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Building Gender-Friendly Cities Using Participatory Approach: A Literature Review of Global Case Studies

Abstract: This research paper presents a comprehensive literature review of global case studies that demonstrate the effectiveness of a participatory approach in building gender-friendly cities. The objective of the research is to pinpoint effective initiatives and strategies implemented in cities globally, with a particular emphasis on notable examples like London, Vienna, and Melbourne. These cities represent diverse contexts and geographies, offering valuable insights into the implementation of participatory approaches to enhance urban spaces for women. The research methodology involved an extensive review of academic papers, reports, and relevant publications that documented the experiences and outcomes of participatory initiatives in these cities. The findings reveal a range of innovative approaches and interventions that have contributed to creating gender-friendly urban environments. The study concludes by underscoring the shared patterns and insights derived from these case studies, emphasizing the importance of inclusive methods in creating cities that are accommodating to gender diversity. The findings contribute to the existing literature on participatory urban planning and provide valuable insights for policymakers, urban planners, and community advocates seeking to create more inclusive and empowering urban environments for women globally.

Keywords : *Participatory approach, Gender-friendly, Inclusive planning, Urban strategies*





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1. Introduction

Creating gender-friendly cities is a crucial step towards achieving social sustainability and fostering inclusive communities. Gender equality and women's empowerment are essential components of sustainable development, and urban spaces have a substantial impact in shaping the lived experiences and opportunities available to different genders. In order to make certain that cities are designed and developed with a gender-responsive approach, the involvement of diverse stakeholders through a participatory process becomes paramount. The participatory approach in urban planning and design involves actively engaging individuals, communities, and organizations in decision-making processes related to the development and management of urban spaces. It acknowledges that the experiences, needs, and perspectives of different segments of society, including females, must be considered to create cities that are safe, accessible, and supportive for all. A gender-friendly city fabric pertains to the physical, social, urban setting that promotes gender equality, inclusivity, and respect. It extends beyond tackling the immediate issues related to safety and ease of use and aims to challenge and transform societal norms and power dynamics that perpetuate gender inequalities. Achieving a gender-friendly city fabric requires the integration of various concepts and theories related to gender studies, urban planning, and social sustainability. One concept that underpins the importance of a participatory approach in creating gender-friendly cities is intersectionality. Intersectionality acknowledges that individuals face overlapping and interconnected forms of



discrimination and disadvantage due to their gender, race, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and various other social identities. Applying an intersectional lens in participatory processes allows for a more subtle comprehension of the diverse experiences and needs of different groups of women, ensuring that urban spaces cater to their specific requirements and aspirations. Theoretical perspectives on feminist urbanism offer valuable perspectives on how the physical environment can be designed to confront gender inequalities and promote women's empowerment. Feminist urbanism critiques the patriarchal biases inherent in traditional urban planning and underscores the significance of incorporating women's perspectives, voices, and experiences in the planning and development of cities. Participatory approaches align with the principles of feminist urbanism by enabling women to actively participate in decision-making, shaping urban environments that are sensitive to their needs and aspirations. By incorporating the participatory approach in urban planning and design processes, cities can effectively address the gender-related challenges and inequalities that women face in public spaces. The following sections will explore the history and the present trends of participatory approach in establishing gender-friendly character to a city and subsequently,

This research paper also presents three prominent international case studies that showcase successful instances of participatory methods in creating urban environments that are inclusive and

supportive of gender diversity. preprints and the Proceedings.

2. Emergence and persistence of feminist participatory approach

The history of the participatory approach in establishing gender-friendly cities can be attributed to the emergence of the women's movement and feminist activism, which advocated for gender equality and challenged the male-dominated urban planning processes. The participatory approach gained momentum as a reactive measure taken in light of the exclusion of women's voices and experiences in urban development and design. In the 1970s, feminist scholars and activists started critiquing the gender biases approaches that would empower women to actively engage in decision-making. The seminal work of urban theorist and activist Jane Jacobs challenged the dominant planning paradigm and emphasized the significance of community participation in shaping cities. Jacobs' ideas, in addition to the influence of grassroots women's organizations, laid the foundation for the participatory approach in urban planning. Over time, the participatory approach has evolved and expanded to address gender-related concerns in urban spaces. It recognizes that women experience cities differently from men and that their safety, mobility, and access to resources are influenced by various social, cultural, and economic factors. Participatory processes now aim to involve women from a range of diverse backgrounds and guarantee their voices and perspectives are taken into account in the process of urban planning and design. Present trends in participatory approaches for establishing gender-friendly



cities reflect a growing re along with the cognition of the significance of women's involvement in decision-making and the need to create inclusive urban spaces. There is an increased emphasis on engaging women directly in the planning and design process, rather than relying solely on top-down approaches. This includes consultations, workshops, focus groups, and community-led initiatives that actively seek women's perspectives and incorporate their feedback into urban development strategies. Moreover, technology and digital platforms have opened up new avenues for participation, enabling wider access to information, communication, and collaboration. Online platforms, social media, and mapping tools have facilitated the collection of data on women's experiences in cities and provided platforms for sharing stories and advocating for change. These advancements in technology have played a role in facilitating women's voices and enhancing their participation in shaping gender-friendly urban environments.

3. Methodology

This review paper will delve into a variety of case studies from various regions of the world, showcasing the diverse contexts, strategies, and outcomes of adopting a feminist participatory approach in urban planning and design. These studies will shed light on the various methods through which women have been engaged in shaping the physical, social, and cultural aspects of their cities. By examining the successes, and challenges, and analyzing the insights gained from these international case studies, this examination will offer a comprehensive comprehension of the possibilities inherent in

employing a feminist participatory approach to achieve urban environments that are supportive of gender diversity. It will explore the innovative methodologies, participatory processes, and community engagement strategies employed to ensure that women's voices are heard and their needs are met. Moreover, this analysis will examine and evaluate the impacts of implementing a feminist participatory approach on urban spaces, including the creation of safe and accessible public spaces, the integration of gender-responsive infrastructure and services, and the promotion of economic opportunities for women. It will also explore the wider societal, economic, and environmental advantages that arise from fostering gender equality and inclusivity in urban contexts. By synthesizing and analyzing these global case studies, this review paper aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on feminist participatory approaches in urban planning and design. It seeks to inspire policymakers, urban planners, and researchers to adopt and adapt these approaches in their own contexts to create more equitable, inclusive, and gender-friendly urban spaces. Ultimately, this review paper seeks to contribute to the broader agenda of achieving sustainable and socially just cities that prioritize the needs and aspirations of all individuals, irrespective of their gender.

4. Review of global best practices

The selected case studies of London, Vienna, and Melbourne showcase the significance of adopting a participatory approach in establishing gender-friendly cities. These cities have recognized the importance of involving women in urban planning and decision-making



processes, aiming to create inclusive and safe urban spaces that cater to the needs and preferences of all residents, particularly women. By examining these instances showcased in detail, readers can expect to gain intricacies into the specific initiatives and strategies implemented by each city to promote gender inclusivity and enhance the urban environment for women.

4.1. "Women's Design Service" - London, United Kingdom:

The "Women's Design Service" in London, United Kingdom, is an exemplary case study that demonstrates the use of a participatory approach to enhance the women-friendly nature of the city. The Women's Design Service (WDS) is a UK-based organization a notable case study that actively works towards advancing gender equality in the processes of urban planning and design. The WDS employs various participatory methods to engage women from different communities, backgrounds, and age groups in the process of planning and design of urban spaces. Through workshops, focus groups, and consultations, the organization creates a platform for women to share their experiences, needs, and aspirations related to the built environment. The participatory approach ensures that women's perspectives are central to decision-making processes, allowing for more inclusive and equitable urban design outcomes. One significant contribution of the Women's Design Service is its advocacy for safer and more accessible public spaces. Through their engagement with women, the organization highlights safety concerns and works towards addressing them. They identify areas where women feel vulnerable or experience harassment and collaborate with local authorities and stakeholders to implement design interventions

that enhance safety and create inclusive spaces. These initiatives may include improved lighting, clear signage, well-designed pathways, and the consideration of women's safety in transportation planning. The Women's Design Service also focuses on promoting women's facilitates involvement in the creation and administration of public facilities. They emphasize the importance of considering women's specific needs when developing facilities such as public toilets, parks, community centers, and healthcare facilities. By involving women in the decision-making process, the WDS ensures that these amenities are designed to be safe, accessible, and inclusive, addressing issues such as privacy, hygiene, and childcare. Furthermore, the Women's Design Service advocates for gender mainstreaming in framing urban policies and strategies. They collaborate closely with community members government agencies, urban planners, and developers to integrate gender perspectives into planning frameworks and guidelines. By incorporating gender analysis into policy development, the WDS aims to ensure that the processes of urban planning consider the diverse needs and experiences of women, ultimately leading to more gender-responsive and inclusive cities. The participatory approach adopted by the Women's Design Service in London has contributed to tangible outcomes in terms of creating women-friendly urban spaces. Their initiatives have resulted in the implementation of design interventions that enhance safety, accessibility, and inclusivity. By actively involving women in the processes of decision-making, the WDS empowers them to influence urban design outcomes and fosters a feeling of ownership and pride in their communities. The case study of the Women's Design Service in London demonstrates the significant of engaging women in urban planning and design processes.



It showcases how a participatory approach can facilitate meaningful dialogue, address gender inequalities, and promote more inclusive and responsive urban environments. The experiences and insights gained from the Women's Design Service can serve as a valuable resource for other urban areas and organizations seeking to adopt similar approaches to enhance the women-friendly nature of urban spaces.

4.2. "Gender Mainstreaming in Urban Planning" - Vienna, Austria

The case study of "Gender Mainstreaming in Urban Planning" in Vienna, Austria, exemplifies the successful integration of a participatory approach to enhance the women-friendly nature of the city. Vienna is globally acknowledged for its dedication to gender equality and its innovative approach to urban planning that addresses the diverse needs and experiences of women. In Vienna, gender mainstreaming is an essential component of the city's urban planning processes. It involves systematically assessing the impacts of urban policies, projects, and designs on different genders and actively promoting gender equality in all aspects of urban development. The participatory approach plays a vital role in Vienna's gender mainstreaming efforts by ensuring that women's voices and perspectives are included in decision-making processes. One key initiative in Vienna is the involvement of women in the development of public spaces. The city actively engages women through various participatory methods, including workshops, focus groups, and surveys, to understand their specific needs, concerns, and preferences. Women are invited to share their experiences and ideas on topics such as public transportation, safety, accessibility, and the design of parks and recreational areas. Their input is then used to shape urban projects and

policies that better reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of women. Vienna's participatory approach also extends to the creation of gender-sensitive infrastructure. The city focuses on designing public spaces and amenities that prioritize the safety, comfort, and accessibility of women. This includes well-lit pathways, public transportation systems with features such as well-placed stops and secure waiting areas, and the incorporation of gender-responsive design principles in the construction and maintenance of public facilities. By involving women in the planning and design stages, Vienna ensures that these initiatives truly address their needs and contribute to creating safer and more inclusive urban spaces. Furthermore, Vienna's participatory approach to gender mainstreaming extends beyond physical infrastructure. The city actively involves women in decision-making processes related to social services, education, and employment opportunities. Women are engaged through dialogues, consultations, and partnerships, allowing them to influence policies and programs that impact their daily lives. This approach not only empowers women but also fosters a sense of ownership and accountability among citizens, creating a more inclusive and participatory urban environment. The success of Vienna's gender mainstreaming in urban planning can be attributed to its commitment to inclusivity and the active participation of women. The city recognizes that by involving women in decision-making processes, urban planning outcomes are more likely to be responsive, equitable, and sustainable. Vienna's experiences demonstrate the benefits of a participatory approach in enhancing the women-friendly nature of urban spaces and serve as an inspiring example for other cities seeking to adopt similar strategies. The case study of gender mainstreaming in urban planning in Vienna



showcases the transformative potential of participatory approaches in promoting gender equality and creating more inclusive cities. By actively involving women in decision-making processes, Vienna has been able to address the unique needs and concerns of women and create urban environments that are safer, more accessible, and responsive to their diverse experiences. The lessons learned from Vienna's experiences can provide valuable insights for cities worldwide seeking to adopt gender-responsive urban planning practices.

4.3. "Safer City Program" - Melbourne, Australia

The "Safer City Program" in Melbourne, Australia, serves as a compelling case study that demonstrates the effectiveness of a participatory approach in enhancing the women-friendly nature of urban spaces. The program focuses on creating safer and more inclusive environments for women by engaging the community, stakeholders, and government agencies in collaborative decision-making processes. The Safer City Program in Melbourne acknowledges that women may face specific safety concerns and challenges in public spaces. Through a participatory approach, the program actively involves women and community members in identifying safety issues, proposing solutions, and implementing strategies to address them. This collaborative effort ensures that the initiatives undertaken are responsive to the needs and experiences of women in the city. One key aspect of the Safer City Program is the establishment of Women's Safety Audits. These audits involve women and community representatives conducting assessments of public spaces, such as parks, streets, and transportation hubs, to identify potential safety risks and vulnerabilities. The findings from these audits

are then used to inform urban planning and design decisions. By involving women directly in the audit process, the program ensures that their perspectives and concerns are taken into account when developing strategies to improve safety. Another important element of the Safer City Program is the active engagement of community organizations, local businesses, and government agencies. These stakeholders collaborate to implement a range of initiatives aimed at creating safer urban environments. For instance, lighting improvements are made in poorly lit areas, public transportation services are enhanced to ensure safety and accessibility for women, and public spaces are redesigned to promote inclusivity and reduce the risk of harassment or violence. By involving diverse stakeholders, the program creates a sense of shared responsibility and collective action towards achieving safer cities for all. Furthermore, the Safer City Program utilizes educational campaigns and awareness-raising initiatives to empower women and raise public consciousness about safety issues. Workshops, training sessions, and public events are organized to provide women with the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate urban spaces confidently. These efforts not only enhance women's safety but also promote a culture of respect, inclusivity, and gender equality within the community. The success of the Safer City Program in Melbourne lies in its participatory approach, which ensures that women's voices are heard, their experiences are valued, and their needs are addressed. By actively involving women and community members in decision-making processes, the program fosters a sense of ownership and empowers individuals to contribute to the creation of safer urban spaces. It also promotes collaboration among various stakeholders, fostering partnerships and collective



responsibility for women's safety. The Safer City Program in Melbourne serves as an inspiring example of how a participatory approach can enhance the women-friendly nature of urban spaces. By actively engaging women, community organizations, and government agencies, the program has been successful in identifying and addressing safety concerns, implementing practical solutions, and promoting a culture of inclusivity and respect. The lessons learned from this case study can offer valuable insights to cities worldwide that are seeking to adopt similar participatory approaches to create safer and more gender-responsive urban environments.

5. Conclusion

The case studies of "Women's Design Service" in London, the "Gender Mainstreaming in Urban Planning" in Vienna, and the "Safer City Program" in Melbourne provide valuable insights into the transformative potential of participatory approaches in enhancing the women-friendly nature of urban spaces. These case studies demonstrate that by actively involving women in decision-making processes, cities can create more inclusive, equitable, and empowering environments for all residents. The participatory methods employed in these projects, such as workshops, surveys, community consultations, and safety audits, have been instrumental in engaging women from a range of diverse backgrounds and guaranteeing their voices and perspectives are taken into account in the process of urban planning and design. Through these processes, key areas of focus have been identified, including transportation, public spaces, safety concerns, and gender-sensitive amenities. The initiatives implemented based on women's feedback have led to improvements such as enhanced lighting,

the creation of women-only spaces, gender-responsive infrastructure, and the promotion of women's participation in decision-making.

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