproportionately affect women, by offering an alternative to the current strategy of gender mainstreaming. A strategy designed to integrate gender considerations across policies and practices. It tries to find ways in which gender mainstreaming can function effectively by re-imagining it as a bottom-up approach within citizen participation processes. By connecting citizen participation processes and the Gendered City through the concept of the lived experience a new approach for tackling gender based spatial issues is formed. Meanwhile, the research also aims to find ways in which participation processes can be designed in a more equitable way, so that they are better equipped to address specific issues that are experienced by minority groups. By proposing a gender-based structure for citizen participation processes it aims to bridge a gap within current participation practices and propose an effective and practical approach to gender mainstreaming.

The main research question guiding this project is

In which way can **citizen participation processes**, by harnessing **'the lived experience'**, be structured to function as a bottom-up approach to address the spatial inequalities of **the Gendered City?**

To answer this question fully, several sub-questions have been formulated

1. In which way can **the lived experiences**, particularly those of women, reveal and highlight the spatial inequalities of the Gendered City?
   Aim: identifying the complexities of the spatial inequalities while examining the role of lived experience in making these inequalities visible. Making the link between lived experience and the Gendered City.

2. Are there opportunities within current **citizen participation practices** to engage with **'the lived experience'** to strengthen their role in addressing spatial inequalities?
   Aim: understand current practices and identifying ways to better integrate lived experience into participatory processes. Making the link between CP and LE.

3. What are effective structural elements, that can be implemented in **citizen participation processes**, that use the lived experience to address **the Gendered City?**
   Aim: Test actionable ways in which participation processes can be adapted to ensure lived experiences adress the Gendered City based on knowledge from RQ1 and RQ2.

These questions are based on a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework, which is further elaborated in chapter 3. In figure 2 the relationship between the three main concepts is illustrated. RQ1 focuses on making the relationship between the Gendered City and lived experience explicit. Next, RQ2 searches for ways in which citizen participation can incorporate the lived experience and finally, RQ3 uses this knowledge to create a new link between the Gendered City and participation processes.

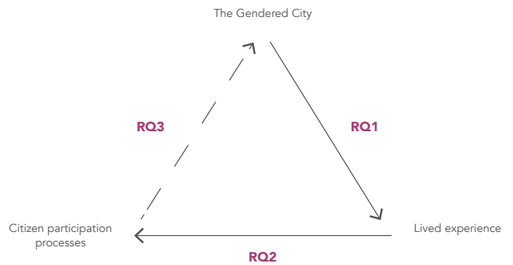


Figure 2. Relationship between research questions

Together these questions intend to bridge the gap between the Gendered City and citizen participation processes by using the lived experience, proposing an alternative approach to contribute to a bottom-up approach to gender mainstreaming where gender-based spatial inequalities are effectively adressed within citizen participation processes.

1.4 Goals | Objectives

Goals | This research hopes to deepen the understanding of gender-based challenges in urban environments and to shed light on the ways in which cities frequently fail to accommodate the diverse needs of women. By examining gender mainstreaming as a tangible and strategic approach within participatory urban planning processes, this study seeks to address a critical gap in existing research—specifically, how gender-conscious planning can be effectively implemented as a grassroot, bottom-up strategy. Through this exploration, the study not only highlights the importance of integrating gender perspectives into urban development but also emphasizes the transformative potential of inclusive planning.

Additionally, this research aims to enhance citizen participation practices by demonstrating the value of a framework that directly addresses issues affecting marginalized groups. Beyond its primary focus on gender, the study aspires to develop an adaptable model that can support other underrepresented communities within participatory governance structures. By linking gender-focused strategies to broader equity-driven urban policies, the findings have the potential to serve as a blueprint for fostering more inclusive and representative planning processes across diverse minority groups.
Ultimately, this study's goal is to contribute both theoretical insights and practical tools that enable urban spaces to become more responsive to the complex social, spatial, and political dimensions of the Gendered City, paving the way for a more just and equitable urban future.

Audience and dissimation | This research adopts a pragmatic and impact-driven approach, aiming to bridge the gap between academic inquiry and real-world application. The reserach is conducted with an internship at C'MON development that ensures its relevance for practice. While contributing to scholarly discourse, its primary objective is to generate tangible outcomes that can be directly implemented by practitioners (like C'MON) in urban development. The key audience for this study includes a broad spectrum of stakeholders involved in organizing and facilitating citizen participation processes, ranging from private developers and local government authorities to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs). These entities play a crucial role in shaping urban spaces and policies, making them essential partners in advancing more inclusive and equitable planning practices.
To effectively reach and support these stakeholders beyond the academic world, this research will culminate in the development of a toolkit—a practical, user-friendly resource designed to translate theoretical insights into actionable strategies. By offering concrete methods and best practices for integrating gender mainstreaming within participatory planning processes, the toolkit will serve as a valuable guide for organizations seeking to enhance inclusivity and responsiveness in urban development.

1.5 Relevance

Societal relevance | This research holds significant societal relevance as it addresses the persistent issue of spatial inequalities in urban environments, which profoundly shape gendered experiences. Many cities reflect patriarchal biases, often overlooking or inadequately addressing the needs of women and other marginalized groups. By advancing gender mainstreaming through a bottom-up approach that leverages the opportunities presented by citizen participation processes, this study explores innovative strategies to make urban planning more inclusive and equitable. Rather than relying solely on top-down policy directives, the research emphasizes the value of grassroots involvement in shaping urban spaces, ensuring that planning processes reflect the lived experiences of those most affected by spatial inequalities. Furthermore, the research bridges the gap between policy frameworks and everyday urban experiences. By integrating participatory mechanisms, it offers a model for direct civic engagement in addressing gendered urban challenges. In doing so, this research confronts the concept of the Gendered City head-on, striving to embed overlooked gender-specific needs into urban development strategies.

Academic relevance | This research is academically significant as it addresses a notable gap in the fields of urban planning and gender studies, particularly concerning the practical implementation of gender mainstreaming as a bottom-up strategy. While gender mainstreaming has long been recognized as an important policy objective, there remains a lack of empirical research on how it can be effectively integrated into urban planning practices to mitigate spatial inequalities in cities. This study seeks to bridge that gap by providing a practical perspective on gender-sensitive urban development.
Furthermore, this research contributes to the academic discourse on citizen participation in urban planning, particularly regarding its potential to address specific, systemic inequalities in urban spaces. While participatory planning is increasingly recognized as a key element of inclusive governance, there is limited research on how it can be strategically utilized to incorporate gender-sensitive urban policies.

By examining the intersection of gendered urban inequalities and participatory planning, this study offers new insights and methodological advancements. The findings of this research have the potential to establish a framework for integrating gender-sensitive methodologies into urban planning while also expanding scholarly understanding of inclusive, participatory approaches that actively address spatial and social inequalities. By combining theoretical inquiry with practical application, this study contributes to a growing body of knowledge on social justice in the built environment. By doing so it is highly relevant for the graduation lab of Civic Transformation, Innovation, Vision for Inclusive Communities, ultimately advancing both the academic and societal discourse on gender and urban space.

02
Theoretical framework

What is the theory behind the main concepts and how do they relate to each other?

Image 6. Exhibition photo with many women crossing the road in Vienna in 1991. © Barbara Krobath Archive

2.0 Theoretical framework

In the following chapter, the four main concepts—the Gendered City, gender mainstreaming, citizen participation processes, and the lived experience—will be explored in depth through an extensive review of relevant literature. Each concept will be examined not only in terms of its fundamental principles but also in relation to the broader theoretical frameworks that support or challenge it. The chapter will critically assess key debates, highlighting both the strengths and limitations of existing perspectives. Furthermore, particular attention will be given to the interconnections between these concepts, illustrating how they influence and shape one another. Ultimately, this will be illustrated a comprehensive conceptual framework, providing a structured approach to understanding their interplay within urban contexts.

2.1 The Gendered City

The Gendered City | The concept of the "Gendered City" examines how urban environments are shaped by gendered experiences and how these spaces reinforce gender-based inequalities (Fenster, 2005; Butcher & Maclean, 2018). Rooted in feminist geography, this idea explores how cities are designed, used, and navigated differently by men, women, and non-binary individuals due to ingrained social norms, power structures, and historical biases in urban planning (Kern, 2020).

At its core, the Gendered City builds upon Henri Lefebvre's (1968) theory of the Right to the City, which conceptualizes urban spaces as socially produced and argues that all individuals should have the right to inhabit, use, and participate in shaping their environments (King, 2019). Lefebvre's work critiques capitalist urbanization, which prioritizes economic profit over people's lived experiences. Feminist scholars later extended his ideas by highlighting how gender dynamics influence the production of urban space (Fenster, 2005). They argue that cities are not neutral landscapes but instead reflect and reinforce patriarchal values, shaping access, mobility, safety, and opportunities differently across genders.

One of the primary dimensions of the Gendered City is mobility, as urban infrastructure significantly affects how different groups move through and experience the city (Lindkvist, 2024; Kawgan-Kagan, 2020). Research has shown that women's mobility patterns differ from men's in fundamental ways. These mobility patterns reflect the unequal distribution of domestic and caregiving responsibilities, which often constrain women's movement and economic participation. Jane Jacobs (1961) was among the first to highlight the importance of proximity to basic services and infrastructure, particularly for women in her book the Death and Life of Great American cities. More recent studies build on her arguments. The general findings from these studies are that a woman's travel radius is smaller than men's on a daily basis. Women are also more likely to work from home, less likely to have a mobile workspace. Women are also more likely to use public transportation, go on non-work travel, make more stops and run household errands (Rosenqvist, 2024) (figure X). Today, Women often combine work with family duties, fragmenting the use of time and space. During daylight hours, public spaces are more likely to be used by women, spending time in nearby parks, with children, disabled and/or senior citizens (Falú & Sassen, 2018).

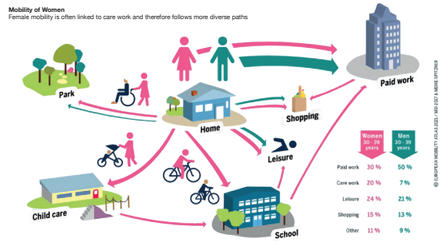


Image 7. Difference in mobility structures between men and women, European mobility atlas 2021

A city's design can either enhance or undermine a person's sense of safety. Women, for example, frequently modify their travel routes, avoid certain spaces, or restrict their movement at night due to safety concerns. This phenomenon, known as the geography of fear, limits women's freedom of movement and, in turn, restricts their access to economic and social opportunities (Koskela & Pain, 2000). Public spaces and services often assume a default male user, inadvertently excluding or inconveniencing women and marginalized groups. Poorly lit streets, isolated public transit stops, and a lack of well-designed pedestrian routes can create environments that feel unsafe, particularly for women. This discourages their participation in urban life and reinforces traditional gender roles by restricting movement and access (Kern, 2020).

Image 8. 2 out of 3 young women is harrased on the streets. From CBS 2022

In addition to safety concerns, accessibility plays a key role in shaping the Gendered City. Essential services such as public restrooms, childcare facilities, and community centers are often unevenly distributed or insufficiently provided. Since caregiving responsibilities disproportionately fall on women, their ability to access these resources directly affects their participation in public and economic life (European Institute for Gender Equality & Istituto per la Ricerca Sociale, 2021). For example, women are more likely to work in lower-paid, part-time, or informal sectors and tend to seek employment closer to home due to caregiving demands and limited access to reliable transportation. As a result, economic disparities become spatially concentrated, reinforcing gendered cycles of inequality.

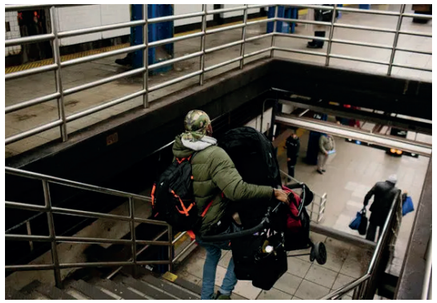


Image 9. Woman carrying a stroller down the staircase of the metro station from New York Times

From these issues, three interrelated, physical spatial aspects emerge as defining features of the Gendered City:

1. **Mobility** – Differences in movement patterns and transportation needs.
2. **Safety** – Variations in experiences of safety and exposure to harassment in public spaces.
3. **Accessibility –** Unequal access to essential resources such as public facilities, childcare, and urban infrastructure.

The aspects and their interrelatedness are visualised in figure 3.

Experience and Perception in the Gendered City

While spatial design plays a fundamental role in shaping the Gendered City, gendered inequalities become most visible when considering how individuals perceive and experience the same urban spaces differently. Much of the Gendered City concept is rooted in lived experience, meaning that subjective feelings of safety, inclusion, and accessibility are just as important as physical urban structures (Fenster, 2005).

For this reason, urban planners, policymakers, and designers must integrate gender as a critical lens when shaping cities. Recognizing that urban environments impact people differently based on gender allows for dismantling structural barriers and creating inclusive spaces where all residents can navigate and participate equally (Wotha, 2016). Urban planners Marta Fonseca Salinas and Sara Ortiz Escalante emphasize that "neutral and universal

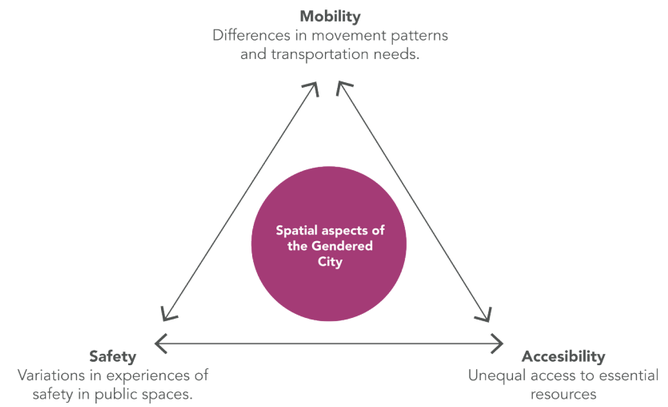


Figure 3. Visual representation of the spatial dynamics of the Gendered City, own work

planning does not exist. What this neutrality does is ignore diversity in our society based on gender, origin, social class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and more" (as cited in Sassen, 2016).

Although the Gendered City primarily focuses on gender-based inequalities, it is crucial to adopt an intersectional approach when analyzing urban experiences. Factors such as race, age, ability, and socioeconomic status further shape how individuals navigate the city. Not all women experience the same urban challenges; for instance, a middle-income, married white woman may face different barriers than a single Black mother. These distinctions must be considered to fully understand the complexities of gendered urban inequality (Kern, 2020).
This raises an important question: Why focus specifically on gender-based inequalities? The answer lies in the fact that gender intersects with all other minority sectors and remains "one of the most pervasive classificatory principles, arguably the most pervasive, with a myriad of implications" (Jenkins, 1996: 61; Kirton & Greene, 2003, as cited in Greed, 2005). Moreover, in recent years, urban planning strategies have often subsumed gender issues under broader diversity initiatives, diluting the importance of addressing specific gender-related challenges (Greed, 2005). This shift underscores the need for targeted strategies that explicitly address gender disparities rather than generalizing them under broader inclusivity frameworks.

The Gendered City concept reveals how urban spaces are not neutral but instead reflect and perpetuate existing gender inequalities. By examining mobility, safety, and accessibility, researchers can identify key spatial dimensions that shape gendered urban experiences. However, beyond the physical structure of the city, subjective experiences of fear, exclusion, or restricted access must also be considered. To create more inclusive cities, urban planning must move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach and integrate gender as a fundamental consideration in policy and design. Recognizing that gender is not the only factor shaping urban experiences, intersectional perspectives must be incorporated to ensure that marginalized communities are not further disadvantaged. By addressing these inequalities head-on, cities can become more equitable spaces where all individuals, regardless of gender, have the right to move freely, feel safe, and access opportunities equally.

2.2 Gendermainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming | A proliferation of movements by and for women aimed at a critical confrontation with the gendered city and at securing the right to safety in the city can be detected in the last 50 years. From the Dolle Mina's in the 1970's to annual 'Heksennacht' today, women are seeking to make urban spaces inclusive by developing a series of urban diagnoses and interventions: gender audits of everyday life, city walks to reclaim urban space, and T-shirts with the text "public women" worn in places where women typically experience vulnerability (Sassen, 2016). Building on this momentum, gender mainstreaming has emerged as one of the main, large-scale strategies employed to address the Gendered City.

Image 10. Action HOGE NOOD (high need) from the Dolle Mina's in 1970 from Atria

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy aimed at integrating gender considerations into all levels of policy-making, planning, and implementation. It seeks to ensure that the different needs, experiences, and priorities of women and men are considered in the development of policies and programs (e.g., Horelli, 2017; Polk, 2016; de Madariaga & Abril, 2019). The term "gender mainstreaming" was first introduced in international discussions during the UN Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985 and was further developed a decade later at the Beijing Conference in 1995. At Beijing, key areas were identified as priorities for gender mainstreaming, including poverty, education, training, health, violence, armed conflict, the economy, power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms, human rights, media, the environment, and issues affecting young girls (Greed, 2005; Horelli, 2017). Since then, gender mainstreaming has been embraced internationally as a strategy towards realizing gender equality.

Despite the intentions behind gender mainstreaming, its actual implementation remains highly uneven. Twenty-five years after its official adoption in the Treaty of Amsterdam which came into force in 1999, gender mainstreaming has been successfully integrated into certain policy areas, such as EU research policy, but remains largely absent from EU urban policy (Hurtado, 2020). However, research shows that urban development is not recognized as a policy priority for gender equality (Christodoulou, 2020). Given that urban policy defines the criteria for sustainable urban development and determines how cities contribute to citizens' daily lives, this omission presents a significant gap in gender-responsive planning.

Despite the gap, in the realm of urban planning, gender planning as a strategic approach to spatial planning has evolved since 2000. On an international scale, gender mainstreaming is now embedded in global urban development frameworks. The New Urban Agenda (NUA), established through the Quito Declaration at the Habitat III Conference, integrates gender considerations into urban policy. Out of 175 paragraphs, 34 explicitly reference gender or women's issues (Sanchez de Madariaga & Novella, 2018), emphasizing the importance of gender-sensitive urban policies (UN, 2015; Novella Abril, 2017). Around Europe many guides, handbooks and policy documents surfaced that try to tackle issues of gender and urban planning (Christodoulou, 2020). A few examples of this are the Gender mainstreaming Handbook of the Senate of the City Government of Berlin, the Spanish Urbanismo con perspectiva de yen eso or the handbook of Gender Mainstreaming Urban Planning and Development in Vienna. Under these approaches, "equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming aim to become a strategy of comprehensive, effective and sustainable planning. Gender relations need thus to be addressed at all planning levels (Sebrantke, 2020)". It is about gaining recognition of women's 'different' spatial needs and reshaping planning policy.

Due to the general and large-scale approach, the super-strategy of gender mainstreaming is still surrounded by a vague conceptual understanding (Greed, 2005). Local planning authorities have

Image 11. Collage of gendermainstreaming policy documents, own work

difficulty understanding how gender considerations might affect spatial policy (Greed, 2005; de Madariaga & Abril, 2019). The translation of this 'social issue' into a field that is mainly preoccupied with spatial solutions is difficult. Sassen (2016) states that "at ground level, cities are often far too chaotic and anarchic to make built gendering a clear visual fact." While efforts have been made, few examples exist of how gender mainstreaming has changed urban form or spatial planning, as little implementation is in evidence. "As to the result, no one knows what the end product would be like if gender mainstreaming were applied to spatial urban contexts" (Greed, 2005). Furthermore, for gender mainstreaming in urban planning and design to be effective, both urban planning expertise and gender insight are required — the combination of which is not often present in practice (Christodoulou, 2020). Past experiences show that gender mainstreaming is often used rhetorically, limiting its effectiveness

in policy and planning. Gender considerations are frequently included in general policy documents but are not systematically incorporated into all stages and scales of planning (Perrone, 2020). Even when effective planning practices exist, they often remain one-off cases rather than becoming part of the larger planning system.

Horelli (2017) stresses that gender mainstreaming as a spatial strategy, partly due to neoliberal politics, has not achieved its intended strategic impact for both sexes. The top-down planning system, which does not support civic engagement, hinders effective tactical urban planning. She highlights the need for efforts to transform the existing system into a more participatory framework that encourages public involvement, self-organization, and everyday gendered practices. Engendering urban planning requires diverse ways of dealing with different types of planning (Horelli, 2017), rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all approach.

Ultimately, while gender mainstreaming holds the promise of creating more equitable urban environments, its current implementation as a spatial strategy is hindered by a lack of understanding, a top-down system, and a confusing conceptual framework. To move forward, new, more practical implementations of gender mainstreaming need to be developed to ensure that the strategy moves beyond a policy document and into real-world change.

2.3 Citizen participation processes

Citizen Participation processes | Citizen participation, also known as resident participation, citizen engagement, or an inclusive process, refers to the involvement of citizens in decision-making processes, particularly in urban planning and development projects. The Oxford Dictionary (2022) defines participation as "to take part in or become involved in an activity," which serves as a foundation for understanding its significance in governance and development. In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on citizen participation in urban planning (Sanoff, 2011; Hartson & Pyla, 2012; Hess & Pipek 2012 as cited in Udoewa, 2022), reflecting a shift from traditional, top-down approaches to more inclusive, bottom-up strategies that prioritize the voices and needs of local communities. Unlike past urban planning models that were often controlled by governmental authorities with little public input, citizen participation ensures that residents—especially those directly impacted by urban changes—play an active role in shaping their environments.

Citizen participation can take various forms, including public consultations, participatory budgeting, co-design workshops, and digital platforms for community feedback. These mechanisms create opportunities for residents to contribute their knowledge, express their concerns, and collaborate with policymakers in meaningful ways. Studies have demonstrated that incorporating citizen perspectives leads to numerous benefits, such as enhancing democratic processes, building trust among stakeholders, fostering social capital, and reducing resistance to urban projects (e.g. Arnstein, 1969; Callahan, 2007; Udoewa, 2022). However, while citizen engagement brings clear advantages, it also raises ethical and moral dilemmas that must be carefully navigated to ensure equitable representation and impact (Udoewa, 2022).

One of the primary benefits of citizen participation is its ability to make use of lived experiences to integrate the diverse needs of different user groups into urban planning. Women, people with disabilities, older adults, and youth each have unique experiences in public spaces, and their concerns often go unnoticed in conventional planning models. By involving these groups in participatory processes, cities can identify and address specific challenges related to accessibility, safety, and inclusivity. For example, women frequently face safety concerns in poorly lit public areas, while people with disabilities encounter physical barriers that limit mobility. By incorporating firsthand experiences into decision-making, urban planners can design environments that are truly responsive to the needs of all citizens, that right now might go overlooked. Citizen participation thus serves as a critical tool for making urban spaces more inclusive and equitable.

However, despite its potential, citizen participation also presents notable challenges. In the Netherlands, for instance, participation has become a mandatory component of urban development under the new Environmental Planning Act. While this legal requirement aims to enhance public involvement, it has sometimes resulted in superficial or "hit-and-run" participation practices. In such cases, participation is treated as a procedural formality rather than a meaningful engagement process, leaving citizens with little real influence while other stakeholders, such as developers and government authorities, ultimately reap the benefits (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011).

Additionally, many participatory processes are based on the principle of equality rather than equity (Udoewa, 2022). This is important because equality treats everyone the same by giving them the same resources or opportunities. Equity recognizes that people have different needs and circumstances, so it gives them the specific support they need to reach the same outcome. Udoewa states that "most participatory design processes initiated by a company or organization maintain or even strengthen power imbalances between the design organization and the community on whose behalf they are designing, further increasing the absencing experience." This distinction between equality and equity is crucial in understanding the limitations of citizen participation. While many participatory initiatives aim to provide equal access to public forums, they often fail to account for structural inequalities that prevent certain groups from fully engaging. Open meetings and public consultations may, in theory, allow everyone to voice their opinions, but in practice, not all citizens have the resources, time, or ability to participate effectively. As Udoewa (2022) explains, "If designers invite community members to participate, they are reinforcing the power differential, the fact that they have the power to invite or not to invite. There is a lack of power for community members to participate in their own way on their own terms." This issue is particularly relevant in the context of gender and urban planning. Historically, urban spaces have been shaped by patriarchal planning systems that have marginalized women's needs. Horelli (2017)

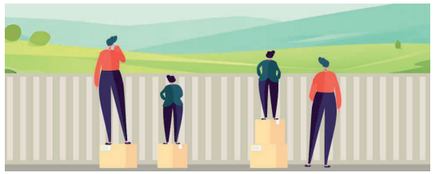


Image 12. Difference between equality and equity, from University of the People

highlights that addressing this historical imbalance requires intentional efforts to prioritize the concerns of women and other underrepresented groups. Without such targeted measures, even well-intended participatory initiatives may perpetuate existing inequalities rather than resolve them.
Arnstein, already in 1969, developed the ladder of citizen participation to assess the degree of citizens involvement in participation processes. The Ladder

aims to illustrate the degree of power and influence that citizens have in decision-making processes. The model highlights the difference between genuine citizen empowerment and superficial participation (Lauria & Slotterback, 2020). While examining citizen participation processes within this research the ladder is a helpful tool that classifies the different ways in which citizen participation can be approached. The ladder consists of 8 steps which are subdivided in three main categories: Non-particiaption, tokenism and citizen power. In the category of non-participation a citizen participation process is conducted but citizens do not have any real power in the process. This second category is tokenism. Tokenism refers to a process where citizens do have a voice and are occasionally heard, however they have no power in the decision-making process. The last category are degrees of citizen power, in which the citizen to a smaller or larger extent has real decision-making power in process. For the citizen participation process to be effective in capturing the needs and experiences the process should fall somewhere in the last two categories. However, if citizen participation is to move beyond just capturing the different needs and experiences of citizen but also utilizing it to respond to these needs a process framework that falls into the last category will make the most impact. The ladder, and it's relations to lived experience are captured in figure 4.

Ultimately, citizen participation holds significant promise for fostering more inclusive and responsive urban environments. It provides cities with the opportunity to cultivate a deeper understanding of community needs and create spaces that reflect diverse perspectives. However, for participation to drive actual societal change, one needs to be wary of equal processes in an unequal environment. As Arnstein's ladder highlights, not all participation is meaningful participation—true empowerment requires shifting decision-making power into the hands of the people who are most affected by urban developments.

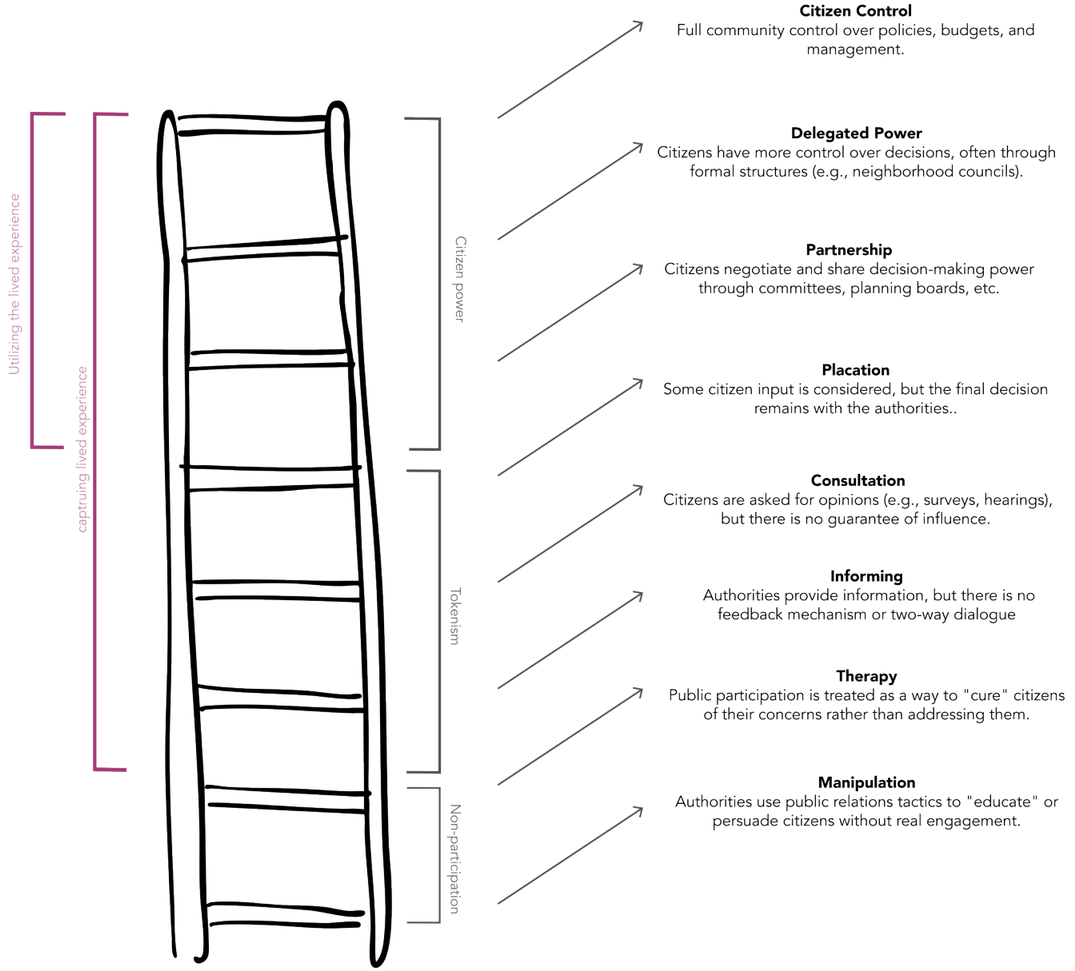


Figure 4. The ladder of citizen participation with the opportunities of the lived experience based on Arnstein (1969), own work

2.4 The lived experience

Lived experience | Urban space is often designed with particular objectives in mind—economic efficiency, aesthetic appeal, or infrastructural necessity—yet the lived experience of these spaces frequently diverges from their intended function. A well-planned park, for instance, might become a vibrant community hub, or conversely, remain underutilized due to safety concerns, accessibility issues, or socio-economic barriers (Jacobs, 1961). Similarly, a highway intended to facilitate movement might fragment neighborhoods and disrupt social cohesion (Cesafsky, 2017). These examples illustrate how lived experience provides a counter voice to top-down urban planning practices. Engaging with urban dwellers in shaping the cityscape, is pivotal in ensuring that spaces function as intended for the people who use them daily.

The concept of the lived experience stems from the philosophical field of phenomenology, which refers to the study of phenomena and how they manifest in our experience (Mapp, 2018). The lived experience, specifically in urban spaces, offers a lens through which we can understand the ways individuals and communities engage with, navigate, and shape their environments. Unlike top-down approaches to urban planning and development, lived experience focuses on the subjective, everyday realities of urban dwellers, capturing the dynamic interactions between people and the city (Lefebvre, 1991).

Henri Lefebvre's triad of spatial production (1991)—conceived space, perceived space, and lived space—provides a useful framework for understanding the concept of the lived experience. Conceived space, in the urban planning context, refers to the abstract, planned, and regulated aspects of the city, shaped by architects, planners, and policymakers. It represents the rationalized vision of urban development, often dictated by economic and political interests. However, the lived experience of urban dwellers frequently diverges from these intentions. For instance, an urban regeneration project designed to revitalize a neighborhood might fail to meet the needs of current residents, leading to displacement.

Perceived space encompasses the physical, material aspects of the urban environment as it is directly experienced in daily life. This includes streets, parks, buildings, and transportation systems, as well as the spatial practices of residents navigating these structures. The lived experience of perceived space is shaped by how people move through and interact with their environment on a routine basis. For example, a metro line may be perceived differently by different users: while some may experience efficiency and convenience while others may encounter overcrowding and delays. These practical interactions with space illustrate how the perceived city can contrast sharply with its conceived version, revealing the experiential disparities among different social groups.

One of the most profound influences of lived experience in urban space is the way individuals ascribe meaning to their environments: Lefebvre's lived space. Public squares, street corners, marketplaces, and alleyways each carry unique significance depending on historical, cultural, and personal factors. A single street might be perceived as a site of nostalgia for longtime residents, a symbol of opportunity for recent immigrants, or a space of exclusion for marginalized communities (Tuan, 1977). These varying perceptions and interactions shape urban space beyond its physical design, embedding it with layers of social and emotional resonance. Over time, these meanings evolve, influenced by political shifts, economic changes, and cultural transformations, demonstrating how urban spaces are dynamic entities rather than static structures. The lived experience of urban space is also deeply shaped by sensory engagement. The sounds of traffic, the smell of street food, the tactile feel of cobblestones, and the visual cacophony of advertisements and graffiti all contribute to an individual's perception of the city. These sensory encounters make urban spaces dynamic and constantly evolving. The same street might feel vibrant and welcoming during a sunny afternoon but unsafe and desolate at night. The temporality of urban experience—how different times of day, seasons, and historical moments shift the perception and function of spaces—further complicates the

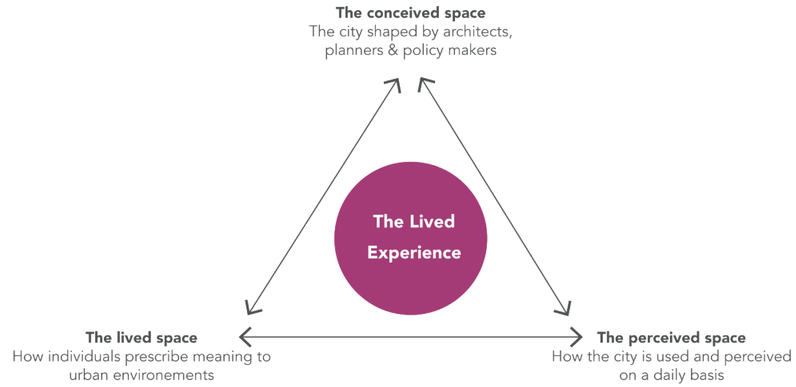


Figure 5. The lived experience as expressed through the triad of spaces based on Lefebvre, 1991, own work

relationship between design and experience (Pallasmaa, 2005). These constantly shifting dynamics underscore the need for flexible and adaptive urban planning strategies that incorporate lived experiences. All the 'spaces' from Lefebvre combined ultimately form our lived experience, as is illustrated in figure 5.

The lived experience thus takes place in different 'spaces' but it is also defined by different identities. Here, the feminist concept of intersectionality arises to understand that different identities shape our everyday lives. The concept of intersectionality comes from the field of feminist theory and explores how various social identities—such as race, gender, sexuality, and class—interconnect and influence individuals' lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1989).

"As people occupy particular social locations in terms of race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, and ability, these multiple identities in combination all at the same time shape their social experiences. Thus, categories of identity are intersectional, influencing the experiences that individuals have and the ways they see and understand the world around them."
Kang et al. (2017)

Multiple identities based on multiple intersectional frameworks are placed in a analytical framework (figure 6) that provides rings of influence. This provides insights in how our multiple identities influence our everyday experience and to what extent. This also reveals that, lived experiences have the ability to reveal disparities in access and mobility within urban settings. While a city may be designed to promote inclusivity, structural inequalities often determine who can fully participate in urban life. Issues such as inadequate public transportation, gentrification, and the privatization of public spaces influence how different groups experience the city (Soja, 2013). For example, a working-class commuter who relies on a bus system may experience the city quite differently from a professional with access to private transport. Similarly, a homeless individual might perceive a park bench as a place of rest, whereas a city official might see it as a site of loitering (Mitchell, 2003). These inequalities based on different identities highlight the power dynamics inherent in urban development and raise critical questions about who cities are built for and who they exclude. Here the lived experience, relates back to the concept of the Gendered City.

Kang et al. (2017) proposes that a framework to understand oneself and one's multiple identities is to situate one's experiences within multiple levels of analysis—micro – (individual), meso- (group), macro- (structural), and global. This framework connects personal experiences to larger structural social or economic forces. The micro level focuses on our everyday lives and experiences like how you move through the street or interact with people at a party. The meso level takes one step back and examines

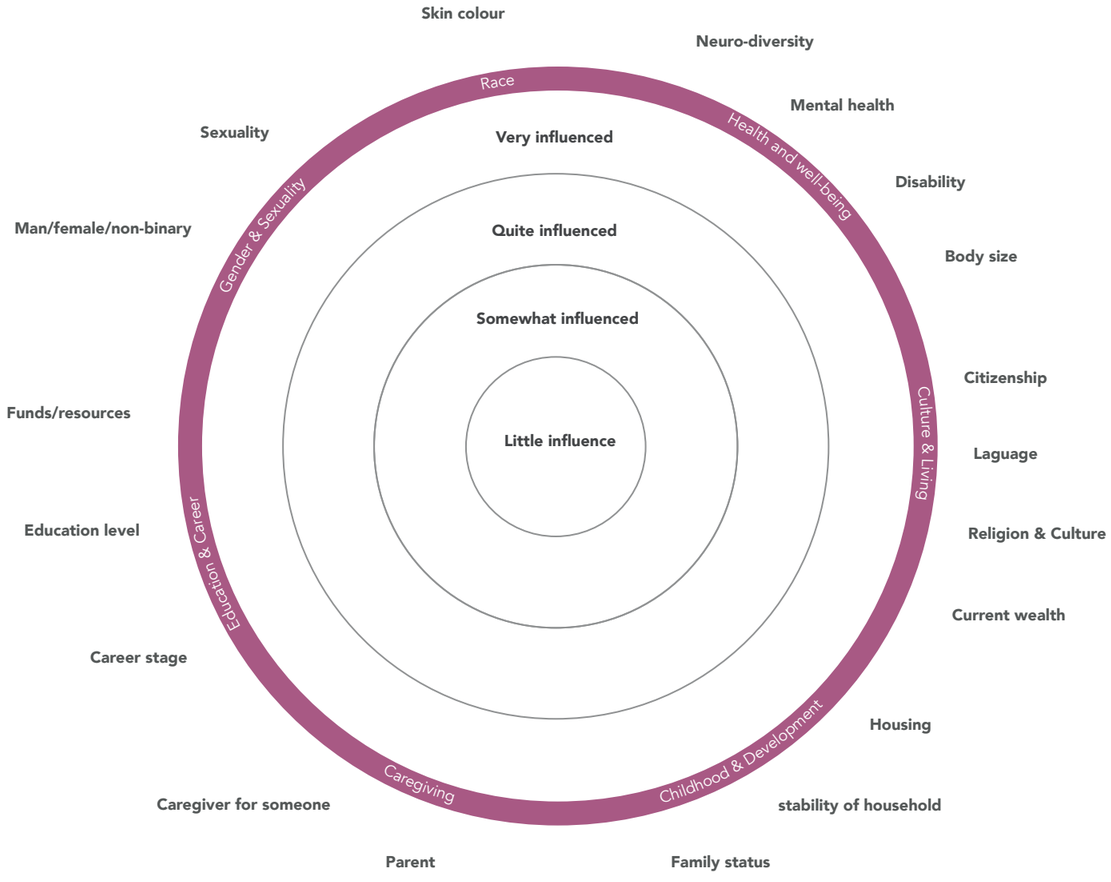


Figure 6. Intersectional identities and their level of influence based on theory of intersectionality, own work

how groups, communities and organizations structure social life. It places the micro level in a larger perspective, so to say. For example, it might reveal how the church might shape gender expectations. “The macro level consists of government policies, programs, and institutions, as well as ideologies and categories of identity (Kang et al. 2017).” It looks at how cultural ideas seams through in national policy, education or even media. For example, current cutbacks in the Dutch education system reflect current dominant ideological discourse but in turn might also affect our daily lived experience by lack of art programs in schools. The global level goes even beyond the national and looks at global structures and trends like our capitalist system, international trade and technological advances. This means that even the technological trend of smartphones has an effect on our personal experiences. Thus, a second framework shows the rings of the micro-, meso-, macro- and global level (figure 7). This framework can help identify at which level lived experiences take place and how they can be related back to larger systemic systems.

In contemporary urban studies, recognizing and incorporating lived experience is increasingly seen as essential for creating more inclusive, equitable cities. Participatory planning methods, which involve communities in decision-making, acknowledge that those who experience urban space daily hold valuable insights into its function and potential (Healey, 2020). Here the lived experience, relates

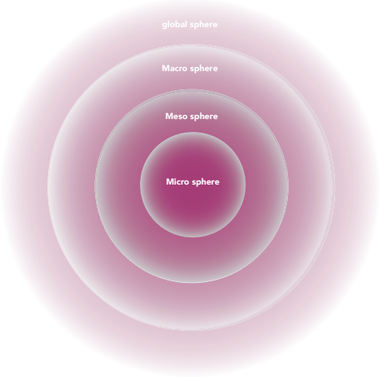


Figure 7. levels of one’s experiences based on Kang et al. (2017), own work

back to the concept of citizen participation processes.

Ultimately, Lefebvre’s spatial triad reminds us that urban spaces are not neutral but made up of different layers of experience. Feminist theory on intersectionality than shows us that lived experience is not only depended on different layers of space but also on multiple identities. Understanding the lived experience of urban spaces requires an interdisciplinary approach that blends geography, sociology, anthropology, and urban design. By prioritizing lived experience, urban planners and policymakers can work toward more just and inclusive cities, ensuring that space is not just designed efficiently but experienced equitably.

Image 13. The lived experience in the streets of London as examined and visualized by NOOMA, 2019

2.5 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework (Figure 8) illustrates the key concepts in this research and how they relate to each other, based on the literature review. It begins with the idea of the Gendered City, which highlights spatial inequalities in three main areas: mobility, safety, and accessibility. Beyond these spatial aspects, the Gendered City also includes non-spatial dynamics, referred to as lived experience. This concept is based on Lefebvre's production of space, which consists of: Conceived space – how space is planned and designed, Perceived space – how space is used and understood by people, and lived space – how people personally experience and interact with space in their daily lives. If properly captured, lived experience can be a valuable tool in citizen participation processes. In this framework, citizen participation is broken down into two parts: the citizen – the individual who brings their lived experience, and participation – the structure of the process that incorporates this experience, which can be structured using Arnstein's ladder of participation. Ultimately, the participation process, has the potential to enhance gender mainstreaming, by making it a tool to adress gendered issues from the bottom-up (pink line), rather than the current top-down implementation, that insufficiently addresses the Gendered City (black line).

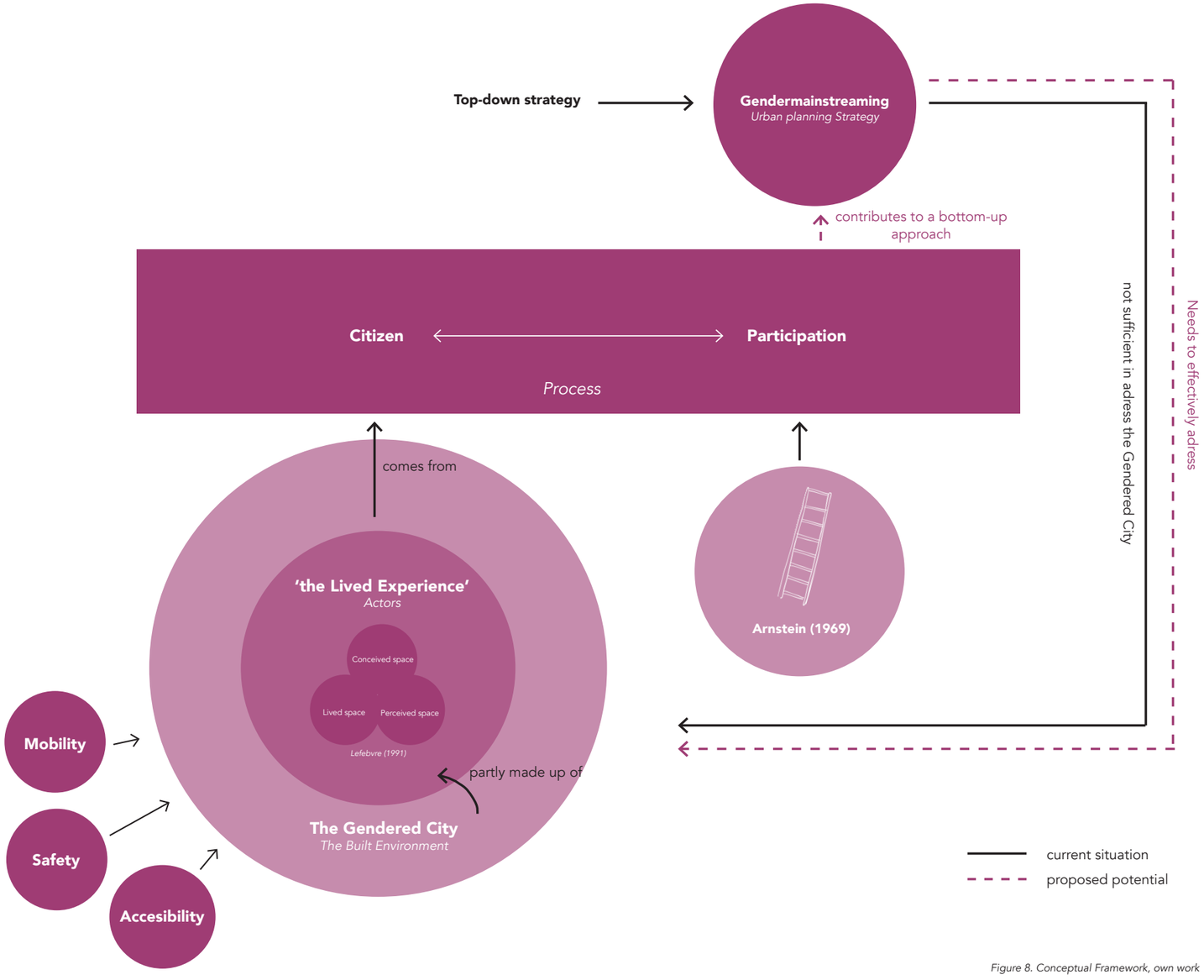


Figure 8. Conceptual Framework, own work

03
The approach

What is the methodological approach to answer the research questions?

Image 14. Women architects in action from re-thinkingthefuture.com

3.1 Research framework

Explorative Research Approach | An explorative research approach was chosen for this study, as it best aligned with the current state of knowledge on the research subject. Explorative research is an approach designed to develop a deeper understanding of a topic, problem, or phenomenon that remains understudied or not yet well-defined. It is particularly valuable in the early stages of research, where the primary objective is not to derive conclusive answers but rather to establish a foundational understanding that could guide further investigation (Mbaka & Isiramen, 2021).

This approach is commonly employed in disciplines such as social sciences, business, and urban studies to explore emerging issues, new concepts, or complex challenges where existing knowledge is limited or fragmented (Mbaka & Isiramen, 2021). As mentioned before, while awareness of the Gendered City and its spatial inequalities is growing, research into practical, bottom-up strategies for addressing these inequalities remains scarce. Given this gap, an explorative approach was well-suited to this study, as it allowed for the identification of key themes, stakeholder perspectives, and specific challenges that informed gender-sensitive urban planning.

Explorative research is inherently flexible and open-ended, often relying on qualitative methods such as literature reviews, interviews, focus groups, and case studies to capture diverse perspectives and insights (Olawale et al., 2023). This adaptability ensured that the research could evolve in response to emerging findings, allowing for a nuanced analysis of how lived experiences shape citizen participation processes in gender-mainstreaming efforts.

Participatory Action Research | Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework was implemented as research framework because aligns well with the exploratory nature of the study, as it focuses on understanding complex, under-researched issues while generating new insights. However, PAR extends beyond exploration by emphasizing action, collaboration, and social change (e.g. Cornish et al., 2023; Kindon et al., 2007). It is based on the principle that those affected by a research problem should be actively involved in the research process, bridging the gap between researchers and

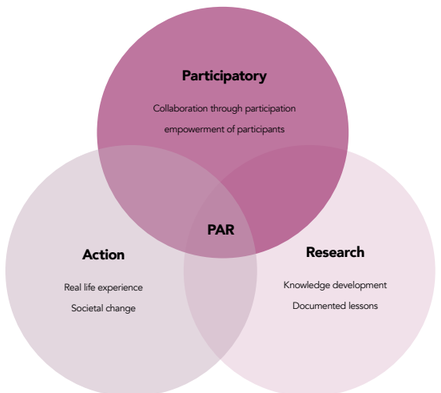


Figure 9. Interconnected facets of PAR based on Schubotz (2019), own work

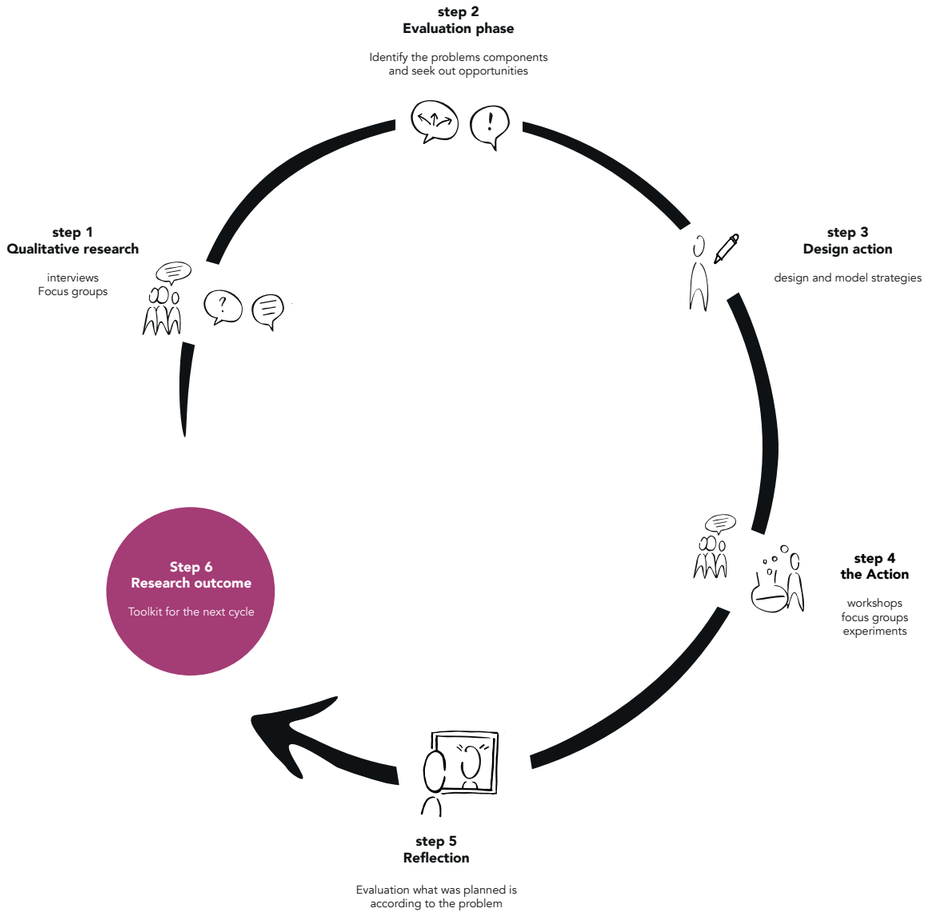


Figure 10. The cyclic steps of PAR with addition of step 6 based on Apolo (2021), own work

participants to foster collaborative inquiry, shared ownership, and actionable outcomes (Kindon et al., 2007). As illustrated in Figure 9, PAR consists of three interconnected facets: participation, action, and research. Participation involves collaboration and the empowerment of those directly affected by the research, which in this case included diverse groups of women engaged from the early stages. Action focuses on implementing real-world change based on lived experiences, making PAR particularly relevant to this study, which tested a new framework for citizen participation in addressing gender-based spatial issues. Research contributes to existing knowledge by generating insights and filling knowledge gaps (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013), which this study did by contributing to the intersection of the fields of feminist geopgraphy and urban planning.

The PAR process consists of multiple steps, as visualized in figure 10, based on Kelly (2005). It begins with qualitative research, using interviews or focus groups to gain a deeper understanding of the issue, followed by an evaluation phase to assess key problems and potential opportunities. Based on these insights, an action is designed and then implemented through workshops, focus groups, or experimental interventions aimed at fostering change. The final step is reflection, where the effectiveness of the action is assessed to determine whether it has successfully addressed the problem. PAR is inherently a cyclic process in which actions are tested, evaluated, and refined for continuous learning and development. However, due to time constraints, only one complete cycle was conducted. While this represents a limitation, as the iterative nature of PAR was not fully realized within the scope of this study, the framework remains highly suitable. To address this constraint, Figure 6 includes an additional step that represents the research outcome, serving both as the conclusion of this study and as a foundation for potential future cycles beyond this thesis.

3.2 Research methods

The methodological framework (Figure 11) outlines the various research methods that were used in this study, illustrating the interconnections between the research questions, methodologies, outputs, and outcomes.

Sub-question 1 | To address Sub-Question 1, which sought to develop an in-depth understanding of how lived experiences play a role and reveal the inequalities of the Gendered City, a mixed-method approach was employed.
The first method that was conducted is a literature review, which provides a theoretical foundation by examining existing research on the Gendered City and its spatial characteristics (chapter 2.1). The second method involved expert interviews with scholars and practitioners specializing in urban spatial inequalities and gendered urban experiences. These interviews offered deeper insights into which value lived experiences of women have in exposing the Gendered City. The third method, exploratory walks, was first implemented as a back-up but proved highly effective in exposing how women's experiences in the city relate to the spatial aspects of the Gendered City. In the exploratory walks, the researcher walked with the participant through their neighbourhood asking questions about their everyday experiences. The last method was a workshop, designed to engage the study's primary stakeholders—women with lived experiences of the Gendered City—in alignment with Participatory Action Research (PAR) principles. This method incorporated elements of a focus group while also integrating workshop-

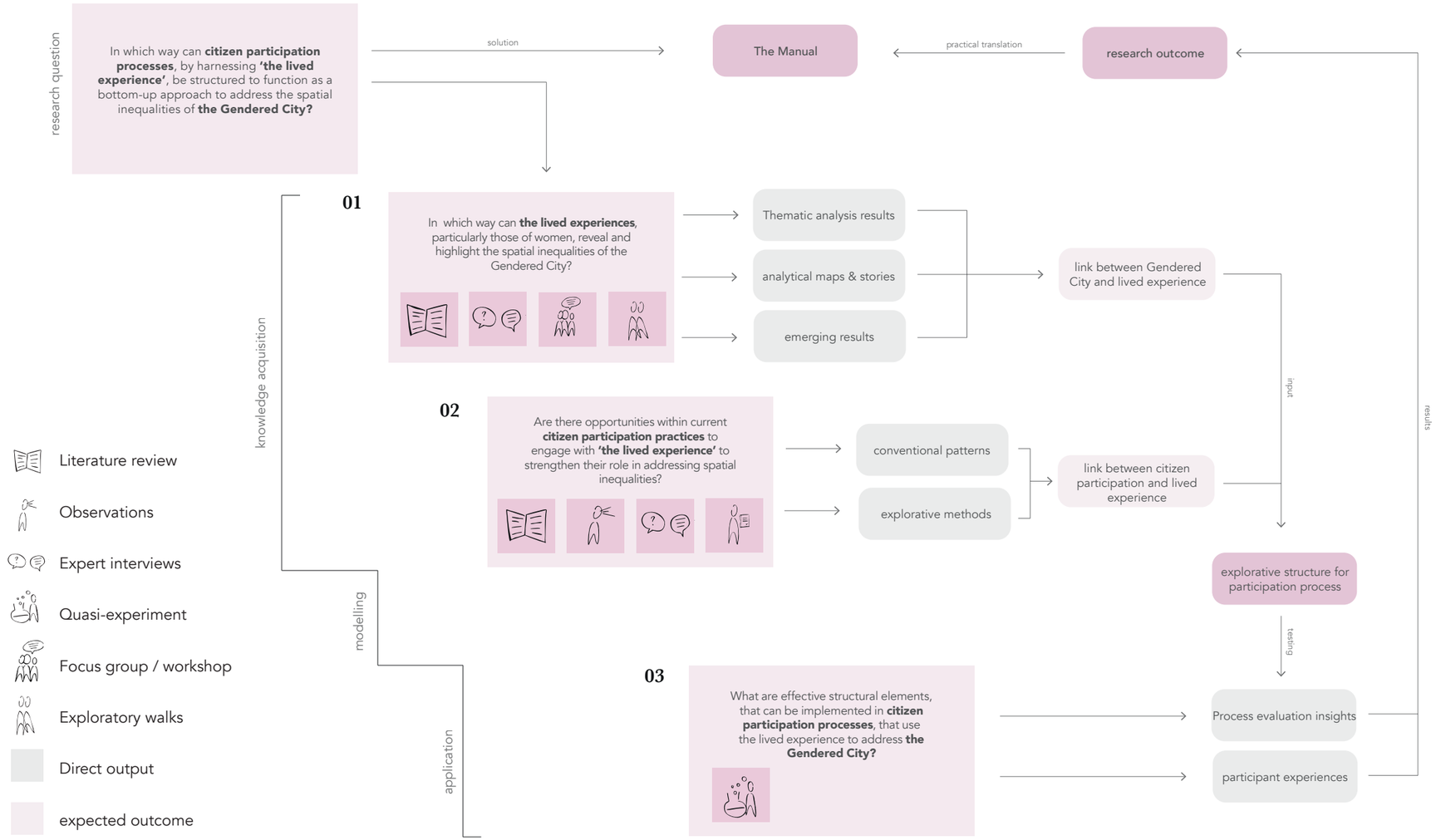


Figure 11. Methodological framework, own work

style activities. In the workshop, based on research conducted by Esteban (2024), an exercise of collective self-inquiry was conducted together with a photo elicitation exercise. Collective self-inquiry is used to encourage dialogue and encourage participants' mutual understanding and role recognition. With this exercise the participants were made aware of their own experience with the Gendered City. Additionally, the photo elicitation exercise prompted participants to discuss how gendered spatial inequalities shape their daily lives. This approach not only validated the participants' lived experiences but also had the potential to uncover practical insights that may have been overlooked in the literature and expert interviews. The outputs of these methods include thematic analysis results, highlighting recurring themes and their interrelations, as well as analytical maps and narrative accounts that link women's lived experiences to the built environment. Ultimately, these combined methods aimed to answer the first sub-question and established a clear connection between the concepts of the Gendered City and lived experience.

Sub-question 2 | The second sub-question was also addressed through a mixed-method approach to ensure a comprehensive understanding of citizen participation practices. The first method that was conducted is a literature review, which provided a theoretical foundation by examining existing research on citizen participation processes and how the lived experience is used in those processes. This review can be found in chapter 2.3.
The second method involved expert interviews with practitioners who are experienced in citizen participation. These interviews complemented the literature by offering practical insights into the effectiveness of current approaches, highlighting both innovative strategies and existing challenges based on real-world experience.
The third and fourth methods included case study analysis and observations. Through case study analysis, a representative example of a citizen participation process in the built environment was examined to identify key opportunities and limitations in addressing specific issues or engaging diverse groups and their experiences. The case study focused on a participatory process for a new residential development of 200 homes in central Netherlands. This village expansion is planned on land that is currently a meadow. Observations of ongoing participation processes further enhanced this analysis, providing first-hand insights into which strategies resonate with communities and which gaps remain unaddressed.
The output of these methods is a thematic analysis of conventional patterns in citizen participation practices that reveal what works and what does not. Next to that another output is the explorative methods that are now used in practice by forerunners and experts in the field of citizen participation.
These combined outputs aimed to answer the second question and established the clear connection between citizen participation and lived experience.

Subquestion 3 | The third research question was explored through a quasi-experiment, serving as the action step within the Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework. The findings from the first two research questions informed the design of a structure for an explorative participation process that address gender issues, this structure was tested in the quasi-experiment. The quasi-experiment was a real-life participation session for a public square in the western part of Rotterdam. The primary output of this experiment was a process evaluation, offering insights into what aspects of the participation process were effective and what challenges arose in addressing gender inequalities. Additionally, participants' experiences were analyzed by a feedback form to assess how inclusive and impactful the approach was. The outcome were reflections on the developed structure, which could then be again refined and further developed. With this structure a clear link between the Gendered City and citizen participation processes is generated. The links between the concepts are once again highlighted in figure 12 for clarification.

Research outcome | The final research outcome was be shaped by the findings from this experiment, alongside the insights gained from the first two sub-questions. To ensure that these findings extend beyond academic discourse, they were translated into a practical step-by-step manual, designed to support more inclusive and effective citizen participation processes in urban planning.
This research was conducted in collaboration with C'MON, an impact developer dedicated to helping organizations accelerate sustainable transitions. C'MON co-creates strategic innovations that bridge the gap between theory and practice. They aim to shape a new economy in the built environment that prioritizes both people and nature (C'MON World, n.d.). Given C'MON's strong social focus, their mission aligned with the objectives of this research.

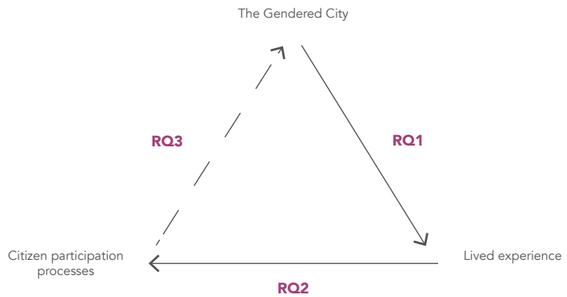


Figure 12. The concepts and the links between them that will be researched, own work

3.3 Data collection | Source, sampling & criteria

Each method needed a targeted approach that outlines how data sources are selected, how participants or cases are sampled, and the criteria used to ensure relevance and validity. An overview of this can be found in figure 13.

Literature review | For the literature review academic papers, relevant published works, and master's theses related to the core concepts of this research were examined. These sources are accessed through various academic databases and libraries, including Scopus, WorldCat, the TU Delft library archive, the TU Delft repository, the TU Delft Architecture Library, and Google Scholar or bookshops. Key findings from the reviewed literature are documented and analyzed to establish connections between different concepts and to support or refine theoretical frameworks (chapter 2).

Expert interviews | The Expert interviews served as a primary data source, providing in-depth insights into gendered urban experiences and participatory planning practices. The experts were selected from various relevant fields, including urban planning, gender studies and participatory design. The experts were identified through own networks, the network of the internship company C'MON, LinkedIn or news articles. Additionally, a snowball sampling approach was applied, where initial interviewees recommend other relevant experts to contribute to the study.
To ensure the relevance and credibility of the interviewees, the following inclusion criteria were applied:

- Expertise: Must have professional or academic experience in urban planning, gender studies, participatory processes, or related fields.
- Experience: A minimum of five years of work or research experience in the subject area.
- Relevance: Their work contributes to discussions on gender-inclusive strategies, gender-based spatial inequalities, or citizen participation projects
- Context: Efforts were made to include experts that have knowledge of the Dutch context as this is the context where the research is conducted.

Exploratory walks | Exploratory walks served as a primary qualitative data source, gathering in-depth lived experiences from women in urban environments. This method aligns with the Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework, ensuring that those most affected by gendered spatial inequalities actively contribute to the research. Participants for exploratory walks were selected on the following criteria:

- Gender Identity: Identifies as a woman or non-binary person affected by gendered spatial inequalities.
- Urban Experience: the participant regularly navigates or interacts with urban spaces in their daily life.
- Diversity: Includes participants from various socioeconomic backgrounds, neighborhoods, and

Literature review
Action: Reading scientific articles, books, and news articles on the topic. Summarise and conclude findings
Source: Google Scholar, Scopus, TU Delft library, bookshops
Criteria: related to the main concepts

Expert interview
Action: Having a semi-structured interview with experts concerning the Gendered City and Citizen participation
Source: Own network, network of C'MON, newspapers, LinkedIn
Criteria: Experience, minimum 5 years experience, work contributes to concepts, knowledge of Dutch context

Focus group / Workshop
Action: Organise a workshop with multiple women of different backgrounds
Source: Own network, Oud House network, flyering
Criteria: open access

Exploratory walks
Action: Walking with a single participant through their neighborhood
Source: through own network
Criteria: women or non-binary, navigates urban life, different backrgounds

Observations
Action: Observe current practice of citizen participation practices
Source: observe current pratice in C'MON projects
Criteria: event must revolve around citizen participation, permission, range of different approaches

Quasi-experiment
Action: Testing a new model in practice by organizing a participation event that has a focus on spatial gender-based inequalities
Source: Collaboration with Oud House Rotterdam
Criteria: real-life citizen participation process, informed consent, spatial issue question, replicability for further research

Case study analysis
Action: reviewing and analyzing current citizen participation processes
Source: through own network
Criteria: case must involve citizen participation, case should tangible outcomes, sufficient documentation of the process.

Figure 13. Overview of methods and their data collection, own work

mobility patterns to ensure a broad representation of experiences.

The exploratory walks were analysed in thematic maps showing their gendered experiences in the city (chapter 4.1.2).

The workshop | The workshop served as a primary qualitative data source, gathering first-hand lived experiences of participants in urban spaces. This method aligns with the Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework, ensuring that those most affected by gendered spatial inequalities actively contribute to the research. Participants included women and men. This was a conscious choice to able to also examine the differences between experiences of men and woman and also enlarge the participant group. The workshop was an open session so every participant was welcome to participate. The source for this workshop came from the researchers own network and that of Oud House Rotterdam, a local initiative with whom in collaboration the session was held.
Participants were not selected but, in the analysis, the following criteria are examined:

- Gender Identity: Differences between men and women or other gender identities
- Urban Experience: Does the participant regularly navigates or interacts with urban spaces in their daily life?
- Diversity: Even though diversity was aimed at, it proved quite hard to find participants for this workshop. Even though there was a good balance between men and women, the population was relatively young.

Observations | Observations were conducted during citizen participation events from C'MON that they regularly have. Their approach to citizen participation was observed and lessons were drawn. Observational data include participant interactions, dynamics, engagement levels, and barriers to participation. A purposive sampling approach was used to select relevant participation events and urban spaces that align with the study's focus. Events were chosen based on their relevance to gender-sensitive urban planning, citizen engagement, or participatory decision-making.
Observations were conducted at sites that met the following criteria:

- Relevance: The event or space must involve citizen participation in urban planning or governance.
- Accessibility: The research must be permitted to conduct observations within the selected sites, ensuring ethical compliance and participant anonymity.
- Diversity: A range of participation models (e.g., public consultations, workshops, grassroots initiatives) are included to capture varied approaches.

The collected observational data helped identify gaps, best practices, and challenges in integrating gender-sensitive approaches into participatory urban planning.

Case study | The case study analysis examined a previously implemented citizen participation process from a single consultancy company. The case was sampled through the researchers own network. The case was then selected on the following criteria:

- Relevance: The case must involve citizen participation in urban planning or decision-making.
- Data Availability: Sufficient documentation (reports, evaluations, academic studies) must be accessible to allow for an in-depth analysis.
- Representation: The case study represents a typical participation process in the built environment sector
- Spatial: The case revolves around a new development or redevelopment of the built environment where public space is also part of the assignment
- Impact and Outcomes: The case should demonstrate measurable outcomes or lessons learned that can inform future participatory planning processes.

The findings from this case study analysis provided evidence-based insights into current practices, challenges, and opportunities for integrating gender issues into participatory urban planning.

Quasi-experiment | The quasi-experiment was conducted within a citizen participation setting, where a gender-sensitive urban planning structure were tested. Due to limitations of the internship, this involved organizing and executing session. A participation session was set up in collaboration with Oud House Rotterdam. There was a question for an open call to the municipality to do something about the adjoining square. This opportunity was used to organize a session for the square. Data was collected through participant interactions, reflections, providing qualitative insights into the effectiveness of the tested structure. Efforts were made to ensure diversity in age, socioeconomic background, and lived experience, as per the structure. However, the session was an open session, so everyone could participate.
The quasi-experiment was conducted under the following conditions:

- Relevance: The setting alignes with real-world citizen participation processes in urban planning.
- Feasibility: The event allows for structured participation while maintaining ethical research standards, including informed consent.
- Replicability: The process should be adaptable for further application in different urban contexts.

Findings from the quasi-experiment function as reflections on the proposed structure and were used to refine and develop it further.

Limitations | Even though the criteria for the methods were set up very extensively, some limitations arose in meeting all these criteria. The research is conducted within the organization C'MON and many of the sources for conducting the research were initially based on their network. However, some misalignment arose between this research and the company's current projects. For that reason, many of the data was collected through other networks. Furthermore, a choice was made to make the workshop open access. This was done mainly, because it proved quite difficult to find participants. Setting strict criteria would only make it more difficult. Many efforts have been made to reach as many people in the neighbourhood. Flyers were extensively distributed and many networks and in the neighbourhood were sought out.

3.4 Operationalisation & data plan

Operationalization | The main concepts of this research— the Gendered City, citizen participation and lived experience—are often abstract and challenging to measure. To ensure consistency in how these concepts were defined and analyzed, operationalization was essential. Each concept has been clearly defined, and their interrelations have been established. However, this alone does not suffice when collecting data, as participants in empirical research may interpret these concepts differently from how they are framed in this study.
To bridge this gap, each concept has been broken down into corresponding variables, which are further specified through measurable indicators. These indicators provided a concrete and accessible way to discuss experiences in terms that all participants could relate to and understand. Since each indicator was directly linked to its variable and overarching concept, the collected data remained relevant and applicable to the research.

A detailed overview of the operationalization framework for all concepts can be found in Appendix G.

Data plan | The FAIR guide was leading in the processing of the collected data: Findability – Accessibility – Interoperability – Reusability.

the main thesis and appendices of this research are published on the repository of the TU Delft, making it open source for anyone interested in the topic. With the key words, the findability of the research is enhanced. The methodology is explained in great detail, references are mentioned and appedices consist all the materials used in the empirical pahse. This ensures interoperability and reusability if needed.

Given the sensitive nature of the data, participant privacy and ethical considerations are of utmost importance. To safeguard individuals who share deeply personal experiences, all data is fully anonymized. This measure minimizes any risk of identification and ensures that participants' confidentiality is maintained. Additionally, informed consent was obtained from all participants, clearly outlining how their data will be used.

The full data plan, made with the DMPonline TU Delft template, can be found in Appendix H.

3.5 Ethical considerations

This study involves human research participants and therefore strictly adheres to the ethical guidelines set by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of Delft University of Technology. The committee emphasizes four key principles derived from the General Data Protection Regulation (TU Delft - Human Research Ethics Committee, n.d.): identifying potential risks to participants, implementing measures to minimize these risks, ensuring participants are fully informed and provide explicit consent, and conducting research in full compliance with the agreements outlined in the informed consent form. Adhering to these guidelines ensures the ethical integrity of the study while prioritizing participant rights and well-being.

This research prioritizes ethical integrity by ensuring that all data collection and analysis processes adhere to ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before conducting interviews, focus groups, observations, and the quasi-experiment. Participants were briefed on the purpose of the research, how their data would be used, and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Anonymity and confidentiality are maintained by anonymizing personal data and securely storing all research materials.

The use of the PAR framework during the quasi-experiment raised ethical concerns, particularly about what the community would receive in return for their participation. Although the event was open to all, there was no guarantee it would result in actual changes to the square. To avoid creating false expectations, in consultation with Oud House, the session was carefully framed as an opportunity to learn more about the square and its surroundings—not as a concrete step toward redesign. Participation was voluntary and positioned clearly as a learning experience, ensuring no false hopes were raised amongst participants.

Additionally, special attention was given to the sensitivity of gender-related topics and lived experiences, ensuring that participants felt safe and respected when sharing their experiences. The research will adopt a participatory approach, valuing the voices of marginalized groups.

To guarantee proper ethical safeguards this research was applied to and approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the TU Delft. It adheres to their guidelines to ensure commitment to ethical integrity.

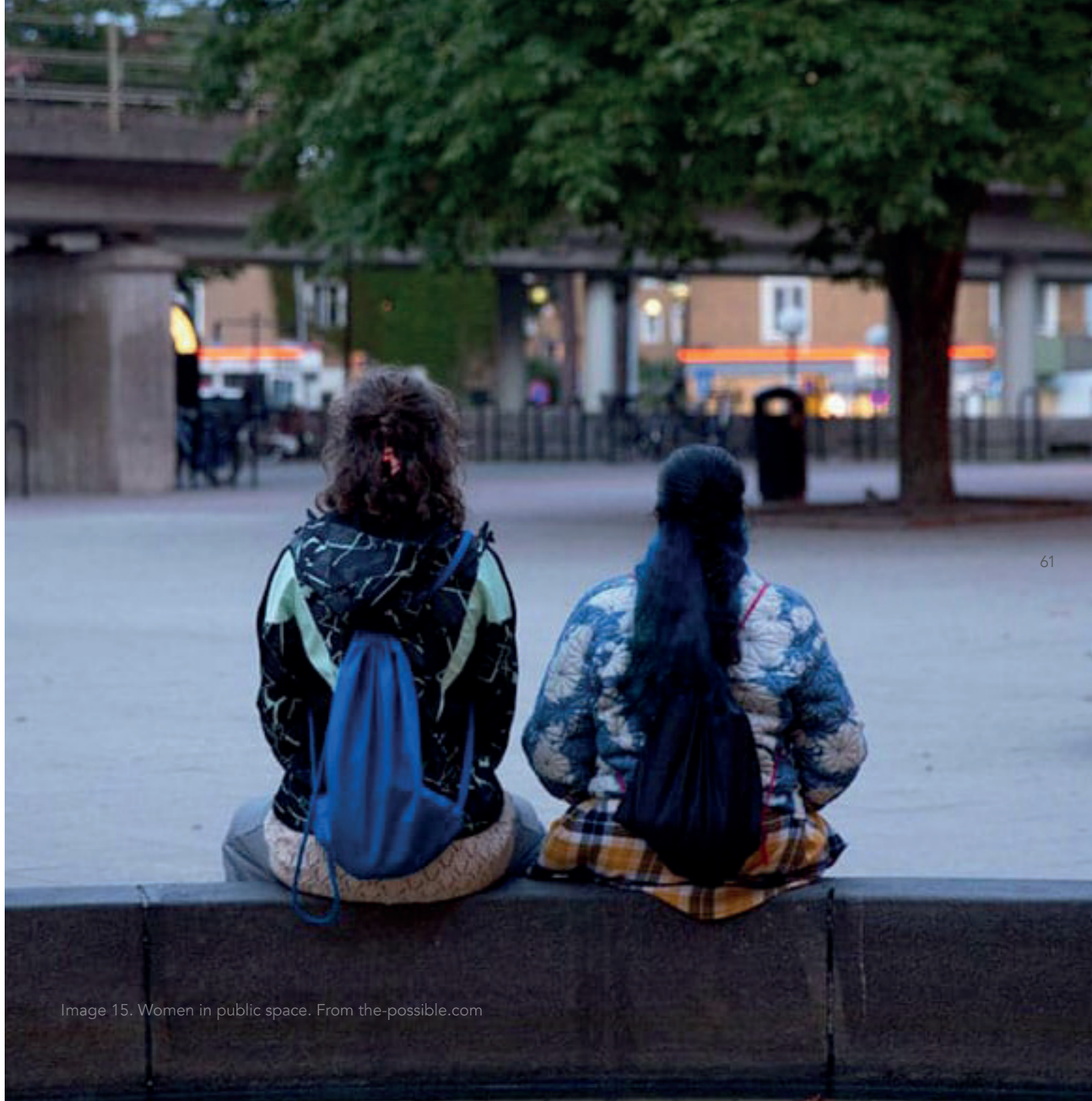


Image 15. Women in public space. From the-possible.com

04
The findings

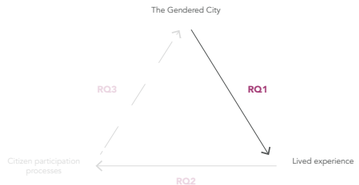
What are the main findings of the research?

Image 16. Women protesting for free movement in space © Barbara Krobath Archive

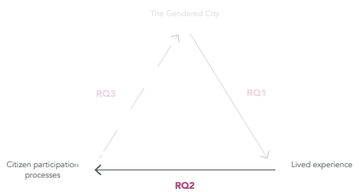
4.0 Reading guide

This chapter consists of three sub-chapters that each relate to one of the sub questions from the research.

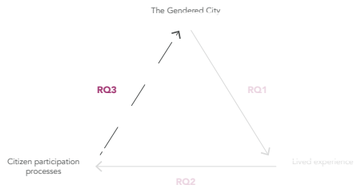
The first sub-chapter will show the findings concerning the relation between lived experience and the Gendered City. This sub-chapter consists of the findings from expert interviews, exploratory walks and a curated workshop.



The second sub-chapter will dive into the findings of the relationship between citizen participation processes and lived experience. These findings consist of expert interviews, a case study analysis and observations from participatory practices.



The third sub-chapter will demonstrate the findings of a quasi-experiment that aims to link the citizen participation with the Gendered City using the findings of the first two sub-chapters. This is done by first explaining the tested structure and then the results from the experiment.



Ultimately, these findings lead to the outcome of the research, which is a practical structure that is presented in chapter 5.

Legend

sub-chapter conclusions

overview of the method and its findings

4.1 Lived experience and the Gendered City

The concept of the Gendered City examines how urban spaces reflect and reinforce gender norms, often privileging some while marginalizing others. Lived experience offers a vital lens to reveal how factors like safety, mobility, and access differ across genders. In this chapter the relationship between lived experience and the Gendered City is examined through emipirical research. Most importantly it tries to answer how lived experiences, especially those of women, can reveal and highlight the spatial inequalities inherent to the Gendered City.

4.1.1 Experts

Overview

What: four expert interviews with professionals at the intersection of gender and urban space

Analysis: Thematic analysis

Main findings: Lived experience reveals interconectedness of spatial aspects — lived experience exposes contextuality — feeling should become data — belonging and otherness — need for policy changes

The experts interviewed are introduced below. While not all are Dutch, each has worked in the Netherlands and brings disciplinary expertise in architecture, urbanism, participatory design, and sociology.

- Nourhan is an architect and founder of a global network focused on gender-sensitive urban data and advocacy.
- Zinzi is a South African urbanist addressing gender and racialized spatial inequalities.
- Evalina co-founded a Greek collective emphasizing feminist, participatory urbanism.
- Laura co-founded an organization tackling harassment and safety in public and private spaces.

The Intention of Interventions: From Feelings to Functionality

All interviewees stressed that lived experience is essential to effective interventions in the Gendered City. Without it, *"superficial and optical solutions that do not actually work"* risk becoming the norm. Interventions must be grounded in lived experience to be meaningful. For example, simply adding lighting to a park may do little if the place remains empty: "*It is not about lighting per se, but about visibility in public space… If you add lighting but the place is still deserted at night, women still won't feel safe.*" This highlights how accessibility and safety are deeply interwoven. Effective interventions cannot be ensured by single-point solutions, as *"many of these lived experiences, it's not just one thing… a lot of these criteria are mixed."* For instance, simply adding public toilets doesn't address safety. *"We can add public toilets but if women still cannot use them they surpass their goal."* The issue lies not in addressing elements of the Gendered City, it lies is effectively addressing all of them to ensure solutions that work.

Importantly, effective changes are not necessarily large-scale. A feminist city *"is not about rebuilding everything; it is about small-scale changes that can actively help women in their daily lives."* However, measures such as panic buttons in stations can be controversial because *"by installing measurements like these you admit that something is wrong or can go wrong here."* Still, the discomfort around such admissions must be weighed against their potential: *"This is not just about feelings. It's life-saving, life-affirming work."*

Interventions that may seem minor can have disproportionate impact, as *"it might be a very small thing but for them in their daily lives it's so important."* Ultimately it becomes clear that solutions must address all the spatial aspects of the Gendered City to be effective.

Contextuality: A Situated Understanding of Urban Inequality

One resounding themes across the interviews was that experiences of gendered space are deeply contextual. Urban inequality does not manifest uniformly— experiences vary not only from city to city, but woman to woman—and even moment to moment. *"The Gendered City is very contextual… It is not something that is the same everywhere and for everyone."* This underscores the need for approaches that are grounded in lived reality rather than guided by universal templates.

"There is not one thing women need in the city. There are so many different perspectives on that." Caregivers, for example, encounter the city differently than students, workers, or elderly residents. Thus, *"there is no one size fits all,"* and singular interventions—no matter how well-meaning—cannot suffice.

This nuance is also visible in participatory practices. *"Everyone is different. We want to engage all women but not all women have the same needs. For young women safety and harassment are often an issue, for mothers accessibility with strollers."* In practice, this means customizing consultation processes to bring forward specific needs and voices. Such methodological nuance is central to ensuring outcomes are both relevant and inclusive.
Lived experience thus becomes a key tool in identifying context-sensitive design needs. It brings nuance and urgency to planning, revealing how gender inequality is simultaneously universal and deeply specific.

Spatial Aspects: The Built Environment as an Experience or Feeling

Spatial inequality is not always legible in maps or plans; often, it is felt in atmospheres and textures. even seemingly mundane elements can carry gendered implications: ***"From the width of the pavement to the placement of public furniture,"*** gender is embedded in the materiality of space. This underscores that urban design is never neutral—it encodes power relations and societal norms into physical form.

One expert noted how even a "row of benches can create a catwalk"—a narrow path that exposes women to scrutiny. responses to such spaces are not incidental—they are central to how urban life is experienced. Historically, this dimension of urban planning or design has been marginalized. *"Words like feelings… have not really had much of a space within the topic of environment or buildings… But we need to develop the lexicon because these things, they matter."* Fear, unease, or comfort are

not merely personal states; they are data points that reveal how space operates socially.

Fear also operates in anticipation. *"If you walk through a dark alley, 9 out of 10 times nothing happens. There is no violence, but you are afraid of it."* This fear, though abstract, limits freedom of movement and autonomy.

Narratives play a key role in surfacing these experiences. *"You have to give people the space to tell their narrative and lived experience, and with that you can then nudge people or slowly make them aware."* Awareness is often the first step: *"You have to make people aware that something is problematic for them to feel responsible and start doing something."*

Ultimately, these insights show how emotion and feelings are important aspects that need to be considered to address the Gendered City.

The Battle for Space: Reclaiming the Public Sphere

The experts emphasized that public space is not just a question of design—it is a political terrain shaped by histories of access, ownership, and exclusion. *"The Gendered City is about who owns a m² of space."* Even when spaces are technically open to all, social norms and behavioral patterns often dictate unequal usage.

Current patterns reflect persistent imbalances. *"Public space belongs to everybody but right now we can't use it equally."* From boys dominating playgrounds or women feeling unwelcome in parks or plazas, these insights signal that issues of access are inseparable from questions of power and ownership

Reclaiming space than becomes a feminist act. It involves asserting presence where absence has been normalized and challenging the underlying assumptions about who belongs. *"How we value people, how we see people influences what we think people deserve in space."* Changing these perceptions is just as critical as changing physical infrastructure.

Creation of Otherness: Belonging and Visibility in Urban Space

Urban space can subtly but powerfully produce feelings of otherness. This occurs not just through exclusion, but through the absence of representation. *"What makes me feel othered […] a lot of it has to do with sense of belonging, sense of being seen."* When one does not see themselves reflected in public symbols, design, or usership, the message is clear: this space is not for you.

Representation plays a crucial role in countering this dynamic. *"One of the criteria we use is representation. It is important for people to see something of themselves in public space."* This could include images, language, or spatial programming that reflects diverse identities.

Inclusion also comes from participation. *"Using lived experiences gives people a sense of ownership. It ensures credibility of the outcomes of your project and it ensures that the project is carried by the intended target group."* Ultimately, inclusion is about more than access—it's about being recognized, and recognizing oneself, in the shared story of the city.

The Need for Policy: From Narrative to Structural Change

While lived experience provides the insight needed to expose the Gendered City, all experts expressed that policy remains an important vehicle through which change is institutionalized. Without good policy, insights risk remaining anecdotal and unrecognized by formal systems.

"We need to be actively challenging how our policies see space, and we need to develop the tools that measure how our policies decrease the vulnerability." Integrating experiential data into policy frameworks requires new methodologies. Socio-spatial mapping, intersectional data collection, and blended knowledge systems—ranging from grassroots testimonies to police reports—are essential in capturing a full picture of spatial inequality. *"Let's integrate knowledge systems… and build a database that helps us see where the po is hitting the fan."* Planning must begin *"with what comes up from the ground"* in order to be truly inclusive and just.

Ultimately, embedding lived experience into policy ensures that those most affected by urban inequality help shape its resolution. This marks a shift from reactive design to proactive justice—placing lived experience not at the periphery, but at the center of the urban agenda.

Conclusion

The lived experiences of women demonstrate that spatial inequality is not abstract—it is felt in the body, in the psyche, and in the rhythm of daily life. Lived experience does not just complement technical knowledge in urban planning—it reframes it. Through lived narratives, we uncover not only where spatial inequalities lie, but how they intersect and are perceived in everyday life. While spatial aspects such as lighting, accessibility, and layout can be mapped, it is through lived experience that we understand how they function—or fail—within specific contexts. In this way, the lived experience of women is not merely anecdotal but is essential to diagnosing, understanding, and ultimately transforming the Gendered City.

4.1.2 Exploratory walks

Overview

What: three exploratory walks with women from different backgrounds and neighborhoods

Analysis: Analytical maps, intersectional framework, scales framework by Kang et al. (2017)

Main findings: Lived experiences influenced by gender extent to which depends on age and lifestage — Lived experience traced back to three spatial aspectsn— mobility of care — cultural differences

Following the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, this study involved participants from the outset. The exploratory walk—mobile interviews conducted in participants' local environments—captured rich, contextual data on how gender shapes experiences of public space.

The walks with women from diverse backgrounds informed analytical maps that visualize their spatial realities (Figure 14).

A more detailed explanation of the method, all three analytical maps and a full report of the walks can be found in appendix A.

Ava is a 28 year old woman who lives in the eastern part of Amsterdam with her partner. She is born and raised in the city and considers this her home. She is a mother of a two year old and combines her motherhood with work and studies. Her days are a balancing act between all these different duties.

Figure 14. Analytical map of exploratory walk 1

Analysis

To better understand how gender and other intersecting identity factors shape lived experiences in urban space, the experiences that were visualized in the three analytical maps were placed onto the Lived Experience Framework (Figure 6). This visual and thematic framework makes it possible to trace how individual experiences relate not only to gendered spatial dynamics but also to broader factors such as age, caregiving roles, cultural context, and personal sensitivity. Each participants experiences have been mapped individually (figure 15, 16 & 17) and lastly, figure 18 presents a consolidated view of participants' experiences, allowing for direct comparison and a clearer understanding of overlapping themes and divergences.

Gender and the Mobility of Care

For participants one and three, gender and caregiving emerged as deeply intertwined themes. Their reflections frequently referenced frustrations with navigating urban space while caring for a child, revealing how caregiving responsibilities directly influence both mobility and accessibility. These experiences reflect the concept of the mobility of care—a term that describes the spatial constraints faced by caregivers, often women, who must adjust their routes, modes of transport, and timing based on their caregiving duties (de Madariaga, 2016). Both participants who currently are in mobility of care (1 & 3) expressed that walking became a more prominent mode of transportation for them since they had children but that they often experience physical obstacles to do so. Furthermore, the analysis also shows how caregiving shifts not just mobility patterns, but perceptions of safety. For instance, participants noted that walking—often necessitated by caregiving—felt slower and therefore more vulnerable than cycling or driving. Here, speed is not merely a function of convenience but becomes linked to personal security. Both these findings suggest something broader: public space is, in many places, not adequately designed to move through at a slower pace in terms of mobility but also safety even though this is a mode of transport often used by women. Such reflections reinforce that caregiving roles cannot be analyzed in isolation from gender: they influence—and are influenced by—the gendered structures of urban space.

Age and Life Stage as Modifiers of Gendered Experience

Participant two reported fewer and less intense gendered experiences compared to the others. A distinguishing factor was age and life stage. Unlike participants one and three, participant two is not in a caregiving role. She also expressed less safety concerns. Although she still reported experiences of discomfort or lack of amenities tied to gender—such as avoiding certain routes or noting the absence of suitable public facilities—these were less frequent and less restrictive.

This suggests that the intensity of gendered spatial experience is mediated by age and caregiving status. While not always explicitly addressed in literature, this aligns indirectly with the concept of the mobility of care, which tends to affect younger women more. This insight is further supported by the experts (see page 67), which indicated that younger women tend to face more frequent harassment and express stronger safety concerns, further underscoring age as an important modifier of gendered experience.

Cultural Context and Social Structure

Another important layer that emerged is the influence of cultural context and neighborhood dynamics. Participant three, for instance, highlighted how her car-dominant, "individualistic" neighborhood—with detached homes and private gardens—lacked visible public life. This absence of people on the street not only reduced opportunities for social interaction but also decreased her sense of safety, especially when walking with a stroller. This was echoed by participant two, who noted that closed curtains in her neighborhood created a similar lack of "eyes on the street." They both also pointed out that they sometimes missed spaces in their neighborhood where they feel at home or in place, which echoes again the theme of representation and relection.

These observations point to a cultural dimension of the Gendered City that is less explicitly addressed in existing literature. While scholarship has extensively documented the male-oriented design of public space, it often stops short of linking specific cultural norms and spatial preferences—such as privacy, car-centric planning, or architectural opacity—to women's urban experiences. This research suggests that culture and gender are not separate forces but work together to shape how space is perceived, used, and avoided.

Conclusion

Taken together, the exploratory walks clearly demonstrate that while gender remains a central factor in shaping lived experience, it does not operate in isolation. Rather, it intersects with other identity dimensions—age, caregiving role, culture, personality, and socio-economic status—to create complex, layered urban experiences. This aligns with the concept of intersectionality, which holds that overlapping social categories produce unique modes of discrimination and privilege.

Importantly, the findings show that the three core spatial aspects of the Gendered City—accessibility, mobility, and safety—are not discrete themes but mutually reinforcing dimensions. For example, limitations in mobility can influence access to amenities, while both mobility and accessibility shape how safety is experienced and managed.

The walks reaffirm that spatial inequalities in the Gendered City are deeply felt and shared, but their severity and form differ depending on intersecting personal characteristics. Gender is a central lens through which public space is experienced, but it is in dialogue with life stage, cultural setting, caregiving responsibilities, and more.

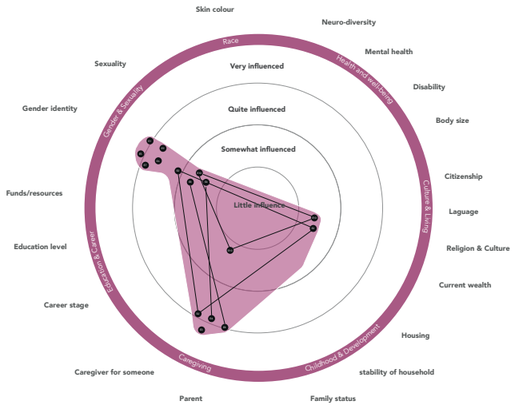


Figure 15. Intersectional analysis experiences participant 1, own work

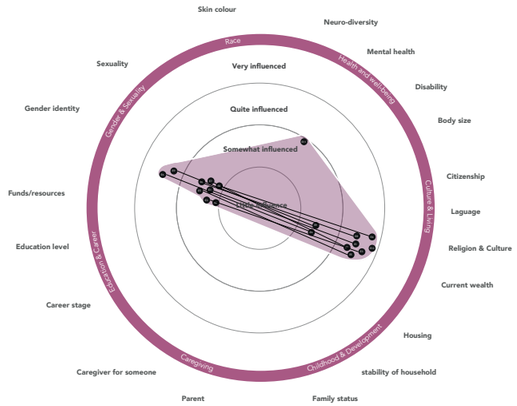


Figure 16. Intersectional analysis experiences participant 2, own work

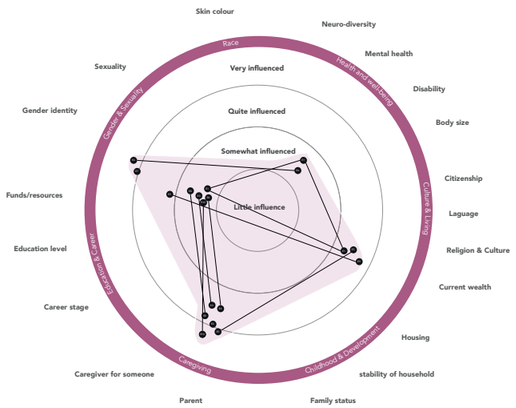


Figure 17. Intersectional analysis experiences participant 3, own work

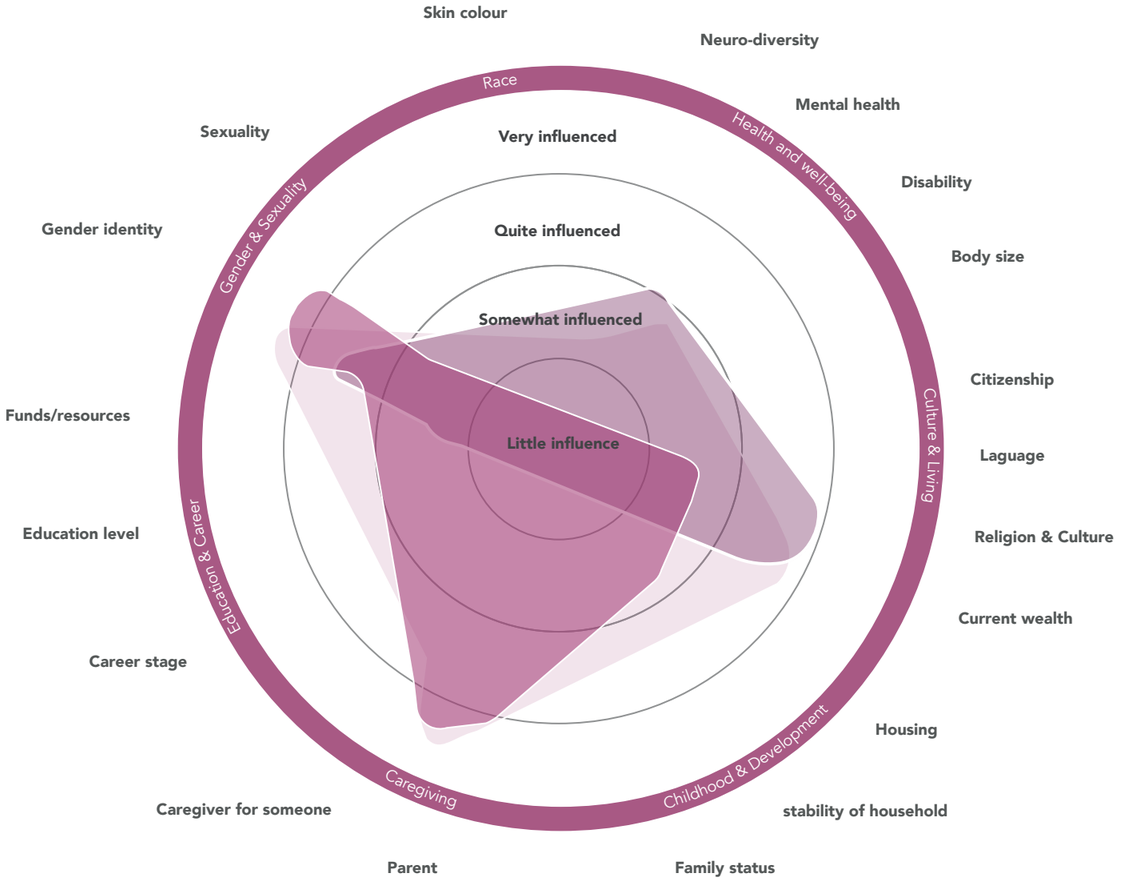


Figure 18. Intersectional analysis all participants together, own work

In Figure 19, the 10 lived experiences of the participants (as can be found in the analytical maps) are positioned along a spatial axis ranging from the micro to the global scale, based on the conceptual framework by Kang et al. (2017). This visual mapping reveals that the vast majority of the experiences described by participants are situated within the micro (personal and immediate environment) and meso (neighbourhood and community) spheres. While this may not be unexpected, it significantly reinforces a core insight: the Gendered City is most acutely experienced at the smaller, everyday scales of urban life.

This spatial distribution of where the Gendered City is experienced validates again the mismatch, as explained in the problem statement, between top-down, globalised policy approaches and the grounded, context-specific realities of urban gender inequality. It underscores the limitations of abstract or universal strategies that fail to consider the deeply localized and embodied nature of the Gendered City. Instead, the findings reinforce the idea of using citizen participation processes, which operate within the micro and meso scales— to address the Gendered City as this is where the gendered dimensions of accessibility, mobility, and safety are most visible and most felt.

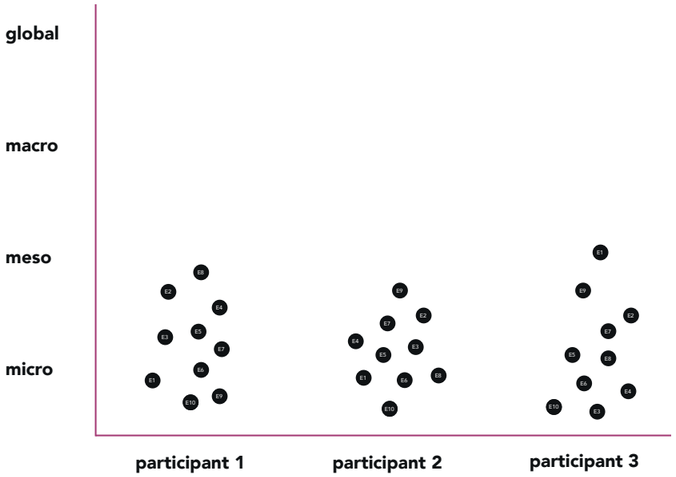


Figure 19. Analysis experiences in the different shperes from Kang et al. (2017), own work

Image 17. Women participating © Urbana

4.1.3 Workshop

Overview

What: one workshop that focused on gendered experiences in public space with 6 participants

Analysis: Thematic analysis

Main findings: Women downplay their experiences — Lived experience reveals spatial aspects of the Gendered City — Spatial aspects are experiences across gender but women are disproportionately affected

The session began with Where We Stand (Esteban et al., 2024), where participants stepped forward in response to statements on accessibility, mobility, and safety. This was followed by a photo-elicited focus group on urban gender issues, and a creative mapping exercise where participants illustrated their needs on a template of the local square.

Together, these activities generated rich insights into how gender, identity, and space intersect in daily urban life. A more detailed description of the session and all the outcomes can be found in Appendix B. Key findings are discussed in the next section.

Capturing the Nuances of Spatial Experience Through Lived Perspectives

A key finding from the workshop is the complex and nuanced nature of spatial experiences within the Gendered City, and the importance of lived

Image 18. The where we stand exercise, own photo

Image 19. Example from photo elicitation exercise, own work

Image 20. Example from creative mapping exercise from one of the participants

experience in revealing these subtleties. While core themes such as safety, accessibility, and mobility were present, it became clear that these aspects are often interrelated and shaped by individual perceptions and context.

For example, during a discussion about public toilets, a participant explained that even if such facilities were available, they would still hesitate to use them. They said: *"They're always in the back and very dirty, you feel cornered in them. It makes them kind of unsafe spaces."* This illustrates how accessibility cannot be considered in isolation from safety—a toilet may be technically present and accessible, but if the space feels unsafe, it remains effectively unusable.

A similar nuance arose in the discussion around a desolate square at night (image 21). One participant noted: *"I would be okay with this. It's light and open—I have overview of the situation."* In contrast, another responded: *"I'd rather go along the sidewalks around it. That gives me a sense of overview and safety."* Both participants referenced the importance of visibility and situational awareness, yet their interpretations of what feels safe differed. These reflections show that even interventions like added lighting or open design, often cited in literature as gender-sensitive improvements, may not meet everyone's needs equally. Without grounding such solutions in lived experience, their intended impact can easily be diluted or misdirected.

Image 21. Photo that arose discussion over desolate squares at night, own work

Another layer of nuance that emerged was the influence of speed and mobility mode on perceptions of safety. A female participant shared: *"For me it depends on whether I'm walking or biking. If I'm on a bike, I'd go straight over the square. If I'm walking, I'd take the sidewalks."* Another added: *"I always walk from the station to my work—it's my preferred way. But if it's Friday night after happy hour, I plan ahead and take an OV-bike or choose a different route through the neighborhood."* A male participant expressed a similar distinction: *"I wouldn't want to walk here at night. Running would be fine though."* These examples demonstrate again how speed and mobility can act as a buffer against perceived risk, shaping how individuals navigate space. Moving faster (e.g., on a bike or running) can offer a sense of control and safety that

walking does not.

These findings reinforce the idea that spatial aspects such as safety, accessibility, and mobility are deeply interconnected, but that their meaning and impact vary across individuals and contexts. Lived experience is crucial in surfacing these layered dynamics. Without it, even well-intentioned design interventions may fail to address needs, especially when it comes to making public space genuinely inclusive and equitable.

Shared Discomfort, Unequal Impact

By the end of the *Where We Stand* exercise, it was clear that the female participants resonated most strongly with the spatial aspects of the Gendered City. They stepped forward most frequently, indicating that these aspects were a consistent part of their lived experience. However, male participants also stepped forward in response to several statements, suggesting that these challenges are not exclusive to women, they are experienced across genders.

This distinction became even more evident during the group discussions. When presented with

Image 22. Photo of the result of the Where we stand exercise, own work

an image of a public toilet (image 23), all male participants responded by saying they would only use such a facility in extreme emergencies. One

Image 23. Photo that arose discussion over public toilets, own work

female participant added that she would prefer to use the toilet in the nearby library, prompting the men to agree they would do the same. While the discomfort was shared, the underlying implications were not: for men, public toilets were a last resort—but still an option; for women, the inaccessibility was stronger, often translating into avoidance altogether.

A similar contrast appeared when discussing a photo of a non-illuminated park at night (image 24). One male participant admitted it felt uncomfortable but said, *"It is the fastest way home. It's not enough for me to go around."* In contrast, a female participant stated that she would always take a longer route to avoid that park altogether. Another male participant shared that he sometimes felt cornered in metro stations, but added: *"I feel uncomfortable, but I never feel unsafe."* Meanwhile, female participants reported actively changing their behavior by putting in headphones, speeding up their pace, or standing close to other females due to feelings of unsafety in similar environments.

Image 24. Photo that arose discussion over uncomfortability at night, own work

A key finding can be found in that the spatial aspects of the Gendered City are experienced by every gender, though the frequency and intensity of the experiences differs. Male participants frequently acknowledged unease in certain spaces but rarely indicated that it limited their actions. For female participants, however, discomfort often escalated into avoidance, altered behavior, or withdrawal—showing a more direct and limiting impact on their freedom of movement and access to the city.

This highlights two key insights:

1. The spatial inequalities of the Gendered City are not experienced solely by women, but they are disproportionately affected by them.
2. Addressing these issues can benefit all city users. While women often face the most acute barriers, improving aspects like safety, access to clean facilities, and inclusive design can enhance the urban experience for everyone.

These findings support existing literature which argues that urban design that prioritizes the needs of the most vulnerable ultimately creates more inclusive, equitable environments for all (e.g. Parthasarathy, 2023; Lee, 2023) .

Downplay of experiences

Another finding from the workshop was the difference in how participants expressed and framed their experiences. A clear pattern emerged: female participants were significantly more hesitant to step

forward during the *Where We Stand* exercise, often downplaying the severity or importance of their experiences, whereas male participants appeared more assertive, stepping forward based on fewer or more isolated incidents.

For example, one male participant stepped forward based on a single experience of verbal harassment, while the women hesitated or took only small steps forward even when describing much more severe incidents. One woman explained her hesitant, minimal step by saying, *"I think my experience is not as bad as others, that's why I did only a small step,"* despite later sharing that she had been physically assaulted in public space. Another remarked, *"Yeah, but many of these things are very normal, so they don't bother me as much,"* referring to multiple gender-based statements. During the group discussion, it was observed that the male participants were very eager to answer the questions while the female participants were more hesitant and often only expressed their opinion when they were specifically asked to.

These responses suggest a socially internalized minimization of gendered experiences among women, a theme that also echoed in the expert interviews, where it was emphasized that women often feel more comfortable and validated in women-only spaces. The mixed-gender format of the workshop highlighted this. There is a need for creating intentional spaces where women feel safe and empowered to share. Without this, there is a risk that their contributions may be overshadowed.

However, this dynamic was not without tension. One male participant expressed conflicting thoughts with the idea of women-only events, stating: "*In my neighborhood, there are women-only events. I get it, but I also don't like it, because I would like to participate too.*" This perspective points to the complex balance between inclusivity and the need for safe, identity-specific spaces—a tension that also arose in the expert interviews. It was acknowledged that gendered interventions are not ideal in principle, because in an equal world they would not be necessary. Right now, however, things like panic buttons, women-only events or train carriages are very necessary in practice to ensure equity and safety.

This theme demonstrates the importance of recognizing gendered communication dynamics in participatory settings. It also reinforces the need for sensitive facilitation and, in some cases, gender-specific spaces to ensure that the depth and complexity of women's lived experiences are not overlooked or minimized.

Conclusion

The participatory workshop revealed the complex and often unequal ways in which gender shapes urban experience. Participants' lived experiences brought to light critical nuances in the spatial aspects of the Gendered City—particularly how mobility, accessibility, and safety are deeply interconnected and that these are experienced differently by different individuals: one person likes openness, the other does not. The themes and uncomfortability were shared across genders, but the impact was uneven: women reported significantly more behavioral adaptations, while men were less likely to alter their actions. The workshop also exposed how gendered social norms can lead women to downplay their own experiences, underscoring the need for intentional, inclusive spaces. Ultimately, the workshop highlighted the essential role of women's lived experiences in understanding and addressing the realities of gendered urban space.

4.1.4 Chapter conclusion

Lived experiences—especially those of women—offer vital, embodied insights that reveal the spatial inequalities embedded in the Gendered City. Across all three methodological approaches, it becomes clear that the Gendered City is not defined solely by its physical layout, but by how urban spaces are navigated, perceived, and adapted to in everyday life. Women's accounts highlight how the core spatial dimensions of mobility, accessibility, and safety are deeply interconnected—and that addressing any one of them in isolation is insufficient for meaningful urban change.

Although these spatial dynamics are experienced across genders, women disproportionately adapt their behaviors or face restrictions in their freedom, underscoring the urgent need to address these inequalities not just for women, but for all city dwellers.

Moreover, women's lived experiences are shaped by the intersection of gender with other identity markers such as age, caregiving roles, culture, and socio-economic status, emphasizing the contextuality of gendered experiences and the need for an intersectional lens. Representation emerged as a new theme. While not as prominent as the other spatial dimensions, the need to see yourself, in some way, reflected in urban space was confirmed in the expert interviews as well as the exploratory walks and influences the lived experience in public space.

Ultimately, the Gendered City cannot be fully understood or transformed without centering these nuanced, context-rich narratives. Only by recognizing and valuing the plurality of women's lived experiences can cities move toward effectively addressing the spatial inequalities of the Gendered City.

Image 25. Women participating © Urbana

4.2 Citizen participation and lived experience

Lived experience refers to the everyday knowledge people gain through direct interaction with their social, spatial, and institutional environments. In citizen participation, it adds valuable insight by grounding decisions in real-life contexts. However, it also raises questions about whose experiences are included and how well participatory processes handle diverse perspectives In this chapter the relationship between citizen participation processes and lived experience is exmained through empirical research. It tries to find opportunities to better integrate this concept into current practices so they can be better equipped to adress gender issues. It aims to answer the following question: Are there opportunities within current citizen participation practices to engage with 'the lived experience' to strengthen their role in addressing spatial inequalities?

4.2.1 Experts

Overview

What: three expert interviews with people who work at innovative social design and participation bureau's

Analysis: Thematic analysis of analysing transcripts

Main findings: Taking away barriers — trust and transparancy — multiple scales needed — adress women's issues — check biases —employ inclusive tactics

The experts are introduced below. They work at the intersection of participation, design and social justice. They were selected for their innovative and progressive approaches to participatory design.

Adinda is a participation expert at a design and engagement bureau that describes itself as a team of "designing doers." Her work centers on developing participatory strategies that are both creative and grounded in real-world impact.

Simone works at a social design studio based in Rotterdam. Her work spans a variety of participatory research projects, with a strong emphasis on social justice. She has contributed to several initiatives that address gender inequality through inclusive design methodologies.

Evalina is the co-founder of a collective based in Greece that focuses on feminist perspectives in urban space and participatory design. Her work emphasizes intersectionality and community-led approaches to rethinking urban environments.

Added Value of Lived Experience

All the experts emphasized that lived experience brings valuable depth to participatory processes. It highlights the complexity of individual perspectives and how these are shaped or reinforced by the built environment. *"The added value of lived experience is that your solution or next steps are closer to reality. Because reality is not one-dimensional: one perspective is never the reality."*

Including those directly affected by decisions not only leads to better outcomes but also fosters long-term engagement. *"It's an investment—yes, it costs time and money—but if you do it well, people often stay involved. They support certain decisions, which also leads to less opposition. So, if you look at it from the client's perspective, it's actually very smart to involve people properly and let them have a say in certain matters."* This insight reinforces the idea that meaningful participation builds support and reduces resistance.

These reflections challenge the view of participation as a box-ticking exercise or a strategy to avoid conflict. Instead, they illustrate how integrating lived experience adds genuine value to a project. *"The ideal is that you do participation because it just leads to better solutions, simple as that."*

This shift is particularly impactful in contexts such as

gender-sensitive sessions. *"The lived experience in these women-only sessions is very empowering […] which gives a collective feeling of empowerment."* However, there remains progress to be made in the broader recognition of this value. As pointed out, *"We still have clients coming to us with the question if we can do a participation next week,"* revealing how participation is still sometimes treated as an afterthought rather than a foundational part of the process.

Inclusive Tactics and Tools

Experts employ a wide range of innovative tactics to make participatory processes more inclusive and representative. One company implemented a weighted lottery system to ensure that certain neighborhoods—particularly those facing greater challenges—were more prominently represented. As one practitioner explained: *"We wanted 20 people, so we drew 80. In that, we also took certain postal codes where there were more problems and gave them more weight."* This approach reflects a deliberate effort to counter structural inequalities by ensuring under-represented voices are heard.

Personalized methods such as one-on-one conversations were also emphasized for their ability to engage individuals who might feel overlooked in more public or formal forums. *"With one-on-one conversation, people have the feeling someone will actually listen to them. It causes a different audience than a walk-in session."* Similarly, the use of breakout groups was praised for promoting active participation from all attendees while creating safer, more comfortable spaces—especially for women—to express themselves freely.

Inclusivity also involves thoughtful consideration of how information is presented and feedback is collected. *"There is also the question of what you need to do plenary and what not. Sometimes we explain something planar but let everyone write something on a note. Or do something very planar like sticking stickers. Which can help if people do not speak the language, for example."* This highlights the importance of offering both structured, visual forms of engagement—such as mapping exercises or sticker voting—and more private, anonymous contributions. Striking a balance between these methods allows participants to share in ways that suit their comfort level, literacy, or language proficiency.

Design probes—kits sent to people's homes—were another tool praised for enabling more intimate and reflective responses. *"It works well because people can do it at their own time, and due to the anonymity, it can collect more intimate data."* Likewise, "conversation pieces" were cited as a broad tool to spark dialogue around sensitive topics that might not naturally arise. *"For example, gender is not something that appeals to many people. So, you need a conversation piece: something that attracts everyone. In this case we made a snack bar. In this way, you can reach the people who normally will not go to a room or event,"* one expert noted.

Crucially, the experts emphasized that participation requires constant adaptation. *"Participation is all about adapting and being flexible,"* one expert observed. *"In that sense, participation is also very iterative: you try something and you adapt again."* What proves effective for one group or context may not work in another, underscoring the need for reflexivity and responsiveness in participatory design.

However, inclusion has its boundaries. *"I am all for participation, but not just anywhere all the time. You have to think about whether it makes sense. You should not put something on the table that requires years of expertise to fully understand. It will lead to people feeling frustrated and not taken seriously because their input cannot be used."* This highlights a key consideration: participation should be tailored not only to who is being consulted, but also to the nature of the topic at hand. If an issue requires technical knowledge, involving experts may be more appropriate than broad public input.

The experts demonstrated that there are numerous tactics and tools available to foster inclusive participation and gather meaningful lived experiences. However, these methods must be context-sensitive. Different situations demand different strategies, and a careful match between project goals, participants' capacities, and the tools used is essential for successful inclusive engagement.

Trust and Transparency

Trust is a foundational element in any participatory process. All experts interviewed underscored the importance of building trust gradually, through consistent and sustained engagement. *"It is very important to also show interest outside of what you are trying to collect from the participant. Just go by without trying to get something out of it immediately."* This reflects a relational approach to participation—one that values presence, patience, and mutual respect over extractive or transactional interactions.

Trusted intermediaries—often community members or local ambassadors—play a critical role, particularly when engaging with marginalized or vulnerable groups. *"When it is about delicate subjects, it is much more complicated, also in terms of trust. It is very important to have an intermediate or ambassador that is already embedded in the target audience."* These intermediaries can bridge gaps between institutions and communities, drawing on their existing relationships and credibility to foster safer and more open dialogue.

It was emphasized that trust must be built from a human perspective: *"The thing about participation is that you do not enter into a relationship with an institution, but with a person. And it's so important that people get to know that person, also privately, so that they can understand that he or she is also just a person."* To support this, informal and social settings—such as shared meals—are often used to build rapport. *"We also do sessions with dinner. It is a good medium to attract people but it also gives the chance to sit beforehand and get to know*

each other person to person, not participant to moderator."

Equally essential is transparency. Setting clear expectations and communicating boundaries upfront helps participants understand the scope and limitations of the process. "*Frameworks and limits are very important to establish: Where lies the space to talk about things, what has already been established and is non-negotiable. It is about being transparent.*" When decisions are made behind closed doors or when feedback is ignored, trust is easily undermined. "*People get frustrated if they have given many ideas but they do not see it back in the solution or design. It is de-motivating,*" one expert observed.

Delays in communication further erode trust. "*For the participant, this is very frustrating because he or she gave input in April, and meanwhile they have been living next to a construction pit for half a year.*" These lapses not only signal a lack of responsiveness but can also damage participants' willingness to engage in future processes.

Ultimately, participation must be understood as a relationship—not between citizen and institution, but between individuals. As one expert put it, "*People tell you more when you have a relationship of trust.*" Trust and transparency are therefore the cornerstones of meaningful participation. Without them, efforts to gather lived experiences risk falling short. Clear goals, defined boundaries, and a sincere investment in human connection are essential for lived experiences to be gathered.

Levels of Participation

Another theme that emerged was the level of engagement and how this must reflect the diversity of how people want to participate. "*Some people really want to engage; some people just want to listen and sometimes say something. And you also have the ones who want to read all the documents.*" A single method will not accommodate this range and therefore will always miss a lot of people's perspectives, so practitioners emphasize triangulation—offering multiple forms of participation in parallel. "*To gather different perspectives, it is pivotal that you use different methods parallel to each other. Not every method works for everyone. Some people are fine with offering an evening, some do not even know what participation is. You need some kind of triangulation*" This finding shows the need for a balance or gradualness in how far you go in participation. Some people might only want to give one comment while the other wants to do a whole session. By combining different levels in the process, you have the best chance of reaching as many people as possible and thus get the widest range of lived experiences. This layered approach avoids the assumption that everyone is equally eager, confident, or comfortable in traditional formats.

Addressing Women's Issues

The experts revealed that unmasking gendered experiences is not easy and often require targeted approaches, as they are not always volunteered spontaneously. "*Women's issues in urban settings is not something that is very obvious to many. If I were to go to a participation it would not be the first thing I would address. You have to ask questions about it.*" Women's issues are perceived as quite complex as they are not always very tangible "*For women's issues, it is very hard to collect that kind of information. It is less visible: as a woman you do not feel safe, but what is actually the cause of that? That is very complex.*" This shows that if you want to collect information on gendered experiences you have to go further than just collect lived experiences, you have to specifically address them.

All experts stated that focus groups consisting only of women were found to be particularly effective for this. "*From our experience it's very evident that they really want to work alone in women-only focus groups.*" Such settings offer a sense of safety for women to express themselves and find themselves heard in other stories. Other methods included giving women their own table in mixed sessions instead of a full womens only session or setting out specific questionnaires that target women afterwards. Using data can also make the invisible visible: "*Most people do not think about gendered experiences… It helps to give people some idea and maybe even data like 80% of women feel unsafe in this specific area.*" This further shows that there are multiple methods to address or provoke gendered experiences and that not all have to be very time consuming or expensive.

Barriers to Participation

Another recurring theme among the experts was the importance of addressing practical constraints that often prevent people from participating in engagement processes. These barriers—such as lack of childcare, transportation, or scheduling conflicts—can significantly limit who is able to take part. The experts emphasized that inclusive participation requires thoughtful planning that actively reduces these obstacles. "*We try to ensure that there is a babysitter, for example… or make sure that there are transport options for the elderly.*" These logistical considerations are not secondary—they are central to ensuring equitable access. "*We know hiring a babysitter costs extra money, but for some it can make a huge difference.*"

Timing was also highlighted as a critical factor. "*For young women it was easier to come at six in the evening, for caregivers it was better to do it later at night.*" Flexibility in scheduling allows broader participation by accommodating the diverse rhythms of people's daily lives. The importance of understanding these needs before designing participatory activities was emphasized: "*It's essential to first map the barriers people experience before you organize something.*" By doing so, participation can be shaped around the realities of the target audience, rather than requiring people to adapt to rigid institutional structures.

Need to Check Your Bias

Power and bias must be critically examined by

those facilitating participation. *"It is very important to check your own biases… Where lies my power? How do I shift it?"* There is an inherent power dynamic in deciding who is invited and how their input is used. *"It is a power question. You are the one initiating the project/participation so you decide who is in it."* While complete representation is impossible—*"100% representation is never possible"*—the responsibility lies with practitioners to continuously question their choices and seek balance. One of the experts uses an intersectional tool to track whose voices are missing. *"From this we can establish if we have really spoken to the people we want or if we are going to try and find more people or maybe even an expert."* This shows that instigators of participation have a large role to play in inclusive participation. It requires an active mindset from the instigator to look beyond themselves or what is obvious.

Bridging the Gap Between Government and Citizens

Another by-catch that has been addressed multiple times is that participation can help bridge the deepening gap between institutions and communities. *"Participation is also a tool to build a better relationship. There is much distrust towards the government and this can really help in that."* Participants are more understanding when included in honest, ongoing dialogue. There is a frustration with making reports and reporting back to municipalities *"I would way rather that they directly sit together […] Citizens can understand why something is impossible but can also immediately do a counter offer."* Ultimately, meaningful participation can foster mutual respect and collective problem-solving: *"I think it also helps, as a society, to learn to better work together."*

Conclusion

The expert interviews highlight that integrating lived experience into participation is essential for creating inclusive and responsive outcomes. Reducing barriers—especially those faced by women—is a necessary first step, but not sufficient on its own; gendered experiences must be actively addressed to be meaningfully included. Inclusive tactics and tools emphasize the need to be flexible, relational and context-specific. Furthermore, trust, transparency, and willingness to reflect on power and bias are foundational aspects that need to be incorporated. Lastly, offering multiple levels and formats of participation ensures that people can engage in ways that suit their needs and comfort. Ultimately, these aspects (see figure 20) make sure lived experience is truly centered, and participation can become a tool to address spatial inequalities of the Gendered City.

Employ inclusive tactics
Use of inclusive tactics and tools like lottery systems to ensure equal attendance, one-on-one sessions, plenary things like sticking stickers but also anonymous possibilities, deisgn-probes, giving turns so everyone gets their say or use conversation pieces to attract other audiences.

Adress womens issues
To collect gendered experiences you have to go beyond collecting lived experience, you have to adress the issues. This can be done by womens only sessions adressing the Gendered City but also by an extra survey, giving women their own table or present data to get people thinking on the subject

Build trust & transparancy
Build trust with participants by establishing a relationship. Take the time to get to know a community and use an intermediary if the subject is sensitive. Make sure there is transparancy about what the participation is about and which aspects can be influenced by the participants.

Offer multiple scales of participation
Use different methods with different intensity of participation. This caters to the different needs and abilities in which participants can and want to participate in a project.

Take away physical barriers
Reduce obstacles that limit people from participating. Provide babysitters for caregivers or transport for elderly. Use places that are reachable and be flexible in your timeslots so you can adjust to your target group.

Check your bias
As an instigator make sure you look beyond your own views and assumptions. Be aware that you, as an instigator, have the power to shape who participates in your event. Checking your bias can be done by using intersectional frameworks and then checking if there are any views you missed that might be relevant.

Figure 20. Overview of tactics for better collection and use of lived experience in participation based on expert interviews, own work

4.2.2 Case study analysis

Overview

What: one case study of participation trajectory for development of new residential area with 200 new homes.

How: document analysis and interview with project leader

Analysis: Thematic analysis and Arnstein's ladder

Main findings: Lived experience captured but not sought out —need for low intesity methods with high impact — need for broader support — need for a practical framework

This sub-chapter explores how participatory processes can better engage with lived experience in addressing the Gendered City, through a case study of a village expansion project in central Netherlands. Led by a spatial consultancy firm, the project was described as a major participation effort: *"we went all out for this one."*

Overview of Participation Strategy and Case Study

Participation strategy | The consultancy firm uses a structured participation model with four levels: informing, consulting, seeking advice, and co-creation—each linked to the project's anticipated impact. A tailored toolbox supports different stages, using tools like stakeholder analysis and design sessions. While co-creation seems ideal, the firm acknowledges it is resource-intensive and not always feasible. A key limitation of the approach is its reliance on predefined assumptions about project impact, which may overlook the significance of smaller-scale interventions (figure 21).

The case | The case involves a 200-home village expansion between Utrecht and Amsterdam. Starting in 2019, the firm worked with the landowner and municipality, categorizing the project at a high-impact level (category three). A stakeholder analysis and community communication preceded a co-creative working group process with four sessions: idea generation, site visit, design feedback, and final plan review (figure 22).

By 2024, the finalized concept plan was shared with the public through a walk-in session and online platform featuring VR visuals and ongoing updates. Collaboration with municipal and provincial authorities continued throughout. A more in depth description of the case study can be found in Appendix C.

	Project category 1	Project category 2	Project category 3
Degree of impact	Limited impact	Medium impact	Large-scale impact
Participation level	Informing or consulting	Consulting or asking advice	Asking advice or co-creation
Examples	Dormer, gardenhouse or small-scale change of function	Demolition/construction of main buildings or large-scale change of function	Large-scale spatial development, new residential area, government policy

Figure 21. Overview participation level linked to project category based on documents from Kubiek, own work

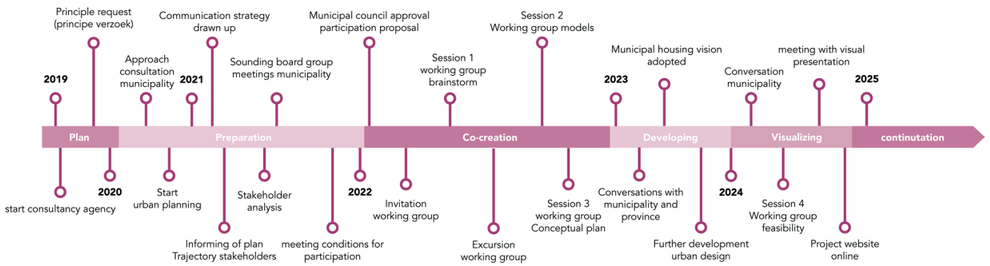


Figure 22. overview of participation trajectory based documents from Kubiek, own work

Thematic analysis

Engagement with Lived Experience

The project leader emphasized that lived experience offers clear added value to spatial projects, stating: *"It always gives the project just a slightly different slant."* In this case, resident input directly influenced certain design decisions. For example, a ditch was preserved in the new development because local residents used it for ice skating during winter, and what initially appeared to be a "boring" green field was maintained because children often played there.

The project leader reflected that while an urban development plan could technically be designed without participation—resulting in a plan that would probably be *"90% the same"*—the remaining 10% (or more, depending on the case) stems directly from community involvement. This 10% often captures subtle but significant aspects of local life that would otherwise be missed. In this project, these valuable insights were mostly gathered during the first session, where participants were given a carte blanche to voice concerns, needs, and ideas.

Nevertheless, the project leader clarified that the primary goal of the participation process was not to capture lived experience but to build broad support for the plan. The insights gained from residents' lived experiences were considered valuable but ultimately a form of "bycatch"—an unintended yet beneficial outcome of the participatory process. Despite this, the case demonstrates that lived experience did meaningfully influence the final design and that participation was crucial in uncovering these local nuances.

The excursion organized as part of the participation trajectory served as a more deliberate method for engaging with lived experience. Participants visited comparable, completed housing projects to reflect on what they appreciated or disliked about those environments. The primary aim was to gather feedback on the appearance of multi-story buildings, but discussions also touched upon related topics like parking solutions.

When asked whether participants raised issues such as safety or mobility during these excursions, the project leader responded firmly: *"No. I think that is a bit too deep. The average Dutch person is not really concerned about that."* This suggests that while excursions are a promising tool for engaging with lived experience, in this case, they were primarily used to solicit aesthetic preferences rather than deeper urban issues. It highlights that while lived experience is a rich source of local knowledge, its potential to address broader societal or spatial challenges needs to be intentionally activated by focusing participants' attention on such topics.
The project also revealed an important distinction between engaging lived experience in new developments versus existing contexts. Since the project was located on former farmland, residents did not have a direct lived experience of the site. The project leader noted: *"If you want people to think about lived experience in a new development, you have to let them experience it. You have to go as far as using VR, for example."*

In this project, Virtual Reality (VR) technology was introduced for the first time by the consultancy firm, allowing participants during a public walk-in session to virtually "walk" through the future neighborhood. However, according to the project leader, the VR experience mainly attracted interest related to the practicalities of home-buying, rather than eliciting deeper insights into the lived experience: *"People were more concerned with where they could register to buy a house."* He admitted that VR in this case served more as a promotional tool than a participatory one. Looking ahead, the project leader expressed the ambition to take the use of VR a step further, suggesting that future sessions could involve asking participants to virtually navigate the streets and reflect on their feelings and experiences: *"Add detail to the plan and then ask people to walk through the street and ask: what do you feel?"*

These findings show that the effectiveness of engaging lived experience depends heavily on the type of development. In existing neighborhoods, gathering input is more straightforward—residents can simply be asked about their daily experiences. In new developments, however, tools like VR and excursions become necessary to simulate experiences, and they must be purposefully designed to explore more than just visual aspects.
In summary, although lived experience was engaged with—particularly through the excursion and the open brainstorming session—it was not a central focus of the participation process. Furthermore, when it was engaged, it mainly concerned the appearance and aesthetic preferences, rather than deeper social or spatial issues.

Inclusivity and Representation in the Participation Process

The case study revealed a clear lack of attention to inclusivity and equal representation within the participation process. While the consultancy firm claimed to have assembled a "balanced" stakeholder workgroup, closer analysis shows that representation—particularly in terms of gender and other minority groups—was not explicitly considered. The participatory plan did not include any criteria or mechanisms to ensure demographic diversity within the workgroup.

This shortcoming was also addressed during the interview with the project leader. He explained that the selection of participants was guided primarily by stakeholder type, including representatives from the cyclists' association, local businesses, the golf course, and a variety of residents. There

was an effort to ensure geographic diversity (e.g., avoiding overrepresentation from a single street), but demographic diversity—such as gender balance—was not a consideration. As the project leader acknowledged, no targeted strategies were implemented to account for gender or broader inclusion in the composition of the group.

In terms of outreach, the firm did make a broad public appeal by distributing flyers door-to-door and placing them in local supermarkets and cafés. However, the project leader noted the limits of this approach, stating: *"At some point, for us—and also for the client—it just stops. Processes are very expensive, and we can consider ourselves lucky if the municipality even approves our approach."* This highlights a structural issue: inclusivity efforts are often deprioritized due to cost, time, and client expectations.

The project leader observed that their participatory events tend to attract more men than women, a trend seen not only in this project but in others as well. When asked whether this gender imbalance was a concern, a practical bottleneck appeared: *"People always have something to complain about, but if you ask them to give up four free evenings like in this co-creation process, most just bail. It's sometimes hard enough to get anyone to participate at all."* This points back to the aforementioned tension within participatory planning: while co-creation is ideal in theory, it may not be accessible or appealing to a wide range of participants. This suggests that inclusive participation — demands a consideration of what can reasonably be expected of people in terms of time, effort, and resources.

In conclusion, the participation process lacked inclusive representation largely because it was neither mandated nor resourced. As the project leader put it: *"If I go to my client and say I only have twenty male participants but it will take me four more months to find ten active females, the client will not care."* This comment underscores a key structural issue: companies often lack practical, cost-effective strategies to implement inclusive participation. As a result, even this extensive participatory process fell short when it comes to inclusiveness and representation, not out of malice or neglect, but due to systemic constraints and the absence of clear guidance or institutional requirements.

Bridging the Gap Between Professionals and Participants: The Role of Tools and Communication

Another theme that emerged from the case study is the challenge of effectively communicating complex spatial concepts to non-professional participants. The project leader emphasized the existence of a significant gap between what spatial professionals are trained to understand and what everyday citizens can readily grasp. He noted: *"For us professionals, it's easy to think spatially, even when nothing is physically there—but for the average Dutch person, that's not the case."*

This disconnect became especially apparent during the initial participation session, where 2D maps were used to discuss the development. The project leader explained that many participants struggled to interpret these drawings, making it difficult for them to engage meaningfully or comment on spatial qualities—*"let alone point out that a certain corner might not feel inviting."* The introduction of 3D models improved participants' understanding, offering a more intuitive grasp of the proposed development. However, the project leader pointed out that even 3D models fall short when the aim is to evoke emotional or sensory responses. For example, stating that a building will be 18 meters tall means little to most participants unless they can visualize or physically sense the scale.

To bridge this cognitive gap, the project leader stressed the importance of translating professional knowledge into everyday citizen reality. When talking about gender considerations this was also addresses: *"Ninety-nine out of a hundred people don't consciously think about that, even if they do experience it. You need to make it tangible and understandable,"* he stated.

This highlights the need for participation processes to rely on tools and methods that are accessible and meaningful to citizens—not just professionals. Conventional professional tools (e.g., technical drawings or abstract language) may hinder effective engagement, especially when dealing with intangible or experiential aspects of urban life. Therefore, selecting the right communicative tools—such as 3D visualization, immersive technologies, or relatable examples—is essential for bridging the knowledge gap and enabling citizens to contribute substantively. Tools that translate spatial plans into everyday experience are crucial for inclusive and effective co-creation.

The Need for a Mandate

A final recurring theme in the case study concerns the absence of structural mandates to include social considerations—such as lived experience or gender sensitivity—in participatory planning processes. These aspects were not excluded because they are seen as unimportant, but because there is no formal requirement to include them. Time and budget constraints play a significant role in determining what is prioritized in a participation trajectory, and in the absence of external pressure, more socially inclusive elements are frequently overlooked.

The project leader explicitly addressed this issue, noting that the public sector—particularly municipalities—could play a much stronger role in enforcing inclusive practices. He explained: *"Right now, the municipality asks for a few things in your participation report. If they just added a clause for equal representation or inclusive considerations, we*

would do it—because we'd have to." This statement reveals the pragmatism that often guides private-sector decision-making. According to the project leader, while a few socially-minded developers exist, the majority remain focused on efficiency and risk reduction. Their primary concern is whether they will receive approval to build; if certain requirements are not met, project delays (and associated costs) are a real possibility.

From this perspective, municipalities and other public authorities have significant leverage to shape participatory practice. By mandating inclusive participation criteria, they could incentivize developers and consultants to actively engage with social dimensions such as gender equity and lived experience.

This underscores that relying solely on goodwill or best practices within private consultancy is insufficient for embedding inclusive approaches into participation processes. Effective tools and techniques are important, but without a formal mandate, there is limited incentive to go beyond what is minimally required. As the project leader noted: *"Our toolbox currently considers things like the level of participation, the scale of the development, and technical tools. But it doesn't yet include any social or inclusive considerations—which could actually be a valuable addition. I think there is a lot to be gained."*

Arnstein's ladder

To better understand how lived experience was integrated into this participatory trajectory, the process is analyzed through the lens of Arnstein's Ladder of Participation, introduced in Chapter 2. This framework helps to map out the levels of influence afforded to participants and provides an overview of where the process stands in terms of collecting and using lived experience.

When evaluated using Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation, the participatory process described in the case study primarily occupies the higher middle rungs of the ladder—namely placation and partnership (see figure 23). The process incorporated meaningful community engagement and gave participants structured opportunities to influence the project. However, these contributions did not translate into shared decision-making power, thus limiting the extent to which the process could be seen as fully participatory in Arnstein's terms.

From the outset, the consultancy firm implemented a thoughtful engagement strategy. Residents and stakeholders were invited to participate in a series of structured working group sessions, some of which allowed for open-ended input. In Session 1, participants were given a "blank slate" to voice their ideas and concerns. This early-stage openness enabled the emergence of lived experience—including insights about how local residents used informal play areas or a ditch for winter ice skating.

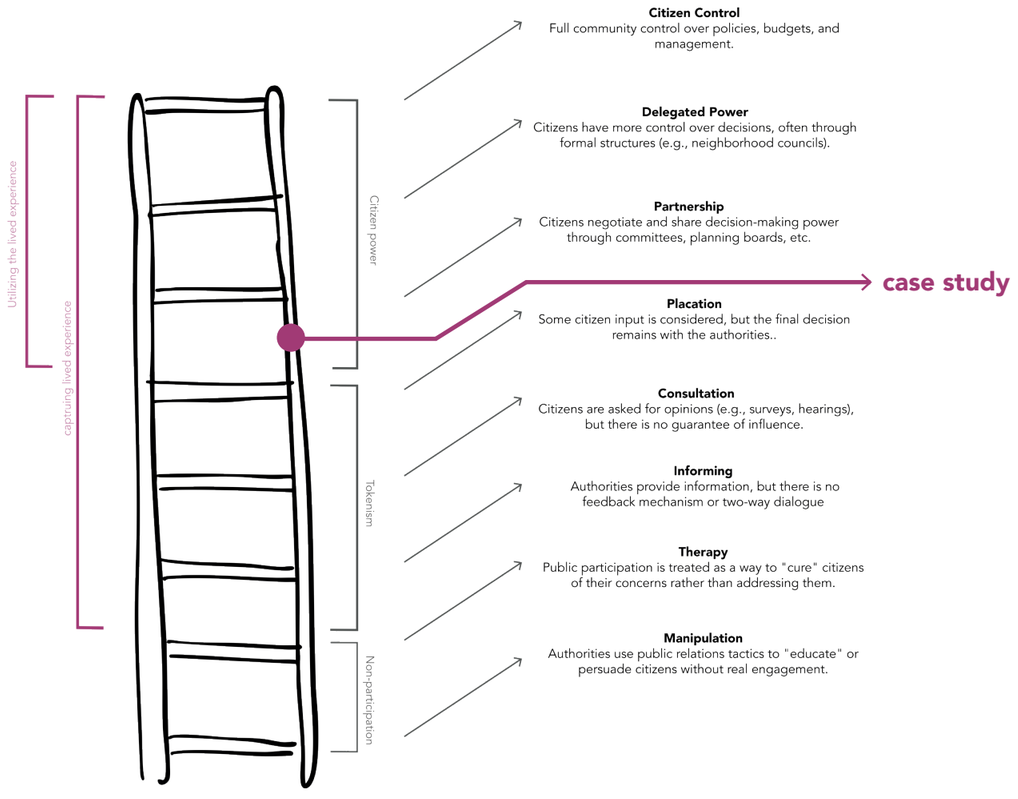


Figure 23. The ladder of citizen participation and the opportunities of the lived experience based on Arnstein (1969), with the case study analyzed, own work

These kinds of contributions enriched the design in subtle but meaningful ways, suggesting that lived experience was valued, even if it wasn't the primary goal of the process. In Arnstein's terms, this level of engagement corresponds to placation—the community's feedback was gathered and visibly incorporated, but ultimate decision-making remained in the hands of the professionals and authorities.

Where the process approached partnership was in its use of co-creation principles and iterative feedback loops. The integration of excursions and feedback on preliminary designs helped foster a more collaborative atmosphere. Participants' lived experiences during the excursion—though often framed in terms of aesthetic preferences rather than deeper spatial or social concerns—nonetheless shaped elements of the evolving plan. This indicates a partial redistribution of influence. However, as the project leader noted, lived experience was considered a form of "bycatch"—a fortunate but unintended outcome of a process primarily designed to build support, not to center experiential knowledge as a design driver. This positioning signals a ceiling on how far the process could ascend Arnstein's ladder.

Still, there were glimpses of more engagement with lived experience, such as during the site excursion and the use of Virtual Reality (VR). These tools had the potential to simulate spatial and emotional experience, helping participants envision the future environment. Yet in practice, their use was largely limited to surface-level responses or promotional aims. For example, the VR session came too late for deeper engagement with urban form or gendered experience. Thus, while the tools were innovative and held promise, they were not fully activated to elicit or integrate lived experience at a meaningful level. This underscores a key insight from Arnstein: that the appearance of participation—innovative tools, workshops, and visualizations—does not guarantee that power is actually being shared (e.g Arnstein, 1969; Cornwall, 2008).

The project also demonstrated structural limits to participation. Despite the firm's aim to ensure a "balanced" group of stakeholders, there was no formal strategy to ensure inclusive representation, particularly regarding gender or other social markers. This omission prevented the process from evolving into a full partnership. As literature emphasizes, without a redistribution of power and clear institutional support, participatory processes often stagnate in the realm of tokenism—offering voice without real influence (e.g. Arnstein, 1969; Cooke & Kothari, 2001).

Overall, the analyzed participatory process reflected a sincere attempt at meaningful engagement and occasionally approached the rung of partnership, especially in its structure and responsiveness. Lived experience was engaged and even influenced aspects of the design—but largely as a secondary outcome rather than a central goal. To move higher on Arnstein's ladder—toward partnership or delegated power—future processes would need to explicitly center lived experience as a design input, ensure inclusive and representative participation, and secure power-sharing approaches to urban development.

Conclusion

The case study ultimately reveals several key insights. Firstly, while the participatory process employed a relatively high level of engagement, it rarely exceeded the level of partnership on Arnstein's ladder. Although elements of lived experience were captured, they were not fully leveraged to address deeper spatial or social issues. Secondly, a broader tension arose between what can reasonably be expected of citizens and the demands of the upper rungs of Arnstein's ladder, which often entail intensive co-creation and sustained involvement. The case particularly underscores how such expectations can be experienced as a burden on individuals. For women—who often juggle multiple daily responsibilities like work and care, this can be the case even more so. This shows the need for low-threshold, high-impact participation methods that are high upon the ladder and meaningfully incorporate lived experience. Moreover, the case demonstrates that structural barriers—such as time, cost, and limited client mandates—often inhibit the realization of more inclusive participation practices. Although there may be a willingness among practitioners to pursue inclusive approaches, they are frequently constrained by market realities. This points to two crucial needs: first, to better articulate and evidence the added value of inclusivity to justify its investment; and second and most importantly, to develop effective, low-cost tools and frameworks that enable the integration of gender-sensitive and inclusive practices within current planning structures.

4.2.3 Observations

Overview

What: observations at three seperate participation events—a neighborhood Listening Group, a co-creation session in Den Haag, and a church-focused community initiative in Spaarndam.

Analysis: Thematic analysis

Main findings: Balance between flexibility and structure — diverse engagement styles

Participation Formats and Facilitation Styles

The observed events varied significantly in structure, revealing how different facilitation approaches shape participation. The Listening Group employed a highly structured yet egalitarian format that prioritized emotional safety and active listening. Key rules—such as speaking from the "I" perspective, avoiding judgment or advice, and keeping stories concise—helped maintain focus and flatten social hierarchies. In contrast, the co-creation session in Den Haag and the session in Spaarndam lacked strong facilitation, allowing dominant individuals to control the dialogue. This resulted in an unequal space were not everybody had the opportunity to speak their mind. Furthermore, the Spaarndam session, situated in a more institutional context of the church, was marked by slow decision-making and resistance to change, illustrating the limitations of traditional top-down structures in engaging communities effectively.

The Role of Informal and Non-Verbal Contributions

Across all sessions, valuable contributions often occurred outside of formal discussion formats. Informal conversations—sometimes framed as gossip or side comments—revealed deeply rooted concerns, everyday struggles, and social tensions that might otherwise go unacknowledged. Furthermore, acts of participation such as offering to bring food, playing music, or simply being present and listening were equally meaningful. These findings suggest the need to broaden our understanding of what constitutes legitimate participation.

Diverse Modes of Participation

A consistent observation was that individuals participate in different ways. Some were eager to speak, lead, or organize, while others preferred to listen or observe. Not all participants are comfortable engaging vocally or publicly, and valuing this diversity is essential. Effective participatory processes must be designed to accommodate a range of engagement styles, ensuring that quieter voices and non-verbal forms of presence are equally recognized.

Visual Communication and Comprehension

Participants frequently struggled with abstract or technical visual materials. Maps and 2D plans were often too small or too disconnected from recognizable features to be meaningful. Many participants required more intuitive and familiar representations—such as 3D visualizations with clearly marked street names and landmarks—to fully understand and engage with proposals. This highlights the importance of accessible communication tools in participatory design, particularly when working with residents unfamiliar with spatial planning conventions.

Engagement Through Children and Intergenerational Dynamics

The participation session at the church in Spaarndam introduced an intergenerational dimension. Children's ideas, though often imaginative and impractical, stimulated creative thinking and indirectly engaged parents who might not otherwise have participated. This proved to be a powerful strategy for extending the reach of participatory processes and highlights how using existing social structures, like schools, can be effective in broadening the reach of the participation

Institutional Resistance and the Need for External Stimuli

In more traditional or hierarchical contexts, such as the church initiative, institutional inertia posed a significant barrier to change. Resistance from key figures and lack of shared vision between stakeholders slowed progress. These environments often require external facilitation and continuous stimuli—such as creative exercises, new actors, or fresh proposals—to overcome stagnation and re-ignite momentum.

Conclusion

These observations underscore the importance of designing participatory formats that are not only inclusive in theory but responsive in practice. Successfully integrating lived experience requires a careful balance of structure and flexibility, as well as a balance between attentiveness to informal dynamics and a clear structure. Visual comprehension and diverse engagement styles also proved important methodological aspects for effective participation. Moreover, sustained and adaptive involvement—rather than one-off events—is essential to building trust and fostering genuine community input. Together, these observations reveal insights into current bottlenecks and how future participatory processes might engage more with the lived experience and offer a more inclusive format.

4.2.4 Chapter conclusion

The combined findings from the expert interviews, case study, and participatory observations indicate that there are indeed opportunities within current citizen participation practices to engage more meaningfully with lived experience—particularly in ways that can help address spatial inequalities. However, these opportunities remain underutilized, often hindered by structural limitations, like time, budget but also the lack of clear and low-key frameworks on how to involve these into the participation process

Expert insights underscore that lived experience must not only be invited but actively centered through inclusive, flexible, and context-sensitive approaches. Building trust, actively addressing women's issues, and adopting multiple formats of engagement are crucial steps in this process. The case study further reveals that even relatively engaged participatory practices struggle to reach beyond tokenism, especially when lived experience is not directly tied to addressing systemic spatial or social issues. Moreover, it reveals a practical tension: while deep citizen involvement is ideal in theory, in practice it can become burdensome—especially for women who face unequal care responsibilities and time constraints. This shows the need for multiple levels of participation that can capture lived experience.

The observations reinforce the idea that for lived experience to be integrated effectively, participatory formats must adapt to real-life constraints and diverse communication needs. Visual tools, informal engagement moments, and long-term involvement strategies were shown to improve responsiveness and inclusivity in practice.

Altogether, the findings suggest that unlocking the transformative potential of participation requires a shift: from high-effort expectations to low-threshold, high-impact practices, and from lived experience as a by-catch toward operational tools and frameworks that embed inclusivity and gender issues into the everyday workings of participation processes. By doing so, citizen participation can move beyond procedural inclusion to become a substantive tool for reducing spatial inequalities—especially in gendered urban environments.

Image 26. Women participating in Night walk © Urbana

4.3. Citizen participation and the Gendered City

Citizen participation offers key opportunities to address the gendered inequalities embedded in urban spaces. Inclusive frameworks can surface diverse needs and challenge gendered assumptions in planning and policy. However, their impact depends on how well they engage with the complexities of gendered lived experience. This chapter explores a proposed structure for doing so, asking: What structural elements can be integrated into participation processes to use lived experience in addressing the Gendered City?

4.3.1 The tested model

Overview

What: Quasi-experiment where a preliminary structure for addressing gender issues in participation is tested in a real-life participation session for a square in Rotterdam.

Analysis: Methods are analysed on five criteria

Main findings: Key and complementary methods — Both requirements need to be addressed — Combination of levels is optimal —sequencing of methods is important

Following the Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework, this chapter tests a structured approach developed from earlier findings (Chapters 4.1 and 4.2) to address gendered issues in participatory processes (see Figure 24). A participatory session was held to apply and evaluate these methods in tackling spatial inequalities in the Gendered City. The chapter outlines the session's context and content, then assesses the methods using five criteria:

1. *Effectiveness*
– To what extent did the methods help address spatial inequalities in the Gendered City?

2. *Inclusiveness*
– Did participants feel empowered to engage? Was there equal opportunity for all voices to be heard?

3. *Actionability*
– Did the methods lead to tangible, usable outcomes or insights that could drive change?

4. *Relevance to Context*
– How well were the methods suited to the cultural, social, or organizational context of the session?

5. *Practicality*
– Were the methods feasible and straightforward to implement in practice?

Through this analytical lens, the chapter aims to critically reflect on the developed structure and its potential for addressing gendered spatial inequalities.

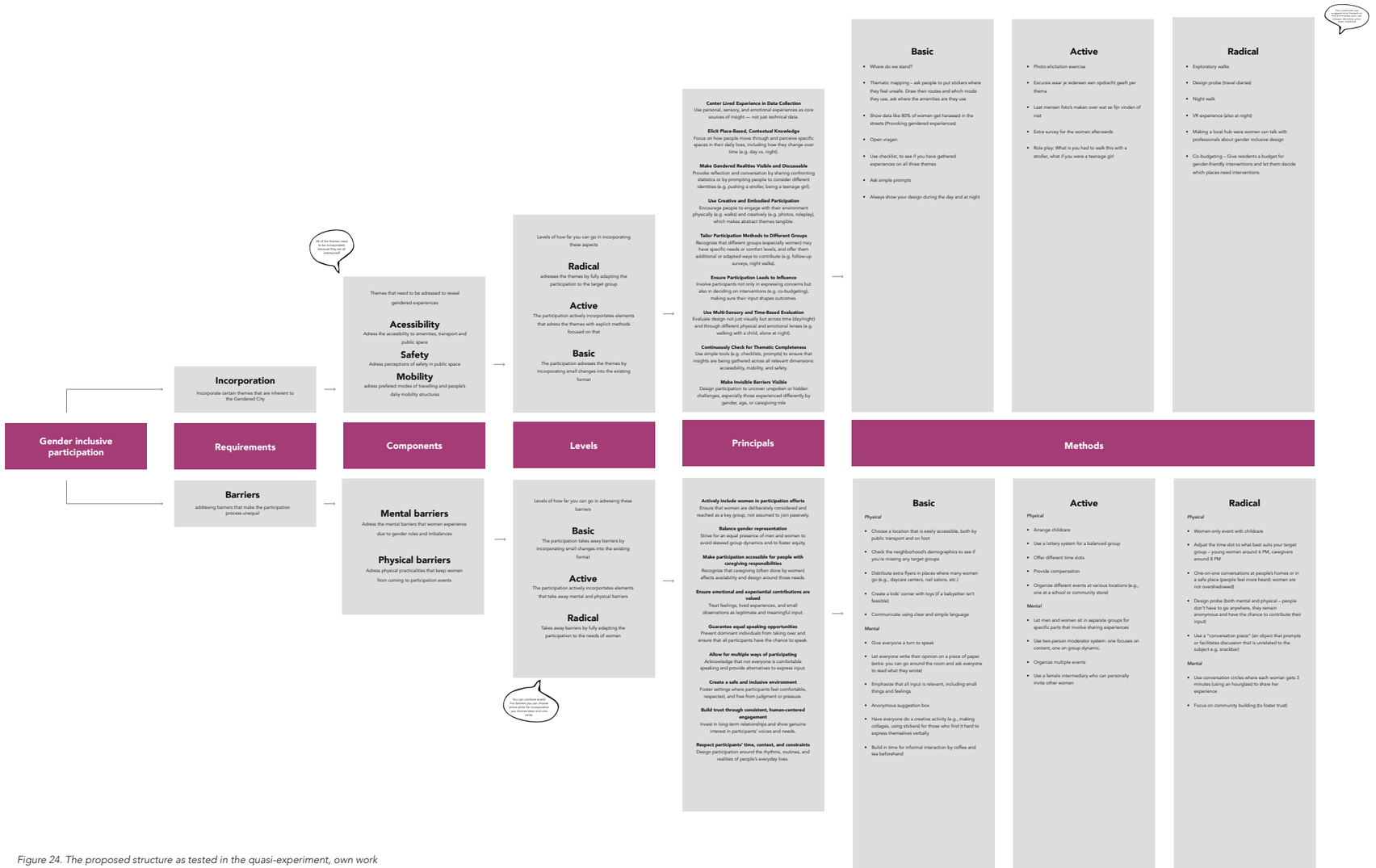


Figure 24. The proposed structure as tested in the quasi-experiment, own work

The context | The participatory session took place in Bospolder-Tussendijken, a Rotterdam neighborhood marked by both socio-economic challenges and strong community initiatives. Held at Visserijplein—an underused public square outside market days (image 27 & 28)—the session was co-organized with Oud House Rotterdam and aimed to explore gender-inclusive redesigns of the space.

Image 27. The Visserijplein during the market, own photo

Image 28. The Visserijplein when the market is not there © Reinier de Jong

The session | A total of eight residents (five women, three men) took part. The session tested methods addressing accessibility, mobility, and safety, mostly from the basic and active levels of engagement.

Activities included a sticker exercise on a fictional public space to spark discussion about gendered design elements, thematic walks exploring the square through assigned lenses (e.g., safety, mobility) with imaginative prompts and a group design task with cards to co-create improved versions of the square. The session ended with feedback and informal discussion.

Even though the session had 3 main exercises, 11 methods were tested. In this chapter, 6 of the methods with the most interesting findings from the session are highlighted. A detailed description of the session and the remaining analysed methods can be found in Appendix D.

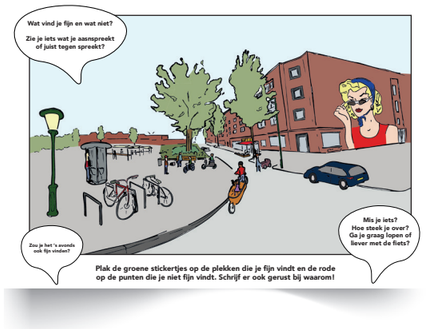


Image 29. The fictional setting as presented to the participants in the first exercise, own work

4.3.2 The analysis

Methods related towards taking away barriers

Method 1: Structured Turn-giving During Discussions – basic level

Following the initial sticker exercise, participants were explicitly given turns to share their thoughts on the elements they had marked. This approach was deliberately used to ensure equitable participation and to counteract potential imbalances in speaking time. Due to entrenched social norms and traditional gender dynamics, men often dominate group discussions, which can marginalize women's voices. By implementing a structured turn-taking system, the session aimed to actively amplify perspectives that might otherwise be overlooked.

While this method did not directly address the physical or spatial aspects of the Gendered City, it scored highly on the inclusiveness criterion (figure 25). All participants were actively engaged, and the format encouraged contributions from those who might not have spoken up in a more free-form discussion. Interestingly, the method also mitigated non-gendered social imbalances: for instance, one particularly outspoken female participant—who would likely have dominated the conversation—was given turns less frequently, while quieter individuals were provided the space to express their views. This underscores the value of structured facilitation as a simple yet highly effective tool for enhancing inclusivity.

Method 2: Choosing an Accessible Location – basic level

The event was held in a venue that was both easily accessible and situated close to the project site. This decision aimed to reduce logistical barriers and encourage participation from local residents by offering a familiar and convenient setting. In terms of inclusiveness, the accessible location proved moderately effective (figure 26). For example, one elderly participant noted that she had originally planned to visit the beach that day but opted to attend the session instead, as it was nearby and manageable given her physical limitations.

However, despite being strategically located and accompanied by outreach efforts, overall attendance remained low. This indicates that while an accessible location can lower the threshold for participation, it is not sufficient on its own to guarantee broad community engagement. It is best understood as a supporting condition—necessary but not solely determinative of inclusivity.

Method 3: Creative Activity for Non-Verbal Expression – basic level

The sticker exercise served a dual purpose, one of which was to create an accessible way for participants—particularly those less comfortable speaking in group settings—to express their perspectives. This approach scored highly on the inclusiveness criterion, though the stickering itself was not specifically targeted at addressing gender issues.

One participant noted, "In the first exercise, it was

easiest to give your own opinion or contribution, because you did it alone and not together." This feedback highlights the value of offering individual, non-verbal modes of participation, especially for those who may feel intimidated by group discussions or less confident expressing themselves verbally.
The high level of engagement observed during this activity (figure 27) suggests that the method was both approachable and appealing for all participants. The use of stickers made the exercise interactive, intuitive, and low-threshold, encouraging even the more reserved participants to engage. Additionally, the method is both practical and cost-effective, making it a valuable tool for participatory processes seeking to maximize inclusivity with minimal resources.

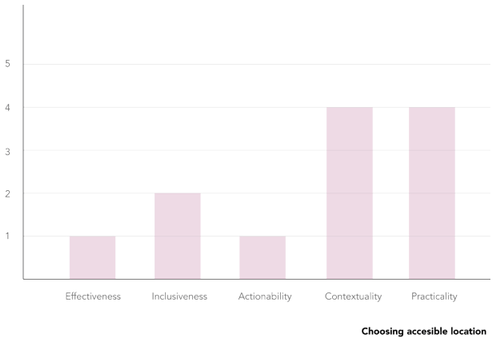


Figure 26. Bar chart analysis choosing accesible location, own work

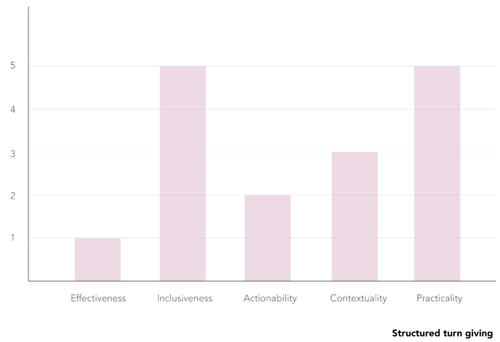


Figure 25. Bar chart analysis structured turn giving, own work

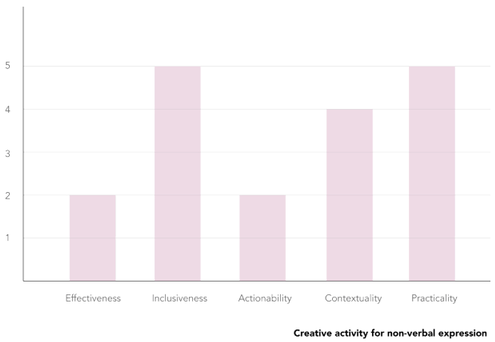


Figure 27. Bar chart analysis creative activity for non verbal expression, own work

Methods to incorporate the spatial aspects of the Gendered City

Method 1: Use of Simple Contextual Prompts – basic level
Throughout the session, simple verbal prompts were used as a method to elicit reflections on gendered experiences in public space. A prompt is an event or fact that causes or brings about an action or feeling. These prompts served as low-threshold, flexible tools to encourage participants to consider how different social roles or personal circumstances might affect their perceptions and use of space.

Examples of verrbal prompts that were posed were: *"How do you like to commute?"*, *"What if you were a mother walking with three children?"*, or *"Would this also feel safe at night?"* These questions were strategically posed to subtly shift participants' perspectives and deepen engagement with gendered spatial inequalities

One of the key strengths of this method is its practicality and adaptability. Prompts can be easily tailored to specific contexts (figure 28). For example, in this case prompts were asked about the current lightning of the square. These prompts require no additional materials or preparation, making them an accessible tool for facilitators. The prompts were moderately effective in raising awareness of gendered dynamics, they function as complementary elements and not as exercises that are designed to address gender explicitly. On their own, they may not be sufficient to foster deeper structural insights, but when used to enrich other methods, they offer valuable contributions to both inclusiveness and relevance to context.

Method 2: Thematic Excursion – active level
The second exercise—a thematic excursion through the project site—was unanimously highlighted by participants as the most favorite part of the session. By physically navigating the space, participants were able to observe, reflect, and engage with the environment in a more embodied way. As one participant remarked, *"You learn to watch and stand still with things you otherwise would not notice."* Others appreciated the opportunity to explore the area in pairs, particularly with someone they didn't already know, which added a social dimension to the learning experience.

Another participant noted that a focused theme—such as accessibility, mobility, or safety—helped make the exercise more digestible and less overwhelming, allowing participants to concentrate on one aspect of the public space without the pressure of evaluating everything.

The excursion proved highly effective and was practical in this context (figure 29), as the square was directly adjacent to the event location. However, this ease of implementation may vary depending on the site. For newly planned or less accessible areas,

additional logistical planning would be required.
In terms of inclusiveness, the method was largely successful: all participants took part, and the interactive, real-world nature of the exercise encouraged engagement. However, some limitations emerged. One participant noted feeling less comfortable expressing their thoughts in a paired format compared to the earlier individual exercise *"It was harder to express my opinion in this setting than the first."*, illustrating that even in duos, power dynamics can persist. Additionally, physical accessibility was an issue: one elderly woman, though willing to participate, was limited in mobility and remained mostly seated in the shade. These physical disabilities were not accounted for in the exercise.

Method 3: Role Play Prompts – active level
Embedded within the thematic excursion were role play prompts—short, imaginative scenarios encouraging participants to consider the space from a different, often gendered perspective. Prompts such as *"How would it feel to walk here as a teenage girl?"* or *"What if you were breastfeeding or menstruating in this setting?"* were used to foster empathy and highlight gender-specific spatial experiences.

These prompts were remarkably effective in provoking reflection and dialogue (figure 30). One participant shared, *"I have never thought of having to breastfeed or menstruate in public,"* indicating how the prompts helped to broaden perspectives. One participant expressed that mixed-gender duos would account for the gaps in lived experience. However, it's important to recognize that not all women share the same experiences—not every woman has breastfed, pushed a stroller, or faced the same challenges. And that if gender representation is not equal in a session these kinds of prompts can really help in highlighting certain perspectives.
This became especially evident during one moment in the session. The prompt *"Would you want to hang out here if you were a teenage girl?"* sparked a broader discussion. Participants first noted that it is typically men—not women—who spend time on the square. When one participant remarked, *"Teenage girls never hang out anywhere,"* the conversation expanded into a deeper reflection on the invisibility of teenage girls in public space and the question of what their needs might be in the urban environment—despite the fact that no teenage girls were present. This underscores the method's ability to surface structural issues and stimulate inclusive thinking, even in the absence of direct representation. This shows the effectiveness these role play prompts can have with quite little effort.

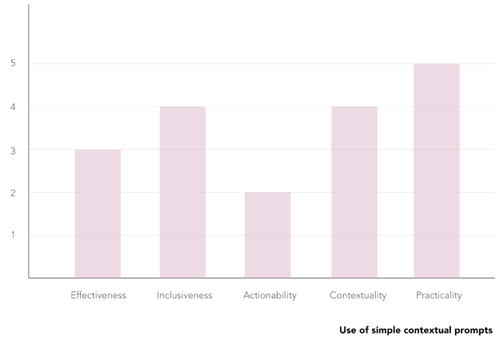


Figure 28. Bar chart analysis use of simple contextual prompts, own work

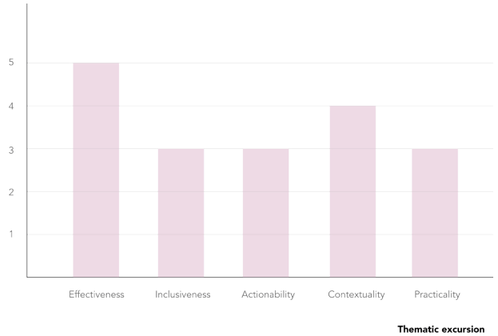


Figure 29. Bar chart analysis thematic excursion, own work

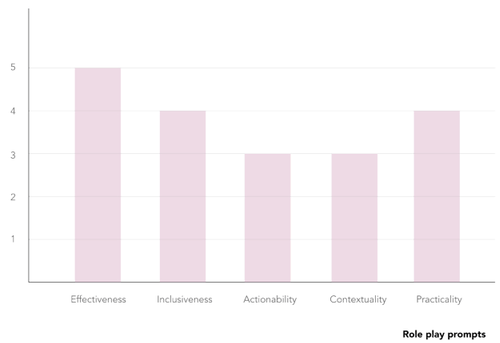


Figure 30. Bar chart analysis role play prompts, own work

4.3.4 Chapter conclusion

The methods tested in this participation session were grounded in the structure introduced at the beginning of the chapter, designed to operationalize gender-sensitive strategies in participatory processes. The session served as a practical evaluation of this framework, using methods across different levels—basic (e.g., turn-taking, accessible locations), active (e.g., excursions, prompts), and radical (e.g., co-creation exercises).

The evaluation reveals that while some methods, such as role-play prompts and thematic mapping, were particularly effective in uncovering gendered experiences, others, like structured turn giving and asking simple prompts, contributed more indirectly by fostering inclusive dialogue. This demonstrates that not all the methods from the structure have the same effectiveness: some methods work well on their own while others have more of a complementary function. A combination of both these functions works best in addressing both the social dynamics of participation and the spatial characteristics of the environment.

Furthermore, the analysis underscores that both structural requirements—removing participation barriers and incorporating gendered spatial themes—must be addressed to meaningfully engage with gender in planning. It also shows that methods from different engagement levels—basic, active, and radical—can each contribute significantly, even if their intensity or visibility varies. Crucially, the session revealed that a combination of methodologies from each level is most effective. A combination gives each participant the opportunity to meaningfully participate in a way that they feel comfortable with. This reveals that the incorporated levels are not only beneficial for the organizer of the participation but also for the participant.

The sequencing of exercises also proved effective, especially on the incorporation side of the structure: starting with low-threshold activities and gradually progressing to more reflective or complex tasks helped participants ease into the topic of gender and engage more deeply over time. This suggests that it is important to think about using which methods when, and maybe not starting your participation session with an exercise from the radical level.

This chapter reinforces the practical relevance of the proposed structure by demonstrating how its components can be applied and tested. It also offers valuable insights for refining and adapting the framework in future participatory processes, emphasizing that flexibility, intentionality, and combining methods are key to work towards inclusive participation that actively addresses gender issues.

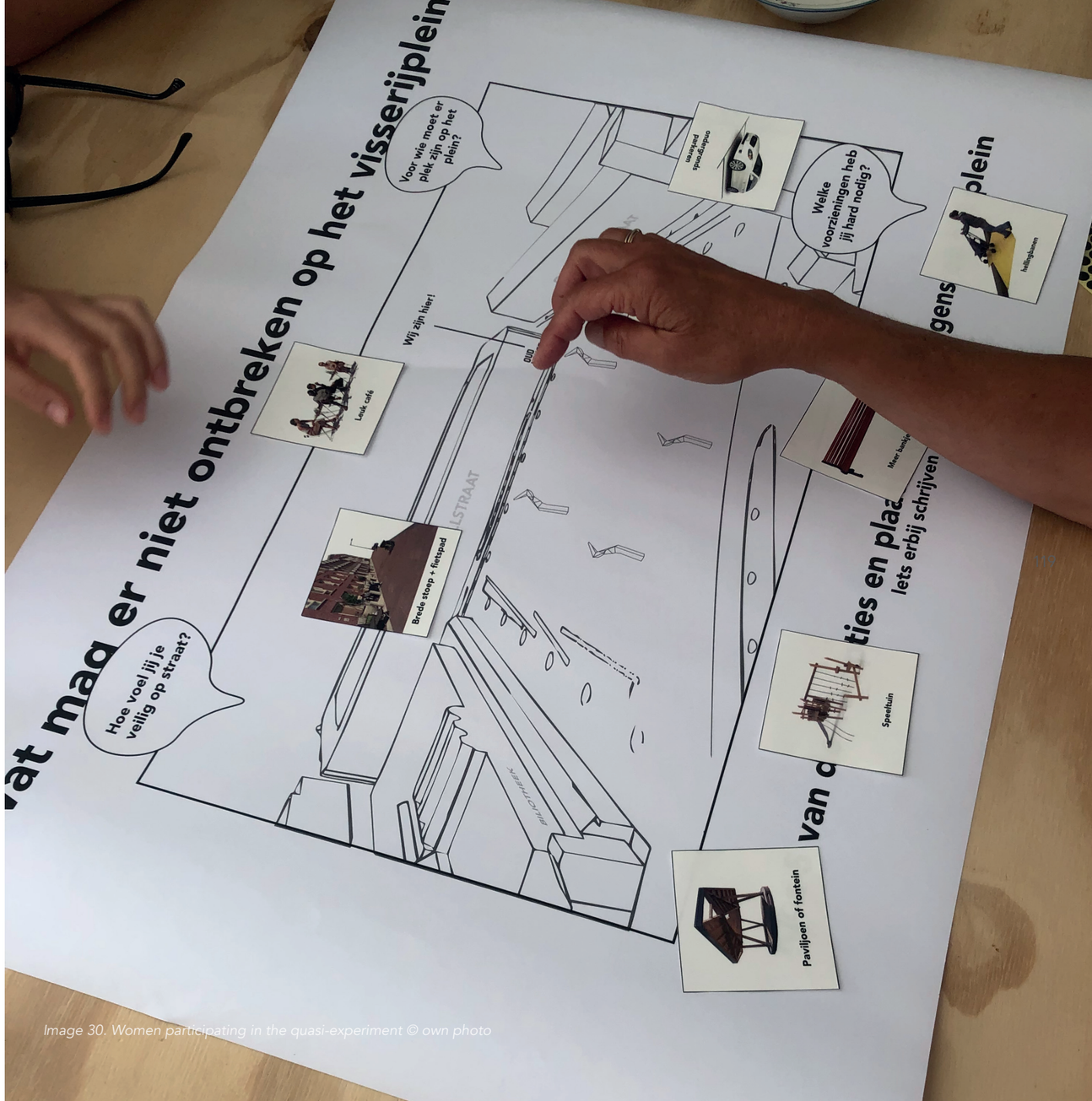


Image 30. Women participating in the quasi-experiment © own photo

4.4 The pink thread

Figure 31 summarizes the findings from the different methods. To highlight the connections between them, pink threads run through the figure, representing recurring themes. Making these threads was an important step, as it allows to see how individual insights relate to each other and to a bigger picture.

The first pink thread appears across many findings, emphasizing how spatial aspects of the gendered city — accessibility, mobility, and safety — are deeply interconnected and significantly affect lived experience. These issues must be addressed in participatory processes, making them a key requirement in the structure. The second thread highlights barriers, both mental and physical, that women face in participating, making this another essential requirement. A third thread shows how gendered experiences are not isolated, they are influenced by context: which can be difference in place but also identity. In participation this translates to the need to check biases and need to address intersectionality. A fourth, smaller thread points to the newly emerging theme of representation. Lastly, a thread across several findings reflects the need for broader support, policy changes, and a stronger mandate to integrate gender considerations into participation.

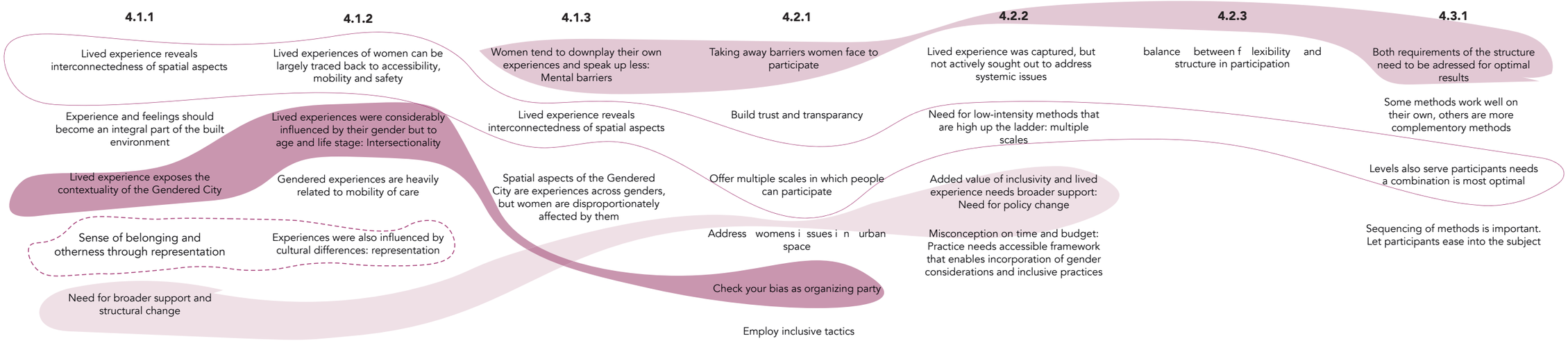


Figure 31. Pink threads between all the findings from different methods, own work

05
The manual

How are the findings translated into practical knowledge?

Image 31. Women walking the streets in Florence © Ruth Orkin Archive

5.1 The manual

A structure (Figure 32) has been developed and refined based on the findings presented in Chapter 4. This structure serves as a practical guide and is intended for developers, spatial consultancy agencies, municipalities, architects, and other organizations involved in participatory processes within the built environment. It is especially relevant for those responsible for carrying out the participation process, whether from the public or private sector. It offers clear guidance on how to implement gender-inclusive participation, detailing the structure itself, its application, and the rationale behind it.

Why Gender-Inclusive Participation?

As outlined in the problem statement of this thesis, many women still face daily challenges in urban life, despite policies like gender mainstreaming aimed at reducing inequality. These efforts often fall short in producing practical changes, underscoring the need for more participatory, ground-up approaches.

This thesis proposes that participatory processes can more effectively address gender-based urban issues. However, existing frameworks often lack inclusivity, particularly regarding gender. Findings from Chapter 4.1 support this, showing that spatial gender inequalities are highly contextual and often emerge in the micro and meso spheres of daily life (chapter 4.1, p. 84). These insights emphasize the importance of ground-up strategies, making participatory processes a critical platform

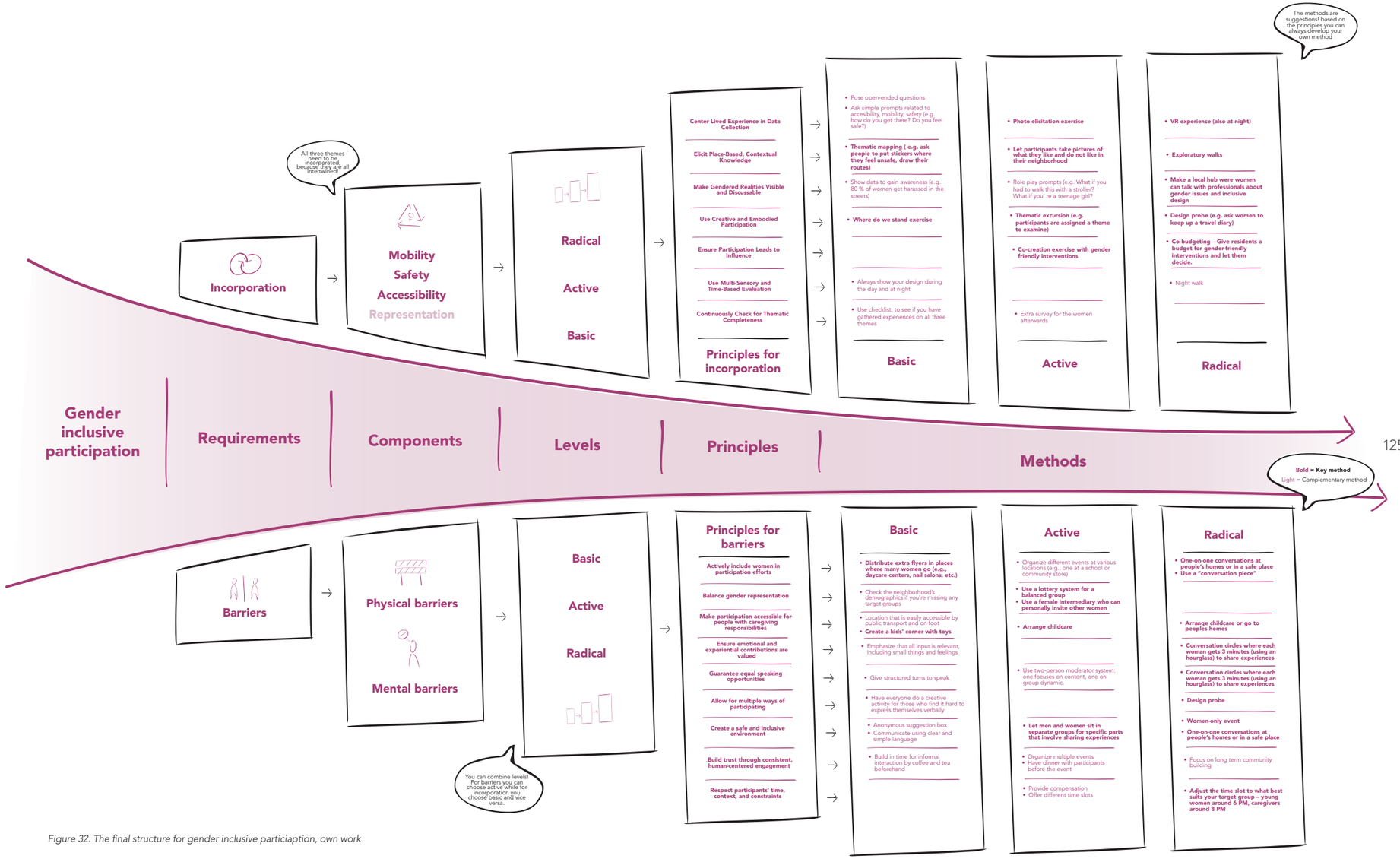


Figure 32. The final structure for gender inclusive particiaption, own work

for identifying and addressing such nuanced challenges.

The structure was developed in response to the findings that organizers of participatory processes often struggle to implement inclusive practices and effectively address gender-related issues. This finding aligns with existing literature, which highlights the broader challenge authorities face in translating complex social issues into spatial planning strategies (chapter 2.2).

As demonstrated in Chapter 4.2, particularly within urban development, participation processes still lack sufficient attention to inclusivity and gender sensitivity. This is largely due to a lack of knowledge among professionals, coupled with the common misconception that incorporating these considerations is overly time-consuming and costly. The structure aims to counter these barriers by offering a straightforward and practical guide. It walks practitioners through manageable steps for integrating gender considerations into participatory processes, and is supported by a toolkit featuring suggested methods to apply in practice.

Step 1: Requirements
The first step outlines two essential requirements for enabling gender-inclusive participation: barriers and incorporation.

Removing Barriers to Participation
As the findings in Chapters 4.1 and 4.2 show, participation processes tend to be disproportionately attended by men, and when women do attend, they often engage differently. This discrepancy prompts the question: Why are women underrepresented, and what prevents their participation? Without addressing these barriers, the lived experiences of women—which are vital to be able to address the Gendered City—remain underrepresented or entirely absent.

Thematic Incorporation of Gender
However, removing barriers alone is insufficient. Chapter 4.1 revealed that women are not always consciously aware that their experiences are shaped by gender, often normalizing hindrances such as inaccessible routes or difficulties navigating public spaces with strollers. As a result, even when women are present in participatory sessions, their gendered experiences may remain unvoiced unless deliberately surfaced. Therefore, participation must not only be inclusive in terms of access but must also actively incorporate themes related to gendered spatial experiences.

Step 2. Components
Each requirement is broken down into specific components that clarify what needs to be addressed.

Barriers to Participation: Physical and Mental
Qualitative research identified both physical and mental barriers that inhibit meaningful participation by women. For example, expert interviews highlighted practical constraints such as caregiving responsibilities that limit physical attendance. However, findings showed that mental barriers proved just as important. Even if there is equal attendance in terms of gender, there are social gender roles and inequalities embedded in our society which often result in women feeling less confident to speak, or having their input undervalued. This was already briefly addressed in the literature (Chapter 2.3, p. 33) but further reinforced by the empirical findings (Chapter 4.1, pp. 90–91). Women tend to downplay their own experiences, are less likely to assert themselves and express themselves more freely in women-only settings. For women to be able to meaningfully participate, both types of barriers must be addressed.

Thematic Incorporation: Key Spatial Elements
Literature (Chapter 2.1) identified three recurring spatial themes central to gendered urban experience: accessibility, mobility, and safety. The research findings reinforce that the gendered experiences women face in everyday life can be mostly related to those three elements (Chapter 4.1.1. & 4.1.2). A fourth theme, representation, emerged in the findings (Chapter 4.1, p. 92). Though less prominent, representation still influences how women experience and perceive the built environment.
Importantly, these elements are interconnected—gendered urban experiences rarely relate to a single factor. This was already suggested in the literature (chapter 2.1, p.27) but further underscored in the findings (chapter 4.1.4, p.92), addressing only one element in isolation can lead to ineffective or even counterproductive outcomes (e.g., installing a public toilet in an unsafe location). To fully capture the nuances of gendered spatial experience, all components should be incorporated into participation processes.

Step 3: Levels
With the core requirements and components defined, the structure introduces a third step: levels of engagement. These levels represent varying degrees of integration of gender considerations into participatory practices.

The need for multiple levels stems from two findings. Firstly, practitioners in the built environment sector seek low-threshold, easily applicable tools. This stems from monetary, time limitations and lack of knowledge that often lead to practitioners skipping themes of inclusivity and gender equality all together. Secondly, the findings from chapter 4.1 show that gendered urban experiences are highly contextual, and that different contexts ask for different approaches. The proposed levels—Basic, Active, and Radical—offer varying degrees for incorporation and barriers. The basic level proposes small changes that can be incorporated within the existing format, the active level incorporates new methods that actively address the theme at hand

and the radical level fully adapts the participation session to the target group, in this case women. This tiered system allows organizers to choose a level aligned with their project's scope, capacity, and context. For instance, a practitioner may opt for the Basic level due to limited budget or time, while another may implement Radical-level strategies for a more immersive, co-creative engagement.

An essential feature of this tiered structure is its flexibility. Practitioners are not restricted to a single level; rather, they are encouraged to combine methods across levels to create a process that is both inclusive and responsive to the group's needs. As shown in Chapter 4.3, these levels are not only relevant for practitioners but also for participants. Different individuals prefer varying levels of involvement (Chapter 4.2, p. 98)—some may want to contribute brief feedback, while others may prefer deep co-creation. Combining methods from multiple levels, as tested in the quasi-experiment in Chapter 4.3, proved effective in creating a participatory environment where every participant could engage at their preferred level of intensity. Combining different levels will result in a broader and richer collection of lived experiences.

In addition to combining levels, the sequence in which methods are introduced plays a significant role. As came forth in chapter 4.2.1, gendered experiences in public space are not topics that people routinely discuss, and participants may not initially recognize how their everyday challenges are linked to gender. Therefore, beginning with less intensive (Basic-level) methods can help participants build confidence and trust, making them more open and prepared to engage in deeper discussions later on.

Step 4. Principles

The fourth step in the structure introduces principles that serve as the foundational guidelines for developing or selecting methods within gender-inclusive participation. These principles are derived directly from the previously identified requirements and components. They function as a translation—helping bridge the gap between theoretical insights and practical application. In doing so, they enable practitioners to make informed decisions, adapt methods to local contexts, or even design new methods — as long as they address the underlying principle. These principles also prevent the structure from becoming overly prescriptive. Instead of providing a rigid checklist, the framework offers strategic flexibility: enabling participation organizers to respond to the specific gender dynamics, barriers, and spatial issues present in their context, while still adhering to the essential values of gender inclusivity.

Step 5. Methods

The final step of the structure offers a practical translation of the previous steps into concrete tools: a selection of methods that can be used to implement gender-inclusive participation. These methods are not rigid prescriptions but informed suggestions, developed based on literature, expert interviews, and empirical findings from this research. As shown in Chapter 4.3, nearly all tested methods had a measurable impact on either removing barriers or incorporating gender themes. However, a clear distinction emerged: key methods that directly address gendered urban issues (e.g. childcare provision, thematic mapping, or guided excursions). Complementary methods that function better in combination with others (e.g. open-ended prompts, asking simple prompts). The methods are therefore categorized based on level and function. While the suggested methods form a practical starting point, they are not exhaustive. Practitioners are encouraged to adapt these tools or develop new ones, as long as they remain aligned with the principles in Step 4. The goal is not standardization, but rather intentional, reflective practice that genuinely engages with gendered urban experiences.

The detailed descriptions of the principles and methods are included in Appendix E of this thesis.

Conclusion

This manual presents a structured, flexible, and practical guide for integrating gender-inclusive principles into participatory processes within the built environment. Grounded in both empirical findings and existing literature, the structure responds directly to the contextual challenges and barriers faced by women in urban spaces. By outlining clear requirements, components, engagement levels, guiding principles, and practical methods, it equips practitioners with the tools needed to create more equitable and responsive participation processes. Ultimately, this manual encourages a shift from policy rhetoric to meaningful, lived inclusion—ensuring that gendered urban experiences are not only heard but actively shape the spaces we all share.

A seperate, practical, less academic, manual was created as a by product for this thesis. This manual is made as a booklet for practitioners to be able to use in everyday practice. Based on the manual, a serious game was also developed that practitioners can play when designing their participation session. The game challenges and helps practitioners to think about what kind of gender sensitive methods they could include. The manual and serious game are openly available thorugh the repository of the TU Delft.

06
The ending

conclusion, discussion and reflections on the process

Image 32. Teenager on a public bench © Didi Sattmann Archive

6.1 Conclusion

Aim | This thesis aimed to find ways to effectively address the spatial inequalities of the Gendered City, as current top-down approaches often fall short. By connecting citizen participation processes and the Gendered City through the concept of the lived experience a new approach for tackling gender based spatial issues is formed. The aim was to find how the spatial inequalities could be better addressed in participation processes while simultaneously provide tools for a more equitable participation framework. The main research question was, "In which way can citizen participation processes, by harnessing 'the lived experience', be structured to function as a bottom-up approach to address the spatial inequalities of the Gendered City?" The results and an answer to this question are described in this conclusion.

Main result | This thesis set out to explore how citizen participation processes can be restructured to more effectively address the spatial inequalities of the Gendered City. By positioning lived experience as a central element in participatory practices, it becomes clear that bottom-up approaches can uncover nuanced, often overlooked insights into how space is experienced differently across gender lines.

The research shows that citizen participation processes can indeed function as a bottom-up approach to address these inequalities—but only if lived experience is actively sought out and systematically integrated into them. This means not simply creating space for input, but intentionally seeking out and valuing the diverse, embodied experiences of urban life, particularly those shaped by gender.

Equally important is the finding that spatial aspects of the Gendered City must be directly addressed within participation. Without this focus, such inequalities remain invisible or are deprioritized even if lived experiences are sought out. Therefore, gender must serve as a foundational lens in how participation is structured and facilitated if it is to actively address gender issues in the urban environment.

Yet for practitioners, making this shift is not straightforward. Many lack clear strategies or feel unequipped to embed these values meaningfully into practice. As a response, this thesis proposes a structured framework that guides both the design and execution of more inclusive participation. This structure was necessary—not just as a tool—but as a support system to help practitioners move from intention to action.

The proposed structure offers value for all involved. For organizers, it provides a practical guide for embedding lived experience and gender sensitivity into participatory processes. For participants, it creates a comfortable and supportive environment for sharing their lived experiences by offering multiple levels of engagement, thereby broadening the reach of the participation process. Together, this fosters more equitable, responsive, and just urban development—making the Gendered City not only visible but transformable through collective input and action.

Sub-results | To answer the research question, the project was divided into three parts. The first part explored how lived experiences could expose the spatial inequalities of the Gendered City, the second investigated current participation processes and the opportunities embedded in them and the last tried to bring those two findings together in an action where a structure for addressing gendered based spatial inequalities in participation is tested.

The first part revealed that women's lived experiences are critical in exposing spatial inequalities—inequalities not only of form but of perception, navigation, and daily adaptation. Issues of mobility, accessibility, and safety are deeply interlinked, and any meaningful intervention must address them collectively. These experiences are shaped by intersecting identities such as age, caregiving responsibilities, cultural background, and socio-economic status, underlining the importance of an intersectional approach. Representation in public space also emerged as a vital, though less prominent, theme—affecting feelings of inclusion and safety. In short, the Gendered City can only be understood and transformed by centering the rich, varied narratives of its inhabitants.

The second part revealed that while current participation practices have potential to address spatial inequalities through lived experience, this potential is underused. Structural barriers—like limited time, budgets, and lack of clear frameworks and tools—hinder meaningful engagement. Lived experience must be actively centered through inclusive, flexible, and gender-sensitive approaches. The findings suggest that unlocking the transformative potential of participation requires a shift: from high-effort expectations to low-threshold, high-impact practices, and from lived experience as a by-catch toward operational tools and frameworks that embed inclusivity and gender issues into the everyday workings of participation processes.

The final part of the research involved testing a proposed structure designed to integrate gender considerations into participation. The findings showed that effective participation requires the removal of both physical and mental barriers that prevent women from engaging fully. The inclusion of spatial themes—accessibility, mobility, and safety—ensured that gendered experiences were meaningfully captured. The use of multiple levels of engagement proved most effective, with some methods serving better as core approaches and others as supportive tools.

Relation between findings | In conclusion, citizen participation processes can be intentionally structured to effectively address gender-based spatial inequalities. The framework proposed in Chapter 5 ensures that women's gendered lived experiences are acknowledged and can actively inform decision-making. By embedding key spatial themes—accessibility, mobility, and safety—into the participatory process, these experiences are meaningfully centered.

Equity is further enhanced by removing the physical and psychological barriers that often limit women's full participation. In doing so, the framework makes participation more equitable. By linking the concept of the Gendered City with participation through the lens of lived experience, the role of participation expands—from a consultative tool to a transformative mechanism for addressing systemic urban issues.

Ultimately, this approach grounds solutions and interventions in the real, embodied experiences of users, ensuring that urban development responds directly to the needs of those affected by spatial inequalities.

6.2 Discussion

This chapter begins by situating the thesis within a broader academic and contextual framework, highlighting its overall position and contribution. It then proceeds to examine specific theoretical and practical implications arising from the study.

Academic contribution

The thesis contributes to the academic field by foregrounding the intersection of gender, urban space, and participatory governance—an area that remains under-theorized despite growing attention to equality in urban and policy studies. Through the development of a practical framework, a new lens is offered through which practitioners can identify, assess, and mitigate gender-based spatial inequalities but also gender barriers in participatory settings.

What sets this thesis apart is its new approach to understanding and addressing gender-based spatial inequalities, one that moves beyond conventional analyses of access or representation. The contribution of this new approach lies in its ability to operationalize complex, often abstract notions of gendered spatial injustice into concrete analytical and design tools for participation. While much of the existing literature identifies the existence of inequalities, fewer frameworks offer practical pathways for systematically identifying and responding to them within participatory settings. By bridging theory with practice, this thesis provides both a conceptual advancement and a methodological innovation. It invites scholars to rethink how spatial justice and gender equity can be embedded into participatory planning, design, and governance processes in more intentional and nuanced ways. In doing so, it not only expands the theoretical terrain of gender and space studies but also aligns with and strengthens a broader academic movement toward more inclusive, just, and reflexive participatory practices.

Lived experience: experiential knowledge is data

By placing lived experience at the center, this thesis offers a significant contribution to the growing body of knowledge that values experiential knowledge as legitimate data and critical source of insight in academic and policy discourse. The lived experiences of women can reveal critical data on the Gendered City and is therefore a pivotal tool for addressing gender-based spatial inequalities. Through the collection and analysis of gendered experiences, lived experience becomes a means of accessing knowledge that is often excluded from formal participatory mechanisms, yet is essential for understanding the subtle ways in which space and power interact. My research also highlights how gendered experiences profoundly affect not only everyday experiences in public space but also who participates in citizen participation processes, how they do so and what forms of participation are even conceivable. By integrating these lived narratives into the development of my framework, I not only illuminate how lived experience can reveal inequalities of the Gendered City but also the subtle but powerful ways in which gender inequalities manifest in participatory processes.

This focus adds value to academic discussions by demonstrating how lived experience can be systematically gathered and translated into a framework that informs both analysis and intervention. In doing so, it reinforces the legitimacy of experiential knowledge as a basis for developing more inclusive participation models—especially in contexts where structural inequalities are deeply embedded in spatial design, institutional culture, or social expectations. The thesis thus contributes to a broader methodological shift in spatial as well as participatory research: one that emphasizes not just who is present, but how they encounter, interpret, and navigate in gendered ways.

Interdisciplinary connections

Moreover, this thesis invites interdisciplinary dialogue by bridging insights from urban planning, gender studies and participatory practices. Scholars across these fields may find value in how the framework operationalizes abstract concepts into actionable criteria, enabling comparative research and practical application. By articulating how gender is not a neutral backdrop but an active agent in shaping participation, my work contributes to a deeper understanding of how power operates within participatory mechanisms. As such, it provides a foundation for further research and policy innovation aimed at fostering more just, inclusive, and spatially aware citizen participation processes.

Theoretical discussion

The Gendered City as a Dependent Variable

This research contributed valuable insights into the concept of the Gendered City by illustrating how lived experiences can make visible the often-overlooked spatial inequalities that women and marginalized groups encounter in urban environments. Drawing on existing literature, the Gendered City was approached as a dependent variable rather than a direct object of empirical investigation. This was done because the study's aim was not to provide an in-depth analysis of the concept but to link it to citizen participation, so that actionable outcomes would emerge. For this reason, it was a well-considered choice to leave the exploration of the Gendered City concept behind in the empirical part of the research.

However, the expert interviews (Chapter 4.1.1) brought forth a significant amount of additional content related to the Gendered City, indicating that while gendered spatial inequalities have long been recognized in theory, they remain underexplored in practice. The empirical research also showed that the Gendered City is very nuanced and that the convergence of different aspects is what makes that women experience the city unequally.

These findings suggest that the Gendered City is still a developing field with many unanswered questions. In the domains of urban development and planning, the issue of gender inequality in urban space requires stronger collective recognition and dedicated resources. Only through deeper inquiry and more widespread institutional support can the concept of the Gendered City be fully understood and expanded—especially in terms of its impact on the everyday lives of women and other marginalized groups.

Arnstein's ladder

While Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation remains a seminal model in understanding the gradations of public involvement—from manipulation to citizen control—the research reveals its limitations within contemporary participatory practices. The ladder is undoubtedly valuable in highlighting the importance of meaningful citizen engagement and the potential for citizen power. However, the findings of the research show that the framework falls short in acknowledging the diverse capacities and structural inequalities that shape people's ability to participate.

Arnstein's model does not sufficiently address the structural and institutional barriers that perpetuate exclusion, nor does it provide guidance on how to foster equitable participation. While well-intentioned, it risks overlooking the need for differentiated approaches that support participation in ways that are responsive to people's lived realities.

Thus, the ladder lacks an equity lens—it measures the degree of power-sharing without questioning whether the conditions exist for everyone to climb the ladder in the first place.

While Arnstein's ladder remains a foundational tool, it needs to be reinterpreted or complemented by more nuanced models that prioritize inclusivity, recognize varying capacities, and actively seek to dismantle the barriers to participation—thereby creating a more just and equitable participatory framework.

Gendermainstreaming

This thesis underscores the importance of grounding gender-sensitive planning in the lived experiences of citizens, emphasizing the need for bottom-up, context-specific approaches to identify everyday barriers and co-create meaningful solutions. While such participatory methods are crucial, the research also reveals that they are insufficient on their own. Structural change requires institutional backing through clear policies, mandates, and resources. Current gender mainstreaming efforts—often criticized in the literature for their top-down nature—are not inherently ineffective, but they fall short when disconnected from bottom-up practical tools: they only address one part of the problem (figure 33). Meaningful progress lies in integrating both top-down and bottom-up strategies. From this perspective, the thesis does not position itself as an alternative to gender mainstreaming but rather as a complementary contribution that bridges practical design thinking with broader policy discourse.

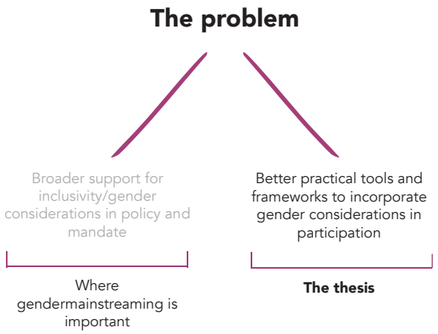


Figure 33. depiction of positioning of the thesis within the broader problem, own work

Focus on one side of the problem

The problem is thus two-sided. To reflect further on this, as someone based in a design faculty, my approach naturally leaned toward design thinking and the development of practical, actionable tools. This orientation shaped the thesis's focus on creating a clear, well-structured, step-by-step framework to support more inclusive and gender-sensitive participatory practices—an ambition that was both guided and validated by the findings of the research. As highlighted throughout the thesis, such a framework is a key requirement for practitioners seeking to translate inclusive ideals into concrete, day-to-day processes. However, this design-driven focus also meant that the other side of the problem—particularly the need broad support, policies and mandate for inclusive participation—were not addressed in full (figure 33). Structural change in participatory processes requires more than improved techniques; it demands shifts in policy, including more generous time allocation, sustainable funding, and institutional mandates that prioritize genuine engagement over symbolic gestures. Addressing these systemic constraints lie beyond the scope of this thesis, which intentionally concentrated on tool development to meet an urgent and practical need within the field.

The Loss of Participatory Value

An important and thought-provoking finding emerged from the case study presented in section 4.2.2, which exemplifies typical participatory processes within the built environment sector. The analysis revealed that inclusive measures are often absent—not due to active resistance, but largely because they are not mandated and are perceived as requiring additional time and financial resources. In contrast, the expert interviews (section 4.2.3), conducted with professionals selected for their innovative practices, demonstrated that inclusive participation is not only feasible but already being implemented in certain contexts. These experts tended to operate in the social design sector and more exploratory settings, such as studies investigating how women experience specific urban spaces like underpasses, or research into public sentiment regarding particular issues. Their work illustrates that inclusive participation can be effectively integrated when there is a broader mandate or vision. This contrast suggests that

while inclusive participation is possible, it is often neglected or deprioritized in standard participatory processes within the built environment. Between these fields, it seems there is much opportunity for boundary spanning: the practice of connecting and facilitating collaboration across different disciplines, sectors, or social groups to enable communication, understanding, and problem-solving (Schotter et al., 2017). To better understand this discrepancy and the opportunities for cross-field translation of inclusive practices, further research is needed to explore why inclusivity is not prioritized in mainstream built environment practices and whether or for which reason initial ambitions for inclusiveness are being lost over the course of project development.

Translation to Other Marginalized Groups

This thesis specifically focused on addressing gender inequalities within participatory practices, with a deliberate emphasis on gender as the central lens of analysis. This focus was informed not only by the empirical findings but also by the literature, which highlights that under the broad umbrella of "diversity and inclusion," the specific needs and experiences of certain groups—particularly women—often become diluted or overlooked (p.31). By centering gender, the research aimed to avoid this generalization and instead provide a focused, in-depth exploration of gendered experiences in urban participation. However, this choice also introduces a degree of tension: while the framework aspires to be a foundation that can be adapted for other marginalized groups, it was not explicitly designed with their distinct needs in mind. This raises a broader dilemma—although it is neither feasible nor practical to develop a separate framework for every minority group, there is a risk that translating a gender-focused tool too broadly may obscure the unique challenges faced by other communities.

Nonetheless, several elements of the proposed structure—such as the identification of barriers, the incorporation of diverse perspectives, and the stratification of participation levels—hold relevance beyond gender and may be adaptable to other forms of marginalization. To meaningfully extend the framework to other groups, further research is necessary to understand how these concepts translate across different axes of inequality and exclusion.

Methodological discussion

Lastly, the methodology that was used to conduct the research is discussed. Methodologically, this thesis contributes to ongoing debates in feminist geography and urban studies by advancing feminist critiques of participation. Through the use of exploratory walks and workshops, the research employs innovative methods during the empirical phase while also contributing to methodological practice by developing a guiding structure. Rather than offering a fixed toolbox of newly developed methods, this structure outlines which issues to consider, when to address them, and what tools may be appropriate in different contexts. Notably, some of the same methods used to collect data—such as the exploratory walks—were also integrated into the final framework, creating a feedback loop between process and outcome.

A Broad, explorative, mixed-method approach

Given the exploratory nature of this research, a mixed-methods approach was deliberately chosen to enable a broad and multifaceted engagement with the research questions. A variety of data collection methods—including workshops, exploratory walks, expert interviews, case studies, and a quasi-experiment—were employed to examine the complex social phenomena at the intersection of feminist theory, urban planning, and citizen participation. The central concept of lived experience, which served as a key link between the field of gender-based urban inequality and participatory practices, required a flexible and explorative approach capable of capturing diverse perspectives, realities and opportunities.

By employing multiple methods, the study was able to address the research questions from different angles, thereby increasing the likelihood of uncovering unexpected variables, relationships, or insights that might have remained hidden in a more narrowly defined study. The aim was to triangulate the findings to strengthen the validity of the conclusions by allowing for convergence across different types of data and participant groups.

A choice within this explorative approach was the intentional diversity of respondents across methods. Each method engaged with a distinct sample to capture a wide range of lived experiences and to identify recurring patterns. For instance, the exploratory walks included women from various age groups, backgrounds, and neighborhoods, while the workshop included both women and men to facilitate comparison. This breadth of perspectives allowed for the identification of broad, gendered patterns in urban experience.
However, this approach also involved certain trade-offs. The diversity of methods led to smaller sample sizes within individual methods. The diversity in respondents also limits the ability to make context-specific claims. Nonetheless, this limitation was considered acceptable given the study's aim: to explore broad patterns and conceptual linkages rather than to provide definitive or localized conclusions. Future research could strengthen the validity of findings by expanding sample sizes and increasing the intersectional representation of participants, particularly by including more women from diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds.

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Incorporating a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework into this thesis added meaningful value by

fostering a collaborative, inclusive research process that bridged academic inquiry with real-world relevance. Unlike traditional methodologies, PAR engages participants as co-researchers—actively contributing to the design, implementation, and analysis—ensuring that the findings are grounded in lived experience and socially relevant. This approach proved especially effective in exploring gendered experiences in urban environments, where early and active involvement of affected communities is essential.

PAR is a cyclic process. While it was clear from the outset that only one cycle would be feasible, the PAR framework was chosen because of the unique value it offered for this research. The subject matter—gendered issues in urban environments—demanded the early and active involvement of those most affected by the issues at hand. This participatory approach proved to be highly effective, generating meaningful engagement and yielding insights that would not likely have emerged through more traditional research methods. Furthermore, the action phase provided important new perspectives on the proposed structure, demonstrating the potential of PAR even within a limited timeframe. To enhance the validity and robustness of the findings, additional cycles would be necessary to more thoroughly test and refine the structure in diverse contexts.

Ethical Reflections on PAR

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were made to ensure that participants clearly understood the scope and purpose of their involvement, and that no unrealistic expectations were created. In retrospect, the Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework was applied in a broad and somewhat limited sense. While several citizens were actively engaged as participants, PAR was not implemented in the more traditional sense—where participants are embedded in a longstanding process that leads to tangible, physical outcomes, such as a redesign of a public square or a new housing development.

This approach raises important ethical questions around participation fatigue and reciprocity—namely, what the participants received in return for their time and input. As the findings of the thesis show, meaningful participation must strike a balance between engaging people in a valuable way and respecting the limits of what can reasonably be asked of them. This principle also applies to PAR, and in hindsight, greater attention could have been paid to this balance during the research design phase.

Practical limitations played a significant role in shaping what could be offered back to the community. The empirical phase of the thesis spanned just three months, which made it difficult to provide tangible outcomes, such as a new urban design or financial compensation. Ideally, the PAR component would have been embedded in an existing, ongoing participatory process, allowing the research to contribute more directly to a concrete result. Unfortunately, this proved unfeasible within the scope this Master's thesis.

Nevertheless, recognizing the value of PAR and the importance of testing participation in action, a participatory event was still organized. This event was voluntary and carefully framed to avoid creating false expectations. Participants were informed that the session aimed to foster critical reflection on their environment, which in itself offered value. This transparency was crucial in maintaining ethical integrity. This suggests that while PAR offers significant added value, its application requires careful consideration of the balance between citizen involvement and the delivery of usable, meaningful outcomes for them specifically.

Overall, the exploratory nature of this research inevitably leaves several questions unanswered and points to numerous directions for future inquiry. However, this openness is not a limitation, but rather a strength. It reflects the complexity of the topic and underscores the evolving nature of discussions around gender inclusivity in urban planning. By focusing on gender not only as a design consideration but as an integral aspect of participatory processes, this thesis aims to contribute to a broader, ongoing dialogue. It invites urban planners, policymakers, and researchers to critically reflect on whose voices are included in shaping our cities—and how. In doing so, it lays the groundwork for future research and practice that can further explore, challenge, and expand our understanding of equity in the urban realm.

6.3 Reflection - TU Delft

What is the relation between your graduation project topic, your master track and your master programme (MSc AUBS)?

My graduation project originated from a pressing societal issue: the Gendered City. At first glance, this appears to be a predominantly spatial concern, seemingly disconnected from the Management in the Built Environment (MBE) track. However, by framing gendered urban issues through the lens of participatory processes, I shifted the focus from purely spatial design to the design of processes—aligning closely with the core principles of MBE. The central question became: How can we design processes that better address gendered dimensions in the built environment? In doing so, the project firmly positioned itself within the MBE domain.

That said, this thesis also highlights the integrated nature of the MSc AUBS programme. Although it is structured into distinct tracks, the programme encourages interdisciplinary thinking. This project intersects with Urbanism due to the urban spatial issues it tries to address, yet its emphasis on process development anchors it in MBE (figure 34). Initially, I struggled to see how a societal issue like gender inequality could be meaningfully addressed within the MBE framework. However, through the Civic Transformation studio—particularly the focus on Innovation and Vision for Inclusive Communities—I came to realize that such challenges are not only relevant but essential to our field. This experience reinforced my belief that addressing complex societal issues requires a cross-disciplinary, process-driven approach, and that MBE plays a vital role in shaping inclusive urban futures.

How did your research influence your recommendations and how did the recommendations influence your research?

This relationship became particularly evident after receiving feedback during the P2 phase. Initially, my thesis aimed to explore a new, bottom-up approach to gender mainstreaming. However, through critical reflection and feedback, it became clear that the objective was not to develop an alternative gender mainstreaming strategy per se, but rather to provide a practical and applicable framework to address gender-based spatial inequalities.

Figure 34. The position of this thesis within the MSc AUBS master, own work

This shift in focus significantly influenced the direction of my research. Rather than pursuing abstract or high-level strategic concepts, the research began to concentrate on designing a concrete, actionable structure. This change also impacted the way I conducted interviews. Conversations addressed broader themes around the value of lived experiences in participatory practices but as the project focus sharpened, the interviews evolved to include more specific questions about tools, methods, and decision-making processes used by practitioners.
Moreover, clarifying the thesis objective helped redefine the role of the Gendered City within my research. Rather than investigating the concept of the Gendered City itself, I treated it as a dependent variable—something that my proposed approach aimed to impact. In doing so, the research became less about understanding the problem in isolation and more about identifying what is needed in practice to address it effectively. This reciprocal relationship between research and recommendations ensured that both evolved in response to each other, ultimately resulting in a more grounded and implementable outcome.

How do you assess the value of your way of working (your approach, your used methods, used methodology)?

The research followed a theory-informed, practice-oriented approach. A comprehensive literature review formed the theoretical foundation, which was instrumental in shaping the empirical phase of the study. This grounding ensured that the research was conceptually robust and helped clarify the nuanced, subjective, and sensitive nature of the topic—highlighting the need for an exploratory methodology.

Given the aim of the thesis to go beyond theoretical insights and deliver a practical outcome, Participatory Action Research (PAR) was chosen as the guiding methodological framework. PAR proved to be highly valuable throughout the research process. It emphasized the importance of early and continuous stakeholder engagement, encouraging me to look beyond conventional expert interviews and instead involve citizens through methods such as workshops and exploratory walks. These participatory methods enriched the research by grounding it in lived experience and diverse perspectives.

Importantly, the PAR approach also challenged me to move beyond conceptual design. It required that the proposed structure be tested and validated in real-world contexts, ensuring that it was not just theoretically sound but also practically applicable. This step was pivotal; when designing interventions intended for practical use, it is essential to step outside the academic sphere and engage directly with the environments and communities the design is meant to serve.

In this way, the methodology and my approach were deeply aligned with the objectives of the research. The combination of a strong theoretical foundation and a participatory, action-oriented framework ensured that the final output—a practical structure—was not only academically informed but also rooted in the needs and realities of its intended users, including both organizers of participatory processes and the participants themselves.

How do you assess the academic and societal value, scope, and implications of your graduation project, including ethical aspects?

This thesis offers both academic and societal value by addressing the persistent issue of gender-based spatial inequalities in urban environments—an area often overlooked in mainstream urban planning. Urban spaces are frequently shaped by implicit patriarchal norms, resulting in environments that fail to accommodate the needs of women and other marginalized groups. By critically examining this imbalance, the research contributes to a broader discourse on equity and inclusivity in the built environment.

Academically, the thesis bridges the fields of feminist geography and urban planning, translating theoretical insights into practical, participatory strategies. This interdisciplinary synthesis offers a valuable contribution to both bodies of knowledge, particularly through its application-oriented focus. Rather than remaining at the level of critique or conceptual discussion, the research delivers a concrete structure intended to support inclusive participation processes. In doing so, it demonstrates how academic research can lead to actionable frameworks in practice.

The societal value lies in the project's emphasis on grassroots involvement. By foregrounding the lived experiences of those most affected by spatial inequalities, the research highlights the importance of bottom-up engagement in planning processes. It advocates for a shift away from top-down approaches toward participatory practices that recognize and integrate diverse voices—particularly those of women—into the design of urban spaces.
The scope of the thesis is intentionally narrow, focusing specifically on gender inequality. This focus was a deliberate methodological choice, allowing the research to move beyond generalizations and toward specific, implementable solutions. While this may limit the direct applicability to other marginalized groups, it also sets a precedent for how similar frameworks could be adapted to address other forms of exclusion.

The implications of the project may seem modest at first glance, as the structure developed is most immediately relevant to those already motivated to address gender in participatory processes. However, the broader ambition is to offer a tool that could be integrated into any participatory process—thus embedding gender considerations as a standard practice rather than an exception. Realizing this ambition requires increased awareness and institutional willingness within the field to recognize the value of mainstreaming gender.

From an ethical standpoint, the project was designed with careful attention to inclusivity, sensitivity, and participant agency. Given the subjective and personal nature of the topic, it was crucial to approach all engagements—particularly workshops and walks—with respect, transparency, and informed consent. Participants were not treated as research subjects but as co-creators of knowledge. Ethical considerations also influenced the choice to test the proposed structure in practice, ensuring that the outcomes were not just designed for people, but with them.

How do you assess the value of the transferability of your project results?

The transferability of the project's outcomes is considerable, particularly within contexts that share similar characteristics with the Dutch planning and participation system. The thesis offers a foundational structure that can be adapted to address systemic issues in participatory processes, not only related to gender, but also potentially relevant for other marginalized groups facing spatial exclusion. It serves as a starting point—a framework that can be developed and expanded upon depending on the specific group or context in question.

That said, the research is rooted in the Dutch context, where citizen participation is relatively well-established and institutionalized. The framework was designed with this setting in mind, which includes certain legal structures, policy frameworks, and cultural attitudes toward public engagement. In other parts of the world, particularly in the Global South, participation often functions differently. While formal participation mechanisms may be less developed, these regions often have strong traditions of grassroots organization and community-led initiatives. The structure presented in this thesis does not directly account for these alternative models, and as such, its global applicability may be limited. For effective transferability across diverse contexts, the framework would require adaptation to local systems, power dynamics, and cultural practices. Nonetheless, its core principles—centering lived experience, promoting inclusion, and designing for equity—are widely relevant and provide a strong conceptual basis for further development.

How did the process influence you as a practitioner and as a researcher?

This process has significantly shaped my understanding of myself both as a practitioner and as a researcher. When I first chose the Management in the Built Environment (MBE) track, I did so with

some hesitation—not because of a lack of interest, but because I was drawn to many different aspects of the MSc AUBS programme. Looking back, I am confident in my choice. However, as a researcher, I discovered that I remain strongly design-oriented, as well as in design as an end-product as well as doing research by desdign. This inclination influenced the thesis to evolve into something closely resembling a social design project—one that aims to produce not only insight but also tangible, usable outcomes. I am motivated to generate results that extend beyond theoretical contribution, and instead offer practical tools for real-world application.

At the same time, my experience as a practitioner—especially during my internship—highlighted my need for research-based justification before taking action. I've come to value the process of immersing myself deeply in a topic, understanding its nuances, and making well-argued decisions. This duality—between research and action—became a defining theme in my journey. I now understand that this tension can be a source of strength: academic work benefits from practical insight, just as professional practice is enriched by critical research. However, this dual drive can also create challenges. I often feel the urge to research, resolve, and act all at once—a cycle that can be unrealistic within the constraints of a single project.

Ultimately, this process taught me the importance of setting boundaries and being clear about what is feasible. Learning to demarcate research goals and accept the limits of what can be achieved within one thesis was a valuable experience.

07
References & appendices

Image 33. Litltle girl playing on the streets with dolls © Barbara Krobath Archive

7.1 References

Abril, I. N. (2020). Gender impact assessments, a tool for the implementation of the new urban agenda: The case of Madrid Nuevo Norte. In Engendering Cities (pp. 267-280). Routledge.

Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A Ladder of Citizen Participation. Journal of the American Institute of Planners, 35(4), 216–224. https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225

Boonstra, B., & Boelens, L. (2011). Self-organization in urban development: Towards a new perspective on spatial planning. Urban Research & Practice, 4(2), 99–122. https://doi.org/10.1080/17535069.2011.579767

Butcher, M., & Maclean, K. (2018). Gendering the city: The lived experience of transforming cities, urban cultures and spaces of belonging. Gender, Place & Culture, 25(5), 686-694.

Callahan, K. (2007). Citizen Participation: Models and Methods. International Journal of Public Administration, 30(11), 1179–1196. https://doi.org/10.1080/01900690701225366

CBS. (2022b, February 1). Twee op de drie jonge vrouwen lastiggevallen op straat [Webpagina]. Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek. https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2022/05/twee-op-de-drie-jonge-vrouwen-lastiggevallen-op-straat

Cesafsky, L. (2017). How to Mend a Fragmented City: a Critique of 'Infrastructural Solidarity'. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 41(1), 145-161.

Chevalier, J. M., & Buckles, D. J. (2013). Participatory Action Research: Theory and Methods for Engaged Inquiry.Routledge UK.

Christodoulou, C. (2020). Gender Mainstreaming Urban Planning and Design Processes in Greece. In Engendering Cities(pp. 229-242). Routledge.

Cooke, B., & Kothari, U. (Eds.). (2001). Participation: The New Tyranny? Zed Books.

Cornish, F., Breton, N., Moreno-Tabarez, U., Delgado, J., Rua, M., de-Graft Aikins, A., & Hodgetts, D. (2023). Participatory action research. Nature Reviews Methods Primers, 3(1), 34.

Cornwall, A. (2008). Unpacking 'Participation': Models, meanings and practices. Community Development Journal, 43(3), 269–283.

Esteban, T. A. O. E., Heijmeskamp, T., & Sadjad, M. S. (2024). Where We Stand: Risk Perceptions on Changing Neighborhoods in South Rotterdam. Atlantis, 35(1), 45.

European Institute for Gender Equality & Istituto per la Ricerca Sociale. (2021). Gender inequalities in care and consequences for the labour market. https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/20204948_mh0220888enn_pdf.pdf

Falu, A., & Sassen, S. (2018). Women and the city: Reclaiming the streets to impose equal rights. The Conversation.

Fenster, T. (2005). The Right to the Gendered City: Different Formations of Belonging in Everyday Life. Journal of Gender Studies, 14(3), 217–231. https://doi.org/10.1080/09589230500264109

Foran, C. (2013, September 16). How to Design a City for Women. Bloomberg.https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-09-16/how-to-design-a-city-for-women

Gauvin, L., Tizzoni, M., Piaggesi, S., Young, A., Adler, N., Verhulst, S., ... & Cattuto, C. (2020). Gender gaps in urban mobility. Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, 7(1), 1-13.

Greed, C. (2003, June). Gender mainstreaming within local planning authorities. In Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers-Municipal Engineer (Vol. 156, No. 2, pp. 119-125). Thomas Telford Ltd.

Greed, C. (2005). An investigation of the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming as a means of integrating the needs of women and men into spatial planning in the United Kingdom. Progress in Planning, 64(4), 243-321.

Harvey, D. (2003). The right to the city. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 27(4), 939–941. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0309-1317.2003.00492.x

Hayden, D. (1980). What Would a Non-Sexist City Be Like? Speculations on Housing, Urban Design, and Human Work. Signs, 5(3), S170–S187.

Healey, P. (2020). Collaborative planning: Shaping places in fragmented societies. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Helleman, G., Majoor, S., Peek, GJ., & Van Der Veen, H. (2021). Participatiemoe(d). In Platform Stad en Wijk. Geraadpleegd op 27 november 2024, van https://sway.cloud.microsoft/smyJ8icyfLfDmoNa?ref=Link

Horelli, L. (2017). Engendering urban planning in different contexts – successes, constraints and consequences. European Planning Studies, 25(10), 1779–1796. https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2017.1339781

Hurtado, S. D. G. (2020). An Analysis of EU Urban Policy from the Perspective of Gender. In Engendering Cities (pp. 214-228). Routledge.

Jackowska, O., & Novas Ferradás, M. (2022). Who owns public spaces? The trailblazer exhibition on

women's everyday life in the City of Vienna (1991). Planning Perspectives, 38(2), 253–279. https://doi.org/10.1080/02665433.2022.2074526

Jacobs, J. (1961). The death and life of great American cities. Vintage Books.

Kang, M., Lessard, D., & Heston, L. (2017). Introduction to women, gender, sexuality studies. Chapter 4: Theorizing Lived Experiences. University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

Kawgan-Kagan, I. (2020). Are women greener than men? A preference analysis of women and men from major German cities over sustainable urban mobility. Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives, 8, 100236.

Kelly, P.J. (2005). Practical suggestions for community interventions using participatory action research. Public Health Nursing, 22(1), 65-73. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0737-1209.2005.22110.x

King, L. (2019). Henri Lefebvre and the right to the city. In The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of the City (pp. 76-86). Routledge.

Kern, L. (2020). Feminist city. Verso.

Kindon, S., Pain, R., & Kesby, M. (2007). Participatory action research approaches and methods: Connecting people, participation and place. Routledge.

Koskela, H., & Pain, R. (2000). Revisiting fear and place: women's fear of attack and the built environment. Geoforum, 31(2), 269-280.

Lauria, M., & Slotterback, C. S. (Eds.). (2020). Learning from Arnstein's ladder: From citizen participation to public engagement. Routledge.

Lee, Z. (2023). Inclusive Design for Persons with Disabilities in Cities.

Lefebvre, H. (1968). Droit a la ville. Blackwell.

Lefebvre, H. (1991). The production of space. Blackwell.

Levin, L. (2019). How to Integrate Gender Equality in the Future of "Smart" Mobility: A Matter for a Changing Planning Practice. In HCI in Mobility, Transport, and Automotive Systems: First International Conference, MobiTAS 2019, Held as Part of the 21st HCI International Conference, HCII 2019, Orlando, FL, USA, July 26-31, 2019, Proceedings 21 (pp. 393-412). Springer International Publishing.

Lindkvist, C. (2024). Gendered mobility strategies and challenges to sustainable travel—patriarchal norms controlling women's everyday transportation. Frontiers in Sustainable Cities, 6, 1367238.

Mapp, T. (2008). Understanding phenomenology: The lived experience. British Journal of Midwifery, 16(5), 308-311.

de Madariaga, I. S. (2016). Mobility of care: Introducing new concepts in urban transport. In Fair shared cities (pp. 33-48). Routledge.

de Madariaga, I. S., & Abril, I. N. (2019). A new generation of gender mainstreaming in spatial and urban planning under the new international framework of policies for sustainable development. In Gendered Approaches to Spatial Development in Europe (pp. 181-203). Routledge.

Matrix. (2022). Making space: Women and the man-made environment (New edition). Verso.

Mbaka, N., & Isiramen, O. M. (2021). The changing role of an exploratory research in modern organisation. GPH-International Journal of Business Management, 4(12), 27-36.

Mitchell, D. (2003). The right to the city: Social justice and the fight for public space. Guilford Press.

Olawale, S. R., Chinagozi, O. G., & Joe, O. N. (2023). Exploratory research design in management science: A review of literature on conduct and application. International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science, 7(4), 1384-1395.

Oxford Dictionary. (2022). Participate verb—Definition, pictures, pronunciation and usage notes. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/participate

Plan International. (2023). Seksueel geweld en intimidatie op straat (pp. 2–3). https://www.planinternational.nl/uploaded/2023/02/Plan-International-Seksuele-intimidatie-en-geweld-op-straat-Februari-2023.pdf?x35548

Pallasmaa, J. (2005). The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses. John Wiley and Sons.

Parthasarathy, S. (2023). Everyone benefits from more gender-inclusive city design. Engineering & technology, 18(6), 19.

Perrone, C. (2020). Gender and the Urban in the Twenty-First Century: Paving the Way to 'Another' Gender Mainstreaming. In Engendering Cities (pp. 281-300). Routledge.

Polk, M. (2016). Gender mainstreaming in Swedish transport policy. In Gendered mobilities (pp. 229-242). Routledge.

Rampaul, K., & Magidimisha-Chipungu, H. (2022). Gender mainstreaming in the urban space to promote inclusive cities. The Journal for

Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa, 18(1), Article 1.

Roberts, M., & Madariaga, I. S. de. (2013). Fair Shared Cities: The Impact of Gender Planning in Europe. Taylor & Francis Group. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ delft/detail.action?docID=1336223

Rosenqvist, J. (2024). Gender and mobility: How does gender affect women's movement? - Urban Cycling Institute. Urban Cycling Institute - Bringing Cycling Research from Science to Practice and Back.https://urbancyclinginstitute.org/gender-and-mobility-how-does-gender-affect-womens-movement/

Sassen, S. (2016). Built gendering.

Schotter, A. P., Mudambi, R., Doz, Y. L., & Gaur, A. (2017). Boundary spanning in global organizations. Journal of Management Studies, 54(4), 403-421.

Schubotz, D., (2019). Participatory Action Research, In P. Atkinson, S. Delamont, A. Cernat, J.W. Sakshaug, & R.A. Williams (Eds.), SAGE Research Methods Foundations. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526421036840298

Sebrantke, J., Stiewe, M., Kelp-Siekmann, S., & Kemmler-Lehr, G. (2020). Gender mainstreaming in the regional discourse over the future of the Ruhr Metropolitan Area: Implementation of gender mainstreaming in planning processes. In Engendering Cities (pp. 191-213). Routledge.

Soja, E. W. (2013). Seeking spatial justice (Vol. 16). U of Minnesota Press.

Sola, A. G., & Vilhelmson, B. (2022). To choose, or not to choose, a nearby activity option: Understanding the gendered role of proximity in urban settings. Journal of Transport Geography, 99, 103301.

Tuan, Y.-F. (1977). Space and place: The perspective of experience. University of Minnesota Press.
Udoewa, V. (2022). An introduction to radical participatory design: decolonising participatory design processes. Design Science, 8, e31.

Urbinat (2021) Healthy Corridor Participatory Process Toolkit: Reporting from https://urbinat.eu/resources/participatory-toolkit/

Wotha, B. (2016). Urban governance and gender-aware planning. In Fair Shared Cities (pp. 91-106). Routledge.

Zibell, B., Damyanovic, D., & Sturm, U. (Eds.). (2019). Gendered Approaches to Spatial Development in Europe: Perspectives, Similarities, Differences. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429503818

7.2 Further readings

Maybe you want to do something after reading this thesis. Here are some tips on further readings on the Gendered City to inform yourself!

Books

Kern, L. (2020). Feminist city. Verso.

Bassam, N. (2023). The Gendered City: How Cities Keep Failing Women. Nourhan Bassam.

Jacobs, J. (1961). The death and life of great American cities. Vintage Books.

Booth, C., Darke, J., & Yeandle, S. (Eds.). (1996). Changing places: women's lives in the city

Matrix. (1984). Making space: Women and the man-made environment. Pluto Press (UK).

Kalms, N. (2024). She City: Designing Out Women's Inequity in Cities.

de Madariaga, I. S., & Neuman, M. (Eds.). (2020). Engendering cities: designing sustainable urban spaces for all. Routledge.

Podcasts

The bartlett review - Planning urban environments for women's safety

Femmecity: Navigating Gender in Urban Spaces from Nirvana Kohli

The CityChangers Podcast #12: The Gendered City

Films and documentaries

From the Ladies, Holly Fisher, 1978, 20m

Space Gender, Marianna Giorgia Marchesini, Francesca Nazzaro, Giovanni Veneri, 2023, 25m

A word of gratitude

I want to thank Ellen for always thinking along with me, for having faith in me and trusting in me this past year. I have enjoyed our talks a lot!

Yawei for always staying critical and very supportive of me and the project.

Lena and Marcella for their guidance and opportunities during my internship.

Oud House Rotterdam, for collaborating, facilitating and organizing two events in a very short period.

Pelle for the hospitality and openness in providing insights in your practice.

All the experts that graciously made time for me to interview them.

All the participants who came, and so eagerly participated in the walks, workshop and experiment. This thesis could not have existed without you!

And lastly, Sem for all your mental support this past year.

appendix A
The Exploratory Walks

7.3 Exploratory walks

In line with the Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework, this study actively involves the intended target group from the early stages of the research process. Alongside expert knowledge, insights into how spatial inequalities of the Gendered City relate to the lived experiences are enriched with data from everyday participants. One key method used to collect these insights is the exploratory walk.

Exploratory walks are mobile interviews conducted while walking through a participant's local environment. This approach allows participants to speak freely about their own lived experiences, with the interviewer guiding the conversation through relevant, responsive questions. As a method, exploratory walks are particularly effective for generating rich, contextual data about how individuals perceive and interact with space. They offer a deeper understanding of spatial dynamics that may not emerge through more traditional, stationary methods of inquiry.

Given the focus of this research on gendered experiences in public space, exploratory walks provide a highly suitable tool for uncovering how spatial inequalities are embodied and navigated. In this study, three exploratory walks were conducted with women from different backgrounds. The insights from these walks were translated into analytical maps, visually representing the participants' spatial relationships and experiences.

To further interpret the findings, the results are analyzed using the lived experience framework introduced in Chapter 2. This framework helps identify connections between the participants' narratives and gender, revealing how these contribute to or challenge their experiences in public space.

Walk 1 | At the start of the walk, the participant was asked to outline what she considered her neighborhood. Rather than describing this in terms of distance or administrative borders, she defined it through physical infrastructure—specifically the presence of water and train tracks (see light pink hatch in analytical map). These elements acted as barriers in her mental map, limiting her movement and sense of connection. The tunnels beneath the train tracks were mentioned several times as areas she actively avoids, describing them as uncomfortable and disconnected from the rest of the neighborhood.

Transportation became a key topic throughout the walk. Due to her caregiving responsibilities for her son, she relies heavily on public transport, though she expressed strong dissatisfaction with it. Both the metro and the train station were described as places that feel unsafe and unpleasant (see analytical map, figure 35). In contrast, she spoke of cycling as her preferred mode of travel, especially in areas where she feels uneasy. For her, the speed and mobility of cycling offer a sense of control and personal safety that walking does not.

A particularly revealing moment occurred when she reflected on a second tunnel under the train tracks that had been noticeably redesigned with improved lighting to enhance safety. While she acknowledged the change, she explained that what made the tunnel feel safer was not the enhanced lighting, but the fact that it was more frequently used by others. This suggests that the presence of people (social control) plays a more important role in shaping feelings of safety than physical design features alone.

Her account clearly reflects the spatial dynamics at the core of the Gendered City. She described a range of challenges related to care-based mobility, including difficulties with navigating public transport and managing cluttered or inaccessible streets while fulfilling caregiving tasks. The theme of safety came up repeatedly, often influencing her decisions about how and where to travel. The three key spatial aspects—mobility, accessibility, and safety—were all present during the walk. Importantly, the way these aspects intersected became evident; for example, concerns about safety directly impacted her transportation choices, which in turn affected her access to services and daily routines.

This walk offers a nuanced view into how spatial barriers, caregiving roles, and feelings of safety combine to shape lived experiences in the city. It highlights how these factors interact, reinforcing the importance of considering everyday, gendered experiences in urban design and planning.

Walk 2 | The second participant also defined the boundaries of her neighborhood in relation to major infrastructure—the train tracks and the highway. These physical features marked the edges of where she felt the neighborhood began

and ended. However, despite living in the area for nearly a decade, she shared that she still struggles to feel a sense of belonging. She described the neighborhood as *"not quite feeling like home"*, although she spoke warmly about a park and lake in the upper right corner of the area (figure 36). Even though it's a bit removed from the rest of the neighborhood, she said it's one of the few places that gives her a feeling of comfort and familiarity. This suggests that beyond physical boundaries, functional relevance and personal engagement play a role in how people define their surroundings.

Throughout the walk, the participant reflected on various aspects of the neighborhood's design and atmosphere. One recurring theme was the lack of greenery. She described many streets and open spaces as empty and uninviting. Even when green areas do exist, they are often tucked away in private courtyards, making them feel inaccessible to the public. Another concern she raised was the limited availability of amenities. While there is a grocery store, she misses other types of places—like cafés, bookstores, or casual spots where people can spend time outside their homes. These are, in the participants view, essential for creating liveliness and fostering a sense of community.

A central feeling the participant expressed was a lack of social connection. She noted that she rarely sees people she feels she can relate to in the

Ava is a 28 year old woman who lives in the eastern part of Amsterdam with her partner. She is born and raised in the city and considers this her home. She is a mother of a two year old and combines her motherhood with work and studies. Her days are a balancing act between all these different duties.

Figure 35. Analytical map of exploratory walk 1

neighborhood and often feels isolated because of it. Although she's not fond of many of the new developments in the area, she shared a sense of hope that these new buildings might eventually attract people she can connect with. For her, the ability to "see herself" reflected in public space—whether through age, lifestyle, or culture—is a crucial part of feeling at home. While this issue of representation doesn't only relate to gender, she did mention the lack of women her age or people who appear creative or culturally similar to her. This reinforces insights from the expert interviews (see page 67), where it was noted that representation plays an important role in how people—especially women—experience public space.

Unlike the first participant, this woman did not report strong feelings of unsafety or inaccessibility in her daily life. When asked whether this changed when she had young children, she acknowledged that it had—but that it's no longer relevant to her current experience. This aligns with what some experts shared: safety concerns are often more prominent for younger women, and accessibility issues tend to affect those engaged in care-related mobility. While this participant no longer faces those specific challenges, she did mention taking alternative routes at times, hinting at a more subtle form of discomfort that mirrors the concerns voiced in Walk 1. This suggests that while certain spatial aspects of the Gendered City—like safety, accessibility, and mobility—may be experienced

Carla is a 57 year old woman who has been living in Amsterdam since she was 18. She works in IT and also loves to be creative. She moved to the western part of Amsterdam 10 years ago after a divorce. She currently lives alone since her children have all moved out into their own places.

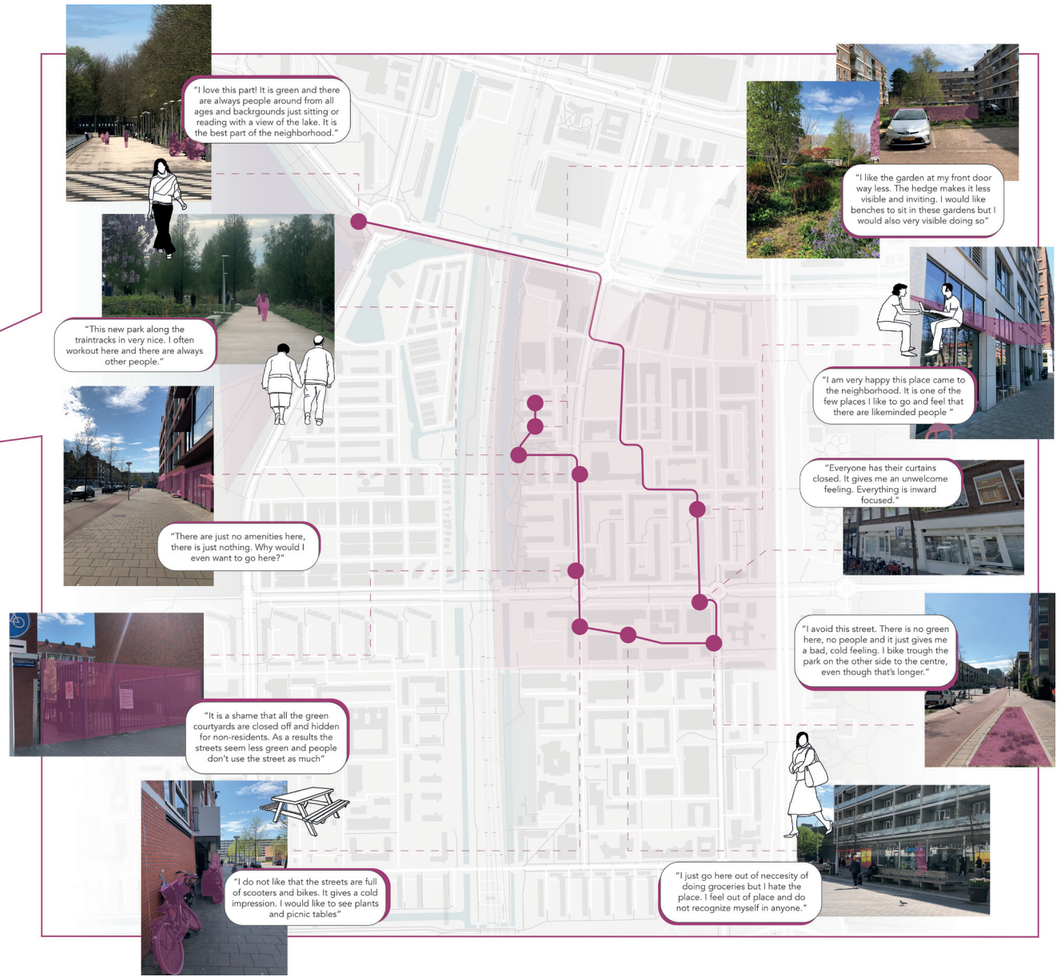


Figure 36. Analytical map of exploratory walk 2

differently depending on life stage or context, they remain relevant across different groups.

Overall, this walk revealed how the emotional and social dimensions of public space—such as feeling seen, connected, and at ease—are just as important as physical accessibility. It also illustrates how representation, both cultural and gendered, can deeply shape one's experience of the city, even in the absence of overt barriers.

Walk 3 | In this exploratory walk, the participant defined her neighborhood boundaries largely in terms of physical barriers, such as main roads. However, her perception of the neighborhood was also shaped by her routine and activities. She consciously excluded certain areas, explaining: *"It's just houses there, so there is nothing for me."* This reinforces the aforementioned suggestion that functional relevance and personal engagement play a large role in where and how people define their neighborhood.

A theme that emerged was the change in mobility patterns due to life stage. Recently becoming a mother, the participant now relies much more on walking. This shift revealed the neighborhood's lack of pedestrian-friendly infrastructure and strong focus on care use. She noted that many pavements are narrow or absent, with cars parked on sidewalks and various bumps and curbs making it difficult to walk—especially with a stroller. These

Elise is a 31 year old woman who lives in the city of Haarlem. She has been living here for three years and lives together with her husband and 3 month old daughter. She loves to be outside and enjoys cooking. In her daily life she works, but right now she is still on maternity leave.

Figure 37. Analytical map of exploratory walk 3

seemingly small barriers have a significant impact on her everyday life now. This finding aligns with the broader theme of mobility of care, in which caregiving responsibilities demand specific spatial conditions that are not always met.

Concerns around safety also came up clearly during the walk. The participant expressed a desire to go for evening walks in the park but stated firmly: "There is not a hair on my head that would think about walking here at night alone. I would only go with my husband" When asked further, her reluctance was very much linked to the absence of others—a lack of social presence that made her feel vulnerable. She reflected that growing up in the city, she had always felt safe because there were always people around. This underscores the importance of social presence as contributors to a sense of safety in public space, a point echoed in earlier walks.

Access to amenities was another recurring concern. In the neighborhood park, she mentioned the absence of public toilets, which often cut her visits short: *"It just makes it hard to stay for longer."* She also noted that although the supermarket is close by, the new hospitality options in the area consist mostly of fast-food chains. These, she experienced, attracted groups of hanging-out youth, which sometimes made her uncomfortable. She preferred cafés with a different atmosphere—those that felt more welcoming and familiar—but these were located in the city center. However, she currently cannot easily reach these due to her caregiving responsibilities. This illustrates how accessibility, mobility, and cultural preferences are deeply intertwined in shaping lived experience.

appendix B
The Workshop

7.3 Workshop

Overview | A participatory workshop was conducted. This method was chosen not only for its ability to gather multiple perspectives in a single session, but also for the way it encourages dialogue among participants. By allowing people to respond to each other's experiences, the workshop offered a rich space for observing both shared experiences and meaningful distinctions between individuals.

The workshop was designed to explore participants' lived experiences in the public space, while also prompting reflection on how these experiences relate to gender. The format aimed to strike a balance between giving participants the freedom to tell their personal stories, and gently guiding them to think critically about how gender might influence their everyday urban lives. A combination of creative and discussion-based activities was used to support this.

The session began with a collective self-inquiry exercise called *Where We Stand*, adapted from Esteban et al. (2024). This activity intends to foster mutual understanding and open up discussion around social roles and identities. In this case, the focus was on gendered experiences. Participants responded to nine statements by stepping forward each time a statement was, or had been, true for them. The statements were developed from literature on the Gendered City, specifically addressing the spatial dimensions of accessibility, mobility, and safety. This allowed the group to visually and physically reflect on how these aspects play out in their own lives.

Following this, a focus group discussion was held, supported by the use of photo elicitation. Photo elicitation is a method that helps unpack personal and contextual complexities by inviting participants to reflect on visual prompts. It also encourages deeper discussion, co-construction of meaning, and engagement with abstract concepts such as identity and representation (Urbinat, 2021). Participants were shown a series of images (e.g. Image 20), each related to gendered aspects of urban space—such as public bathrooms, metro access, and nighttime visibility. These images were accompanied by questions designed to provoke reflection and conversation. Participants discussed the reasons why they appreciated or disliked elements in the photos, and shared experiences were exchanged.
The workshop concluded with a creative mapping exercise that invited participants to articulate their urban needs (image 21). Each was given a coloring page of the central square in the study area, and asked to draw or write what they would want or need from that space. This final activity provided space for imaginative expression and grounded the discussion in a specific, local context.

Together, these activities offered valuable insight into how gender—and its intersections with identity, space, and daily life—shapes experiences in the city. The key findings from this workshop are presented in the following section.

Where we stand | During the Where we stand exercise of the workshop, participants were presented with statements. If their answer to the question was yes they had to step forward. If the answer was no they could remain in place. Below you find a brief protocol of the exercise and the statements that were presented. The results from the workshop can be found in chapter 4.1.3 of the main thesis

Script for Where we stand exercise

Today we're going to do an activity called Where We Stand. It's a chance for us to explore different experiences and reflect on how gender can shape the way we move through public spaces.

I'll be reading a series of statements. If a statement is true for you—or has ever been true—please take a step forward. If it doesn't apply, stay where you are. There are no right or wrong answers. You're not required to step forward if you don't feel comfortable. We ask that everyone remains respectful during the activity so we can honor each other's experiences.
9 Questions:

- Step forward if you've ever felt unsafe walking alone in public at night.
- Step forward if you've changed your route, transportation, or schedule to avoid a place that felt unsafe.
- Step forward if you've received unwanted attention—like catcalling or discrimination in a public space.
- Step forward if you've ever had difficulty accessing basic services (like clinics, schools, or government offices) because of transport or mobility challenges.
- Step forward if you've ever had to hold in using the bathroom in public because there were no accessible, safe, or clean toilets.
- Step forward if you generally make more than 4 stops a day
- Step forward if you've had to travel long distances to access things like work, education, or childcare.
- Step forward if you've altered how you dress based on where you're going or how you'll get there.
- Step forward if you've ever felt that your city or neighborhood wasn't designed with your needs in mind.

Questions afterwards:
"How did it feel to step forward—or not step forward—during certain statements?"
"Was there anything that surprised you about the group's responses?"
"What connections can we draw between our personal experiences and your gender?

Photo elicitation exercise
The second exercise was a photo elicitation exercise where the participants were presented with photos of urban settings accompanied with questions. The photos were based on three themes: accessibility, mobility and safety. Image 34 is an overview of the photos that were discussed.

Image 34. The photo's that were used in the photo elicitation exercise, own work

Image 34. The photo's that were used in the photo elicitation exercise, own work

Image 34. The photo's that were used in the photo elicitation exercise, own work

Design exercise

The last exercise was a design exercise to let participants think about what they would need in public space. Participants were asked to draw/write what they would find necessary on the square that accompanied the workshop location. The results of this exercise are depicted below.

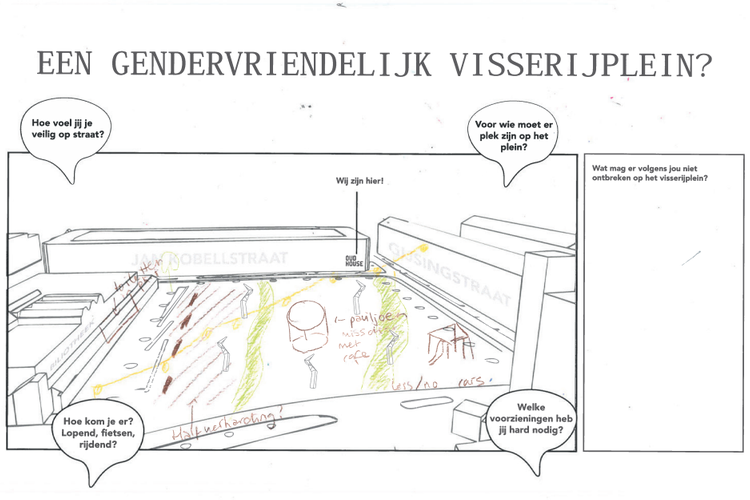
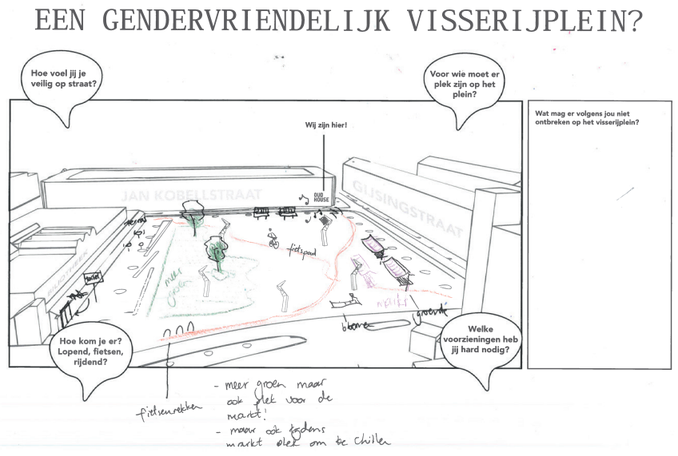


Image 35. The results of the design exercise in the workshop, own work



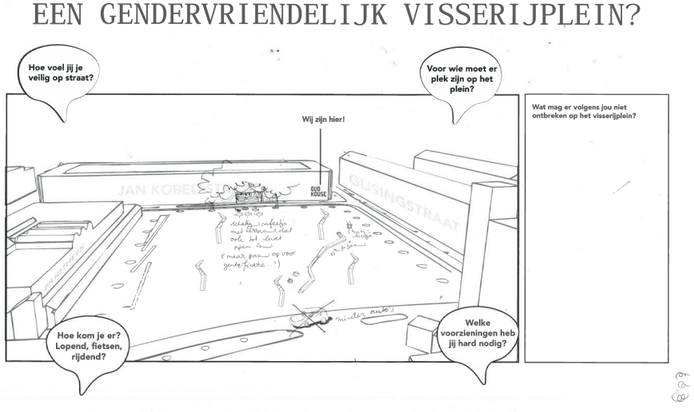
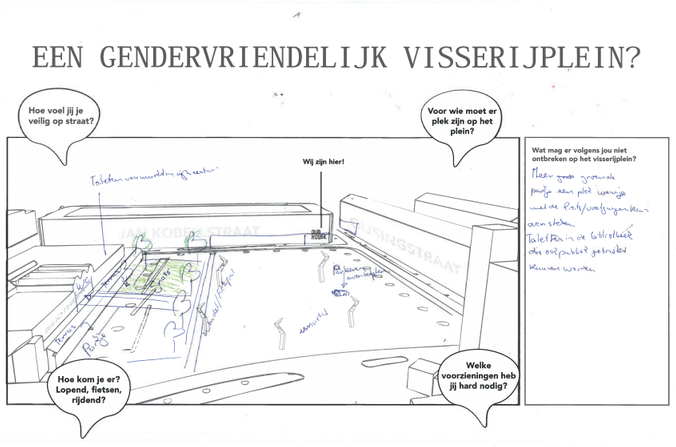


Image 35. The results of the design exercise in the workshop, own work



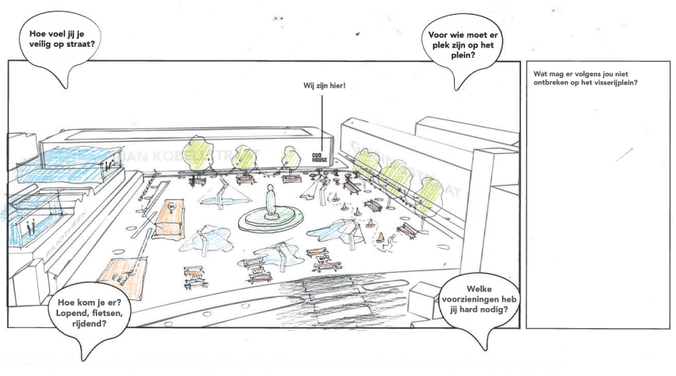


Image 35. The results of the design exercise in the workshop, own work

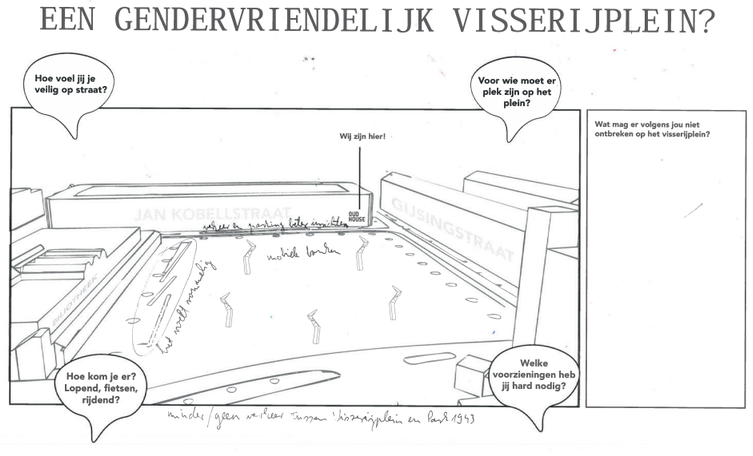


Image 35. The results of the design exercise in the workshop, own work

appendix C
The Case Study

7.3 Case study

Overview of participation strategy and the case study

Participation strategy | As a consultancy agency operating in the field of spatial planning, the firm has developed a structured strategy for public participation. At the core of this strategy is the distinction between four levels of participation: informing, consulting, seeking advice, and co-creation. These levels differ significantly in the degree of influence participants have on the outcome of a project (Figure 38).

To operationalize this framework, the firm categorizes projects based on their anticipated impact on the built environment (Figure 39). Each project category is then linked to an appropriate level of participation, ensuring that the intensity of public involvement is aligned with the scale and consequences of the intervention.

Building on this structure, the firm has developed a participation toolbox tailored to different project types and phases. This toolbox comprises four categories of instruments: preparatory tools, shaping tools, imaginative tools, and informing tools. Each category is applied at specific stages of the planning process, depending on the nature of the project and the intended participation level (see Figure 40).

The firm acknowledges that, while co-creation is often regarded in academic literature as the ideal form of participation, its application in practice is more complex. Co-creation demands significant time and effort from participants, often unpaid, which can be a barrier to engagement. Therefore, aligning the intensity of participation with the project's potential impact is critical (Helleman et al., 2021).

The firm's distinction between project categories and corresponding participation levels is both practical and necessary—particularly given that not every project has the resources for an extensive participatory process. However, one notable limitation of this approach is that it relies on predefined assumptions about a project's impact. This can lead to underestimating the social or spatial significance of smaller-scale interventions, which may, in fact, have profound effects on local communities.

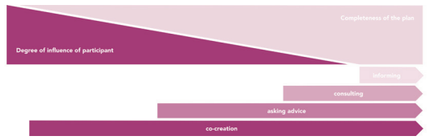


Figure 38. Influence participant per participation level based on documents from Kubiek, own work

	Project category 1	Project category 2	Project category 3
Degree of impact	Limited impact	Medium impact	Large-scale impact
Participation level	Informing or consulting	Consulting or asking advice	Asking advice or co-creation
Examples	Dormer, gardenhouse or small-scale change of function	Demolition/construction of main buildings or large-scale change of function	Large-scale spatial development, new residential area, government policy

Figure 39. Overview participation level linked to project category based on documents from Kubiek, own work

	Project category 1	Project category 2	Project category 3
Preparatory instrument		Stakeholder analysis Environmental analysis	Stakeholder analysis Environmental analysis Expert meeting
Shaping instrument	Letter Survey Street conversations	Letter Survey Street conversations Participation meeting Kitchen table conversations Walk-in consultation Working group excursion	Letter Survey Street conversations Participation meeting Kitchen table conversations Walk-in consultation Working group excursion Project website
Imagining instrument		Maps Visualisation Photo insertions Animation	Maps Visualisation Photo insertions Animation VR-application
Informing instrument		Communication medium Promo medium	Communication medium Promo medium

Figure 40. overview of instruments per project category based documents from Kubiek, own work

The case | The case study, as previously mentioned, contained of an expansion of a village of around 200 homes. The firm was hired in 2019 by the land-owner to see what could be build there. In the preparatory phase the company sat with stakeholders, informed stakeholders about possible plans and made a participation proposal that was approved by the municipality in 2022. Due to the impact and the size of the project, project category three was chosen. The municipality organized two focus group sessions with community members to discuss the framework for both development and participation. The proposed participation strategy was officially approved by the municipal council in early 2022. The planning process and public participation strategy were developed in close collaboration with the local municipality, whose involvement was essential throughout. To prepare for the participation phase, a stakeholder analysis was conducted to identify relevant local groups and interests. The initiative was also communicated to the surrounding community.

The participatory process began with inviting stakeholders to take part in a working group. From the respondents, a balanced selection was made to ensure broad representation of interests and profiles from different areas. The working group process was based on principles of co-creation and social design.

- Session 1 focused on brainstorming ideas and identifying local concerns, such as traffic and infrastructure. At this stage, there were no design proposals—participants had a blank slate to raise issues and suggest ideas.
- A site excursion followed, where participants visited similar completed housing projects and the proposed development site. This helped gather input on design preferences and inspired discussion.
- Session 2 involved presenting and discussing preliminary design models, which were created based on the input from session 1 and the excursion. Participants gave feedback that was incorporated into a concept plan.
- In Session 3, the first version of the concept plan was presented. This was followed by a period of refinement to make the design technically feasible and ready for implementation.
- By 2024, Session 4 was held to present the finalized concept plan to the working group. The session marked the conclusion of the participation phase and included a discussion of the project's feasibility and next steps.

Following the working group process, discussions were held with both the municipal and provincial governments. Around the same time, the municipality finalized its housing vision policy.

At the end of 2024, a public walk-in session was organized for all interested stakeholders. During this event, the finalized urban design plan was presented using visual aids like VR, allowing attendees to leave feedback and ask questions—many of which related to the possibility of purchasing homes.
In parallel, a dedicated project website was launched. This platform serves to share updates, design information, and the latest developments, ensuring transparency and easy access for the broader public.

The full trajectory of the participation process can be found in figure 41.

Figure 41. overview of participation trajectory based documents from Kubiek, own work

appendix D
The Quasi-experiment

7.3 Quasi-experiment

Context

The participatory process took place in Bospolder-Tussendijken, a neighborhood in Rotterdam known for its persistent socio-economic challenges as well as its vibrant community initiatives and strong sense of resilience. Within this neighborhood lies the Visserijplein, a central square that comes alive twice a week—on Thursdays and Saturdays—when it hosts a bustling market (see image 36). On other days, however, the square remains largely empty and underutilized (see image 37).

Image 36. The Visserijplein during the market, own photo

Image 37. The Visserijplein when the market is not there © Reinier de Jong

In recent years, a number of local initiatives have emerged along the Jan Kobellstraat, adjacent to the square, forming what is now collectively referred to as de Energiemeent. This cluster of community-driven organizations collaborates on various social and spatial projects. One of these initiatives, Oud House Rotterdam, initiated a dialogue about the future of the square. Alongside the other Energiemeent partners, they proposed launching an open call to explore new possibilities for the space.

As a first step in this process, a gender-inclusive participation session was organized in collaboration with Oud House Rotterdam. The aim of the session was to explore how the square could be reimagined to better reflect the needs and experiences of a diverse group of users, with particular attention to gender-related spatial inequalities.

The session

The participatory session aimed to test a range of methods designed to incorporate key spatial dimensions of the Gendered City—accessibility, mobility and safety, and the removal of participation barriers. These methods were drawn from the basic, active, and radical levels of engagement. However, due to practical constraints—including limited time, available resources, and the format of a single session—only a selection of methods, primarily from the basic and active levels, could be implemented. More resource-intensive or time-demanding methods, such as exploratory walks, had been conducted in earlier phases of the research and were not repeated here.

The session was open to all community members, and was advocated in local networks and by flyering in all kinds of place in the neighborhood. A total of eight participants attended: five women and three men.

The session began with a low-barrier warm-up activity. Participants were shown an illustration of a fictional public space, which discreetly incorporated a variety of elements related to the Gendered City. These included positive features such as wide pavements, public art, and passive surveillance (“eyes on the street”), as well as more challenging aspects such as obstructive parked cars, absence of public toilets, solid walls, and areas dominated by hang youth.

Image 38. The fictional setting as presented to the participants in the first exercise, own work

Without any prior explanation of these features, participants were asked to place green stickers on elements they liked and red stickers on elements they disliked. They were also encouraged to annotate their choices with brief explanations. Once everyone had completed the task, participants were given turns to share their choices and reasoning with the group, initiating an open discussion.

In the second activity, a thematic excursion, participants were divided into pairs and assigned one of three themes central to the Gendered City framework: accessibility, mobility, or safety. Each pair was given 15 minutes to explore the Visserijplein with a themed observation sheet that included both open-ended questions and imaginative prompts. These prompts encouraged participants to engage in light role-play—for example, “If you were walking here with a stroller, what would be different?” or “If you were a teenage girl, would you feel safe spending time here?” Following the walk, participants returned to the session space and presented their observations and reflections to the larger group.

The final exercise was a hands-on design task. Participants were split into two break-out groups based on gender. Each group received a large A1-sized 3D template of the Visserijplein and a set of ten illustrated intervention cards. Many of these interventions were inspired by principles of gender-inclusive urban design. Each group was asked to

collaboratively select five interventions and justify their choices. The groups then presented their redesigned visions of the square to one another, allowing for cross-group feedback and dialogue.
The session concluded with the completion of a brief feedback form and informal conversation among participants and facilitator. Here the materials from the session are depicted. The findings from the session can be found in chapter 4.3

Image 39. The stickered fictional setting from exercise 1

Image 39. The stickered fictional setting from exercise 1

The second exercise of the quasi-experiment was a thematic excursion. In the thematic excursion duo's were sent out the the square, which the participation session was about, with a theme assigned to them. They were given a sheet with question related to the theme of which some were role play prompts. Below, the filled in sheets can be found (image 40).

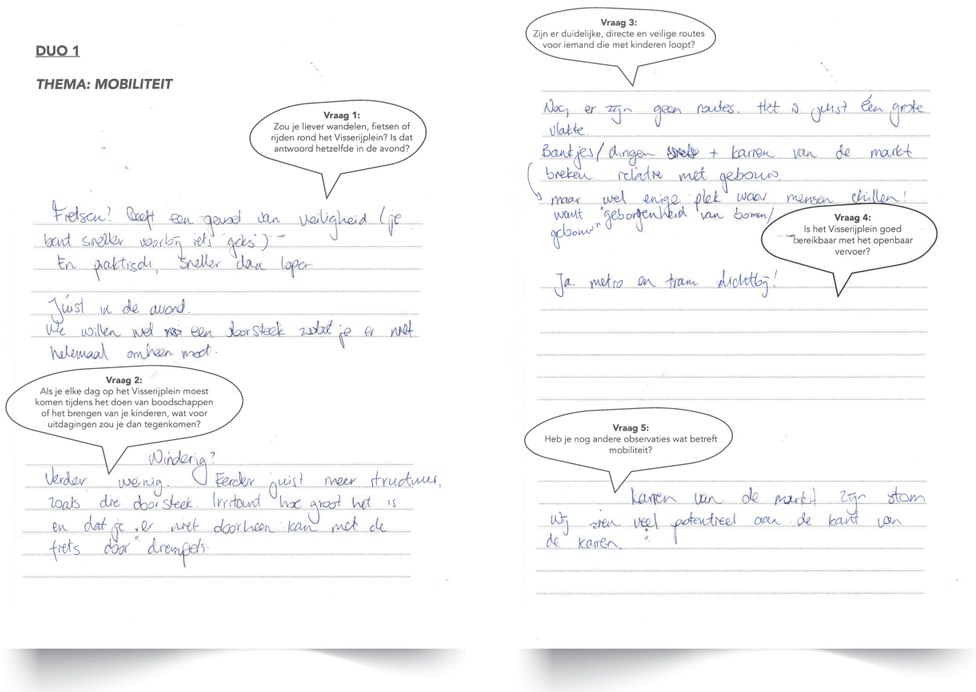


Image 40. The filled in sheets from the thematic excursion

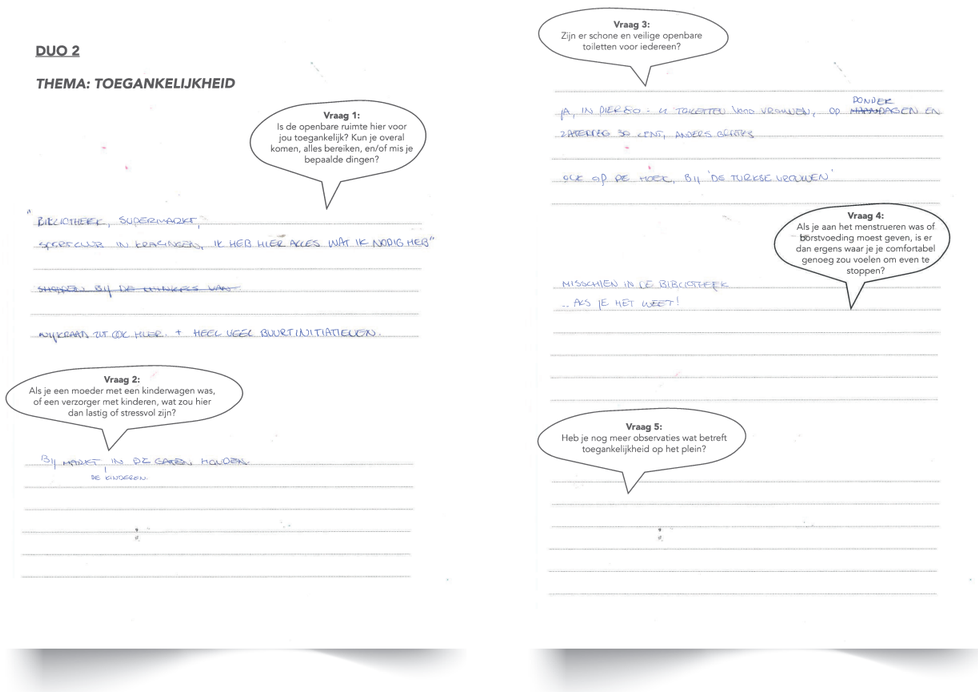
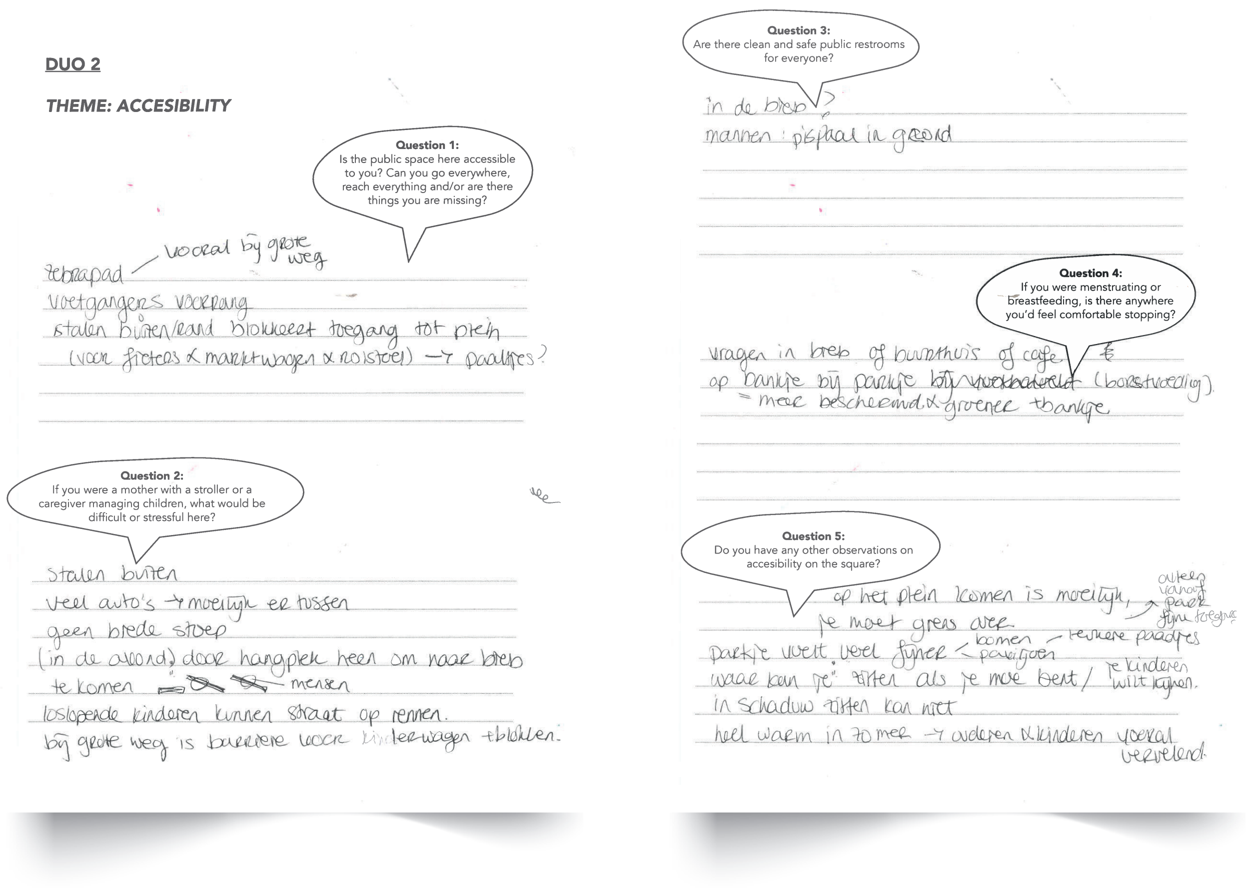


Image 40. The filled in sheets from the thematic excursion



DUO 2

THEME: ACCESIBILITY

Question 1:
Is the public space here accessible to you? Can you go everywhere, reach everything and/or are there things you are missing?

zebrapad — vooral bij grote weg
voetgangers voorrang
stalen buiten/rand blokkeert toegang tot plein
(voor fietsers & marktwagen & rolstoel) → paaltjes?

Question 2:
If you were a mother with a stroller or a caregiver managing children, what would be difficult or stressful here?

stalen buiten
veel auto's → moeilijk er tussen
geen brede stoep
(in de avond) door hangplek heen om naar bieb
te komen ~~..~~ ~~..~~ mensen
loslopende kinderen kunnen straat op rennen.
bij grote weg is barrière voor kinderwagen + blokken.

Question 3:
Are there clean and safe public restrooms for everyone?

in de bieb?
mannen: pispaal in grond

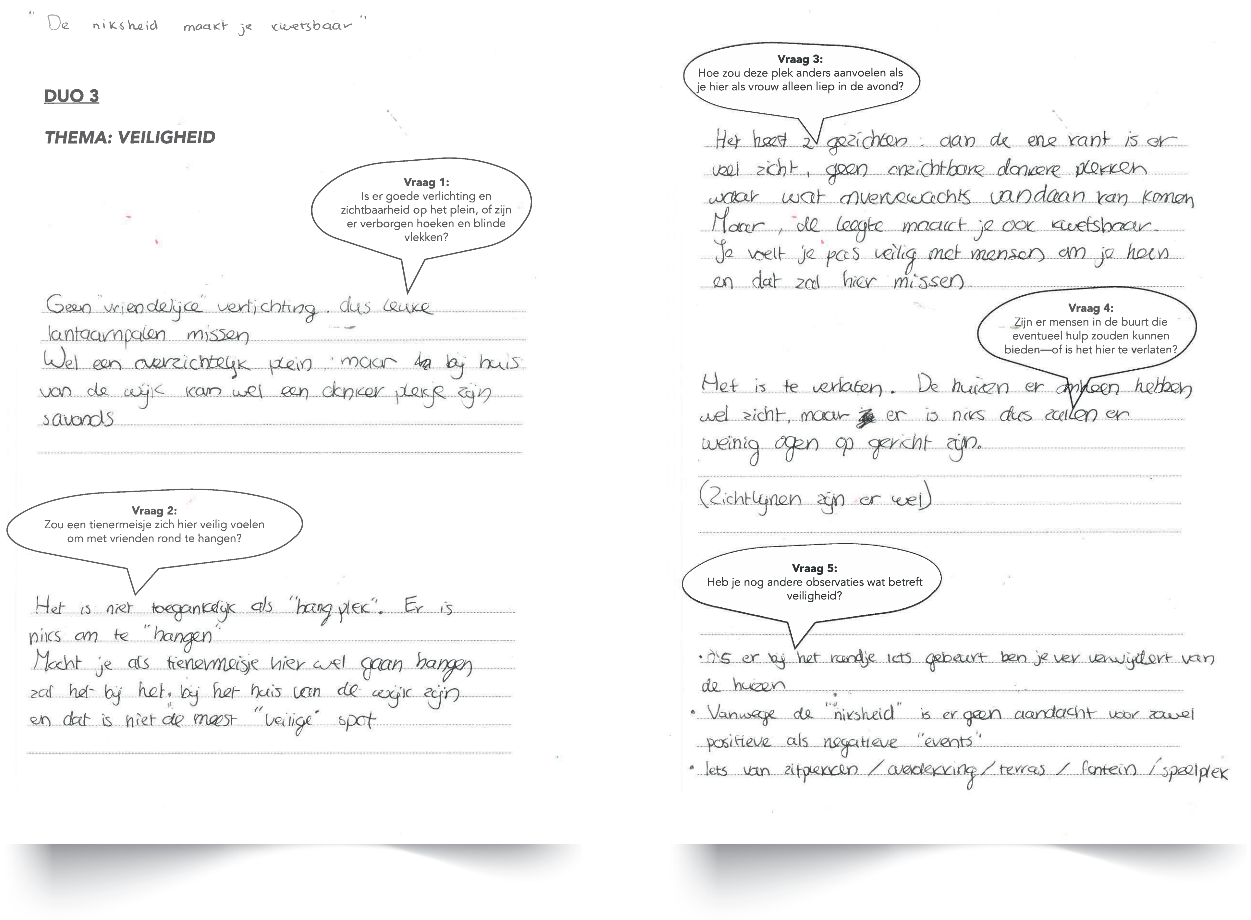
Question 4:
If you were menstruating or breastfeeding, is there anywhere you'd feel comfortable stopping?

vragen in bieb of buurthuis of cafe €
op bankje bij parkje bij ~~[illegible]~~ (borstvoeding)
= meer beschermd & groener + bankje

Question 5:
Do you have any other observations on accesibility on the square?

op het plein komen is moeilijk, → alleen vanaf park fijne toegang
je moet grens over
parkje voelt veel fijner < bomen / paviljoen — kleinere paadjes
waar kan je zitten als je moe bent / je kinderen wilt kijken.
in schaduw zitten kan niet
heel warm in zomer → ouderen & kinderen vooral vervelend

Image 40. The filled in sheets from the thematic excursion



" De niksheid maakt je kwetsbaar "

DUO 3

THEMA: VEILIGHEID

Vraag 1:
Is er goede verlichting en zichtbaarheid op het plein, of zijn er verborgen hoeken en blinde vlekken?

Geen "vriendelijke" verlichting. dus leuke
lantaarnpalen missen
Wel een overzichtelijk plein, maar ~~..~~ bij huis
van de wijk kan wel een donker plekje zijn
s'avonds

Vraag 2:
Zou een tienermeisje zich hier veilig voelen om met vrienden rond te hangen?

Het is niet toegankelijk als "hang plek". Er is
niks om te "hangen"
Mocht je als tienermeisje hier wel gaan hangen
zal het bij het, bij het huis van de wijk zijn
en dat is niet de meest "veilige" spot

Vraag 3:
Hoe zou deze plek anders aanvoelen als je hier als vrouw alleen liep in de avond?

Het heeft 2 gezichten: aan de ene kant is er
veel zicht, geen onzichtbare donkere plekken
waar wat onverwachts vandaan kan komen
Maar, de leegte maakt je ook kwetsbaar.
Je voelt je pas veilig met mensen om je heen
en dat zal hier missen.

Vraag 4:
Zijn er mensen in de buurt die eventueel hulp zouden kunnen bieden—of is het hier te verlaten?

Het is te verlaten. De huizen er omheen hebben
wel zicht, maar ~~..~~ er is niks dus zullen er
weinig ogen op gericht zijn.

(Zichtlijnen zijn er wel)

Vraag 5:
Heb je nog andere observaties wat betreft veiligheid?

- Als er bij het randje iets gebeurt ben je ver verwijdert van de huizen
- Vanwege de "niksheid" is er geen aandacht voor zowel positieve als negatieve "events"
- Iets van zitplekken / overdekking / terras / fontein / speelplek

Image 40. The filled in sheets from the thematic excursion

In the last exercise, participants were seperated in groups of men and women. They were assigned a co-creation exercise. In a 3D poster of the square they were asked to place interventions. They could choose 5 out of 10 options. This forced them to set priorities on which interventions they found most important. The results of those posters are depicted below (image 41)

Image 41. The filled in 3D maps from the co-creation exercise

Image 41. The filled in 3D maps from the co-creation exercise

7.3 Analysis Quasi-experiment

Here the remaining methods that were used in the quasi-experiment are analysed.

Method 1: Gender-Based Group Separation – active level

In the final exercise, participants were divided into gender-specific groups. This method was intended to create a safe space for women to express themselves more freely, thereby lowering psychological barriers to participation. The aim was to enhance inclusiveness by acknowledging that mixed-gender settings can sometimes inhibit open dialogue, especially for women.

However, in this particular session, the method had limited effectiveness (figure 42). While it did theoretically provide a safe space, several participants expressed confusion about the purpose of the separation, with one remarking that "it felt more like separation than inclusion." Given that participants had already indicated they felt comfortable in the group setting, the gender division was unnecessary and even counterproductive, reinforcing a sense of division rather than fostering openness.

A more context-sensitive approach—such as conducting a follow-up survey specifically with women or organizing a dedicated women-only event—may have been more appropriate in this case. That said, the method could be beneficial in different settings, particularly where male-dominated dynamics inhibit participation. Its strength lies in its ease of implementation within existing workshop formats, making it a flexible tool when applied in the right context.

Method 2: Thematic Mapping with Stickers – basic level

The sticker exercise also served a second, more conceptual purpose: to introduce and explore spatial aspects of the Gendered City through a visual and interactive medium. A custom illustration was created that discreetly embedded both positive and problematic spatial elements, allowing participants to respond to these without prior framing or theoretical explanation.

Participants identified and engaged with many of these embedded themes. For instance, several noted the café as a positive feature, appreciating how it encourages social presence in public space. The street lantern with soft lighting was also well received, with participants commenting on its aesthetic and perceived contribution to safety. Importantly, the exercise revealed contrasting lived experiences of certain urban elements. While some viewed the benches as inviting, others expressed concern about the presence of loitering youth, which could undermine feelings of safety—particularly among women.

A similar divide emerged around the depiction of a public urinal. Some participants saw it as a step toward addressing the lack of public sanitation, while others criticized its male-centric design or admitted they would avoid using it entirely. The depiction of street art featuring a woman also drew varied responses: while some appreciated the representation, others were more focused on the blank wall it was painted on, seeing the surface itself rather than the image as the dominant feature.

Overall, the method was highly successful in prompting discussion around gendered experiences of urban space, making abstract concepts tangible through visual storytelling. It also scored well on inclusiveness (figure 43), as all participants were able to engage with the activity regardless of verbal confidence or familiarity with the theoretical framework.

That said, the exercise was resource-intensive to develop. Crafting a drawing that accurately and subtly incorporates such a range of gendered spatial elements requires significant time and effort. However, this investment is offset by the method's reusability; once created, the drawing can be used across multiple sessions or contexts, offering a sustainable tool for future participatory work. Furthermore, it was a very low-threshold exercise for the participants to engage with a difficult topic.

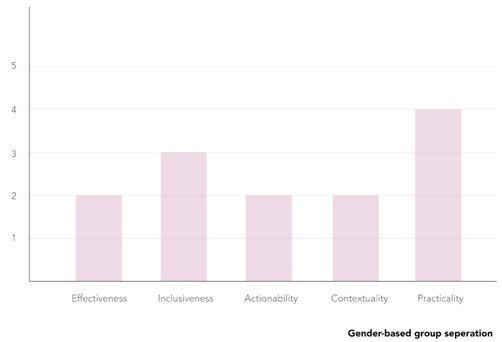


Figure 42. Bar chart analysis gender-based group seperation, own work

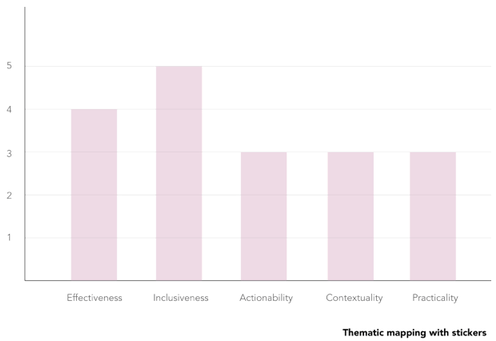


Figure 43. Bar chart analysis thematic mapping, own work

Method 3: Prompting Reflections on Day vs. Night Experiences – basic level

Another method used throughout the session was consistently prompting participants to consider how their experiences of the space might differ between day and night. This approach is particularly relevant given that gendered experiences of safety often intensify after dark. In each exercise—both verbally and through written forms—participants were asked whether they would feel equally comfortable using the space at night.

These questions proved effective in sparking discussion and revealing the complexity and duality of perceptions of safety (figure 44). For example, participants observed that while the square's openness provides a sense of visibility and surveillance, that same openness can also make individuals feel exposed and vulnerable, particularly women. This dual perspective underscores the importance of considering temporal dynamics in urban design and planning, and highlights how simple prompts can help participants critically reflect on changing conditions of safety over time.

Method 4: Use of Open-Ended Questions – basic level

A consistent method employed throughout the session was the use of open-ended questions, which allow participants to share their experiences freely and contribute insights that may not have been anticipated by the facilitator. This approach created space for a broader range of responses, supporting a more exploratory and participant-led dialogue.

While open-ended questions had a moderate impact on surfacing gendered experiences, they proved to be effective conversation starters, particularly when paired with structured activities (figure 45). On their own, open questions can sometimes be too abstract or vague, especially if participants lack a clear context. However, when anchored in a specific task or visual aid—such as the drawing used in the sticker exercise—they became more accessible and impactful. This highlights the value of combining open-ended inquiry with tangible reference points to help participants articulate their perspectives more clearly and confidently.

Method 5: Co-Creation with Gender-friendly interventions

The final exercise of the session was a co-creation activity, in which participants were invited to collaboratively design a new version of the square. While the exercise did not exclusively focus on gender-based interventions, it included several gender-sensitive design options—such as ramps, wide pavements, and inclusive seating arrangements—among the choices provided. By asking participants to select only five preferred interventions, the exercise aimed to reveal their priorities in shaping the space (image 46).

The activity yielded moderate results in terms of explicitly addressing gender. What did become evident is that both male and female groups prioritized interventions that enhance social presence in the public realm—such as a lively café. Similarly, wide pavements were chosen for their potential in appropriation that encourages informal interactions and passive surveillance. However, more explicitly inclusive features, like ramps for strollers and wheelchairs, were largely but aside. This suggests that participants intuitively valued social control and activity in public space over more targeted accessibility measures, showing priorities in gender-friendly solutions.

While this exercise may have had less direct impact on addressing gender than previous activities, it played a crucial role in transitioning from problem-identification to solution-making. It empowered participants to consider tangible interventions and take ownership of the space's future. One participant noted that the visual materials felt a bit coarse and expressed a preference for being able to draw their own ideas, suggesting the format could be improved in future iterations. Importantly, this method did not yield a complete redesign of the square but rather surfaced key intervention preferences, making it a valuable yet limited step in the participatory design process.

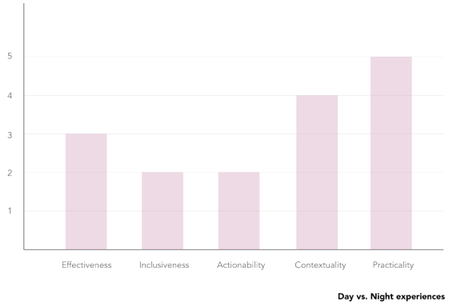


Figure 44. Bar chart analysis day vs. night, own work

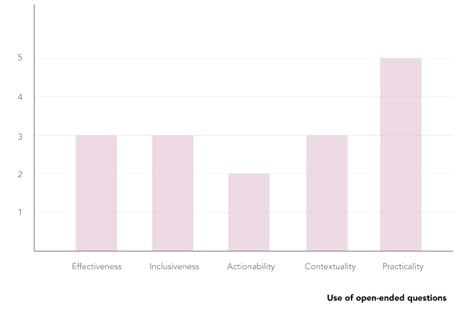


Figure 45. Bar chart analysis open-ended questions, own work

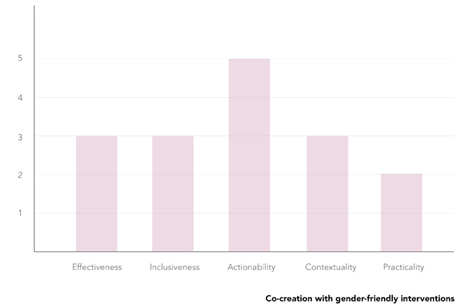


Figure 46. Bar chart analysis co-creation, own work

appendix E
The Principles and Methods

7.3 The principles and methods explained

In chapter 5 of this thesis a manual is presented for gender inclusive participation. The manual also lists multiple principles and suggestions for methods that can be used to achieve this. In this appendix the principles and methods that are mentioned are further explained. It reveals what they entail and why it is effective in addressing gender inequalities.

Principles for incorporation of the gendered themes

1. Center Lived Experience in Data Collection
People's personal, sensory, and emotional experiences often reveal nuanced challenges and needs that traditional data collection may overlook. Prioritizing lived experience ensures that insights are rooted in real-world encounters rather than abstract assumptions, enabling more human-centered and empathetic design and decision-making.

2. Elicit Place-Based, Contextual Knowledge
Understanding how individuals interact with and perceive specific environments is critical, as experiences can vary greatly depending on place, time, or identity. Contextual knowledge brings to light patterns and barriers that static or generalized data miss.

3. Make Gendered Realities Visible and Discussable
Gender influences how space is experienced, often in invisible ways. People need some help to get a good idea on what gender inequalities look like or what in encompasses. By making these realities visible with examples, data etc. participants get a good sense of what gender inequality in urban environments is about.

4. Use Creative and Embodied Participation
Traditional engagement methods often fail in addressing the Gendered City. Creative and physical participation opens up avenues for deeper engagement, helping participants externalize thoughts and emotions through movement, drawing, or making—making an intangible subject like gender inequality more visible and relatable.

5. Ensure Participation Leads to Influence
Genuine participation should go beyond token input. When communities contribute their perspectives, those insights should shape decisions and interventions. This principle ensures that participants see the value of their involvement and helps build trust and accountability in the process.

6. Use Multi-Sensory and Time-Based Evaluation
The Gendered City is not always visible but something that is felt. It engages all senses and changes over time. Most notably the difference between night and day makes a certain difference but also the differences between the seasons for example. By employing multi-sensory and time-based evaluation these gendered experiences can be captured better.

7. Continuously Check for Thematic Completeness
Complex issues like accessibility, mobility, and safety require attention across multiple dimensions. Regularly revisiting data collection with structured prompts or checklists ensures that no important perspective is missed, helping avoid biases and blind spots.

Principles for taking away barriers

1. Actively include women in participation efforts
Women's participation should never be assumed or incidental; it must be purposefully facilitated. Structural barriers and social norms often limit women's ability to engage freely, so outreach and design strategies must prioritize their presence to ensure their perspectives are heard and valued.

2. Balance gender representation
An equal mix of genders in participatory processes helps prevent power imbalances and ensures that both men's and women's voices influence outcomes. Without intentional balance, perspectives and experiences can de missed, potentially marginalizing key insights and needs.

3. Make participation accessible for people with caregiving responsibilities
Many women juggle caregiving roles that limit when and how they can engage. Recognizing these constraints—by offering flexible timing, childcare support, or remote options—ensures that they're not excluded from participating.

4. Ensure emotional and experiential contributions are valued
Traditional formats often prioritize 'rational' input over emotional or sensory experience. Validating feelings, daily experiences, and subtle observations as legitimate contributions helps capture the full richness of lived realities, especially those often expressed by women.

5. Guarantee equal speaking opportunities
In mixed settings, dominant voices can overshadow others—often to the detriment of women and marginalized genders. Equal speaking opportunities ensure everyone has the opportunity to speak and be heard without interruption or intimidation.

6. Allow for multiple ways of participating
Not everyone is comfortable with verbal communication an verbally, women often get overshadowed by men. Offering a range of expression—such as drawing, writing, storytelling, or physical interaction—makes the process more inclusive and responsive to diverse communication styles, often shaped by gendered experiences.

7. Create a safe and inclusive environment
Safety is foundational to genuine participation. For women it is often difficult to talk about experiences they have had in certain spaces. This means physical, emotional, and psychological safety—is a

key element when trying to address gender-based spatial inequalities. An inclusive space empowers individuals to share openly without fear of dismissal or ridicule.

8. Build trust through consistent, human-centered engagement
Trust doesn't form overnight. Especially for marginalized groups, consistent, respectful, and empathetic engagement is essential to build confidence in the process. Demonstrating care for people's perspectives and well-being leads to more honest and meaningful contributions.

9. Respect participants' time, context, and constraints
Participation also asks something of the participant. By being considerate of the participants time and context, the chances are that outreach is larger. Designing participatory processes that align with participants' daily lives—work schedules, cultural practices—shows respect. Flexibility and contextual sensitivity are key to equitable involvement, particularly for women balancing multiple responsibilities.

Methods related to incorporation

1. Pose Open-Ended Questions
What: Use broad, interpretive questions that cannot be answered with yes or no.
Why it's effective: Open-ended questions allow participants to share their stories and nuanced experiences. This can uncover systemic or subtle issues that standardized questions overlook, such as emotional responses, microaggressions, or situational fears.

2. Ask simple verbal prompts related to accessibility, mobility and safety
What: incorporate questions that relate to one of the three themes into existing formats like "How do you get to work?", "Do you feel safe at this bus stop?", or "Can you bring a stroller through here?"
Why it's effective: These questions can be asked during any activity and tap directly into everyday experiences. They help reveal gendered experiences that affect travel choices, feelings of safety, and ease of access—areas where women, elderly people, and caregivers are often disproportionately impacted.

3. Thematic mapping
What: Provide participants with maps and ask them to mark areas they feel unsafe, their common routes, amenities they use, or places they avoid. Tools like stickers, colored pens, or digital mapping platforms can be used.
Why it's effective: Visual mapping localizes gendered experiences spatially. It helps planners identify problem zones and patterns related to fear, inaccessibility, or lack of resources, which are often missed in general planning efforts. By letting each participant map, you also ensure that every participant is able to deliver input.

4. Show data to raise awareness
What: Share existing gender-specific data with participants or decision-makers—such as "80% of women feel unsafe at night."
Why it's effective: Data serves as powerful evidence, validating individual experiences while highlighting systemic trends. It also pushes participants to think about and acknowledge the urgency of addressing gender-specific urban issues.

5. "Where Do We Stand" exercise
What: A physical or visual activity where participants respond to statements by placing themselves along a continuum (e.g., agree/disagree, safe/unsafe).
Why it's effective: This participatory format encourages empathy and visibility. It makes abstract or sensitive issues tangible and promotes collective reflection on how gender influences experiences of urban space.

6. Always show your design during the day and night
What: Present proposed designs or conduct site visits under different lighting and time conditions.
Why it's effective: Women often face dramatically different risks and comfort levels at night. Reviewing designs in low-light conditions ensures they're evaluated through a lens of nighttime safety and visibility, which is vital for inclusive planning.

7. Use checklists on key themes (Accessibility, Safety, Mobility)
What: Create and use a checklist to ensure all core gender-related themes (accessibility, mobility and safety) have been addressed in the participation session
Why it's effective: This tool prevents oversight, unchecked biases and ensures attention to the full spectrum of factors affecting women's and marginalized groups' experiences.

8. Photo elicitation exercise
What: Show participants photos of urban spaces that have something to do with accessibility, safety or mobility and ask them to comment on their reactions, feelings, or memories associated with the image.
Why it's effective: Photos stimulate reflection and conversation, especially about complex emotional responses. This is particularly useful for discussing sensitive gender issues like fear, exclusion, or surveillance in public space. It is also highly effective is exposing the duality of gendered experiences (e.g. openness gives oversight but also a feeling of being exposed)

9. Let participants take photos of what they like/dislike
What: Provide cameras or smartphones and ask people to document spaces they enjoy or avoid in their neighborhoods.
Why it's effective: This method empowers participants to share their reality on their own terms. It gives insight into gendered preferences,

discomforts, or dangers that might otherwise be invisible to planners. You force participants to engage and stand still on their everyday surroundings.

10. Incorporate role play prompts
What: Ask participants to imagine navigating the space in another role, such as a caregiver with a stroller, a wheelchair user, or a child walking alone. This can be done with simple questions but you can also let a participant walk with a stroller or sit in a wheelchair as a radical experience.
Why it's effective: Role-playing encourages empathy and reveals infrastructural or design flaws. It makes sure that some perspectives are discussed and incorporated even if participants from that group are not present. It also highlights the gendered nature of care work, often carried out by women, and how urban design accommodates it.

11. Thematic excursions
What: Organize guided walks or visits where each participant or duo is assigned a theme to observe—such as safety, accessibility, mobility, or gender representation. This can be a focused excursion but this format could also be incorporated in existing excursions by just adding a few questions in the excursion.
Why it's effective: The focused observation sharpens awareness and encourages participants to analyze space critically. It makes sure that all the three themes of accessibility, mobility and safety are incorporated. It reveals how different gendered lenses pick up on different challenges or opportunities in the environment.

12. Co-creation exercise with gender-friendly interventions
What: Facilitate collaborative design sessions where participants brainstorm and shape gender-sensitive interventions—like better lighting, seating, or signage. This exercise can also be done by proposing gender-sensitive interventions and let participants chose which ones they find most important.
Why it's effective: Co-creation ensures interventions reflect real needs. Women and gender-diverse participants become active agents in shaping public space rather than passive recipients of top-down decisions. This makes sure that the interventions relate to actual needs and are not only effective in theory but also in practice.

13. Extra survey for women after the session
What: Distribute a follow-up questionnaire specifically for women to elaborate on or add insights they may not have shared during group activities.
Why it's effective: Some participants may feel uncomfortable voicing certain issues in public or mixed-gender settings. A follow-up survey provides a safe space for deeper reflection and disclosure. It also makes sure that the themes will be addressed from a gender-perspective.

14. VR experience (including night scenarios)
What: Use virtual reality to simulate walking through different urban areas during the day and night, allowing users to "experience" the design.
Why it's effective: VR helps stakeholders literally experience a design. Simulating night-time experiences, for instance, can highlight feelings of vulnerability that might be invisible on paper. By being able to experience the design, participants can give more detailed feedback on what they like and do not. This is especially useful in new developments where a whole new urban setting is created. This makes sure the participants have something they can react on.

15. Exploratory walks
What: Organize a one-on-one walk where participants move through their neighborhood freely, encouraged to observe and reflect without a fixed structure but sometimes guided by some questions from the researcher.
Why it's effective: This open format allows authentic, in-the-moment insights to surface. It reveals how people navigate public space instinctively, and what they notice or avoid, often shedding light on subconscious gendered behaviors.

16. Local hub for women to speak with professionals
What: Create a dedicated, accessible space where women can meet planners, architects, and local authorities to discuss gender concerns in the built environment.
Why it's effective: It fosters trust, continuity, and open dialogue. A localized, gender-focused hub breaks down barriers between experts and community members and offers a platform for sustained engagement.

17. Design probe
What: Give people an assignment they can fulfill themselves in their own time. For exmaple, ask participants to keep a diary of their movements over a week or more.
Why it's effective: This longitudinal method captures the complexity of daily experiences, including emotional responses and patterns in behavior that might reflect safety concerns or caregiving responsibilities. It also ensures that participants can participate on their own terms and time.

18. Co-budgeting
What: Give residents—particularly women and marginalized groups—real budgetary power to prioritize and select gender-friendly interventions.
Why it's effective: It builds ownership, democratizes decision-making, and ensures resources are directed toward issues that matter most to underrepresented voices.

19. Night walks
What: Organize guided or group walks through public spaces at night to evaluate safety, lighting, visibility, and atmosphere.
Why it's effective: First-hand experience of the night-

time city reveals aspects of gendered vulnerability and fear that are rarely captured during daytime assessments. It also sparks critical discussions about who gets to safely occupy public space after dark.

Methods related to taking away barriers

1. Distribute extra flyers in places where many women go
What: Place outreach materials in locations like daycare centers, hair salons, clinics, or community kitchens.
Why it's effective: These are trusted, frequented spaces for women, especially caregivers. This targeted outreach meets women where they already are, increasing awareness and participation among those often excluded.

2. Check the neighborhood's demographics
What: Compare the attendees of participation with neighborhood demographics. This reveals if you are missing any important target groups.
Why it's effective: Ensures the planning process reaches a representative sample of women. Avoids skewed participation that overlooks specific barriers or experiences tied to gender, age, or ethnicity.

3. Choose a location that is easily accessible
What: Select venues near public transport routes and within walkable distance for most residents.
Why it's effective: Women use public transport and walking more then men. A convenient location reduces logistical burdens and safety concerns.

4. Create a kids' corner with toys
What: Set up a space where children can play safely during events.
Why it's effective: Enables mothers and caregivers—who are often women—to attend and participate without needing external childcare. It sends the message that their dual roles are acknowledged and supported.

5. Emphasize that all input is relevant
What: Openly state that emotional, experiential, or "small" feedback is valid.
Why it's effective: Women may hesitate to speak up if their concerns don't seem "technical." This encouragement legitimizes their lived experiences and promotes richer, more inclusive dialogue.

6. Give structured turns to speak
What: Give structured turns to participants. For exmaple ask: "[insert name], what do you think of this?"
Why it's effective: This reduces dominance by louder voices (often men) and gives women a fair chance to express their opinions. It also eases anxiety for those who are shy or less confident.

7. Include creative activities
What: Use non-verbal or artistic expression methods during sessions like making collages or sticking stickers
Why it's effective: Helps participants who may struggle to express themselves verbally, or who are intimidated by group discussion. It fosters emotional expression and lowers cognitive barriers to participation.

8. Anonymous suggestion box
What: Allow participants to submit feedback privately by placing an anonymous suggestion box.
Why it's effective: Provides a safe outlet for women who fear judgment or have sensitive concerns. Especially useful in mixed-gender settings where power dynamics can silence open discussion.

9. Communicate using clear and simple language
What: Avoid jargon, legal terms, and overly technical vocabulary.
Why it's effective: Women with limited formal education or for whom the local language is a second language may feel alienated by technical speech. Clear communication ensures accessibility and dignity.

10. Build in time for informal interaction
What: Set aside unstructured time for mingling before or after the session with tea and coffee
Why it's effective: Encourages trust and relationship-building. Women may feel more comfortable sharing once they've established a personal rapport with others.

11. Organize events at various locations
What: Hold events in diverse venues like one in a school and another one in a community store.
Why it's effective: Increases access and comfort, particularly for women who have to travel alot.

12. Use a lottery system for a balanced group
What: Randomly select participants from various demographic groups to ensure fairness and balance.
Why it's effective: Prevents over-representation by more vocal or privileged community members. Ensures women from different backgrounds are heard.

13. Use a female intermediary for outreach
What: Engage a trusted local woman to invite and support other women's participation.
Why it's effective: Women may be more receptive to invitations from peers. This peer-to-peer model builds trust and breaks down social barriers.

14. Arrange childcare
What: Provide on-site or subsidized childcare during events.
Why it's effective: Childcare is a major barrier for mothers. Offering it signals that their needs are valued, and it removes a major logistical obstacle to attending a participation session.

15. Two-person moderator system
What: Use one facilitator to lead content and another to focus on emotional safety and group dynamics.
Why it's effective: Ensures sensitive issues are

managed respectfully. A supportive environment is especially important for women sharing vulnerable experiences.

16. Separate groups for men and women (when sharing experiences)
What: Split into gender-specific groups for parts of the session, especially when discussing personal or emotional topics.
Why it's effective: Women often feel more secure to talk about gendered experiences amongst women. This reduces fear of judgment and frees women to speak more openly.

17. Organize multiple events for trust building
What: Schedule several smaller gatherings over time rather than a single session.
Why it's effective: Trust—especially among women with past exclusion—is built gradually. Ongoing engagement fosters confidence and stronger participation.

18. Have dinner with participants before the event
What: Share a meal together prior to the session.
Why it's effective: Eating together builds a sense of community and lowers social barriers. It is a chance to get to know eachother outside the situation of organizer vs. participant.

19. Provide compensation
What: Offer monetary compensation, gift cards, or transit reimbursement for attending.
Why it's effective: Recognizes participants' time and reduces economic barriers. Women with precarious work or caregiving duties are very busy. This shows their efforts are valued and lowers barriers.

20. Offer different time slots
What: Run events at varied times (day, evening, weekend) to suit diverse schedules.
Why it's effective: Women's availability is shaped by caregiving, jobs, and domestic responsibilities. Flexibility enables broader participation.

21. One-on-one conversations in safe spaces
What: Meet women in their homes or other familiar, safe locations for interviews or feedback sessions.
Why it's effective: Increases comfort and trust. Useful to get in-depth data. For women with mobility issues, cultural constraints, or trauma public participation is difficult.

22. Use a conversation piece
What: Introduce an unrelated, physical object as a neutral discussion starter. For exmaple, make a snackbar stand that starts conversations on gender equality.
Why it's effective: Gender inequality is a difficult subject for many and not everyone is eager to talk about this. This playful or symbolic approach lurs people into deeper conversations on the subject with something that is unrelated.

23. Conversation circles with timed turns
What: Participants sit in a conversation circle and each has a set time (e.g., 2 minutes) to speak, using a visible timer like an hourglass.
Why it's effective: Promotes equal participation and prevents domination. Encourages those who might otherwise stay silent to share their views.

24. Design probe
What: Ask participants to complete creative tasks or keep diaries about their environment or behavior.
Why it's effective: Allows reflection in private, which can uncover insights not shared publicly. Particularly good for introverted participants or those with language barriers.

25. Women-only event
What: Host a session exclusively for women.
Why it's effective: Reduces fear of judgment, builds solidarity, and allows freer discussion of gendered experiences.

26. Focus on long-term community building
What: Build ongoing relationships rather than one-time events. Support leadership training, peer networks, and continuous dialogue.
Why it's effective: Sustainable trust empowers more women to speak up and stay engaged. It creates lasting impact beyond isolated interventions.

27. Adjust time slot to suit specific groups
What: Tailor event timing to participant routines (e.g., young women often prefer the early evening; caregivers after bedtime).
Why it's effective: Matches real-life schedules, making it easier for women to participate fully without neglecting other responsibilities.

appendix F
Interview protocol

7.3 Example of interview protocol

Before the Interview
Dear [Interviewee's Name],

Thank you for making the time to speak with me and for agreeing to be interviewed for my graduation research on The Gendered City and participation. This document contains an outline of the questions that will be discussed during the interview, as well as a consent form that explains how the data will be used and what measures are in place to handle the information responsibly.

Before we begin, we will take a moment to get acquainted, and I will briefly introduce the purpose and context of my thesis.

Research Topic & Background

My thesis aims to explore the question:
How can participation processes be structured in a way that brings gender inequalities in the city to the surface and helps address them?

The concept of The Gendered City highlights how women experience structural inequalities in the built environment — from a lack of public toilets and street harassment to challenges in navigating the city with a stroller. These barriers have existed for a long time, yet are rarely properly addressed in participatory planning processes.
This research does not aim to propose design solutions, but rather focuses on how participation can be shaped so that these gendered experiences are more likely to surface.

Your expertise in the field of participation and/or gender issues can provide valuable insights into how we might improve these processes.

Semi-structure for interview
1. Introduction

Can you briefly describe the work you or your organization does?
What is your professional background? (e.g., urban planner, social designer, policymaker…)

2. Lived Experience

In your opinion, what is the value of lived experiences in participation processes and/or in exploring The Gendered City?
Are you successful in capturing lived experiences in your projects? Does it require significant effort?
To what extent do you think women's lived experiences have historically been overlooked?
How do you use these experiences in your work?

3. Participation

How do you reach your target groups?
What methods do you use when dealing with sensitive topics?
How do you ensure that all perspectives are represented at the table?
How do you determine the level or form of participation?
How do you create a safe and inclusive space for participants?
If we want to improve participation processes, what do you think needs to be added or changed?

4. The Gendered City

What are some barriers women face in the city, in your view?
What aspects of public space make it harder for women to feel comfortable or move freely?
(If applicable:) I saw that you worked on a project related to [XYZ] — could you tell me more about that? What were the outcomes and how did you approach it?

Conclusion & Consent

Finally, I would like to ask if I may use this interview as data for my thesis.
You will find the informed consent form attached. It explains:

- What will happen with your data
- How your anonymity and confidentiality will be protected
- Your rights as a participant

If you have any questions about this form or the process, feel free to reach out.

appendix G
Operationalization table

appendix H
Data Management Plan