

A Gender-Sensitive Public Space and Community Facilities

The public space shapes our experience of the city and the urban community life. It is where we get some fresh air, relax, play, exercise, and meet up. It is the place that enables us to connect with urban nature, connect with ourselves and connect with those around us. The gardens and the parks, the city squares, the boulevards, the streets, and the beach promenade, alongside the community facilities (community centers, public country clubs, libraries, and more) – are all places to meet, become acquainted and build communality in the city. The COVID-19 crisis, which brought social and spatial restrictions into our lives, reminded us just how important the public space is to all of us so we can lead a full, healthy, happy and shared life.

However, the public space is not neutral. It has been planned for everyone but is experienced differently by women and men. Girls and women have unique and different needs and their patterns of use differ from those of boys and men. When the public space is planned and managed without etiquette consideration of these, the result is a space that does not maximize its potential for half of the city's population.

In recent years, a growing number of cities across the globe, together with international organizations such as the United Nations, the European Union and the World Bank, are advancing gender-sensitive urban planning. In Israel, this matter still needs to take a quantum leap.

The Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality decided to focus on the gender aspects of designing and managing the public space and community facilities in the city. This reflects

a belief that **ADDRESSING THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF GIRLS AND WOMEN WILL NOT ONLY CREATE A HIGH-QUALITY, ACTIVE, SAFE, AND MORE INVITING SPACE**

for them, but also for all the city's residents. It will also

ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF OTHER MINORITY GROUPS

(people with disabilities, senior citizens, the LGBT community, etc.).



This chapter is a product of collaborative work by numerous municipal departments: the Community, Culture and Sports Administration, City Engineer, City Architect, Resilience and Social Equality Authority, Strategic Planning Unit, Operations Division, Construction and Infrastructure Administration, and others. The chapter reviews the current situation and adopts action items for advancing the matter and creating change in the city.

Why is a gender lens needed when examining the public space and community facilities?

Research from Israel and other parts of the world suggests that gender inequality exists in the public space. This ranges from extreme cases of sex segregation (such as making streets and events off limits to women) to gender disparities in recreational options and use of the public space. In many instances, this means that women do not benefit from urban resources to the same extent that men benefit from them.

WOMEN IN TEL AVIV-YAFO GO TO THE BEACH LESS FREQUENTLY THAN MEN, and generally express a lower degree of satisfaction with the condition of the beaches: the cleanliness, the showers, the restrooms and the sense of personal safety while spending time at the beach

(Women in Numbers, 2021).



WOMEN REPORT THAT IT IS DIFFICULT TO WALK ON THE SIDEWALKS MORE THAN MEN DO,

whether due to the cars parked on them or due to people riding bikes and scooters (The City Survey, 2020; The City Survey, 2021).

THERE IS A GAP BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN IN THE CITY IN TERMS OF THEIR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND USE OF MUNICIPAL SPORTS FACILITIES

when exercising outdoors (athletic fields, the sports complex, outdoor gyms in the public space): 14% of the women as opposed to 25% of the men.

(Municipal Sports Survey, 2020).



What creates those differences and which factors affect how women spend time in the public space? The answer lies in a combination of three factors – physical, social and experiential:

The physical factor:

The physical infrastructure of the public space – the network of streets, the geographic spread of public and community facilities, the transportation systems, shade-related elements, and more – affects how it is used, ranging from the mix of uses at the municipal level (for example, whether residential areas are detached from employment districts and how that affects women, who are the main caregivers in the family) to the degree to which community buildings are adapted to the needs of women (for example, whether the restrooms are safe and accessible).

→ Research studies indicate that women are prepared to wait, walk a long distance and even change their plans in order to find inviting public restrooms. In other words, the location and features of the restrooms have a direct effect on how women use the public space on a daily basis.

→ Numerous research studies draw a parallel between the built environment and its visibility and the sense of safety in the public space. Oftentimes, both women and men feel unsafe in the public space, but women suffer from that more and at times they even refrain from using the public space, especially at night. An analysis of the calls received by the municipal 106 Plus Hotline in 2020 regarding public lighting showed that 64.8% of the calls asking for more lighting in public parks were made by women.



In Tel Aviv-Yafo, only about 3% of the streets are named after women.

THE MUNICIPALITY IS ACTIVELY WORKING TO CHANGE THE SITUATION AND RECENTLY PASSED AN AMENDMENT TO THE STREET NAMING PROCEDURE, WHOSE AIM IS TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF STREETS NAMED AFTER WOMEN AND MINORITY GROUPS.



This past year saw the addition of more streets and public institutions named after women, including Dr. Vicki Shiran, Dahlia Rabikovitch, Zahrira Harifai, Ofra Haza, Ahuva Ozeri, and others.

Gender intersects with other factors, such as age, status, disability, etc. The research indicates that women who experience other types of social discrimination are more vulnerable to sex segregation in the public space. Thus, for example, women's socioeconomic status, age, and the cultural-religious environment in which they live and work – have direct implications for the way in which diverse women make use of the public space and community facilities in the city.

The social factor:

The use women make of the public space is influenced by social norms and socioeconomic and cultural factors. Even in 2022 and even in Tel Aviv-Yafo, there is a gender division of labor at home and at work in many households. Women are still the primary caregivers of children and others in need of assistance, such as elderly parents. This leads to the fact that in most families women are the ones who have part-time jobs, leave work early, and spend the afternoon with the children in parks and community centers, or they are the ones who accompany an elderly parent to a health clinic. In other words, based on estimates, women spend more time in the public space than men do in terms of frequency and duration.

→ 30% of the women in Tel Aviv-Yafo worked part-time in 2019, compared with 19% of the men. On average, women also worked fewer hours a week than men – 38.5 compared with 44.9 (The City Survey, 2021).

The experiential factor:

Women's experience in the public space is affected by a **sense of a lack of personal safety**. Because they fear gender-based violence, women do not enjoy the same freedom of action and movement that men enjoy, and for that reason certain parts of the public space become less accessible and available to them. This is a well-known occurrence worldwide. According to research conducted by the United Nations, starting from the age of eight, girls feel much less safe and go to parks and gardens less often. Consequently, 80% of the public spaces in cities are characterized by a predominance of boys (UN-Habitat, 2021).

Additionally, given the disparities in the presence and representation of women in the space (such as street names, signage, content customized to female residents, etc.), the **sense of belonging**, the value of equality, and the connection female residents have with the place they live in are adversely affected.

IN TEL AVIV-YAFO WOMEN DON'T FEEL AS SAFE AS MEN DO WALKING ALONE IN THE DARK

(The City Survey, 2021).



The Solution: Gender-Sensitive Urban Planning

In recent decades, gender-sensitive urban planning has been advanced in various cities around the world, including Vienna, Berlin and Barcelona. The aim is to ensure the representation of women in urban planning decision-making processes, besides creating a space that is safe, convenient, inclusive, and suitable for women so they can take an active and meaningful part in urban life.

The premise underlying this approach is that identifying the needs unique to girls and women in the urban space and attempting to meet those needs – create a high-quality, active, safe and more inviting space for all residents of the city, in addition to addressing the needs of minority groups (people with disabilities, senior citizens, the LGBT community, etc.).

Gender-sensitive urban planning is carried out by applying a gender lens to three facets:

1

The planning process

- Collecting data and building gender-based knowledge. For example: a gender analysis of women's and men's behavior and activity patterns in the public space; the use of a variety of methods and sources to gather information that also includes the needs of minority groups (interviews, observations), etc.
- Public participation – ensuring the active participation of women from diverse groups and of different ages - for instance, by holding meetings in special forums that enable women to freely share complex experiences in a supportive environment.
- Meeting the needs of women, while also taking into account cultural, ethnic, age and other factors.

2

Planning products

incorporating gender-sensitive aspects at all planning levels: urban development plans and topic-based strategic plans, master plans and urban design concepts, as well as outlined site planning and detailed site planning – streetscapes, public squares, public parks and gardens, etc. (for example, as regards shade, public restrooms, outdoor gyms, street furniture, places to breastfeed, places for baby strollers, etc.).

Strategic principles of gender-sensitive planning include among other things mobility, accessibility, and connectivity, as well as mix of uses – incorporating commercial uses (shops, businesses, offices) close to residential areas, which would support combining work commitments with family obligations (which women bear more than men).

3

The management and operation of the public space and community facilities

the latter require addressing the following elements:

- Mapping barriers, opportunities, and gender needs, considering other characteristics such as age or social and cultural background, and developing customized content, activities and services at community, cultural and sports facilities.
- Increasing the presence and representation of women to reinforce their sense of belonging.
- Advancing maintenance-related and operational issues and meeting the diverse needs of the women using the space in real time to enhance personal safety.



What did we learn from other parts of the world?

Vienna has been a pioneer in gender-sensitive urban planning since the 1990's. It is ranked as one of the cities with the best quality of life in the world. In 2014, the municipality adopted STEP 2025 -Urban Development Plan Vienna that called among other things, for creating a city characterized by gender equality. The strategic goals set by the municipality for mainstreaming gender-sensitive planning in urban planning were: an equitable distribution of resources achieved through awareness of different spatial needs; support for synchronizing family and work obligations; strengthening the appeal, security and safety of residential environments; and representation based on equal participation and involvement of all groups in decision-making processes.

In Umeå, Sweden, the LEV tunnel was opened in 2012. The 80-meter-long tunnel, which is designed for walking and bike riding, connects the city center with an adjacent residential neighborhood. When planning the tunnel, the municipality held workshops for the planners and also solicited public participation in identifying gender needs, where the importance of the unique needs of women users of the space was highlighted. As a result of that, the tunnel has wide openings that facilitate passage with children and baby strollers, rounded edges and lighting to enhance the sense of safety. The tunnel also features works of art that make the space an inviting place. The tunnel has become one of the main attractions in the city and its widespread use increases the sense of safety of its users even more.

In Paris, the municipality launched a public space renewal project in 2017, while applying a gender lens and encouraging women to make use of the space. The project relied on mapping usage patterns of Place du Panthéon (by means of observations and workshops) and replanning the space. The steps taken included imposing restrictions on vehicular traffic and parking to increase the sense of safety, creating diverse seating options to encourage people to spend time and meet up, and commemorating the names of women. The launch of the project included an event called "A Place of Her Own" which consisted of a tribute to a well-known feminist artist, the writing of women's names on elements in the square, the screening of films made by a nonprofit organization that supports young women who are survivors of violence, and more.

In Madrid, the municipality spearheaded a project designed to create 'spaces of equality' – buildings throughout the city named after women, whose purpose is to empower women and raise awareness about equality issues, protection from violence and healthy relationships. The activities include empowerment workshops as well as social and legal services for women.

In Amsterdam, since 2016 the municipality has been advancing a strategic plan called "Age Friendly City Amsterdam", which focuses on elderly people and targets four main areas: dementia, loneliness and social environments, housing and accommodation, and safe mobility. Reflecting the understanding that culture is a key to health, wellbeing and participation among older people, a plan was devised whose focus is on culture. The municipality collaborated with the city's public library organization and cultural institutions to develop and run cultural activities adapted and customized to elderly people, held at libraries and community facilities.

Action Items for Applying the Gender Lens in the Public Space and Community Facilities in Tel Aviv-Yafo

For Implementation Within Five Years

Creating a municipal database on the public space

- Systematic gender analysis of data obtained from surveys, municipal databases, the 106 Hotline, and other sources of information. 
- Designing a periodic survey to examine public space usage patterns.
- Developing a municipal mechanism for gathering and tracking needs on the ground to improve the lighting in dark areas and increase the sense of safety (for example, by means of the SafeUp App, calls received by the 106 Hotline, etc). 

Formulating directives and tools for developing a gender-sensitive public space

- Formulating a document containing directives for advancing an inclusive public space in different scales (gardens, city squares, streets, parks, neighborhoods); the document will be designed based on a pilot. 
- Characterizing and developing a municipal tool comprised of a variety of information layers (open public areas, public buildings, demographics, etc.) for the purpose of analysis and providing planning solutions.
- A gender assessment of the deployment and adaptation policy pertaining to public restrooms in the city. 

Applying the gender lens in public building planning

- Formulating gender-sensitive plans for public buildings: community institutions, educational institutions and other public institutions. 
- Planning family restrooms and locker rooms at all public institutions. 

Presence and representation in the public space

- Mainstreaming gender-equal language and representation in municipal signage and publications. 
- Commemorating more women by naming streets and public sites in the city after them. 
- Establishing the first-of-its-kind gender equality municipal center that will be a professional resource and an educational knowledge hub on the subject of gender equality and feminism, in addition to showcasing important endeavors of women. 

Developing a suite of tools for gender-sensitive management of community facilities

- Advancing gender equality with respect to elements of the community space (regular activities, community initiatives, language and communication, culture and events), while paying particular attention to senior citizens, persons with disabilities and the LGBT community.



*Already in progress

[Click here to read the introduction and the other chapters of the plan >>](#)

Main References

- Amir, Tula (ed.), 2017. Tamrurot: Feminism and Space in Israel. Tel Aviv: Xargol [Hebrew]
- Bitton & Shavit, 2015. 'The Differences between Men's and Women's Monetary Valuation of Crime Avoidance Behavior,' *Feminist Criminology* 10(2), pp. 115-139
- Brookfield, Katherine & Sara, Tilley, 2016. 'Using Virtual Street Audits to Understand the Walkability of Older Adults' Route Choices by Gender and Age', *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 13(11), p. 1061
- City of Vienna, 2014. STEP2025 - Urban Development Plan Vienna
- Damyanovic, D., 2013. 'Gender Mainstreaming as a Strategy for Sustainable Urban Planning', in Sánchez de Madariaga, I. and Roberts, M. (eds.), *Fair Shared Cities. The Impact of Gender Planning in Europe*, Ashgate, Farnham, p. 338
- Gustafsson, L., 2017. Umeå - Gender Equality at the Heart of the City, URBACT
- Mercer, 2019. Quality of Living City Ranking: 2019 City Ranking
- Place du Panthéon - Les MonumentalEs, 2017
- Portal Web del Ayuntamiento de Madrid, n.d. Espacios de Igualdad en los Distritos
- Reinwald, Florian, Marian Roberts & Eva Kail, 2019. 'Gender Sensitivity in Urban Development Concepts: The example of Two Case Studies from London and Vienna', in *Gendered Approaches to Spatial Development in Europe*, Routledge
- Sivan, Esther & Toby Fenster (eds.), 2006. *What Kind of Space? Spatial Planning from a Gender Perspective*. Jerusalem: The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute [Hebrew]
- Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality, 2020. Municipal Sports Survey [Hebrew]
- Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality, 2020. The City Survey [Hebrew]
- Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality, 2021. The City Survey [Hebrew]
- Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality, February 2021. Women in Tel Aviv-Yafo in Numbers: Select Data, The Center for Economic and Social Research [Hebrew]
- The World Bank, 2020. *Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning and Design*.
- UN-Habitat, 2021. *HER CITY - A Guide for Cities to Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Planning and Design Together with Girls*
- Women's Health East, 2020. *Creating Safe and Inclusive Public Spaces for Women*, WHE, Melbourne
- World Cities Culture Forum, n.d. *Age Friendly Cultural City Programme*

***Research and academic guidance:** Architect Hila Lotan and Urban Planner Hen Roznek