TRANSPORTATION, MOBILITY, AND WOMEN IN CITIES OF DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

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Summary

This article deals with the issues of women mobility, urban transportation and accessibility in western cities. Women face drawbacks getting around in cities in their everyday life. This is due to the wrong design of urban spaces that only takes into account masculine necessities and pattern of mobility. Women have different needs and experiences in urban spaces and this affects their use of those spaces. This is overlooked by urban planners, as they take male necessities and special mobility patterns as a universal model. Accessibility is a key part of the analyses; it provides a more comprehensive view of the issue. The concept of citizenship is examined in order to include women's concerns in city planning. Cities are supposed to satisfy citizens' necessities, so thus it is important to analyze the very concept of citizenship.

1. Citizenship and Women

There is a gap between urban transportation systems in developed countries and women's needs. This unsuitability is not due to technical matters, but to social ones. One of the most important aspects that determine the social nature of this problem is the very concept of citizenship, which emerged in the Enlightenment period and was seen to include all men, as members of the society with full rights. The concept was and remains gender-biased in mainstream city planning, not considering women at the same level.

A city is supposed to be designed and equipped for citizens. In other ages cities fulfilled functions and satisfied necessities that nowadays might be irrelevant (e.g. as a refuge from danger), but currently people expect cities to offer services that were not expected in previous ages. If a modern city does not fulfill people's expectations and satisfy their

needs (or at least the needs a citizen think must be satisfied), then it can be said to be poorly designed. Nevertheless, it can be the case that a city is well designed and fitted to the citizens' needs, as a universal model, which in fact means for a particular group of citizens. In this case, the very concept of citizenship would be the root of the city's unsuitability, and it should be re-examined to include the different and diverse social groups, to create the foundations for a more democratic and fairer urban society.

The political tradition of social liberalism was the dominant form of politics in the twentieth century. This way of understanding politics is based to great extent on the idea of the social contract. Liberal thinkers developed the social contract theory in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (an exception is Thomas Hobbes). The social contract theory supports the state's legitimacy and by extension, all its institutions (like citizenship). It is based on the idea of an original "contract" between human beings in order to create society. All these persons lived in a pre-societal state that is called a "state of nature". This was a permanent "state of war" where people were in constant danger. This provided the motivation for gathering together to form society.

This social contract guaranteed citizen's liberties and rights, and established their duties. The people included in this figurative contract were those who society was designed for, and the city was built and furnished for. Nevertheless, the social contract was accompanied by an implicit sexual contract about maintaining the tradition of women's subordination and free access to women's bodies, which in fact meant that women were excluded from the public sphere of citizenship, from the very beginning. This is the basic reason why women were not taken into account in city planning.

The social contract is in force only in the public sphere of the society and not in the private one. The private sphere is ruled by a matrimonial contract, where all the family members are under the authority of the *pater familias* until leaving the household. So, they leave a patriarchal law to join civil society, ruled by the social contract laws. Following these arguments, it is said that the social contract is opposed to patriarchy. Nevertheless, women's discrimination circumstances still continue in the public arena, under the social contract. It shows that patriarchal precepts work in civil society as well, not as opposite factors but linked forces. It can be concluded from all of this that patriarchy is inherent to social contract. And this can only be explained by the existence of another contract that deals with all these matters: the implicit sexual contract. Every attempt to connect citizenship and urban planning should start from here.

2. Theoretical framework

To develop an equally gendered design in urban planning requires considering a broad concept of citizenship to include women's needs and demands. A true study on mobility (that is mainly related to urban transport) and accessibility for women in urban spaces must come from that standpoint.

Many classic social theorists have been interested in social relationships in space, as is the case of Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, George Simmel and Karl Marx, although they did not pay so much attention to these questions as they may deserve. The first sociologists that carried out a sociological analysis on specific spatial matters were

those known as the 'Chicago School' in the early 1920s. Nevertheless, they did not pay attention to women as a group characterized by special spatial limitations Later on, some other theorists like Le Corbusier (1929), Henri Lefebvre (1984) and Manuel Castells (1983) would greatly influence urban planning theories, and influence feminist writings coming from Geography and Sociology of Gender on urban design and mobility. Le Cobussier imagined a well-designed city to be a number of watertight spaces, each one with very well defined functions, different and segregated from the others: a place for shopping, a place for working, a place for living, etc. This approach enhances the use of cars, it was opposite to all multi-functional spaces (like the street), and on the whole it was better adapted to men's way of life. Henri Lefebvre analyzed the urban issue taking into account three elements: everyday life, space and capitalist reproduction of social relations. The most important elements to study the city were based on everyday life because it is where capitalist reproduction of social relations comes true. Manuel Castells analyzed urban spaces as the sociopolitical context for social actors. These relevant social scientists did not distinguish women as a particular social actor.

Geography of Gender has dealt with these questions when studying space, paying special attention to gender issues (Weisman, 1992). The analysis of urban spaces by this approach is particularly rich, and it includes the study of women's mobility, accessibility and urban transport. This discipline considers the traditional perspectives on urban planning to be insufficient because of their lack of interest in women's role in urban spaces. The traditional perspectives have been based on men's needs and way of life, and have hidden this fact by pretending their designs to be universal and not gender-based. In these cases, a spatial problem is studied overlooking gender differences to obtain a solution destined to the population as a whole. Nevertheless, they are using gender-biased information. Women traditionally have showed a different pattern of space interaction in urban settlements. Their daily mobility routines are (in many cases) different from those of men: drive (if they have access to a car) children to school, go to work, go for grocery or other shopping, carry their children to the playground, and other domestic tasks. In urban areas, rather than rural ones, people accomplish more activities (consumption, leisure, work, education, cultural...) in their daily routines, and these activities are located in different places. These facts involve a higher need of mobility. Such activities are linked to specific roles: productive, reproductive and assistance to the elderly, many of them played mainly by women. One of the consequences of this is that women spend (generally) more time and more financial resources than men on transport in cities. In addition, women get around in cities in a different way from men as they have to deal with toddlers, young children, and disabled persons. They are also more vulnerable to be assaulted than men. Another important aspect that is highlighted by Geography of Gender is the conception of women as active social agents that are able to change their environment and affect social action rather than a passive element as traditional perspectives showed.

Social science research connecting gender and space started in the 1970s. Administrations in diverse countries carried out gender-based policies in urban planning in these years. The Greater London Council's Women's Committee developed research during the 1970s and early 1980s on a broad range of issues related to urban design and planning from woman's point of view. In the mid 1980s the London Women and

Planning Group was founded, made up of women experts on urban planning and representatives from feminist organizations interested in gender and spatial issues. This group fulfilled an important role in urban planning, trying to focus the Administration's attention on women's issues in urban environment. They published some important reports like 'Planning for Choice and Opportunity' in 1989. The 'European Charter of Woman in the City', written in 1998, is the result of the research and effort regarding women's special requirements in urban planning. The main target of this Charter is the eradication of women's invisibility in urban planning by attending to their needs to the same degree as males', and developing a more sustainable and pleasant city to live in. The Charter contains twelve main issues for real citizenship for women (encouraging equal access to opportunities, women's participation processes, etc). Another goal is to achieve a non-bias gender design in several fields, including urban transport, security, environmental problems, and so on. An important task to achieve is to assure the irreversibility of the attained goals. Social networks should be encouraged to rise, keep and spread the results of policies, plans, etc., useful to improve women's urban status. Habitat (United Nations Center for Human Settlements) is an example of networking in that sense, putting together worldwide experience on women and urban planning. In Europe, the Scandinavian experience in this field is of particular relevance.

Pahl's (1968) and Harvey's (1985) research on urban mobility are of great importance. Specifically about urban transport, a good example is the work of the Independent Transport Commission. These studies are mainly focused on the social aspects of mobility and transport rather than considering them to be mere technical problems.

Gender perspective on urban planning has been discussed at international level as well. An example is the International Workshop on Gender Responsive Environmental Planning and Management (its first meeting took place in Nairobi in 1998). The latest theoretical tendencies on women and transport (where authors like Pickup in United Kingdom, Coutras in France or Massolo in Italy stand out), focus attention on the fact that women's discrimination in urban spaces will not be solved only by the development of new policies. Women's discrimination in urban spaces include a disadvantageous spatial interaction due to poorer access to mobility, a different pattern of movement in urban spaces that involves more walking, higher risk of assault, spaces that can become dangerous for women at night (for instance), among others. The reason why new policies are insufficient to solve women's discrimination (in urban spaces as well as in some other fields) is the social complexity of the problem, although these policies are useful and necessary. Theoretical tendencies on urban mobility and transport in the third millennium should pay more attention to environmental sustainability in urban planning and to increase public participation and decentralization of public policies.

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