

TERRITORIO DELLA RICERCA  
SU INSEDIAMENTI E AMBIENTE  
RIVISTA INTERNAZIONALE  
DI CULTURA URBANISTICA

10

che "genere"  
di città  
per il futuro



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## Sommario/ Table of contents

### Editoriale/Editorial

Dalla città della donna alla donna per la città / *From the city of women to women for the city*

Mario COLETTA

### Interventi/Papers

- L'empowerment economico delle donne nelle città/ *Economic empowerment of women in cities*  
Teresa BOCCIA 23
- Questioni spaziali: la forma urbana della città influenza le possibilità economiche, in particolare per le donne/*Space matters: the urban form of the city influence the economics possibilities particularly for women*  
Ana FALU' 35
- COST network genderSTE: creare rete per la parità di genere nella Ricerca ed Innovazione in Europa e oltre/*COST network genderSTE: Networking Gender Equality in Research and Innovation in Europe and beyond*  
Inés SÁNCHEZ DE MADARIAGA 43
- Sfide di "genere" per smart cities più umane fra teoria, prassi e auspicabili scenari futuri/*Challenges of "gender" for more human-centered smart cities between theory, practice and desirable future scenarios*  
Gabriella PULTRONE 57
- Muse, committenti, progettiste. Il lungo percorso delle donne in architettura/*Muse, contractors, designers. The long road of women in architecture*  
Claudia MATTOGNO 71
- Sapere femminile e cura della città/*Female knowledge and care of the city*  
Ida FARÈ 85
- LA CASA DI EVA. Progetti al femminile per la città/*EVE'S HOUSE. Feminine projects for the city*  
Luisa CASTELLI 93
- Processi demografici e sociali, soluzioni innovative per comunità solidali, sguardi di genere/*Demographical and social processes, new solutions for communities' solidarity, and gender approach*  
Assunta D'INNOCENZO 107
- Una città su misura. Servizi sociali e assetto urbano nella pubblicistica e nei congressi dell'Unione donne italiane (1960-64)/*A custom-made city. Social services and urban assets in the magazine and congresses of the Union of Italian Women (1960-64)*  
Cristina RENZONI 121
- "Dance, dance otherwise we are lost". A reflection on the times of the city from an Urban Design perspective/*"Dance, dance otherwise we are lost". A reflection on the times of the city from an Urban Design perspective*  
Luisa Maria CALABRESE 135

Linea e Forma: spazi pubblici lineari ed areali inclusivi e fruibili. Hoofbogen a Rotterdam/ <i>Line and Form: linear, areal, inclusive and accessible public spaces. Hoofbogen in Rotterdam</i> Maurizio Francesco ERRIGO	149
Identificare i parametri spaziali per le differenze nel comportamento di genere negli ambienti costruiti. Il flâneur e la flâneuse del XXI secolo/ <i>Identifying the spatial parameters for differences in gender behaviour in built environments. The flâneur and flâneuse of the 21st century</i> Tra My NGUYEN, Akkelies van NES	163
Attivazione sociale, soggetti deboli e spazio pubblico: il caso del parco di Rione Traiano in Napoli/ <i>Civic activation, vulnerable subjects and public space: the case of the park of Rione Traiano in Naples</i> Gabriella ESPOSITO DE VITA, Stefania RAGOZINO	173

## Rubriche/Sections

<b>Recensioni/Book reviews</b>	191
<b>Studi, Piani e Progetti/Studies, Plans and Projects</b>	
Urbanistica di prossimità: competenza di genere o strategia miope? Reintroduzione delle valutazioni dell'impatto di genere nella pianificazione spaziale/ <i>Urbanism of proximity: gender-expertise or shortsighted strategy? Re-introducing Gender Impact Assessments in spatial planning</i> Lidewij TUMMERS	213
Green economy: un'occasione per le aree montane/ <i>Green economy: opportunity for mountain areas</i> Domenico PASSARELLI, Maria SAPONE	219
La Campania Felix nell'agenda nazionale dei siti di bonifica/ <i>The Campania Felix in the national agenda of reclamation sites</i> Anna Maria FRALLICCIARDI, Francesca CERISANO	229
Rigenerazione urbana e pianificazione guidata dal mercato durante gli anni della Thatcher/ <i>Urban regeneration and market-led planning during the Thatcher years</i> Antonio ACIERNO	239
La ricchezza delle città e loro prospettive future negli studi di Milan Zelèny/ <i>The wealth of the city and their future perspectives in the research of Milan Zelèny</i> Candida CUTURI	251
<b>Dibattiti, convegni, interviste e conferenze/Debates, meetings, interviews and conferences</b>	
Un'esperienza d'arte relazionale nel territorio della ceramica campana/ <i>Experience of relational art in the territory of ceramics in Campania</i> Francesca PIROZZI	255
La Risoluzione 24/XX al 24° CG di UN-Habitat - Nairobi 2013/ <i>Resolution 24/XX at 24° CG di UN-Habitat - Nairobi 2013</i> Teresa BOCCIA	259
Il mare e la città 2.0, partecipazione e condivisione per lo sviluppo locale di Napoli/ <i>The sea and the city 2.0, participation and sharing for local development in Naples</i> Antonio ACIERNO	263
<b>Iniziative accademiche/ Academic initiatives</b>	
URBANIMA: Centro strategico di ricerca sulla città "gender oriented" del LUPT/ <i>URBANIMA: strategic center for research on the city "gender oriented" LUPT</i> Teresa BOCCIA	269

Studi, Piani, Progetti

## Urbanism of proximity: gender-expertise or shortsighted strategy? Re-introducing Gender Impact Assessments in spatial planning

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The theorizing of gender, diversity and spatial planning began over three decades ago, both within and from outside the planning profession. It has evaluated from representing 'specific-gender/role connected-interests' to analysing the dynamics of inequality and difference. It is important to distinguish between approaches based on the concept of "women friendly" planning, which aims at the improvement of the every day life of women without trying to change "traditionally gendered" roles, and concepts that challenge the embodied gendered roles.

### Urbanism of proximity<sup>2</sup>

Domestic activities and care for children, elderly, sick people etc. are still in the majority of cases performed by female citizens, although female participation in the labour market constantly grows. Reconciliation of home and job is one of the key-concepts of Gender Mainstreaming<sup>3</sup>. Planning policies addressing the reconciliation of care and waged labour continue therefore to be classified as 'gender-aware' approaches.

In the present situation, most gender-aware spatial planning, instead of looking at structural inequalities, still aims at 'women' as a special needs target group; see for example the websites of Punt6, or Seoul women friendly city. The 'women friendly approach' allows for paying attention to spatial conditions for many people still confined to ancient role-patterns or extra burdens, and measures built on this concept can improve spatial conditions for many women in this situation [Booth and Gilroy 1999]. In this way it may alleviate the so-called 'chain of care' which makes career-women dependent on services of low-educated low-paid, usually immigrant women [Sassen 2000].

The result is an 'urbanism of proximity' [Muxi 2010; Irschik 2008, Kail 2005] that is also in the interest of the growing number of senior citizens, or of young families. But who guarantees that on the long run such measures do not convert in their opposite: an obstacle for emancipation? If conditions are optimised, why complain about the job?

Although the projects built with such criteria result in highly appreciated environments [Schröder-Zibell 2004], it remains unreported if and how facilitating the care-wage balance in spatial development affects the division of tasks between women and men. Furthermore, evaluation of gender mainstreaming in spatial planning indicates that it has not succeeded in giving more visibility to the multiple (formal and informal) layers of economy [Burgess 2008, Larsson 2006]. Going beyond policies to embed gender-aware approaches in planning practice happens rarely. Yet, to quote Clara Greed: 'if planning tools change, planning law needs to change with it'. Finally the distribution of power and pay within the profession itself is still far from gender-equality [Greed 2007].

The call for a humane urbanism is far from new; and the question arises in how far it can succeed in the deconstruction of the social roles of women and men in spatial terms. Toker found for example that housing built in participative design compared to housing built under 'new urbanism' made significant difference in the room used for women's own activities [Toker 2010]. Similar phenomena can be found in the recent 'grassroot designed' French quarters in the south of Germany [Tummers forthcoming].

A critical approach aiming to level the gender balance, instead of confirming women's nurturing role in society, tries to provide spatial patterns, criteria and parameters that enhance the choice for women and men in their societal roles as breadwinners, house-keepers, seasonal labourers, politicians, volunteers, creatives, parents, and so on. Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) is an *ex ante* evaluation method designed to identify possible gender effects in general policy [Meesters and Oudejans 2005]. Applying GIA to Spatial development policies and planning proposals may be useful to gain insight in gender dynamic beyond the urbanism of proximity.

### Gender Impact Analyses

GIA has a solid theoretical basis, based upon the existence of structural inequalities between men and women. It locates these inequalities in four domains: Employment, Private Life, Citizenship and Knowledge (Verloo and Roggeband 1996). The inequalities in these domains are maintained by two major principles: the distribution of resources, among which time and space are important ones; and power, including written and unwritten rules relating to gender roles and violence. The effects of policy proposals on these domains and principles can be assessed against criteria of equality, pluriformity, autonomy and social support. (See illustration source: Verloo and Roggeband 1996 p.10)

*Summary of the theoretical framework*

The core concepts of the theoretical framework are:

1. Structures
  - Gendered division of labour: paid and unpaid work, decision-making and organization
  - Organization of intimacy: sexuality, procreation, relationships between adults and children
2. Processes
  - Distribution, use and access to resources
  - Rules relating to gender
3. Criteria
  - Equality
  - Multiformity/autonomy

A GIA consists of 5 steps:

1. Description of current gender relations
2. Description of probable development without the planned intervention
3. Description and analysis of the plan
4. Description of potential effects on gender relations
5. Evaluating the positive and negative potential effects on gender relations

In the Netherlands, GIA has been implemented to spatial planning proposals; suburban VINEX<sup>4</sup> -schemes, addressing public transport, regional and national development policies as well as the fifth National Spatial Framework [Hupe et al 2002]. The implementation came to a halt when the central bureau for emancipation was abolished.



*“Tussen den parken”  
Utrecht, Netherlands*

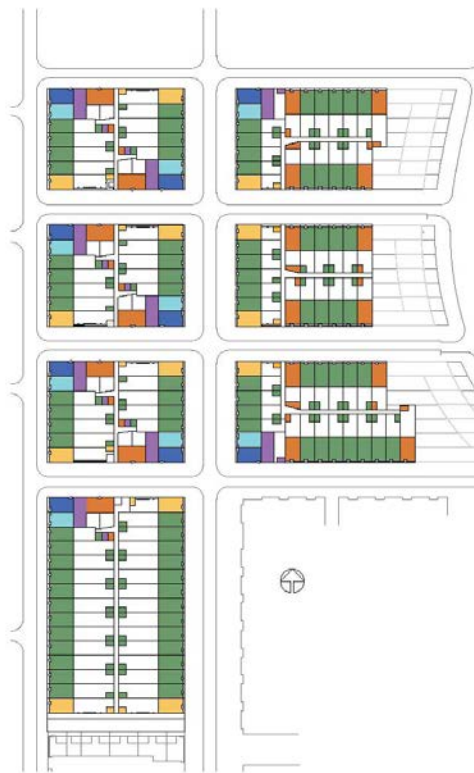
To illustrate the concepts that relate GIA 'domains' to spatial conditions the gender-aware proposals developed since the 1980s offer a rich source. For example, safe public space is seen as necessary for citizenship activities (such as going to meetings). In the same way, public transport is seen as a necessary condition for women to access the labour market. Other criteria include mixed use, the qualities of public space, the flexibility and variation of housing typology, the diversity of planning staff and the image conveyed by the planning and PR documents of the development area.

A gender audit comparable to GIA was applied to the 1999 National Development Plan of Ireland [Gender Equality Unit 2001]. Besides listing the above-mentioned issues, it also addresses

poverty and women's access to finance, health, and data-collection. The absence of gender-differentiated data can be a hindrance to perform full GIA [Verloo Roggeband 1996].

Useful concepts for developing GIA in spatial planning can also be found in equity planning, such as vulnerability, social networks, time-space patterns, exclusion and the social production of space. The scope of possibilities is also illustrated by the compilation that geographer Jarvis made together with Kantor and Cloke in 2009.

Recommendations for local planning teams may influence local planning decisions, as well as the selection of designers and staff and briefings for architects and builders. However producing such recommendations alone does not secure their implementation. For example, local planning decisions may be overruled by regional structure plans. At the same time, planning parameters at a higher scale-level (such as densities or plot-size) determine possibilities for the next scale-step such as housing typology or the quality of public space [Wankiewicz 2009]. The GIA evaluation is especially suitable at the scale of regional planning instruments, planning policies and building law in general. Structural and methodic gender analyses is not a 'social aspect' of planning; it can be considered a hard planning tool which if applied with expertise will form part of the due innovation of planning practice, both in its staffing, representation and substance. It is time to re-open the Gender Agenda that Sandercock and Forsythe proposed in 1992, and to redefine notions such as diversity, equality, participation and public domain for the post-crisis metropolises.



*"Tussen den parken"*  
Utrecht, Netherlands



## FOOTNOTES

1 Many thanks to Heidrun Wanckiewicz and Sylvette Deneffe for the inspiring discussions on this theme

2 aka 'Stadt der kurzen Wege' or 'Ciudad proximo'

3 With the Treaty of Amsterdam on 1st of May, 1999, the principle of Gender Mainstreaming was codified legally binding within the European Union. Art. 2 and 3 (2) committed member states to carry out active equality policy.

4 VINEX: acronym for Vierde Nota over de Ruimtelijke Ordening Extra, the 1991 supplement of the Fourth Report on Spatial Planning by the Dutch Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment.

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