

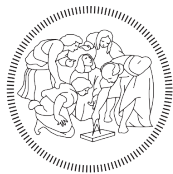


**POLITECNICO**  
MILANO 1863

# DESIGNING FOR **(WO)MEN**

*Women as place experts and designers: a guide to feminist placemaking*





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# Abstract

The thesis intends to investigate the intersection between women's interventions in urban design and the concept of the 15-minute city to enhance the quality of living in neighborhoods. It attempts to prove that by empowering, including, and promoting women to become active citizens and shapers of their community, neighborhoods can experience social and economic transformations.

Through a case study research analysis and a systematic literature review, this study aims to focus on the characteristics and the intended effects that women's interventions have in the design and regeneration of the built environment public spaces, with specific attention toward walkability, accessibility, safety, identity, economic vitality and quality of life for women and for everyone. It investigates how feminist urban design principles and investing on women as space experts and designers, they can help (re)define the concept of placemaking based on gender-inclusive solutions having as an objective a more equitable and sustainable future.

Chapter One

**Introd**

**uction**

# “Women are the real architects of society”

- Harriet Beacher Stowe

## 1.1 Background context

Cities are supposed to serve every citizen equally, from access to services and public spaces, to ensuring safety, opportunities and life quality regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, etc., but this is not usually the case. Nowadays cities grow at a much faster pace than they used to 100 years ago, and they face a number of challenges to adapt to such changes. Fast growing urban spaces, unequal distribution of public services and spaces, inefficient public transport systems and gentrification are a few examples of how cities struggle to cope with change and to provide citizens with equal opportunities and access to services and spaces that improve their quality of life.

Historically, architecture has been a male-dominated profession, including urban planning, resulting in the design and creation of spaces that reinforce traditional gender roles and stereotypes (Khalatbari, 2024). Being a profession that's led by men, public spaces and cities have been designed for decades to primarily satisfy the needs and conveniences of men and the heteronormative family (Beebeejaun, 2017).

According to the American Institute of Architects (AIA), in 2020 only 17% of all registered architects were female. Similarly, in the UK women represent only about 14% of

the built environment workforce (Cosgrave et al., 2020). In 2021 only 35% of all city planners were reported to be women, and a 2022 survey revealed that across 9,500 local U.S. governments, only 29% of the top appointed officials were women (Forbes, 2024). It is due to this gender disparity between professionals and people in power, who are in charge of creating better infrastructure, better services, and better policies, that women's needs are not represented equally in both city plans and realities (Forbes, 2024).

Since cities have been designed with men's needs in mind, it is no surprise that women and other marginalized groups face more and greater challenges to access public services, public spaces and transportation, and - consequently - social and economic opportunities.

In contrast, cities are growing at an unprecedented rate, where urbanization and industrialization have created a demand for better organized urban infrastructures and services for cities to be efficient at a micro and macro level.

Several attempts at addressing these issues have been discussed over the past decades. From feminist urbanism to the “15 minute city” concept, there's a clear need to redefine the current urban planning biased approach in order to properly address citizens' needs equally.

## 1.2 Research problem

City planning has recently been the focus of discussion and

innovation when it comes to the topic of gender equality. Starting with Glasgow's new public policy to become a "feminist city", with an all-female council to ensure "everyone has the place they need and that women are properly represented in decisions that are made about their environment" (Glasgow City Council, 2024)

Due to the fact that systemic gender bias is ingrained at the root of city planning, traditional urban planning design has often neglected women's needs. This has led women to be at a disadvantage in settings that were not created with their views and experiences in mind (Greed, 2006).

Cities face the challenge of implementing targeted fundamental changes in urban design to create better cities that are more equitable for women (Day, 2011). Over the past decades, research and practice have been conducted to improve cities and the built environment and their relationships with citizens.

The problem with cities not being inclusive towards women or minorities goes beyond the structural and physical component of it, but is a consequence of patriarchal societies and stereotypical gender roles that women are subject to. From women's needs being systematically excluded nor taken into consideration from design processes to women being excluded from decision-making bodies, society has set women as disadvantaged inhabitants, because public systems and structures were set in place to favor others.

Studies show that women's interventions in urban spaces have a positive effect on their community, increasing safety, walkability, and identity. By identifying and measuring how the built environment can benefit from women's interventions and as placemaking actors, it is possible to design better cities at a neighborhood level.

### 1.3 Objectives of the study

The objective of this study is to identify the importance of women's interventions in designing urban spaces and how their interventions can positively impact their environment and as a consequence, their community.

Identify the relationship between women and neighborhood, where women are important players in the transformation of neighborhoods, both physical and social spaces, and the role of neighborhoods as both, space and an expression of social relationships. Understand the pillars of a well-designed, inclusive and accessible neighborhood with a strong sense of place.

Moreover, this thesis will briefly shine a light on the causes and consequences of systematic exclusion of women and other minorities during city planning, before exploring deeper placemaking theories and women-led placemaking projects and their community impact.

Investigate the link between women as placemakers agents and the incorporation of the 15-minute cities, as a real-applicable solution for better integrated and revitalized communities, both socially and physically.

Finally, the study will highlight current and future limitations to design and implement participatory urban design theories in contemporary cities.

Chapter Two

# Literatur

re review

# Cities should be feminist

*In this chapter we will delve into the literature review that will serve as the basis of this thesis. We will focus on key concepts related to urbanism, placemaking and feminism. We will begin by exploring the concept and definition and types of placemaking, a community-driven and bottom-up approach to (re)designing public urban spaces, with an interest in safety, inclusion, belonging, social interaction and public life, and promoting the people's right to the city.*

From there we will analyze the 15-minute city concept, a contemporary urban planning model that focuses on enhancing sustainability, accessibility and enhancing the living experience within cities. Additionally we will discuss feminist urban design principles, an urban design approach that criticizes traditional urban planning and re-invisions urban planning seen through a gendered lens, including women's needs and behaviors as key elements for inclusive city making.

Following we will engage with gender inclusion in urban planning and placemaking, with an in depth analysis of the two main axis that influence how women live, perceive, and experience cities, emphasizing on the importance of including women as active shapers and designers of their

environment and how designing spaces that empower women is beneficial for inclusive city making and city life. Lastly we will highlight the role of women in placemaking interventions, showcasing how women have contributed to (re)shaping and (re)designing urban environments in a more inclusive and gender sensitive way.

## 2.1 Theoretical framework

Urban planning is defined by the World Bank report "Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning and Design" as a "multi-disciplinary approach to deciding where things get built and why". While claiming to be concerned with the relationship between people and the built environment and ensuring the protection and welfare of the community, traditional urban planning has more often than not ignored the diversity of other histories and neglected perspectives (Agrawal, 2023)

Traditional urban planning has been criticized by post-modern professionals and theorists, who express the urgent need for developing new approaches that are more attentive to cultural differences and to local and gender diversity, shifting the focus to a more participatory design process rather than textbook practices that result in strengthening the status quo and misconceived gender stereotypes.

While urban planning is the science behind city design, the built environment consists of the human-made, physical spaces in which human activities take place (WorldBank, 2023). In other words, the built environment is the tangible component of urban planning. Citizens interact and experience the built environment everyday, thus, it is constantly modified, adapted, reshaped and repurposed. Consisting of streets, buildings, public spaces, parks, crossroads, transportations systems and more, the built environment can influence physical and mental health, public safety, commerce, and traffic patterns. (Frank, et al., 2003)

The process of modifying and reshaping the built environment to improve its relationship to citizens can be referred to as Placemaking. The Project for Public Spaces (1980) defines placemaking as the process of building communities around a place, working with communities to build urban space into home-like places (Sedini, et al. 2023). Professor Mark Wyckoff from the MSU Land Policy Institute defines placemaking as a process, a means to an end, in which the end is the creation of Quality Places. He defines Quality Places as "Places with a strong sense of place, places where people and businesses want to be. They are active, unique locations, interesting, visually attractive, often with public art and creative activities. They are people friendly, safe, and walkable with mixed uses." (Wyckoff, 2014, p.2 )

Placemaking is not a radical approach to fix the faults of traditional urban planning, it is instead a targeted practice of relatively affordable and actionable small projects and activities that can

incrementally improve the quality of a place over a period of time. Placemaking can transform any place into one with a strong sense of place that serves as a magnet for people and new development (Wyckoff, 2014).

As placemaking poses a low-cost low-risk solution to current urban planning, it is of utmost importance that placemakers agents are of diverse gender, ethnicity and backgrounds, in order to transform spaces into Quality places.

Feminist approaches to urban design (Feminist urbanism), explore how by considering gender we can enrich our understanding and design of urban spaces. While there's no official definition of feminist urbanism, we will refer to it as the urbanistic practice of "putting people's lives at the center of urban decisions" (Right2City Organization). Incorporating the concept of diversity into public policy can make the built environment "less like a landscape of exclusion or a palace of risk and into a more accessible, secure, and enjoyable space for everyone" (Agrawal, 2023).

Cities need to address womens diverse needs the same way they address mens. Public and urban spaces need to be Quality places for everyone,. People and businesses need to want to live and be in such places. Neighborhoods need to be safe, inclusive, prosperous, and communities need to have a sense of identity and belonging, but most importantly they need to be accessible. From crossroads, walklanes, streets and transport systems, proximity has been a design principle that has gained momentum in the past decades as a key ingredient to sustainable and inclusive

urban planning.

The 15-minute city concept is a decentralized urban planning model that aims to design self-sufficient neighborhoods that contain all basic social amenities and services for living, working, education, healthcare and entertainment within a 15 minute walking or biking distance. Different from today's city planning where most cities have "operation-based" neighborhoods, that characterize different neighborhoods for different uses, (most commonly are residential, economic and entertainment neighborhoods), resulting in fragmented cities (Deloitte, 2021), the 15- minute city concept aims to create neighborhoods that are multipurpose, self-sufficient and that strengthen the sense of community.

While the 15-minute city concept has been developed from a more ecological and sustainable and proximity point of view, it is clear the benefits it poses for (re)designing inclusive, accessible neighborhoods and the influence it may have on targeted placemaking.

## **2.2 Contemporary approaches to city making**

In this section the concept of Placemaking will be presented in depth, analyzing and understanding the foundations of such concepts and the different classifications of Placemaking interventions as defined by Wyckoff (2014). Following the description of each type of Placemaking, this chapter will delve into the application and potential of Placemaking as a driver for policy (re)making and the political, economical and mostly social implications and

impacts. Finally, we will discuss community design and involvement as a main pillar of placemaking.

### **2.2.1 Placemaking: a strong sense of place**

The nature of place goes beyond the traditional understanding of place as a unique location with a physical and a material form that can be created, shaped, and destroyed by human actions. Places have a social and psychological dimension too, they can be built and shaped by a constructed set of social meanings. A place can be "interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood and imagined" by its inhabitants (Cartel, et al., 2022, p. 351; Gieryn, 2000) and can alter how they experience it, and their behavior towards and within it.

Therefore, a place can be referred to as 1) an experience - this includes how people feel, think, and experience a specific place and by consequence develop a sense of place; and 2) a practice - referring to how people construct a place physically and socially (Cartel, et al., 2022).

According to Cross (2001), sense of place is a concept that comprises the many different ways in which people form connections with the environments they occupy, it is the subjective and emotional connection and set of associations that develop between people and places (Devlin, 1989). It is not only influenced by the built environment, but rather by users whose perceptions can shift even without the environment changing due to personal experiences, evolving needs or cultural trends (Wyckoff, 2014). It ranges from simple recognition, to deep connections linking places with feelings, memories, and even individual identities (Relph, 1976)

All places have a sense of place, whether it's positive or negative, and it influences how people perceive it and how they interact with it. Moreover, the sense of place directly impacts the sense of community of the people who occupy the same space. These two intangible attributes of places can be seen as a form of "social capital", that as J. Ellery wrote, "shapes the residents' personal identities, fosters a degree of community member rootedness in a place, provides us with a measure of liveability for that place, and creates a sense of wellbeing within us". (ibidem, 2019, p. 237)

Speaking of social individuals that live, create and shape both communities and spaces, social capital is a two-level form of capital that deals with the intangibility of social connections as well as the physicality of the spaces shaped by and for individuals. Jane Jacobs (1961) defined social capital as having two levels of manifestation and impact, an individual/personal level and a territorial/urban level. Social capital is created through proximity, physical, geographical, social, institutional and cognitive, and networks, non economic, trust based, and reciprocal relationships of social individuals. (Sedini, 2020) These levels interact constantly with each other and generate individual and collective social capital, that as Enzo Rullani (2006) stated, implicitly, it often embeds itself into territories and spaces.

As social capital is rooted in territories, it can be said that collective social capital is clearly linked to social and economic improvement of places (Sedini, 2020) Shared social capital influence how societies work as one with other individuals and in conjunction with local institutions and associations, supporting civic engagement, promoting mutual trust and tolerance, and personal and private interest transcend and become a shared public interest. (Sedini, 2020) Robert Putnam (1993), declared that the

possession of social capital can have a direct positive impact on a territory and its institutions, therefore it is inevitable for territories to have a strong social participation to achieve a certain level of efficiency.

By acknowledging the dual nature of places, it is possible to identify the importance and effect the physical dimension of the built environment has on the perception and usage of public spaces, the success or failure of community engagement and inclusion, the quality of urban life, social and economic development and even safety indicators. All spaces have soft and hard elements that influence how we perceive, shape, and are shaped by such space. Soft elements can be referred to as the qualitative characteristics of the environment, the intangible elements of spaces that are fluid and usually influence all types of the space senses (sense of place, sense of belonging, sense of safety, etc) Hard elements refer to the quantitative characteristics of the space, that are usually linked to the physicality and urban infrastructure of said space. Such elements are typically what give cities and neighborhoods their physical identity and are focused on providing residents with amenities, services and means specifically through tangible ways. (Sedini & Zurlo, 2023)

All communities inhabiting a same space share a set of social ideas and values, Enzo Manzini referred to them as "Social Commons" , and defined them as the social glue that keep societies together and give cities, regions and cities unique characteristics, from sense of safety to mutual trust in their neighborhood, to views on human rights and democracy. (idem, 2019).

The undeniable link between people and places has become a driver for change in the urban design field, where the responsibility of city making can no longer rely



on the sole responsibility of urban planners, but needs to adopt a bottom-up design approach that involves people as empirical designers. It is imperative for communities to collaborate with each other and (re)discover their creative skills, strengths and interest and start a new wave of social commons, to collaborate together with the aim of achieving specific results that are aligned with their interests and evolve into creative communities and later into collaborative organizations (Manzini, 2019). Such collaborations within the design process that is born from the community rather than imposed by top authorities, can produce side effects like trust, friendliness, empathy, mutual attention and care within communities, strengthening the sense of place, belonging, and inevitably, the space itself. (Manzini, 2019)

Improving and adapting existing infrastructure usually represents a high investment and requires a substantial amount of public funds. Cities as a whole were built addressing specific needs for specific demographics, however, with the passage of time, the built environment has struggled to adapt to the demanding and diverse needs of its residents. Changes in demographics, advances in technologies, the invention of new services, transport methods, new mobility patterns, social trends, are some factors that influence the obsolescence of a built environment that does not reflect the characteristics and needs of today's urban life. For this reason, placemaking approaches "help to convert ordinary places into ones that can attract people and activities, and bring economic and social benefits" (Golkar, 2011; Lak, A., 2024, p. 54)

A place's sense of place varies from one demographic group to another, and it is not static nor permanent. We are constantly building on it based on our ongoing experiences of the place. We build upon past experiences and even project a future sense of place, (Cartel et al., 2022) and just as much the physical aspect of a place influences how we experience it, our experiences also shape how we (re)shape our physical surroundings. Citizen involvement empowers communities as active shapers of their environment, and as Sillberberg et al., (2013) stated, placemaking creates a virtuous cycle and mutual stewardship between a community and its environment. (Ellery et al., 2019)

### **2.2.2 The foundations of placemaking**

The concept behind placemaking dates back to the 1960's, where pedestrian areas and citizen's relationship with their environment were the main focus of leading minds like Jane Jacobs and William H. Whyte. In her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* published in 1961, Jacobs openly critiqued the modernist, orthodox city planning and rebuilding in the post-war U.S (Wendt, 2009) where she questioned the basic premises of modern urban planning.

The post-war period was a time of challenges and unequal prosperity for many (mostly) Western countries, whereas cities grew at a fast paced rate, people were moving in large numbers out of them and into the suburbs, leaving cities the challenge not only of rebuilding them, but developing them.

Even though Jacobs did not have a formal training as an urban planner or architect, or any design field, and based merely on observation and analysis, she found that the new projects commissioned by the city of New York in the 1950-60's that were appreciated by planners and

architects bore no relation to what people actually needed (Kunstler, 2001). She claimed that in order to understand how cities work, one must engage in inductive thinking and reasoning while closely observing city life. Following this line of thinking, Jacobs argued that "Ordinary people relying on their observations even have an advantage over urban planners, since they have been educated to act according to deductive theories instead of using their good judgment." (ibidem, 1961: ; Wendt, 2009, p. 4)

Jacobs ground-breaking ideas on how cities function, evolve and fail have, and still are, revolutionized the field of urban planning. This fact reinforces the premise of the importance of involving women and diverse groups of actors in design decisions involving their environment in all efforts for placemaking transformations.

Like Jane Jacobs said in her 1960's book, improving the quality of life should start at the scale of public spaces such as street, block or building. Through various types of interventions, placemaking seeks to build or improve spaces so that they also serve physical, cultural and social objectives (Ellery, 2019).

### **2.2.3 Types of placemaking**

Placemaking can take many forms and may have different specific objectives, however, all placemaking efforts aim to improve the quality of a place and by consequence, the quality of life of people within that place. Wyckoff identifies three specialized types of placemaking and two main intervention approaches (ibidem, 2014)

We have previously described placemaking as the process of building communities around a place, working with communities to build urban space into home-like places

(Sedini et al., 2023). It requires the engagement and empowerment of the people to participate in the design process.

The first specialized type of placemaking is the Strategic Placemaking, that aims to attract talented workers while creating Quality places that are uniquely attractive to them, creating “talent hubs” and therefore attracting businesses, promoting job creation and improving the neighborhoods income and quality of life.

This type of placemaking is usually achieved collaboratively by public, non profit and private sectors over a longer period of time, approximately 5 to 15 years. The specific characteristics and timeframes of Strategic Placemaking projects are slower and bigger in scale, having a bigger impact at urban level. Downtowns and nodes along key corridors are examples of ideal places subject to interventions. (CNU article on Four types of Placemaking, 2014)

This approach is similar to that of Creative Cities, proposed - among the others - by Richard Florida who identify the so-called Creative Class as the preferable target of urban policy interventions having as an objective the economic (and eventually) social improvement of cities (Florida, 2002). This model has been harshly criticized because of the distortions that it had in terms of inclusiveness of the most disadvantaged populations which are generally excluded by these kinds of strategies (Peck, 2005).

The second type is Creative Placemaking, it is defined as the process in which “Partners from public, private, nonprofit and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, tribe, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. It animates public

and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local businesses viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired” (Markusen & Gadwa, 2014).

This type of placemaking is closely linked to Charles Landry’s concept of Creative City, where he advocated for the importance of rediscovering urban creativity, combining cultural planning with urban governance. (Segovia & Hervé, 2022). Landry’s vision of his Creative City focuses on the process of city making rather than production or consumption of a city. He envisioned an inclusive and participatory city where arts and culture were a means and a practice for placemaking and living (Pratt, 2008)

This type of Placemaking promotes artistic projects made in public settings instead of funding artists to create art in private, to work in conjunction with urban planners and the community to integrate art and culture into urban regeneration projects (Zitcer, 2020) It gives art, culture and design activities and strategies the same importance as land-use, transportation, economic development, education, housing, infrastructure, and public safety strategies (National Endowment for the Arts). By doing so, it is possible to strengthen communities and improve a neighborhood’s quality of life.

The third type is Tactical Placemaking, it is derived from the concept of tactical urbanism, also known as DIY urbanism, guerrilla urbanism, pop-up urbanism. It is defined as “incremental, small-scale urban design interventions that work as a way to stage more substantial investments’ “ (Lydon & Garcia, 2015). This concept implements low-risk trial and error concepts before making greater political and financial commitments.

Due to its low-risk, low-cost and quick-implementation identity, this type of placemaking focuses primarily in public spaces with the implementation of small projects and short term activities. The idea is that while this type of implementation can have an almost immediate or short term impact in the regeneration of public spaces, in the long term it can transform an area and improve the whole neighborhood's livability, safety, walkability and identity (Wyckoff, 2014).

The before mentioned types of Placemaking can be achieved through two main intervention approaches, Projects and Activities (Wyckoff, 2014). As its name implies, Placemaking projects are more permanent types of interventions, like art murals to represent a neighborhood's identity, investment in bike lanes and walkways, public art displays, transformation and repurposing of public facilities or buildings, mixed-use developments, cultural hubs like museums, unique transit stations, learning centers, guerrilla gardening, etc.

On the other hand, Placemaking activities are less permanent and faster to implement than projects and usually intervene in the "soft" properties of places, they vary from community events, chair bombing, movie screening in parks, entertainment and cultural activities, car free days, events in town squares, outdoor music concerts, weekend street markets, etc.

Historically, people have undertaken placemaking projects and activities since before the term was formally defined. Citizens have informally been part of placemaking activities without consciously doing so, proving that individuals are actively seeking to improve their community through small interventions. From yarn bombing in Bristol by knitting communities, to transforming streets at night

for social gatherings, people are constantly shaping their environment.

### **2.2.4 Placemaking as a driver for policy making**

In the past few decades, urban planners, scholars, developers, practitioners and organizations have advocated the importance of the sense of place and placemaking to improve quality of life. This focus is key to understanding people's decision making process and behaviors in relation to the making and remaking of the places they inhabit. People are place sensitive, both at physical and psychological level, and how people experience, feel, remember and interpret a place influences the interactions with such place, and therefore, the activities they perform in it, for it, or because of it (Cartel et al., 2022).

In the U.S. organizations like Main Street, Project for Public Spaces, the Urban Land Institute, and Smart Growth America have raised awareness among community leaders on the sustainable impact, social, physical and ecological, that reinvesting in existing communities has in comparison to allocating funds in a never-ending urban sprawl. Spaces need constant targeted intervention in order to stay relevant and constantly build on their sense of place. Professionals are starting to emphasize and acknowledge placemaking strategies and processes as a sustainable approach for revitalizing distressed urban neighborhoods and consequently improving the lives of its residents (Ellery et al., 2019).

As Placemaking projects gain popularity in many policy makers' agendas, whether it's for environmental reasons or to improve safety and livability, cities all over the world are investing resources and efforts in improving neighborhoods

and regenerating their public spaces. Placemaking is very strictly connected with mobility. Indeed, major European cities like Hamburg and Madrid have announced plans to become car free cities to leave more space (and places) for walking and slow mobility behaviors. Cities like Milan, Paris and Copenhagen have implemented car free days, invested in pedestrian and cycling infrastructure and transformation of public spaces into multipurpose spaces, and increased the provision of public transportation (Yassin, 2019).

Research shows that placemaking has had positive effects in the relationship residents have with their built community, and improved the levels of community health, safety, walkability, identity, sustainability, economic opportunities and public space usage.

One example of Creative Placemaking is Milan 's project "Un nome in ogni quartiere" (trans. A name for each neighborhood). Milan is one of the first cities in the world to have a public department dedicated to public art (Ufficio Arte negli Spazi Pubblici). In collaboration with "Milano & Partners" and Fondazione Comunità Milano, the project goal was to help strengthen the sense of identity of different neighborhoods across the city through street art and murals that represent the diversity of their local residents and the richness of each neighborhood. Led by Marina Pugliese, former director of Museo del Novecento and current director of Mudec and head of the Ufficio Arte negli Spazi Pubblici, the project focused on regenerating urban spaces through community participation and artistic practices and strengthening the sense of place in each neighborhood, using art to represent the rich diversity of their residents (Milano Citta Stato, 2023).

Unlike traditional urban planning, placemaking is a bottom-up approach, it can be temporary activation or a long term

investment in an area, however, this "Use of tactics is based on a belief that deep organizing structures (social, cultural, economic, and other) have a two way relationship with the physical environment: they both produce the environment and are reproduced by it" (Merker, 2011: 49). As there's a direct correlation between residents, place and sense of place, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of including local residents as active agents in shaping their community, with a special focus on including women and minorities to accurately represent their identity and needs in their urban environment.

If done correctly, placemaking can build human connections, promote civic engagements and become catalysts for social and economic revitalization in disadvantaged communities (You & Rios, 2003; Deconseille & Scanner, 2020)

## **2.2.5 Community Design for Placemaking**

As mentioned before, community participation is key for successful urban interventions. The recent interest and need of cities to rethink the way they address urban planning, and the rising practice of community-driven placemaking signals an urgent "need to reexamine the practice of community planning and design and the role of civil society forces in the making of the public realm" (You & Rios, 2003, p.19)

After the 1960's feminist urban movement, which is going to be discussed later, attention has risen considerably on communities and how the built environment impacts gender and people with diverse identities. In order to design better places, we need to take a more observational approach and reconsider the text-book models of urban design not as best practices but as a general framework, and investigate

“the importance of people’s responses to various affective atmospheres related to everyday life experiences, the embodied experience of place, and social interactions and values” (Abusaada & Elshater, 2021, p. 3389 ) in the aim of creating more inclusive and empowering spaces that reinforce the sense of place in local residents. (Khalatbari, 2024)

Traditionally, a city’s landscape lies in the field of urban planning and landscape architecture, whose practices have often proven to result in the incompatibility of spaces for the communities (Ismail & Said, 2015). Slow but steady, communities have been gaining a seat at the table when it comes to urban design. Local governments have recognized the importance of community participation as an integral element of sustainable development and good governance, and have introduced measures to involve citizens and

communities in their making and planning processes.

According to Loures and Crawford (2008), “Public participation begins by laying the base for sustainable practices in planning and management of the physical environment as well as landscape architecture. In creating a sustainable design for communities, it involves local citizens by allowing them to analyze their own problems and fashion their own solutions plus by supporting community initiatives in which to allow them to be the instruments of their own change.” (Ismail & Said, 2015).

The traditional approach to city planning has often left out the human component of cities, they have failed to acknowledge the diversity and identity of whom the space is designed for, leaving local communities to feel detached and not represented by the built environment in which they



perform their everyday life. This feeling of lack of identity directly impacts on the sense of place people have about their communities, and can negatively impact urban spaces.

Communities are constantly shaped by their individuals, and individuals are shaped by their communities. As one directly impacts the other and vice versa, community engagement during the design process and decision making is crucial to create spaces that value diversity and inclusivity. Inclusivity, access and safety are dynamically produced through space and negotiated in tandem with other people (Beebejaun, 2017).

Acknowledging diversity exists and that different communities have different needs, patterns, backgrounds and are culturally diverse it's the first step towards effective urban intervention. It is imperative that cities ensure every citizen's equal right to spatial justice and right to the city, providing everyone the right to access the different space within it. (Sedini & Colleoni, 2024) Spatial justice is influenced by the built environment and its hard and soft elements, that impact differently on different groups of people, depending on their background, class, ethnicity, etc. Pirie (1983) therefore refers to spatial justice as social justice in space. Through a spatial perspective it is possible to address economic, political, and cultural inclusion (Sedini & Colleoni, 2024).

Therefore, it is of utmost importance to include designers and non designer professionals, members of the community of diverse backgrounds, women and minorities, to accurately voice their needs, in order to achieve spatial justice and equal right to the city by involving the right stakeholders in the right space.

In contrast, such was the case from the interventions in

the Saint Marie neighborhood in the Village-Park of au Pied-du-Courant in Montreal, where it was noted that while "women were active, present, and in positions of power and influence [during design decisions], they were not representative of the broader diversity of the neighborhood the park is in, as they were by and large, young, relatively well-off, with higher education, and primarily white" (Travers, 2020, p. 215)

Public participation has increasingly been adopted by professionals in their design practices, however, Randolph Hester, a prominent participatory practitioner, argues that participatory design and planning is so institutionalized and parochialized that it no longer meets many of its original goals (You & Rios, 2003) It can be argued that main insights derive from the informal interactions of individuals and their surroundings, and while there is a need to standardize some of the process, the risk of over institutionalizing the practice can lead to false premises and ineffective investments and consequently, failing to represent the needs of the individuals. What makes participatory design so valuable also makes it incredibly delicate.

Community design processes need to be fluid, open, transparent and flexible to avoid falling into overly bureaucratic models. Good governance requires better communication within a society, and designing an effective public involvement programme requires skill and effort. As discussed by Wan Azlina and Ismail Said (2015), "improving the social life within an urban area, without the input from the public, and relying only on designers, urban planners and landscape architects is not enough to build a good public space"

The goal of community design and incentivizing public participation is placing the final decision-making in the

hands of the public and the communities that inhabit, interact and shape a place. The role of professionals therefore shifts to serve as a facilitator to implement the final decisions the community makes, instead of being the sole leading role of the design process. Even though design is an empathetic practice, such empathy can even produce corrupting effects in the design process. Designers should start questioning their creative ideas and stop idealizing the “desired, foreseeable end” of their projects, and apply more of a realistic perspective with a dose of political realism, to avoid unsuccessful and unmeaningful outcomes (Von Busch & Palmas, 2023). While community participation is key to inclusive city making, it is a careful delicate practice that should not be institutionalized and designers should be aware that it is a constant conflict between the “desired should be” and the actual design outcome.

### **2.3 15-Minute City Concept**

The 15-minute concept idea was formally introduced by Colombian urbanist and professor Carlos Moreno in 2016. Although he started developing his model around 2006, it was the 2015 Paris Agreements on World Climate Change (COP21) what really promoted his research. Moreno argued that when it comes to powerful players in the fight against climate change, we should also consider cities, not only states.

According to Carlos Moreno, living in cities means accepting a certain level of dysfunction: long commutes, noisy streets, underutilized spaces, lack of identity. In the realm of urban planning, neighborhoods are arguably the most critical element for the spatial and functional organization of a city (Ibidem, 2020). Historically speaking, they can be attributed the successes and failures of attempts at creating ideal cities, stressing that “neighborhoods should be the

spatial context in which residents meet their basic needs, interact and communicate with each other” (Pozoukidou & Chatziyuannaki, 2021 p. 2; Smith, 2011) Based on accessibility by proximity, Moreno’s 15-minute city concept aims to create neighborhoods where residents have access to all the necessary services to live, thrive, learn and relax within their immediate vicinity, at a maximum of 15-minute walking or biking distance. He envisioned dense and connected socially and functionally mixed neighborhoods based on the human scale design to encourage walking and cycling (Balleto et al., 2021; Noworól et al., 2022)

Similar to placemaking, his idea is based on the basic premise that urban areas should adapt to humans to improve their quality of life, and not vice versa. However, different from placemaking, FMC’S (Fifteen-minute Cities) lay their foundation on decentralizing services and focusing instead on geographical proximity and their relationship to people. This means that efforts are put in order so the location of people, services and activities are near one another to ensure people have access to spatially distributed opportunities in the urban environment (Pozoukidou & Chatziyuannaki, 2021) These proximity strategies focus on people’s local access to a wide range of amenities that are important for quality life, they range from preschools, social services, commercial services, cultural and leisure activities and facilities, parks, etc.

To achieve social equity, the 15-minute city concept emphasizes equal access to urban services for all people and decentralizes urban infrastructures and functions; it envisions affordable housing, career opportunities, and social services for vulnerable social groups. (Moreno et al., 2021)

Addressing urban planning as a 15-minute city concept

has many benefits for social inclusion, safety and economic prosperity. According to Kowaleski-Jones (2018) evidence from US cities, a walkable environment in neighborhoods poses positive advantages for public health and can even lower crime rates. It can also increase opportunities for social encounters in public spaces like sidewalks and boosts the sense of identity (Su et al., 2019)

Another main point of FMC's is the focus of workplace proximity and the redistribution of businesses at neighborhood level. According to Badawi et al. (2018), transportation costs of households living in walkable districts are half of those living in car dependent areas. A study from Chicago's metropolitan area showed that proximity to the workplace allowed residents to save on transportation expenditures, which consequently reduced unemployment and poverty in the area. At a neighborhood level, this means less traffic and thus, less road maintenance needed, more flexible street use, encouraging existing urban areas development, reducing energy consumption and carbon emissions. At city level, similar impacts can be perceived, like less carbon emissions, improvement of public transport, and increased environmental sustainability. For local residents, this means saving on transportation expenses, free up time, reducing unnecessary travels, more leisure time, fostering social interaction and inclusivity and investment in local shops and businesses that help the local economy (Moreno et al., 2021).

Whether they call it 10, 15 or 20-minute neighborhood/district, short distance city, compact city, human scale city (ciudad a escala humana), vital neighborhoods (barrios vitales), complete neighborhoods, etc; many cities around the world have implemented the concept of 15-minute cities as contemporary strategies to address social and environmental sustainability. Cities like Portland, Paris,

Melbourne, Milan, Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Ottawa, and Charlotte, are some examples of cities who have reassessed their approach to urban planning for a proximity-centered solution. (Noworól et al., 2022).

Given that cities are dealing with various issues that are not universal, Moreno's one-size-fits-all solution has been criticized by professionals as a solution that is not feasible, or easily implemented, for all cities. Each community requires a neighborhood development plan that takes into account geographic specificity and its unique issues (Pozoukidou et Chatziyuannaki., 2021). It is also argued that even though it is considered a bottom-up design approach, FMC's do not take great detail into the socially and demographically diverse needs of their residents and do not tend to consider their different daily life patterns and behaviors, which may cause a theoretically complete and well designed neighborhood, but that does not accurately represent the needs of its dwellers, and does not address community identity and satisfaction.

As previously discussed, reassessing how cities are built is necessary to design sustainable cities at a social and environmental level. Understanding citizens' needs and patterns is crucial for an optimal spatial layout of future urban areas, guaranteeing access to all basic services for a good quality of life. Moreover, as a bottom-up approach, the 15-minute city concept needs constant community engagement and participation to accurately address the unique needs of each neighborhood. However, flaws to the model exist in assuming one solution can be standardized for all cities, and as different cities may have different time frames and projects may take a considerable amount of time to be developed, citizens are faced with frustration, tiredness and lack of commitment when goals are not represented or met. Additionally, if the engaged

**“To improve the quality of life we need a city without zonification with a lot of local services”** (Moreno, 2023)



community is not diverse enough, new plans can fail due to inappropriate representation of the actual community, with all its cultural, social, economical diversity.

Therefore, placemaking projects need to work in conjunction with the regeneration of urban spaces and 15-minute model projects to enhance the sense of place, improving the intangible qualities of neighborhoods like safety, identity, representation, and inclusion.

## 2.4 Feminist Urban Design Principles

In 2023 the United Nations (UN) released a report that stated “The world is failing girls and women”. Despite global efforts to address gender equality, society is failing to achieve its goals, struggling to close the gender gap across all spheres. Most modern cities are the physical representation of a patriarchal and capitalist system that took for granted the needs of the ruling, privileged class as universal. As patriarchy is still deeply present in private life, it is too replicated in the public sphere, resulting in cities reinforcing outdated gender roles and depriving women and other minorities from the public domain (Muxí Martínez, 2018). Gender inequalities are extremely complex in nature, they operate across different sectors, scales and places. These gendered perceptions are embedded into cultural, socio-economic and political norms and hence, impact negatively on women’s rights and everyday’s lives and experiences (Andres & Natarajan, 2023). In other words, modern cities are landscapes for power, and that power has a gender (Rose, 1993).

Traditional urban design has been predominantly a male dominated profession and therefore, unconsciously, it has favored the needs of the “white, heterosexual, able bodied, male norm” (Perez, 2020) , leaving users that do not fit

this description navigating a built environment that do not consider their diverse needs and often shapes spaces in ways that negatively impact them (Agyeman, 2017). Men of color, different ethnicities, women, elders, members of the LGBTQ community, children and teens, disabled people, are often subject to systemic exclusion by the simple fact that urban design practices group different users into one same category with a set of “universal needs” without considering the gender, cultural and ethnic diversity of their subjects (Love & Kok, 2021) The underrepresentation of women in urban spaces reinforces the notion of women as background elements that patriarchy has attributed to them (Muxí Martínez, 2019).

Women have always been seen as a problem for the modern city. (Kern, 2019) In her book, *Feminist City*, Kern defended how women’s everyday urban experiences are ruled by gender (idem, 2019). Gender inevitably plays an important role in how women and men navigate a city designed by white-men in power, for other privileged white-men. Jane Darke (1996) said “Any settlement is an inscription in space of the social relations in the society that built it, our cities are patriarchy written in stone, brick, glass and concrete.”

When it comes to power roles, space is a crucial category for feminist theory because it is in the material and theoretical practices that space structures how gender identities are constructed and maintained (Rose, 1993).

In the last decades, many scholars, urban practitioners and feminist activists have stressed the importance of challenging and changing the patriarchal structure of current urban planning, arguing that the current model excludes and marginalizes women and non-hegemonic groups from urban spaces, overlooks their right to be involved in the decisions about their relationship with their

city, reinforces whiteness by making invisible the diverse experience of migrants and people of color (Fenster, 2005), and disadvantages women as a consequence of the patriarchal system (Day, 2011).

The challenge for urban planning is recognizing that there is value in the differences, and learning to benefit from them, rather than being considered inconvenient variables, as it has been so far. From acknowledging that different realities co-exist and co-shape the public domain, regardless of gender, cities can (re)design spaces that are gender-neutral and patriarchy free, where design and functionality is shaped by the real experiences of real people (Muxí Martínez, 2018). Azcona (2023) estimates that "By 2025, urban areas are expected to house 70% of the world's female population, (3.3 billion). Alarming trends suggest a third of these women and girls could find themselves living in inadequate housing or slums"

Feminist urbanism intends to close the gap between gender disparity in the urban design field. In order to successfully implement a feminist lens to urban planning, feminist urbanism argues for the need of a multidisciplinary team with scholars of diverse backgrounds, professionals and citizens (Renau, 2020). Urban design can no longer be a one-man's job, and needs a 360° intervention from urban designers, architects, feminist thinkers, sociologists, anthropologists, social geographers, designers, public institutions and citizens.

Peake (2015) argues that the collaboration with stakeholders outside of academia brings to the table a different perspective of knowledge production, becoming a channel of representation for marginalized voices and incorporating relevant ideas into feminist research and urban practices. Alliances with residents, activists and

women organizations, and incorporating the working poor women class as knowledge producers, are crucial to challenge the hierarchical relations between theory and methods. (Peake, 2015)

Overall, cities are complex in nature. They are more than just a set of buildings, streets and services, they are both the natural and man-made assets that build on their tangible and intangible heritage (Nespral & Sala, 2020). Geography on an urban level can be defined as the relationship between people and their human-built and natural environment, and it is key to designing inclusive cities. Nevertheless, traditional urban planning gender bias has reinforced women's status as background elements not just through the notion of cities duality, but through an actual, material geography of exclusion (Kern, 2019)

As urban geography aims to approach urbanism through a more holistic view including social and cultural relationships, unsurprisingly it is, too, a male dominated field. Needless to say that proper feminist geography knowledge needs to be produced by women as it too faces the risk of producing "legitimate" gender biased knowledge with serious social consequences. (Rose, 1993) For urbanism to be seen and approached through a feminist lens, first it is imperative to create the space and environment to attract female professionals and second, to raise awareness and make feminism a pillar of study, discussion and practice to challenge patriarchal norms and standards. Simply increasing the number of women in architecture and related fields is not enough to design more egalitarian practices and results. (Walker & Cavanagh, 1999), increasing social awareness and public participation should be at the core of all urban initiatives. When it comes to social change, white men citing other

white men further embeds gender biases in “legitimate” scholar and research works (Kern, 2019).

Transforming urban design principles, methodologies, processes, strategies and interventions into an inclusive practice means considering and acknowledging the diversity of the people who shape the city and putting people’s lives at the center of urban decisions (Right2City). Feminist urbanism pursues social justice by guaranteeing the right to a gendered city. (Iturralde, 2021)

Feminist urbanism principles proposes a design framework that focuses on prioritizing inclusivity, accessibility, sustainability, and democracy as a potential solution for designing urban environments that are just, equitable, and empowering for all individuals. (Khalatbari, 2024)

On this account, feminist urbanism proposes that the interaction and collaboration between public institutions,

architects, urban geographers and planners and citizens is imperative for the visibility and integration of women back in the urban environment. (Renau, 2020). It is important to recognize that research must be done in both contexts of the global north and the global south, as women experiences, identities and the ideas of “woman” in society are mobile across historical and geographic spheres (Peak, 2015), resulting in a broad range of gendered practices, experiences and subjectivities (Peak & Rieker, 2013)

Expanding beyond the physical component of cities, feminist urbanism also addresses the emotional dimension of urban spaces, this includes the attitudes, perceptions and “ways of being and thinking that are embodied in spaces and places that create symbolic orders and invisible boundaries for women (and others).” (Hudson & Ronnblom, 2008, p.73)

As cities are built for people, feminist urbanists argue



that it should also be built by people. Following a bottom up approach, the design of cities should involve the participation of the residents that inhabit and shape it, challenging patriarchal practices, views, and unequal power dynamics in relation to gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality and ability (Hudson, 2008). By giving the general public, and women in particular, power over the development, alteration, enhancement, and maintenance of the physical environment, participatory design is a crucial tool for attaining social justice (Feldman, 1999). Fenster (2005) and Young (1997) discusses how unequal power dynamics in urban planning can result in places being colonized by certain social groups and not others.

Women do not only interact with public spaces differently than men do, but they also perceive them differently and have different concerns. Morzinger (1985) wrote that when speaking from a feminist point of view, there is no “truly public” space that is experienced in the same way by all groups. Moreover, if we recognize that differences exist between men and women, we must acknowledge the differences amongst women themselves (Anthony, 2001). No absolute truth exists to categorize women’s experiences in urban spaces. Race, ethnicity, class, religion, physical ability, age, sexuality - all shape women’s experiences and their relative privileges, where white, middle class women’s voices have dominated among the others. (Day, 2011) The lack of representation and sense of belonging in urban spaces is directly related to every woman’s own privileges, oppressions, and background (Muzí Martínez, 2019)

Even when including women’s perspectives, concerns and patterns into the design process, it is necessary to recognize that no public space will single-handedly meet the needs of all groups at all times, (Day, 2011; Paxon, 1989) and therefore it is better to design spaces that focus on the

needs of specific social groups that are relevant to the city, neighborhood and citizens.

To truly design feminist cities, it is imperative to acknowledge that women encompass more than just the needs of the white, heterosexual middle class women. New designers, and designs, must understand the relationship between the diverse systems of privilege and oppression, including racism, sexism, homophobia, classism and ableism (Kern, 2019), and how a gendered lens must include race, class, sexuality and physical and mental ability.

Feminist urbanism does not seek to impose women needs over men, but instead it intends to empower women and other groups to be represented in the urban decisions of their environment, and challenge the status quo, social injustices, polarizations, contradictions and limits that are embedded in the social, economic and cultural structures that shape the city and its built environment. (Kern, 2019; Carrera & Castellana, 2023). Simply put, feminist urbanism is considering the needs of women when building and planning the urban realm, both culturally and physically, taking the female body and what it means to be a woman in today’s society, all the tangible and intangible associations, as a pillar in the design process. (Clemmensen, 2024)

Citizens, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or background, have an equal right to the city, however, the male ingrained bias in urban planning has left certain groups at a disadvantage. Accessibility, representation, safety and walkability are the main pillars upon which feminist urbanistic practices intend to close the gender gap, addressing the physicality of structures and reshaping a space’s attached perceptions, routines, behaviors and assumptions.

# “The city of tomorrow must be feminist, ecological, and supportive”

- Anne Hidalgo

## 2.5 Gender perspectives and inclusion in urban planning and placemaking

In a western context, gender is defined by the social and cultural connotation of roles, that attributes to men or women, specific capacities, assigns specific spaces and establishes specific priorities (Muxí Martínez, 2018). Patriarchy is responsible for making gender roles become an absolute truth and unquestionable reality in the modern world. Gender roles play a crucial element in social hierarchy, influencing the perceived social value of individuals. In the words of Gillian Rose (1993) “in the dominant culture of the West now, a white bourgeois heterosexual man is valued over a black working-class lesbian woman.” (idem, 1993, p. 14)

According to Marion Robert (2018), when speaking of urbanism and gender equality, rather than seeing spaces as a commodity to be exploited, a gendered approach should seek to understand how spaces and places are produced and co-constructed through people’s everyday use combined with their presence in the imagination.

Generally speaking, women across the world still experience an unequal position in society (Beebeejaun, 2017). Hence, women are too, underrepresented in political offices almost

everywhere across the world. This underrepresentation of women in positions of power is responsible for political decisions not reflecting adequately women’s needs and preferences across all socio-economic and political scenes. Attempting to build feminist cities requires more than just producing legitimate knowledge and processes that take into consideration the diverse needs of the underrepresented social groups, specifically women, it too must be incorporated into the political agenda (Peake, 2015). Policymaking needs to adopt feminism at its core to truly challenge gender injustice and give space for social change.

Gender inequality is present across all spheres of urban planning, from transportation systems, public recreational spaces, like parks and sport facilities, street and sidewalks, mixed-use spaces, to public services and businesses locations. To attempt closing the gender gap in urban planning we must first acknowledge the gender biased policies responsible for setting the systematic exclusion of women and other groups.

One of the reasons why gender inequality is so present in the urban field is because crucial criteria like gender have been universally assumed to be not relevant enough when designing how cities are built. Almost universally, in accounts of urban life, women are typically characterized

as part of the “background” rather than as part of the “action”. (Day, 2011, p. 152; Lofland 1975, in Sandercock & Forsyth, 1992). The streets and homes in cities are closely linked to the perpetuation of the public/private divide that supports gender inequality (Rose, 1993), hence, women’s role in modern cities are shaped by the reproduction of those same gendered public/private contexts that cities are built around. In other words, public urban life is masculine in nature, and women are attributed and associated with home and private life.

By actively reinforcing gender roles and perpetuating the division of the home/urban and public/private division of labors, cities have evolved to become hostile and unwelcoming places for girls, women and other marginalized groups (Bassam, 2023)

In the public sector, and very commonly in the private sector too, there is a lack of relevant data available to support urbanists and designers when it comes to city making decisions, and the little data that is available is usually not disaggregated by sex. The available data usually comes as a generalized package of information that assumes everyone has a set of universal needs, and fails to account for the diverse patterns, behaviors, and needs that exist between men and women. By not breaking down the collected data, local authorities are unconsciously reinforcing a biased built environment and contributing to widening the gap in gender inequality. (Perez, 2020)

When talking about public space, and more specifically access to it, we know that the built environment in conjunction with unequal power dynamics plays a decisive role on who claims the space. Public spaces are often attributed to certain bodies and excluding others. (Fenster, 2005; Young, 1997) The unequal distribution of “access”

to such public spaces often leads to places being attributed a sense of hostility and unsafety, for those outside the claiming social group (Bassam, 2023).

Concerning public space engagement by gender, there’s a common phenomena involving public parks. In the early 1990’s the city of Vienna conducted a gender sensitive study on how men and women were engaging with their local public spaces. The study showed that when it came to parks, young girls stopped frequenting the park almost entirely after the age of 9 (Designing a City for Women, 2020) A similar 2012 study in Sweden showed that above the age of 8, public parks and spaces were mostly dominated by boys by approximately 80%. (Blomdahl, U., et al 2012) A research by Women in Sport (2022) by the Yorkshire Sport Foundation showed that 68% of young girls and women felt parks did not meet their needs saying “There’s nothing there for me to do there” even if 76% of them said they would like to be more fit and active. Moreover, 59% of them said boys take over park spaces and they don’t feel welcome, mostly because park spaces and courts are focused on more “men” sports and the park configuration does not account for how girls would want to interact with their park. (Make Space for Us, 2022)

This lack of disengagement of girls and women from public parks is shown to lead to less participation of women in sport activities that have long term health consequences. (Perez, 2020). These are classic examples of how public spaces are not granting equal access for both genders and minorities, and how segregating data by gender is necessary for designing better inclusive spaces for all.

For many years, scholars have advocated for community participation in urbanistic practices and processes. Cities and communities need to be built by the community itself

(Feldman, 1999). However true this statement is, reality is it's complicated to modify the existing built environment, however it is possible to (re)shape it. Through placemaking, public spaces can be transformed to be more inclusive, engaging and vibrant (Bassam, 2023). By adopting a bottom-up approach, placemaking lays the groundwork for community engagement, where all perspectives and voices are valued with equal importance, and opens the door for citizens to take part in the design of their own environment (Ellery & Ellery, 2019).

Generalizing data by not breaking it down by gender or minorities is the main reason why the urban space fails to meet women's and other vulnerable groups' needs. For this reason, organizations and local authorities have acknowledged the need for place sensitive research and data for improving places across all dimensions. Place sensitive data includes looking at places through a sociology and human geography lens too. When placemaking is seen through a gendered lens, it's called feminist placemaking. As we've discussed, feminist placemaking is not a new concept, however it is relatively recent that it has been relevant for political agendas. While feminist placemaking is built upon the premise of value within participatory design, community involvement and a bottom-up design approach, designing an agenda requires a systemic approach to accurately address the social gender gap and promote gender equality in urban spaces, and design spaces that are inclusive and accessible for all. (Bassam, 2023)

According to The Gendered City Organization, the keysteps for designing a feminist placemaking agenda are gendered-dissegregated research and data collection, involvement of a diverse group of stakeholders from both the public and private, academia and community, empirical and professional designers, identifying the key focus area

that is relevant for the community, it should set realistic, achievable, specific goals and objectives, and finally, it should document and advocate for the development of policies, frameworks and guidelines for future placemaking processes (idem, 2023)

The battle to acknowledge, represent and empower women in the public and urban spheres is one fought every day.

### **2.5.1 Gendered mobility patterns and its impact on sense and making of place**

Gendered mobility patterns mean the different ways in how men and women move through and utilize urban spaces. It has become a relevant study area because mobility in the urban sphere perpetuates social inequalities, limiting accessibility, engagement and safety for groups other than that of the status quo.

While our analysis will focus on data primarily from the UK, Ireland, and major European countries, it's important to recognize that the constraints and opportunities shaping women's mobility often transcend national borders. This suggests that despite cultural and geographical variations, underlying similarities in women's travel behaviors and experiences are present in most countries across the global north and global south, rooted in persistent gender norms and social structures. By examining these patterns, we can better understand the complex relationship of factors influencing women's behaviors and patterns, and advocate for more equitable and inclusive transportation systems and inclusive cities that do not limit, by their physical and psychological constraints, women's accessibility to public life.

Most cities follow a similar structure, they have an economic

“City Business District” (CBD) and are built radially around it. This radial structure impacts how adjacent systems are designed and built, where often urban planners opt for “zoning” the city, designating specific areas for residential, commercial, and industrial single-use purposes. Beyond specific architectural assets, gender norms are embedded through the separation of spaces of work and home, and public and private (Kern, 2019). Separating work from home is the spatial representation of the patriarchal system and is responsible for contemporary urbanism and its problems. (Markusen, 1981; Spain, 2014) This theoretical practical division of cities has woven male bias and gender inequality even deeper into the roots of cities.

To understand the impact male biased urbanism has on women’s life and sense of place, we must first analyze patterns and the gendered roles women play in society.

Gender influences access to resources, codes the body, and organizes social interactions such as division of employment and responsibilities. (Pollard & Wagnild, 2017) A broad overview of these roles are traced back to a very well established patriarchal system present in almost all cultures.

According to a report by the International Labour Organization (ILO), women participation in the global labor force is approximately around 47%, while mens rises up to 72%.

Breaking it down by type of jobs, men are more likely to own a formal employment while women are overrepresented in vulnerable jobs, mostly involving care work, home care, and unpaid labor. Reasons for the disparity in workforce participation has to do mostly with social-economical constraints and pressure exerted from traditional gender roles, that tend to label women as responsables for primary

house and family care. Women tend to look for work that allows them to accommodate their assigned gender role responsibilities and unpaid work with their paid work, which results in women holding most of the part time work positions, with unusual working hours. (Eurostat on Women’s situation in the labor market, 2024; Womens Budget Group, 2019). Overall, women hold the majority of the least stable and unsafe jobs, and are also among the more poorly paid workers (Walker & Cavanagh, 1999). This gender phenomena impacts women at a social, economical and human relationship levels.

As men are more likely to hold more formal and steady 9–5 jobs, they have a relatively simple travel pattern, a twice a day commute in and out of the CBD. Women on the other hand tend to have a much more complicated travel pattern, says Sánchez de Madariaga. Due to the nature of women’s jobs, they tend to work on the city’s periphery rather than in the city center. As primary home carers, women are also more likely to “trip-chain”, meaning traveling several short distances with multiple purposes, like dropping a child off at school, grocery shopping, visiting a family member, running errands, etc. (Transport for London, 2012)

In the UK alone, women make around 30% more bus rides than men (Ride with the Via, 2022). During daytime, women represent 54% of all bus riders, while at nighttime this cypher drastically drops to 34%. They are also less likely to own or have access to a car, only 47% of women have a valid driver’s license in the UK, compared to 60% of men. When women do live in a household with access to a car, they are also less likely to have active access to it. (Transport for London, 2012) (Womens Budget Group, 2019)

While cars are seen as convenient and safe, especially for women with caregiving responsibilities, they also reinforce

spatial inequalities and limit women's engagement with their local communities, hindering their ability to actively shape their neighborhoods. (Cahill et al, 2020)

Looking at how public transport systems operate in cities, it is clear that women are left at a disadvantage, leading them to spend more time and more money than men navigating a biased transportation network that does not consider their needs, making it harder for them to complete their day to day responsibilities, for both paid and unpaid labor. (Wei, Z., 2023)

An LSECities Study showed that in general, young women are unsatisfied and do not feel safe on public transport in their local areas and this affects whether and when they access public spaces (Making Space for Girls, 2022).

Because transport networks prove to be inefficient for women, they are more likely to walk from one place to another than men. According to a study done by Pollard and Wagnild (2017), results were consistent with the general trend indicating that women dedicate more time and undertake more trips than men to service their households, and more women than men walk for errands.

To design for women, therefore, is often synonym to designing for pedestrians. (Wei, Z., 2023) Overall, women tend to travel more on public transport and by foot, where approximately 54% of all walking trips are made by women (Transport for London, 2012).

In the urban context, we refer to mobility as the dynamic movement of people within a city, however, when analyzing mobility patterns and the limitation of such, we are instead talking about motility. The term motility can be defined as the capacity of mobility, the potential of people and things

to be mobile both geographically and socially (Kaufmann et al. 2004). It encompasses not only the physical capability to move but also the knowledge, skills, and opportunities that enable individuals to navigate and utilize urban spaces effectively (Sedini & Colleoni, 2024). This includes understanding transportation systems as well as the access, competences, appropriation and attitudes to other modes of transportation (Cuignet et al, 2019), feeling safe and comfortable in public spaces, and having access to destinations that meet their needs.

Women traveling with strollers face additional struggles since more often than not, sidewalks are reported to be in poor state and (or) not wide enough for pushing a stroller, limiting their access to public spaces and public services. Since most public transport options are not stroller friendly, women tend to need to plan their errands on not-concurrent times and face additional time poverty struggles (Perez, 2020).

Women from lower-income households or with disabilities face additional barriers to mobility, including limited access to private vehicles and reliance on often inadequate public transport. This can lead to social exclusion and further marginalization in the shaping of public spaces (Cahill et al, 2020)

Due to lack of access to motorized transportation, adequate public transport, disabilities and age, often vulnerable groups like children, single mothers, and elders spend a considerable amount of time in parks, playgrounds, and other public areas in their neighborhoods. (Collins, 2020) (Wei, Z., 2023) Moreover, the design of the built environment affects the ability of persons with disabilities to be physically active and to be socially integrated with their community. (Dannenberg, A., et al., 2003)

These numbers tend to worsen all across the global south, where patriarchal systems and gender roles are more culturally rooted and infrastructure is less well preserved. When we want to address social change, it becomes clear how physical places like cities do matter and influence social power dynamics. (Kern, 2019)

This data is relevant to the urban context because it lays the foundation of women's interactions with the built environment. Women overall interact more and in more ways with the built environment than men and are inevitably more susceptible to the conditions of such than their counterpart. They walk more, spend more time navigating it, and are in constant contact with it, regardless, women's community participation, social involvement, engagement rates with neighborhood's services, public spaces and infrastructure, and sense of belonging is still limited by the built environment and the mental construct of place exerted by such.

Women's mobility revolves significantly around safety concerns, particularly at night or in isolated areas. The mental construct of places and its association with fear or crime and lack of safety leads to self-imposed restrictions on movement and on their own motility, limiting their access to certain places and times, and impacting their sense of freedom and belonging in public spaces. (Cahill et al, 2020)

These big and small daily struggles have been normalized as part of one's daily life, nevertheless it is a systemic problem that leaves residents feeling unsatisfied with their local environment. (Tandogan, O., Ilhan, B. 2016) Society has grown to accept that navigating a city or neighborhood comes with certain levels of discomfort, however, women are pushed to the extreme end of feeling a low sense of place, belonging and representation of their gender and

their needs in their surroundings.

The city's and neighborhoods distribution of public spaces, services and facilities should be reassessed, with the goal of making services accessible by proximity to residents. Modifying a city's urban (re)design is a big, long-term, expensive project that can take many years to be completed, with the constant threat of falling down on the list of priorities in the authority's agendas. More economic, community-involved, smaller and targeted placemaking efforts are needed to give back the city to the people. Studies show that the built environment impacts on a communities social capital, mental health and community integration. (Dannenberg, A., et al., 2003)

Addressing residents' proximity to basic services and within easy reach fosters social life and inclusion, it invites residents to make use of the streets, it brings back a neighborhood's street vitality. By bringing out people to make use of the streets, the perceived sense of space is directly impacted. Moreover, proximity to services also reduces the use and need of motorized vehicles as a transport method, reducing the dependency on cars or public transport. Improving mobility has an environmental impact, reducing carbon emissions, noise levels that improve the quality of life, and reducing street traffic, that ultimately allows for improving access to pedestrianized areas and greenspaces, allowing for alternate activities that foster social activities for the local residents. (Hemmati, M., Rohr, U., 2009).

Additionally, limited motility can lead to social exclusion. The ability to move freely within a city allows individuals to access essential services, participate in social activities, and engage with their communities, contributing to their overall well-being and sense of belonging. Ensuring equal levels of urban motility is an essential right to the city that

is still not yet achieved for vulnerable populations (Sedini & Colleoni, 2024).

## **2.5.2 The shaping role of fear in urban planning and placemaking**

How a place is perceived is directly related to its physical aspects, cleanliness, aesthetic, good or poor lighting, etc. However, the biggest drivers are psychological. Speaking of women, fear is often referred to as a very important driver. When it comes to urban life, women's experiences of public space is often restricted by fear. (Day, 1998) The imagined city is shaped by experience, media, art, rumor and our own desires and fears (Kern, 2019)

Fear of crime and of one's own personal safety greatly affects the livability of a city, negatively impacting on the everyday lives of its residents, especially women. It imposes limitations in women's daily lives. Changes in behaviors, travel patterns, avoidance of certain spaces or routes, use of public spaces and times in which women engage in urban life is often ruled by the sense of fear. (Wei, Z., 2023)

Fear can cause fewer people to use streets, pose an obstacle for socializing, public spaces to be underused or deserted, city services not being used by the people who need them, limit residents from experiencing a quality city life, and economic distress for businesses due to the loss of customers. (Tandogan, O., Ilhan, B. 2016) For women, the sum of all fears can lead to their withdrawal from urban life. (Miethe, 1995). Women end up creating mental maps of fear associated with specific places and times, and navigate the city adopting defensive tactics like avoiding specific areas and specific times (Valentine, 1989), depriving them of their right to a fear free, comfortable, independent right to the city. A 2021 study by Young Women Lead showed

that in Scotland, only 20% of girls and young women feel comfortable when using their local public spaces.

The idea of "fear" among women is so embedded in the public and social context that it has been mistaken as an innate trait of girls and women (Kern, 2020) . Society has normalized and accepted women's fear as part of women's nature, overlooking the right for everyone to experience and live a fear-free life. Fear therefore contributes to the gendered experience of women in urban spaces and is the direct result of the physical environment and the social power relationships of and within cities. (Sági, 2022)

Urbanists fail to include fear as a driver to address when designing the urban environment, and when they do, they often do not analyze how fear is perceived differently from men to women. Unsurprisingly, in the UK 89% of young men and women (16-18) reported to have never been asked about the perception of their neighborhood. (Grosvenor Group, 2020) (Make Space for Girls, 2022)

Jane Darke (1994) referred to women's fears as the most important single issue in planning for women. Women experience the city differently than men, mostly because they are more aware and concerned with security issues like aggression and harassment, and tend to take precautionary actions and adopt avoidant behaviors (Transport for London, 2024). Fear of violence, perception of risk, and sense of vulnerability are among the main drivers of women's behavioral changes that represent major mobility and social obstacles when interacting with the public space.

Given that women interact more on a daily basis with the built environment, addressing women's perception of fear can lead to designing spaces that are inclusive for all, ensuring a more equal access to public life and spaces

for all genders and ethnic groups. Reducing the sense of fear improves the sense of belonging, safety, community engagement, economic prosperity and a fair use of public spaces and vice versa (Ataç, 2007).

Studies show that the relationship between fear and physical factors is more influential than the relationship between fear and demographic structure (Ergun & Yirmibeşoğlu, 2016) (Köklü & Yirmibeşoğlu, 2017) A United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) research survey demonstrated that 32% of women interviewed felt unsafe when using public spaces at night.

Additional research shows that 80% of women and girls have experienced harassment in public, 80% of women fear

being harassed in public transport (International Transport Forum, 2019), impacting directly on women's access to opportunities, to enjoy public life and their quality of life.

Sense of fear is directly correlated to an individuals' race, age, sense of belonging, education, social status, past experiences, but most relevant of all is gender. (Çardak, B., 2011)

Dark lanes, poorly-lit streets, alleyways, graffiti walls, empty parks, enclosed parks, broken roads, non-busy roads, silent streets, abandoned buildings, are common spaces with a high fear perception where women are more likely to feel uncomfortable and avoid using. (Cities Alive, 2022). In Gill Valentine's words,

**“Women’s fear of male violence does not therefore just take place in space but is tied up with the way public space is used, occupied and controlled by different groups at different times”** (*idem*, 1989, p. 389)

A study done on women's perception of the city at night by Transport transport (2024) in Milan, showed that places with low safety perception levels could be easily improved through three main interventions. Improving lighting conditions in streets and public spaces to maximize visibility and awareness of one's surroundings increased women's perception of safety of said space, open businesses like bars and restaurants at nights that attract the presence of people increases women's perception of safety, related to the fact that if needed, being able to receive social support albeit from strangers rather than feeling isolated and

desolate. Lastly, enhancing public transport, like bus and tram stops, and re(designing) them into more recognizable and attractive hubs have the potential to make women feel safer and reduce their sense of fear when traveling at night. When talking about the physicality of such spaces, most of them can be benefited from specific placemaking interventions that address women's needs and concerns.

A 2001 study by the European Crime Preventing Network (EUCPN) showed that the sense of fear was higher in cities than in rural areas due to the lack of social connection

and solidarity amongst residents. Improving a sense of belonging can reduce a sense of fear and bring back social connections in local neighborhoods.

Given that the built environment influences how we mentally perceive space, and how we perceive space influences how we interact with it and thus shape it, improving one aspect will inevitably improve the other. (Fran et al, 2003) We do not intend to advocate for a “designing for fear” approach, but rather stress the importance of understanding fear as a factor on how different genders perceive and therefore engage with the built environment, in order to improve space through placemaking interventions that consider safety, belonging, representation, integration, community development and improve social life for all. Intervening the physical aspects of space that contribute to the perception of safety, it is possible to improve residents' experience of place and have positive impacts on social life and gender inclusion. (Köklü & Yirmibeşoğlu, 2017)

A feminist city is one where women feel safe, respected, and empowered. It's a city where women have equal access to resources and opportunities, where women can live their lives without fear (Kern, 2019)

## **2.6 Women's interventions in placemaking**

When it comes to urbanism and gender equality, there is no single standard solution that can be replicable and implemented across cultures and countries. (Jackowska, 2022) It was the UN World Conferences on Women in Beijing in 1995 that catalyzed the international community to reconsider urbanistic practices and adopt a more gender-sensitive and participatory approach to close the gender gap and focus on human sustainable development





of cities.

Countries across the world have responded with different approaches to address the issue, for example the Netherlands implemented gender view into policy programmes rather than creating new laws, France renewed the law on gender equality in 2014, implementing gender mainstreaming policies across all sectors where now most cities have a “women and the city” programme and budget for urbanist purposes, while Spain and Germany opted for urban renewal acts. (Tummers & Wankiewicz, 2020) Cities like Chicago, Paris, Milan, Bogota, Ottawa, Melbourne, have implemented local policies and urban interventions that seek to close the social gender gap.

Placemaking is a participatory design process in which all interested parties are involved in the decision making process. It begins by acknowledging diversity of a given space, in order to design projects and activities that are relevant to the local dwellers. To this extent, gender is central to placemaking.

Women’s movements to reclaim their right to the city started in the 1960’s with Jane Jacobs. She advocated how modern cities failed to serve all its citizens equally and pointed out the male bias ingrained in city planning. She was a pioneer in advocating for local residents, or “amateur professionals”, to participate in the design process of their neighborhood, distributing the decision making power from professionals and giving it back to the people. In other words, she argued that planning is too important to be left in the hands of planners, and citizens should engage in the planning of their spaces. (Ehrenhalt, 2001)

Ten years later, in 1970, Betty Friedan called for a Women’s Strike for Equality Day. With thousands of women showing

up, contemporary feminists built their rights into the city through women's centers, credit unions, and feminist health clinics. These places were created by women and for women, reclaiming women's rights to the public space. (Spain, 2014)

Since the 1970's, many major services and places designed and directed at women started emerging. Feminist bookstores, self-help clinics, shelters, and public spaces were not only addressing women's needs, they were also connecting women, forming networks and fostering social life outside the domestic realm.

They were voluntarily gendered spaces that empowered women. (Spain, 2014) These services flourished because women spent a considerable amount of their time and money to shape the spaces they had available to reclaim their right to their city. Unconsciously, they were active placemakers.

Feminist placemaking is a transformative practice that

aims to challenge traditional gender norms and create public spaces that are inclusive, safe, and empowering for all. It recognizes that public spaces are often designed and experienced through a gendered (male) lens (Rose, 1993), perpetuating gender inequalities and limiting women's accessibility to belong and participate in society. Feminist placemaking seeks to address this issue by centering women's experiences and voices in the design, planning, and use of public spaces (Bassam, 2023).

This involves incorporating women's needs and perspectives into all aspects of urban development, from transportation and housing to public art and green spaces.

Women-centered approach does not mean that it fails to account for men's needs. Several studies show that a gendered approach to placemaking is beneficial for women, men, and minorities across all socio-economical and environmental levels. (Loroño-Leturiondo et al, 2022) By covering the needs of the vulnerable, indirectly everyone's needs are met. Voicing the needs of women

**“Feminist placemaking is more than just adding women to existing spaces, it is also about fundamentally transforming the way we think about and design our cities”** (Kern, 2019)

through placemaking aims to encourage structural changes to improve women's accessibility to public spaces and work-life balance, as it also aims to improve the sharing of responsibilities and gender equality.

Feminist placemaking also prioritizes collaboration and community engagement, acknowledging that women's voices and experiences are diverse and intersectional, and empowering them through design processes (Bassam, 2023). Gender-aware planning and design processes must be inclusive and participatory, ensuring that women from all backgrounds have a say in shaping their environments (Moser, 1993)

A pioneer project in feminist design and placemaking was Vienna's "Manual for Gender Mainstreaming in Urban Planning and Urban Development" published in 2013. However, the city of Vienna has been investing and placing women at the center of several urban projects and redevelopments since around the 1990's. Vienna's Women's Office was inaugurated in 1992 and focused on voicing women's struggles and advocated for the representation of the female point of view within the built environment. The city adopted a gender-sensitive approach to all city-making projects, not only those regarding the urban realm.

Sweden has also adopted a gendered approach to placemaking in recent years. The city of Umeå has invested in women-led placemaking interventions and feminist policymaking placing women at the center. Local authorities have constantly advocated for women's quality of life in the city and adopted a feminist lens to city and policy making in attempts to close the gender gap and make the city, physically, politically and socially, gender neutral.

Women's role in placemaking projects is crucial for inclusive gender neutral outcomes. Women will advocate for their hidden needs and concerns, hidden everyday struggles that consciously and unconsciously prevent them from equal access to public spaces and that negatively impact their mental construct of space and belonging. From access, to safety, to mobility issues, men do not face the same obstacles on a daily basis and hence cannot design for women as women can. Inclusive design comes from experiencing place at a personal level and gender is a key characteristic of how a place is perceived. Men's needs are addressed without saying because the status quo already has their needs at heart. Feminist placemaking does not intend to stop addressing men's needs, but designing for the vulnerable already includes the general set of needs of the standard male. Designing spaces, cities, and the urban environment through a feminist placemaking lens is designing for inclusion and for all.

Many placemaking interventions can have a symbolic nature, whether it is in the form of street names, street signs, same sex traffic lights or colors. Projects like Mapping Diversity, EqualStreetNames, Las Calles de las Mujeres, Toponomastica Femminile, are working to map gender gaps in street names of several cities across the world. According to Mapping Diversity of 155,468 street names across 32 major European cities, located in 19 countries, more than 90% of streets named after individuals were named after white men, with Stockholm topping the ranking with 19.5% of its streets named after women. (Mapping Diversity, website). These numbers reinforce how women are systematically marginalized and underrepresented in the urban and public realm.

More physical interventions like wider sidewalks, bike lanes, artistic interventions, more casual and shaded

benches in public spaces, the reconfiguration of public parks with more versatile playing courts, have proven to have a deep significance for many residents, specially girls, women, elderly and vulnerable groups, like immigrants and members of the LGBTQ+ community. Little interventions like these have shown to make such groups “feel seen” and thus, feel represented by their environment. As a consequence, it improves the sense of place, sense of belonging, community integration, safety and social and gender inclusion. Placemaking is a powerful tool for social change, paving the way for marginalized groups to reclaim their right to the city and assert their presence in the public realm (Hayden, 2005)

Through these strategies, feminist placemaking strives to create cities that are not just safe and accessible for women, but also actively promote their empowerment and well-being. It envisions a world where public spaces are truly inclusive and reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of all members of society.

## **2.7 Previous work methodologies**

Previous works on the topic of 15-minute city, feminist urbanism, gendered views on urban planning, and feminist placemaking can be divided into two main scopes, quantitative and qualitative metrics. Common metrics are found across all studies, like “walkability”, “proximity”, “safety”, “accessibility”, “mobility and transportation”, “inclusivity”, however, the process of research and measurement of such criteria varies from topic to topic.

To understand and develop the concepts of the 15-minute city and feminist urbanism, most research is mostly done under a strict analysis of contemporary urbanism, and the physicality of the built environment, where proximity, walkability, safety and inclusion are key research parameters.

Through extensive analysis and discussion, previous research compares the effectiveness of a top-down vs. bottom-up design approach focusing on an inclusive view of local residents’ needs, where 15-minute city’s research focuses on accessibility by proximity, sustainability and walkability, and feminist urban design principles focus on accessibility through a gender inclusive view. Because of the nature of such topics, previous work consulted for the purpose of this thesis involves a combination of case study comparisons from urban projects in different cities and extensive discussion is done through qualitative metrics to measure the project’s effectiveness.

Previous work on gendered views in urbanism analysis takes on a mostly quantitative approach. Extensive discussion and comparison between available hard data sets segregated by gender is discussed to understand gender patterns that involve the urban realm. Mobility patterns, workforce representation, public spaces engagement, paid and unpaid labor responsibilities, time poverty, public transportation networks, public spaces distribution, “zoning” practices dividing residential and business areas and how it impacts differently each gender are discussed through surveys, polls, and analysis of numerical data sets, uncovering the hidden male biases rooted in urban urbanism. This type of data, though easily represented, is hardly collected by public offices and thus little research is available with data broken down by gender.

Placemaking and feminist placemaking previous research methodologies take a mixed-method approach. They discuss the impact of bottom-up participatory design practices that are diverse, gender and minority inclusive and representative of the local residents. Through interviews, focus groups, co-design sessions, observation, and analysis of relevant data sets, previous research has gathered

qualitative and quantitative data focusing on soft and hard public space interventions and (re)designs.

Most works focus on people's perception of spaces on "safety", "accessibility", "sense of identity", "sense of belonging", "sense of fear", and the mental construct of defined spaces. Because metrics for this type of research are qualitative, most works analyze it through a "before and after" comparison of the previously mentioned parameters, as an attempt to measure the project's impact. Case study discussion from different projects across the world highlight the best-practices for successful feminist placemaking interventions, and the importance of having a diverse group of co-creators with shared interests.

Chapter Three

**Metho**

**dology**

The purpose of this thesis is to comprehensively analyze the existing research done on feminist placemaking, and the importance of women's active role as co-designers and shapers of their community and accessibility by proximity, bringing inclusive social and economic positive transformations at neighborhood level.

Leveraging from existing concepts like the 15-minute city, feminist urban design principles and placemaking, this study will analyze feminist placemaking interventions within the concept of accessibility by proximity and the importance of women and minorities participation and inclusion in placemaking as a sustainable design method that empowers, represents and acknowledges women's right to city, public spaces, and public life, with a key focus on sustainability, accessibility, safety and inclusion.

### **3.1 Data collection and analysis**

Through extensive secondary and desk research, this study will carry out a systematic literature review with the aim of identifying key themes, gaps in current research, trends, discussing current limitations and proposing a new feminist placemaking design manifesto.

The arrange of works gathered for the purpose of this thesis were collected through online academic and scientific journals (SpringerLink, Sage Journal, Taylor & Francis Group, Wiley Online Library), advanced search engines (Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, JSTOR) online publications, articles, government databases, non-profit organizations reports, publications and articles, e-books. These sources contain both qualitative and quantitative data.

### **3.2 Keywords and search terms**

Keywords used for the selection of works for the purpose of this case study analysis, were based on the concepts explored and explained in the literature review. Keywords included "Placemaking", "Feminist placemaking", "Feminist urbanism", "Tactical placemaking", "DIY urbanism", "Gender biased urbanism", "Right to city", "Guerrilla urbanism", "15-minute city", "Proximity by design", "Gendered city", "Community design", "Participatory placemaking", "Inclusive citymaking", "Urban motility".

New concepts that were not previously mentioned in the literature review, that derived later on the research and as a consequence of other keyword searches were also included as keywords for this section.

New keywords include "Urban motility" that refers to the capability and mobility potential (Kaufman et al, 2014) as well as the access, competences, appropriation and attitudes to modes of transportation (Cuignet et al, 2019)

### **3.3 Case studies**

This research will analyze 3 feminist placemaking case studies containing a combination of feminist placemaking projects and activities across the world and within different socio-economic and urban contexts to understand the effectiveness and impact of such placemaking interventions in the community, and discuss the physical, social, and psychological drivers for feminist placemaking.

The case studies selected focus specifically on women's involvement in placemaking interventions and design processes, also referred as feminist placemaking, or case studies in which the purpose of such interventions was intended specifically to target women and vulnerable populations, in attempts to improve safety levels, sense

of place, identity, and empower women's participation in public and social life through the (re)shaping of public spaces and inclusive design practices.

The methodology section outlines the systematic approach taken to collect, evaluate, and synthesize relevant literature, ensuring a thorough and unbiased analysis of the topic.

### **3.4 Research questions and objectives**

A comprehensive literature review and extensive secondary and desk research established the evidence and helped define the project scope.

This review is guided by the following research questions and objectives:

- Identify the behaviors, challenges, obstacles and opportunities that women and vulnerable groups experience in public urban areas, and by consequence, the gender inequality between men and women's Right to the City
- Explore the role of the built environment on women's engagement with public spaces, public life, sense of place and belonging, inclusion and perception of safety
- How and why is it important to include women in placemaking design processes?
- What are the positive environmental and socio-economic impacts of feminist placemaking interventions in communities?
- How can accessibility by proximity urban concepts like 15-minute city benefit from adding feminist placemaking as a pillar for city (re)design for creating safer, inclusive, accessible and gender neutral spaces for all

Chapter Four

# Case study

**y analysis**

This section presents an in-depth analysis of four feminist placemaking case studies, with at least one representative for each type of placemaking (creative, tactical and strategic) across the world to further support each category, selected to illustrate the positive environmental and socio-economic impacts of such interventions. These case studies were carefully selected based on their relevance to the research questions and objectives of this thesis.

The analysis aims to understand the effectiveness of feminist placemaking interventions and their contribution to community transformation, (re)generation, (re)design, sense of place, sense of belonging and identity, safety, and community engagement with their built environment, public spaces, public life, and right to city, addressed specifically through a feminist lens.

The case studies will be analyzed using the following structure and criteria

- *Background context*

This section will focus on understanding the broader social, economic, and cultural context in which the placemaking intervention occurs. It includes any relevant historical events, prevailing gender norms, and specific challenges or inequalities that the project focuses on.

- *Location*

This section relates to the physical location of the project and when relevant, may include a brief description of the characteristics of the site of the intervention.

- *Organizing body*

This section focuses on identifying the entity or group responsible for initiating and implementing the placemaking project.

- *Target users of intervention*

This section centers on defining the primary beneficiaries of the project, mostly encompassing women, girls, LGBTQ+ individuals, or other marginalized groups whose needs and perspectives are central to the intervention's design and implementation.

- *Stakeholders involvement strategy*

This section identifies the various individuals and groups, besides the target beneficiaries, that are involved in the project. It encompasses local residents, businesses, government officials, and other relevant parties whose interests and concerns are considered during the placemaking process.

- *Type of placemaking*

This section identifies the project as one from the three main types of placemaking (Creative, Strategic and Tactical) and provides a brief description of the specific strategies and activities employed to create a feminist place.

- *Intervention outcomes and results*

This section provides a detailed description of the strategies, activities and interventions implemented in the project. It may include participatory design workshops, art installations, community events, hard and soft interventions of the urban spaces and other interventions aimed at

addressing gender inequality and fostering inclusivity. It also evaluates the tangible and intangible impacts of the placemaking project. It includes assessing changes in the physical environment, shifts in social dynamics, and the extent to which the project achieved its goals of promoting gender equity, empowerment, and inclusivity, considering both short-term and long-term effects.

- *Findings*

This section focuses on capturing and summarizing the key observations, insights, and lessons learned from the case study. It encompasses challenges faced during implementation, unexpected outcomes, and the project's overall contribution to feminist practices and contributions to closing the gender gap and empowering women in the public realm and their right to the city.

## **4.1 Vienna's Einsiedler Park**

### ***Background context***

The city of Vienna has been awarded by the Mercer firm to be the "Most livable city in the world" for more than 10 years in a row, with a brief interruption during the COVID-19 pandemic, and gaining the position back in 2024. (The city of Vienna, 2024). The score is based on 39 factors from 10 different categories, which are: Consumer goods, Economic environment, Housing, Medical and health considerations, Natural environment, Political and social environment, Public services and transport, Recreation, Schools and education, Socio-cultural environment. (The Mercer Group)

The research and analysis division of The Economist Group, the Economist Intelligence Unit, has ranked Vienna

as the "Most Livable City" for the third time in a row (2021-2024) with a score of 98.4. (The Economist Group, 2024) The EIU's liveability index ranks cities based on more than 30 indicators across 5 different categories: Healthcare, Education, Infrastructure, Stability, Culture and environment. (EIU report on The Global Liveability Index 2024, 2024)

Vienna has been a pioneer when it comes to feminist practices, dating back to the early 1970's, when the women of Vienna started demanding gender equality in all areas of life, from gender-sensitive language to being represented in public offices and involved in the decision-making process of the public sphere. Following the 1985 and 1995 UN World Conferences on Women in Nairobi and Beijing, the city further invested in feminist initiatives and efforts to close the gender gap.

The city of Vienna has recognized the biases ingrained in their built environment in part due to the extensive involvement of citizens in public affairs and their demands on equal rights. In 1991, Austrian urban planners Eva Kail and Jutta Kleedorfer, who worked at the City of Vienna's Planning Department, organized and set up an exhibition called "Who Owns Public Spaces? Women's Everyday Life in the City", with the intention to make visible the everyday struggles of women in a city dominated by cars (Jackowska, et Novas., 2022). The exhibition uncovered more than just traffic related struggles, it also shone a light on how and why the city was gender biased and how it

limited women's interactions and involvement in everyday's and public life.

In 1992 the city founded the Women's Office under the lead of Eva Kail. The Women's Office focused on planning issues and to properly represent women's voices in public decisions within the urban realm, and consequently, designing with women's needs in mind too.

Besides applying a gendered approach to urban planning, the municipality has constantly involved its citizens as co-designers of their environment. Local surveys and participatory approaches are part of the Women's Office duties to understand gendered concerns about the city and specific areas and implement placemaking interventions in the identified problem areas. (The city of Vienna, 2014) (Wei, Z., 2023)

**Location:** Einsiedler Park, Vienna

The pilot study was located in Einsiedler Park, a relatively ethnic diverse neighborhood in Vienna. It was noted that even though girls did walk through the park at least twice a day, before and after school, they did not stop to spend time in the park as boys did, and when they did it was usually to pick up a younger relative. (Sidorova, 2017) This unusual set of behaviors and unequal engagement between young boys and girls had been normalized and ignored for decades, however, it represents how public spaces are not gender sensitive.

### **Organizing body**

Vienna's Women's Office commissioned the project to (re)design the park space and promote girls and teenagers participation, engagement and usage with the

space. Budget for the project was covered by the 5th district budget allocation for public park redesigning, and personnel resources were provided by the Office for Planning and Housing Construction Methods That Take Account of Women's and Everyday Needs. (USE report on Gender-Sensitive park design at Einsiedler park and St. Johann park)

Six consultant planning offices, of which Tilia Planning Office won the project licitation (Ratzlaff, 2024), female planning experts and sociologists were involved in the project, as well local residents, park supervisors, school representatives as participants and informal leaders of the project. (Sidorova, 2017)

### **Target users of intervention**

As part of the projects conducted by the Women's Office, the city addressed girls and teenagers' engagement with public parks, after it was noted that girls almost entirely stopped making use of them between the ages of 10-13.

### **Stakeholders involvement strategy**

Scholars and authorities worked together with the community to address the issue, applying a gender-sensitive and bottom-up design strategic approach. (Perez, C., 2020) They understood that girls engage with public spaces differently than boys and make use of public spaces for different social activities, and the current design of parks was not welcoming for them nor encouraged them to make use of it. (Make Space for Girls, 2023)

Using a bottom-up design approach, local authorities from the municipality of Vienna, Vienna's Women's Office, members of the Park Department of Vienna and Tilias

planning office designers collaborated with local residents, girls and teenagers from the community who frequented the park, mothers, to co-design and be involved in the decision making process in the efforts to understand what young girls and women were looking for in public spaces and how to improve their feeling of belonging and engagement with their local park. (Make Space for Girls: Safer Parks, 2023)

Starting with informal conversations with girls and teenagers who frequented the park, the designers had a first idea on why the park spaces were not appealing for them. The public participation was on a voluntary basis, where the girls who participated in the project were interested frequent park visitors; nearby schools representatives, park supervisors and even local priests were also invited to be part of the project. (Sidorova, 2017)

This project was entirely community driven, and at the time there was no formal academia or industry involvement or participation. However, local school and kindergarten representatives that were involved in the design process provided an alternative point of view with a more scholarly and formal approach, complementing the design process.

### ***Type of placemaking***

#### *Tactical Placemaking*

Through tactical placemaking projects, the city of Vienna has approached city making through a gender sensitive lens for the last decades, giving back to women their right to the city.

Through a series of workshops with girls from the community, conducted by the Park Department of Vienna,

the city uncovered that while technically the park did provide recreational spaces for young people, young girls did not find them appealing, attracted or welcomed to use them, in other words, young girls felt there were no facilities for them and therefore they had no reason to stop and spend time in the park. (Make Space for Girls: Safer Parks, 2023)

### ***Intervention outcome and results***

Enclosed courts, narrow entrances, lighting conditions and main pedestrian roads leading to the park were among the first intervening spaces to make the park more welcoming for girls. Hard interventions modified the physical space to



Fig. 1 Soft intervention. Hammocks, benches and platform that act as informal seating in Einsiedler Park

improve actual and perceived safety, gender inclusion and adding spaces that were relevant and inviting for young girls, teenagers and young women. (Ratzlaff, 2024)

The city repurposed the park's green spaces to form semi-private areas that girls were more attracted to use. Hammocks, benches and ledges were added as spaces where young girls could use for chatting and playing,

creating open and less structured playgrounds and park spaces to address the needs and wants of both boys and girls. Soft interventions included strategically added benches near the court areas that acted as rest and hanging spots (Ratzlaff, 2024), and allowed for parents and baby sitters to visit the park more frequently, allowing mothers to keep an eye on their children while socializing



Fig. 2 Benches added inside kids' playing areas, allowing for mothers, older sisters or people looking after young children to have a space to gather, hang out while simultaneously keeping an eye on their children

with neighbors, friends and other mothers. (Designing a City for Women, 2020).

One basketball court was transformed into a multipurpose "court" with no formal setting for any sport, allowing girls and boys to use it for different purposes and not constraining the space for a specific sport and consequently, a specific gender. This hard intervention on the space allowed for a more flexible use of the space, which simultaneously became a soft intervention by allowing for more activities to occur in the same space. In the court area, hard interventions included adding an in-between platform where young girls and boys could enjoy the activities by watching without the need to actively participate in the game, providing a safe and dedicated space for observing the games, based on the analyzed behaviors of girls.



Fig. 3 Hard intervention. Platform added in between courts for multipurpose uses, to watch, rest, or perform non-sport activities or court constrained games and activities

This flexibility of the space allowed girls to freely engage in their more informal gameplays that usually involve the whole body and often consists of made up games.

Since the implementation of specific and tactical placemaking interventions, the park has seen an increase of visitors and girls' engagement with public parks has recovered ever since. (Designing a City for Women, 2020)

As an indirect consequence of intervening the space to make it accessible and appealing for young girls, adult women started frequenting the park too. The shaded areas and open spaces allowed for women and mothers to gather in the park and spend time together, while simultaneously keeping an eye on their childrens playing.



Fig 4. Map of Vienna's Einsiedler Park displaying the location of the park's playground, open cement field, soccer, basketball and volleyball courts, as well as a number of seating places

## **Findings**

Findings included girls not feeling welcome or feeling excluded from using the facilities partly because of boys' behaviors. Upon observation, it was noted that girls prefer to watch the games before deciding to get involved, however, there was not enough space in the court for spectators, making girls either stand outside or observing from really close, but as boys tend to congregate around the entrances, this behavior made girls feel unsafe, uncomfortable and unwelcome and preferred to avoid those spaces. (Palit, 2019)

The study also showed that girls tended to use the spaces for different activities and in a variety of ways, regardless of the intended purposes of the court. However current court design was limiting girls interaction with the park, as courts are seen generally a masculine space due to the type of sport and setting (ex. football or basketball)

According to Claudia Prinz-Brandenburg, a landscape architect working for the Park Department of Vienna and who was involved in the project, the workshops uncovered that fear, or sense of fear, was a common denominator on why and how girls engaged with the park spaces (Sidorova, 2017).

## **4.2 Umea's Lev! Tunnel**

### **Background context**

Umea is the biggest city in northern Sweden, it is also considered to be the most youthful and one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse cities too, this mostly as a consequence of Umea's University. (Sandberg & Ronnblom, 2015)

Since 1979 the city has had a strategic public office, the Committee on Gender Equality, to oversee gender equality matters, and has worked actively and constantly to improve and promote gender equality across all public services, infrastructure and policies (Municipality of Umea, 2019), becoming one of the first cities in the world to include gender equality matters in their agendas and the first in Sweden to do so. In 2019 Umea was selected alongside three other Swedish cities to be part of a five-year government initiative to achieve equal conditions for men and women (Urbact report on Sustainable Urban Development , 2019)(Coi, 2022), however Umeas rich history and long lasting efforts on gender equality has positioned the city as an example and inspiration for other municipalities around Europe and the world. (Cattelan, 2014)

During the 2000s the city held a series of seminars discussing safety, fear and gender equality in the built environment to understand what makes a space be perceived as unsafe and what elements of the built environment contributed to crime rates in order to channel efforts to intervene and (re) design better spaces through a gendered lens.

Part of the research done by the Committee on Gender Equality and by the series of seminars made visible that women and men use and move in different ways in the public space, and which aspects of the built environment influence when, if and how people move in the public space and how it plays a role on gender inequality, specifically on gendered mobility patterns. (Municipality of Umea, 2019) As part of the goal of achieving a gender neutral city, Umea has invested in designing and creating accessible outdoor environments for everyone. (Sandberg & Ronnblom, 2015)

Located close to the city's central train station and

connecting with the Haga district, there is a 170 m long tunnel that has become one of the city's most iconic landmarks and an example of how the city has tackled gender equality through placemaking interventions and the positive social effect the project has had.

The Train Station Tunnel, now renamed the Sara Lidman Tunnel, used to be a long, narrow, dark underpass connecting the Haga district with the central train station in central Umea. The Haga district had gained the reputation to be an unsafe neighborhood due to a series of crimes committed in the area, where women were targeted and assaulted (Sandberg, 2013).

The underpass design and the perceived reputation of the Haga district contributed to people, especially women, having a high sense of fear and unsafety when using the underpath (Coi, 2022) and opted for taking longer detours to avoid walking through the area. According to Safer Sweden research, the fear of being a victim is approximately 10-15 points higher in women than men and around 50% of women report feeling unsafe in vulnerable areas. (Kneeshaw, 2018)

As part of Umea's own gender-equality agenda and as part of URBACT III (2014-2020) project's guidelines, the tunnel was selected to be intervened and (re)designed in order to improve accessibility, safety and belonging for everyone. (URBACT report on Sustainable Urban Development , 2022) The project was funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), national contributions paid by the member and partner states, local contributions from cities and regions. The total project's budget was 96,3 M€. (URBACT, website)

**Location:** Haga district and Central Umea, Sweden

### ***Organizing body***

Umea municipality in cooperation with the city's Transport Administration, with funding from URBACT as part of their pilot project.

### ***Target users of intervention***

The project was mainly focused on targeting women traveling alone with the need to commute from central Umea to or through the Haga district, and indirectly, all city dwellers and tourists who use the underpass to commute.

### ***Stakeholders involvement strategy***

Umea's municipality has long since employed a gendered approach when designing spaces. To achieve gender equality in the urban sphere and understand how the built environment plays a role in gender powered dynamics, the Umeas City Council, the Gender Equality Office, led by Linda Gustaffson, and the Swedish Transport Agency (The Sara Lidman's Society, website) worked alongside gender experts and urban planners to gather relevant and disaggregated data on transport, mobility patterns and perceptions of the public space (URBACT report on Gender Equality at the heart of the city, 2022). The art studio FA+ was commissioned to work on the project to transform through art the tunnel into a welcoming space rather than a threatening one. (World Bank Group, 2020) (FA+ studio, website)

Using a bottom up approach, the project actively and closely consulted with local residents, women of different ages and backgrounds, architects, local authorities, artists and designers, involving them in the co-creation of solutions (URBACT report on, 2022) (The Gendered Landscape,

website).

A two-week experiment was carried out in which the pedestrian and cycling tunnel was filled with different natural noises. More than 400 people were interviewed regarding their feeling and perception of safety in and around the tunnel area before and after the experiment, in order to grasp a general feeling of the space (The Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, website)

The municipality led workshops on gender equality and urban planning involving project participants in the aim of voicing the real needs, wants, concerns of the local residents and including them in the design process. (Cattelan, 2023) (World Bank Group, 2020)

The project was led by the municipality and the Swedish Transport Agency and commissioned to FA+ art studio for the artistic landscape. Architecture firm White Arkitektur along with landscape architect Mattias Nordström and architect Lennart Sjögren were commissioned for the hard architectural interventions, and Ljudverket KB, Per Erik Rylander worked on the sound and music interventions of the tunnel. (Umea Kommun report on the Station Tunnel, 2024) However no academia was involved in the design process and industry participation was limited as there is not a strong active presence of it in the intervened space.

### ***Type of placemaking***

#### *Creative Placemaking*

Through creative feminist placemaking efforts, the tunnel was re-designed to tackle the sense of fear and become a welcoming space for everyone. (Cities Alive, 2022) The project, called “The Lev! Tunnel” (which means “Live”) aimed to create a functional and beautiful place where

art and design helped to improve safety in an environment that was previously perceived as unsafe (Municipality of Umea, 2019).

As part of URBACT’s pilot project guidelines and Umeas already in-place design methods, the municipality focused on collecting gender-disaggregated qualitative and quantitative data to understand the real needs, pains, and wants of girls, boys, women and men. (UIA, 2022) (European Platform on Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans, 2020)

### ***Intervention outcomes and results***

The project focused on improving safety and reducing the sense of fear in the area. The underpass is now wide and well-lit. (Coi, 2022) Wider entrances reduce the sense of fear because there is space to walk and move more freely even when people are coming in groups or from the opposite direction. (World Bank Group, 2020). To improve accessibility, wider walklanes were added to fit strollers and wheelchairs, as well as a wide bicycle lane (International Urban and Regional Corporation, report on Umea) . Additionally, the tunnel has an elevated midpoint to optimize visibility from end to end (Cattelan, 2023), where the steepness is barely noticeable and does not compromise the experience for people pushing strollers and wheelchairs.

The entrance is also visible from the other side of the tunnel and alternative exits were added halfway through the passage, allowing women, and men, to use it in case of an emergency (The Gendered Landscape, website). Rounded corners were added to improve visibility, prevent injuries and to create open spaces, as well as improving visibility when existing the tunnel, making it almost impossible

for unknown individuals to hide and promote safety (International Urban and Regional Corporation, report). This configuration of multiple exits and rounded corners gave users the reassurance that in case of feeling unsafe, there is always a way out, reducing the fear of using the tunnel. (Make Space for Girls, website)

The new tunnel was designed with optimal inflow of light at all entrances (The Gendered Landscape, website), allowing natural light to enter the tunnel during daytime, and is well lit at any time of day.



Fig. 5 Tunnel with open spaces, wide bike and walk lanes, an intermediate alternative exit, round corners and optimal light flow

The project collaborated with Stockholm based art studio FA+, transforming the space through artistic and design interventions along the whole length of the tunnel, creating a 170 meter long art installation rendering tribute to Swedish award winning writer Sara Lidman.

One side of the tunnel is covered with 186 double glass panels with blurred birch trees in the background. The panels convey the feeling of transparency and allow for more natural light to illuminate the tunnel, and alternate between green and blue light during darker times, giving the illusion of looking at a forest through the window of a moving train. (Umeå Kommun, 2019)

The floor and walls are covered with famous quotes from the authors' works, and passers-by can press buttons and listen to Sara Lidman's voice reciting her own work. (The Gendered Landscape, website). Citizens were actively involved in the process. They were invited to submit their favorite quotes from the author, where FA+ studio and



Fig. 6 Photo of entrance to the tunnel with wide walk and bike lanes, benches and glass panels depicting a forest as seen from a window of a moving train

Sara Lidman Connoisseurs worked together to curate and select more than thirty quotes to be included in the installation. (FA+ studio, website)

The installation also plays soft calming melodies. From within the glass wall, a collection of 16 melodies is played on loop all day, from Sara Lidman's voice to bird songs and calming sounds of nature, soothing sounds can be heard while crossing the tunnel. (Umeå Kommun, 2019) (Visit Umea, website). Tomas Stromberg states that "For women, the presence of other women is particularly reassuring,



Fig. 7 Glass wall portraying the quotes of Sara Lidman's famous works, illuminating and welcoming people

and to have the company of a woman through the tunnel, even if she's not there in person, the presence of Sara is tangible, we think it really increases the feeling of security". (idem, Umeå Kommun, 2019)

In some walls of the tunnel, pieces of wood from Sara Lidman's house are placed with braille inscriptions of the same quotes that are written on the pavement and walls. The wood pieces become part of the installation to both look and feel creating a space that is inclusive, safe and welcoming for all. Linda Gustaffson, Umeas gender equality officer, says that "The whole work of art has a cozy and sheltered feeling" (North Sweden Cleantech, 2020, website).

By addressing women's concerns of fear and safety, their perception of space and their needs, The Lev! tunnel interventions increased the sense of belonging and place, and has seen an increase in use and community engagement. The municipality acknowledges that although the new design of the tunnel cannot end violence against



Fig. 8 Braille inscription in wood of Sara Lidman's quotes

women, the project has become a platform and channel to raise awareness on issues of gender, safety and violence. (World Bank Group, 2020) It has become an iconic beacon of Umeas commitment to gender neutrality and inclusion and successful feminist placemaking. (Cattelan, 2023) (The city of Umea)

## Findings

Through interviews and data collection and analysis, the city discovered people, and more specifically men and women, navigate the public space differently. (URBACT, 2022) The project also recognized how fear influences the perception of the public space and how such space is used, occupied and controlled by different groups at different times (Sandberg & Ronnblom, 2016). The power of sense of fear is crucial and must be a key element when designing gender-equal spaces.

The physical design of the tunnel added to the feeling of unsafety and sense of fear. The original tunnel was narrow and very dark, even during daytime, discouraging many city dwellers, mostly women, to cross through it, opting to take longer routes. (Cattelan, 2023) The tunnel narrowness and steepness made it also inaccessible to people in wheelchairs or traveling with strollers. (Coi, 2022)

According to city architect Tomas Stromberg who was involved in the project, since the beginning of the project they understood that in order to improve space and make it safer, first they had to get people out into the public space. (Umeå Kommun, 2019). In general, the presence of people in the public space makes other people feel safe and encouraged to make more use of it.

The tunnel length was also a critical point discussed during the workshops, considering the narrowness and poor lighting conditions, walking 80 meters in a narrow dark space with no intermediate exit in case of an emergency contributed to the unsafe perception level of the passage. People feel safer in public spaces in the company of other people, the more people use a space, the more likely others are to follow and use that same space (Coi, 2022),

therefore the project needed to not only improve the technical aspects of the space, like lighting and pavement conditions, but to create an environment and atmosphere that invited people to want to use the space, providing a positive experience for all users.

### **4.3 Barangaroo Precinct**

#### ***Background context***

To understand the importance and scale of the project, it is imperative to understand the historical and cultural context that the place represents for local history, culture and communities.

#### *Cultural and historical context*

Australia's modern history is that of a relatively young country, with the first British colony settling on January 26, 1788 in New South Wales. A group of 850 convicts, their Marine guards and governor Arthur Phillip settled in what is now known as Sydney Harbour, the geographical area of which Barangaroo harbor is also part of. (New South Wales Parliament, website) As more British settlements began to rise in the country, aboriginal tribes and people began to be displaced from their lands and relocated in reserves under the excuse of protection, and were subject to a range of injustices, including discrimination, mass killings, denial of human rights, and even denied to perform their cultural practices, many of such were subsequently lost. (Victorian Public Sector Commission report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Culture and History)

In 1901 when the Australian constitution was amended, First Nation people were considered to be a different race for which special rules and laws should be made and were not governed nor protected by the Australian constitution.

For two hundred years First Nations peoples were deprived of their basic human rights, and had continuously lost rights to their lands as white colonialism settled in the continent. (National Museum Australia, website) In 1948 all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were granted Australian citizenship, however it did not grant them voting rights, which they were granted until 1962 through the Commonwealth Electoral Act. (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, website). In 1967 a referendum to change the constitution was done to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people to count as part of Australia's population, and in december of that same year the federal parliament passed the Aboriginal Land Rights, being the first legislation in Australia that allowed First Nations peoples to claim land rights for Country (Central Land Council, website).

Aboriginal tribes spiritual identity is fundamentally based on their strong bond with the land, often referred to as Country. Even though many Aboriginal people no longer reside on their original land, this connection with Country and value towards it still exists. According to First Nation people, Country is essential to their connections, culture, and sense of self. (Victorian Public Sector Commission report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Culture and History) Contrary to the dominant European influenced Australian culture that sees land as a commodity to be used, enjoyed and owned, Aboriginal culture sees in Country sustenance, comfort, and spiritual connections.

In most Aboriginal cultures, the status of women is equal and complementary to that of men. In the economic sphere, women were important and empowered because they provided food, nurtured and raised children, looked after their health and well-being, led women's religion and ritual, passed on knowledge to future generations of

women, and looked after the nation and holy places. (Heiss & Gibson, 2013) This status was corrupted during the 19th century due to the effects and forces of white colonization, the marginalization of aboriginal culture, and the imposing colonists' prejudices that put Aboriginal culture and women through a prism of race and gender. (Haebich, 2014)

Stripping Indigenous women of their power by imposing European patriarchal family and governance systems while simultaneously dehumanizing Indigenous women laid the foundations for the legal and geographic processes of dispossession and displacement (Kern, 2019).

Australia holds a cultural, social and human debt towards the First Nation people that is impossible to repay, however in the last 30 years the country has made efforts to advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders rights, acknowledge them as the country's First and original people, and efforts to repay the 200 years of oppression, marginalization and human rights violations. (Reconciliation Australia, website, 2021)

It is the understanding of this cultural and historic context that was a pillar in the development and focus of the Barangaroo Harbor Park project and the focus of its placemaking interventions.

#### *Barangaroo Harbour Project background context*

Barangaroo Harbour, previously known as East Darling Harbour, is a 22 hectare site in central Sydney that used to be a ship container port that since the late 1970's had lost ship traffic and fell into decay. It is now transformed into a sanctuary for people to live, work, relax and enjoy the outdoors in the heart of the city.

Barangaroo is situated in the Sydney Harbor, the same

place where the first British settlement was raised more than 200 years ago. Before British colonialism, the harbour was part of the territory of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, the Traditional Custodians of the Sydney area. The Gadigal called the site Tumbalong, that means where seafood is found (Darling Harbour site, website, 2020). Eora Nation women used the harbour for fishing, the land for hunting, and the shoreline as a place for social gatherings and congregations. (Barangaroo, website) Eora women respected the land and sea, feeling deep spiritual connections with Country, they lived through sustainable practices, respecting and worshiping the land, and in sync with it, they were advocates and guardians of Country and their culture. (Karskens, 2014)

After white colonists settled in the area, the relationship between the Eora Nation and Country was disrupted, and eventually the land was stolen from them. (Karskens, 2014) In the early 1800's the site was exploiting the local sea resources and began to flourish with maritime and industrial activities, with the first wharves constructed in the 1820's, being the Market Street Wharf the only one still remaining today. (Darling Harbour site, website, 2020) The exploitation of the sea resources undermined the status of aboriginal women as the main food providers for their family and community, and was the beginning of a social and hierarchical displacement of women in the social scene. (Mcdaniel, 2018) (Fredericks, 2010)

With the construction of the wharves came the first imports to the continent, and the industrial revolution brought with it the need to expand the site, adding a shipyard, more wharves, railroads, and increasing the import and export cargoes that crossed through the harbour. By the end of the 1860's the original shoreline was obliterated and the site was totally transformed. (Barangaroo site, website)

During the rest of the 19th and 20th century, the harbour flourished with business and trading activities, but in the late 1960's and beginning of the 1970's, the introduction of shipping containers revolutionized the maritime trade dynamics. Unable to cope with the fast changes in technologies and market needs, the site became rapidly unsustainable as a modern port and quickly fell into decay. (Barangaroo Maritime History, website) (Barangaroo Delivery Authority, annual report, 2019)

In 2003 the port was officially closed with all maritime activities transferred to Port Botany, and the government of New South Wales announced plans for transforming the unused space into a new urban project, to create a unique public waterfront development and becoming a business, social and cultural hub for the people of Sydney, celebrating local history and First Nations people.

**Location** Barangaroo Harbour, Sydney

Sydney Harbour is a natural harbor known for its iconic landmarks and stunning beauty. It is located in the heart of Sydney, New South Wales, and serves as a bustling hub for both commercial and recreational activities. It is framed by the world-famous Sydney Opera House and the iconic Sydney Harbour Bridge. Due to its natural and man-made beauty and social life reputation, it has become a major tourist destination and a beloved area for locals, offering a unique view of the ocean and a dynamic life of water sports, leisure, social life, business and recreational activities.

**Organizing body**

The New South Wales Government commissioned the work. In March 2009 they established the Barangaroo Delivery Authority, a specific office in charge of ensuring

the management and compliance of the developments in the Barangaroo site to achieve the established goals. It was abolished in June 2019 and its functions were transferred to the Infrastructure NSW office, a government agency responsible for delivering major infrastructure projects across New South Wales. (Barangaroo Delivery Authority annual report, 2019)

**Target users of intervention**

The project intended to target local communities and residents. By designing and creating Quality Places, the project aimed to become an attractive hub for social life, businesses and residents, improving quality of life and economic vitality in the area and improving the city's reputation. Overall, the Barangaroo site (re)design was aimed for all people of Sydney, visitors and tourists, with a focus on celebrating and acknowledging local history, original inhabitants, integrating women and a specific focus on aboriginal women in the social and public context, and becoming a welcoming Quality Place for everyone regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, religion and background.

**Stakeholders involvement strategy**

The New South Wales Government, who commissioned the work, was represented by the Barangaroo Delivery Authority, whose responsibilities were managing efforts and stakeholders to achieve the goals set for the project.

Because the project scale was of major dimensions and involved public funding, Sydney's municipality issued an open call to compete for the redesign of the Barangaroo development, and another for the design of the Barangaroo Harbour Park. Hill Thalys Architecture + Urban Projects,

Paul Berkemeier Architects and Jane Irwin Landscape Architecture proposal was the winner for the Barangaroo development, and AKIN group, composed of Studio Chris Fox, Architectus, Yerrabingin, Jacob Nash Design and Flying Fish Blue, with Arup consulting firm as engineering consultants were selected for the design of the Barangaroo Harbour Park. (Outdoor Design Source, 2023)

The masterplan of the Barangaroo development proposal by Hill Thalys Architecture + Urban projects divided the project in three main precincts, which were supported by individual proposals. Roger Stirk Harbour + Partners collaborated on the masterplan for Barangaroo South, the business and retail district. Skidmore, Owings & Merrill worked on Central Barangaroo the residential and social district, and Peter Walker, FASLA, of PWP Landscape Architecture, in association with the Australian design firm Johnson Pilton Walker participated in the design of the Barangaroo Reserve, the green and multipurpose area connecting the adjacent districts. (Barangaroo Planning, website)

The School of Architecture, Design and Planning of the University of Sydney was part of the design team involved in the project, and the group collaborated and included the First Nations community, local residents, artists, historians, and aboriginal experts. (The University of Sydney, 2023)

### ***Type of placemaking***

#### *Strategic Placemaking*

#### ***Intervention outcomes and results***

In 2003 the government of New South Wales announced its plans to repurpose the old shipyard as a potential extension of the city's CBD goal of embracing public

parklands. As part of the office of the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, the Planning Group focuses and invests on placemaking interventions with the goal of (re)shaping cities, towns and regions for the benefit of the residents. (Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure NSW, website). The department also has an office branch specifically for Placemaking projects called Placemaking NSW.

The government issued an open call to receive proposals for the upcoming redevelopment of the site, with Hill Thalys Architecture + Urban Projects, Paul Berkemeier Architects and Jane Irwin Landscape Architecture winning the competition for the design of the Barangaroo site. In 2006 the concept plan was approved and the transformations began. (Barangaroo, website)

In line with the country's efforts to make amends with First Nation people and their historical debt, the area was renamed to acknowledge and celebrate local history. More than 1,600 entries were submitted through the government's portal to rename the site, where the name Barangaroo was selected.

The site, previously known as East Darling Harbour, was renamed Barangaroo in honor to the Cammeraygal woman of the same name. She was an influential figure in the early years of European colonization. (Barangaroo, website) She belonged to the Cammeraygal clan, an Eora language group that inhabited the area around the Sydney Harbour. She was an independent and strong woman who stood up for the rights of women and the protection of her country to the first settlers who invaded her land. (Mcdaniel, 2018) She is regarded as a strong woman of exceptional integrity and tenacity, as well as one of the major Aboriginal leaders of the late 1700s (City of Parramatta, website), and a role

model for all women even in today's reality.

Her second Husband was Bennelong, after whom Bennelong point, where the Sydney Opera House stands today, is named. Her connection to the city and Country is undeniable, and her influence is celebrated through the symbolic dedication of naming the site where she and the First Nations people belong to. (Barangaroo South, website).

Hill Thalys Architecture + Urban Projects along with the Barangaroo Delivery Authority selected the name Barangaroo as part of the commitment of the project to recognising the deep and spiritual connection of Aboriginal people to Sydney and Country (Sydney Metro report Heritage Interpretation Plan for Barangaroo Station, 2022), and weaving back women and specifically Aboriginal women into the social fabric of the city, and the social fight towards feminism (Fredrekis, 2010).

The total area of the site is approximately 22 hectares of land and 11 km of shoreline (International Towers, website), and it is divided into three main areas, Barangaroo South for business and retail, Barangaroo Central for residential, cultural and civic purposes, and the Barangaroo Reserve serving as a link between both areas, while celebrating local flora, history, traditions, nature, the Nations First people and their connection with Country. (Planwisely, website, 2023)

According to Anita Mitchell, Chief Executive for Placemaking NSW, Barangaroo represented a once-in-a-generation opportunity to take a forgotten part of the city and turn it into something dynamic and sustainable, adding a new part of the city that was welcoming and everybody could embrace (Business Events Sydney, 2023)

In 2023 the government of New South Wales in collaboration with the Barangaroo Delivery Authority incorporated the Barangaroo Art Implementation Plan 2023, which outlines the ongoing commitment and effort for the Barangaroo precinct to “deliver public art that inspires people and solidifies its status as a celebrated cultural destination, (Barangaroo, website). Barangaroo precinct aims to incorporate public art interventions as a

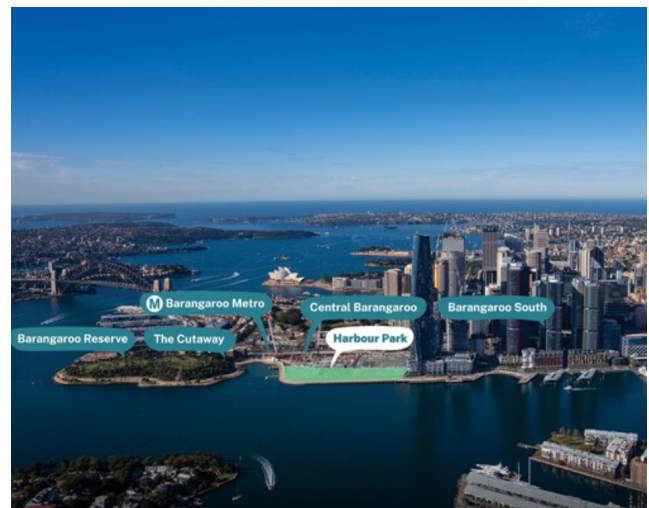


Fig. 9 Map of Barangaroo Precinct

way to build connections of people with the land, promote sense of belonging, community building, celebrating and honoring Australia's First Nation People and their culture, empowering them through the inclusion recognition of active shapers of their rightful land, and celebrate their history. (Infrastructure NSW, 2023)

### *Barangaroo South*

Barangaroo South is the commercial district of the development. It consists of 7.5 hectares of the whole site and it is developed by Lendlease firm, with the final building designed by Renzo Piano being inaugurated in 2024. It includes commercial and residential buildings, dining and retail options, a landmark hotel and is home to 3,500 residents and 24,00 office workers.

The site expects to attract businesses and promote the area's economic vitality, the city's reputation as a financial hub in the Asia-Pacific, and provide all the people of Sydney access to quality places for leisure, community bonding, and access to the space that they are entitled to. (Lendlease, website) It is estimated to attract more than 18 million visits every year, becoming a cultural hub and destination for locals and tourists.

During the development, Lendlease architects and designers understood that all space is public space, and it was key to address and include people and peoples needs and wants at the core of their designs. They made 100% of the shoreline accessible for pedestrians and cyclists, and more than 50% of the development is open public space. (Lendlease, website) Barangaroo South reinvisioned how cities incorporate business and social life, and focused on the wellbeing of people who work and live in the area, creating attractive and healthy environments for people to work and socialize. (Business Events Sydney, 2023)

In 2013 Lendlease developers partnered with TAFE to set up the Barangaroo Skills Exchange (BSX), an onsite learning hub for workers. They recognized that a development of that scale's main value was their workforce, and they had a social responsibility towards them. The BSX was born from Lendlease commitment to social and environmental sustainability, and one of its main goals was to help vulnerable workers become more proficient in reading and numeracy by giving them foundational skills and improve the workers long term employment prospects. (Australian Training Awards, 2016; Green Building Council Australia, 2016). BSX's primary objective was to develop a skilled workforce onsite, providing on-the-job training to workers and apprentices, closing the gap between theory and practices and contributing to social and professional equity,

with more than 500 Indigenous Australians workers involved in the construction process, before and after (Business Events Sydney, 2023). In two years more than 10,00 workers undertook formal skills training and more than 16,000 accreditations issued from Skills Sets, Advanced Diplomas, High Risk licenses, trades and safety leadership. (Australian Training Awards, 2016)

With more than 50% of Barangaroo South being free and open public spaces, they focused on designing spaces that were attractive, welcoming and multipurpose, whose major goal was to help weave social inclusion in the business side of the city, and remembering, celebrating and respecting the original people of Sydney and their traditions. (Planwisely, website, 2023) Once inaccessible for everyone, the development opened the access to the shoreline, first eliminating the concrete plank of the old shipping yard and retracing the pre-colonial original shoreline.

The Wulugul Walk, which means kingfish in Darug language, is an commemorative harbourfront path consisting of the 11 km of shoreline of the area, going from Barangaroo South to Barangaroo Central and running through the Barangaroo Reserve. (Landezine Award, 2020) Lined and shaded with native trees and other flora, green spaces, art installations, mentions of local landmarks, descriptions of

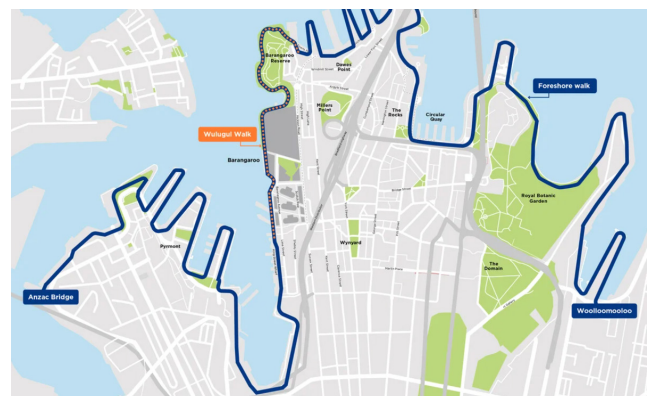


Fig. 10 Wulugul walk map

local flora and fauna found along the walk, and celebrations of aboriginal culture. The selection of colors, materials and design was inspired by traditional aboriginal practices and the original aspect of the land, to respect original traditions and restore Country to its original state. (PWP Landscape Architecture, website)

To continue this Acknowledgement of Country, Darug language words are relevant to the site providing information 'bites' about the natural environment, and celebrating the sites heritage and cultural importance. (Sydney Metro report Heritage Interpretation Plan for Barangaroo Station, 2022)

Shell wall 2015 is an artwork found on the facade of the Alexander residential building in Barangaroo South. It is a piece born from the collaboration between Bidjigal/Eora elder and senior artist Esme Timbery and Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi artist Jonathan Jones, remembering the pre-colonial state of the land, where the shore was full of shells and celebrating the culturally significant tradition of shell making that is unique to the Sydney Aboriginal community of La Perouse. (Barangaroo South, website; International

Towers, website)

Watermans Cove is an amphitheater style boardwalk that embraces the water and the waterfront (Barangaroo, website), its wide boardwalk makes it accessible to everyone and the access to the waterfront creates an entirely new public space on the city's foreshore. (Holmes, 2020) The space adds more than 11,000 square meters of public space for people to stroll or sit and admire the views. (Trigg, 2020). The design of the space, the combination of steps, terraces and the boardwalk provide the space a variety of small and large "private" areas that can be used for specific uses and events, making the space flexible and multipurpose. (Landezine Award, 2020)

Hickson Park is a cool, shaded park that celebrates Aboriginal culture, recognising the cultural significance of Australia's First Nations People (Build Australia, 2020), and doubles as a cultural hub in the middle of Barangaroo South. It is an ideal space for gathering and recreational activities for residents, workers, tourists and all the people of Sydney. Lendlease collaborated with Infrastructure NSW and NPM Indigenous, a majority-owned indigenous group

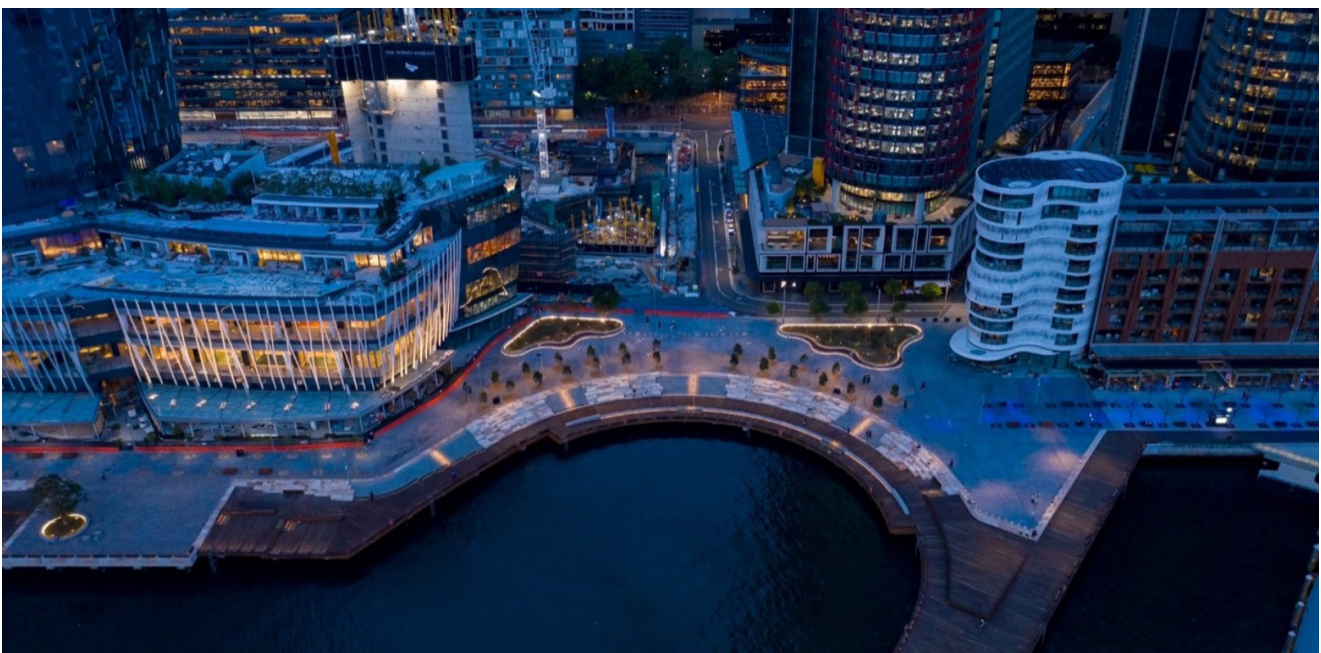


Fig. 11 Watermans Cove

representing the Kamilaroi and Wiradjuri Nations, for the design of the park and its amenities (Barangaroo, website). The park was designed to be protected from cold winds in winter and provide tree shaded areas in the summer (Landezine Awards, 2020).

In line with celebrating cultural traditions and resorting Country, the park flora is that of native trees and bushes. (Infrastructure NSW, 2020). NPM Indigenous commissioned the design of the gardens to Jiwah, an indigenous company that specializes in cultural landscape and design. (Jiwah, website) The trees and flora found in the park is a selection of native plants that looks to reintroduce native endemic plant specials all across the Barangaroo area. (Barangaroo, website; Infrastructure NSW, 2020)

NPM Indigenous collaborated with Aboriginal people in the design process and execution of the development, with more than 80% of the businesses involved in the project being of Indigenous origins. Their involvement was that of key stakeholders of the place to ensure their needs, traditions and practices were respected (Build Australia, 2022). As part of NPM Indigenous goals, they advocate for Aboriginal's rights and provide meaningful employment and economic opportunities for Australia's First People (Barangaroo, website)

The space was artistically intervened and is home to aboriginal art installations specially created to celebrate the local history and heritage. The "Native Tapestry", designed by Deuce Design, is a poem-filled art piece that showcases local insects and birds nestled within an abstract representation of an *Angophora costata* canopy, embedded into the bench's surface. This tapestry leads visitors on a 'treasure trail' that extends into the park, where they can discover poetry and native species depicted on sandstone

seats and pavement blocks. (Infrastructure NSW, 2020)

The "Winged Wonderland", designed by six artists from Studio A, a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering artists with intellectual disabilities, is a 100-meter-long artwork piece that celebrates the Barangaroo Bench in Hickson Park and highlights the importance of diversity in culture and nature (Barangaroo, website; Infrastructure NSW, 2020).

### *Barangaroo Reserve*

Designed by Peter Walker, FASLA, of PWP Landscape Architecture, in association with the Australian design studio Johnson Pilton Walker (Barangaroo, website), Barangaroo Reserve was the first of the three precincts to be developed. It is a six hectares reserve consisting green spaces, a continuous sandstone foreshore, it is part of the Wulugul Walk, a 10 meter wide pedestrian and cycle path, several coves, a 300 space car park, 75,000 native plants and the Cutaway, a space for cultural exhibitions and events in the headland. (Barangaroo Delivery Authority report, 2019)

New South Wales former prime minister Paul Keating envisioned Barangaroo Reserve as the opportunity to heal a place that was "vandalized" by its industrial past, and was the first step towards remediating the damage done to the site (Sun-Herald, 2010). In his vision, the city of Sydney had a moral and obligation to restore what had been destroyed, speaking of land and culture. (Dowling, 2016) One of the main characteristics of Sydney and the Sydney Harbour are its magnificent harbors, they are intrinsically linked to the city's identity, however nature and culture are bound together and Sydney cannot be true to its identity by denying the cultural value of its land.

The Reserve is situated where the old shipyard was built and the original shoreline was obliterated by the end of the 1860. As part of the purpose to celebrate and restore the land that was stolen from the First Nation people, the original pre-colonial shoreline was restored. (Dowling, 2016) The Reserve honors Sydney's original owners and celebrates one of the oldest living cultures in the world. It connects with the depth of Sydney's history and its natural setting ( (Barangaroo Delivery Authority report, 2019)

For Indigenous Australians, identity is inextricably linked to their sense of place through language, customs, and the enduring bond that exists between them, the land, and the local flora and fauna. Throughout the Barangaroo Reserve, most spaces and elements are named in the original Darug language, to enhance Australia's First Nation People and their connection to land, water and Country (Sydney Metro report Heritage Interpretation Plan for Barangaroo Station, 2022).

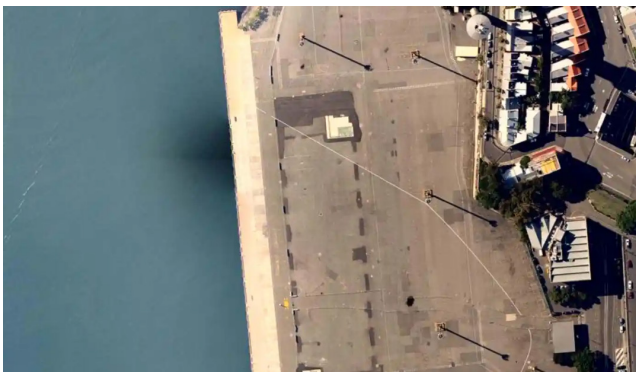


Fig. 12 Barangaroo shoreline on 2011



Fig. 13 Barangaroo shoreline on 2023

The headland was constructed with recycled and repurposed resources, which included caissons and asphalt from the pre-existing shipyard and cargo port. Beneath the man-made headland, the Cutaway is a vast empty space created by sandstone excavation activities intended to house performances, art shows, or an eventual Aboriginal Cultural Centre (Landezine, 2016). Through urban design and placemaking interventions, Barangaroo Reserve marks the conversion of an industrial site into a contemporary reinterpretation of its more sustainable past by transforming a vast expanse of vacant concrete into a humane, usable area.

More than 75,000 native plants from 84 different endemic species were planted in the Reserve, mimicking the original landscape and flora found in the area before the colonial era, while also re-introducing plant species from threatened ecological communities, in attempts to strengthen the overall narrative of cultural heritage interpretation

Barangaroo Reserve is home to significant public artworks that are relevant to the space and the project's goal of inclusion, honoring and celebration of the original culture. Curated by the City of Sydney's Public Art Advisory Panel, the art installations found in Barangaroo Reserve are the result of a long and close consultation with the local community and First Nation people to reinterpret land and traditions through art that articulates local identity. (Harrison, 2024)

Public art offers a platform for promoting relationships and a sense of belonging, honoring cultural history, and influencing public opinion. It can be considered creative curatorial placemaking.

At the entrance to the Cutaway, a 10 minute audio-visual

artwork named Wellama (meaning “come back”), from artists Alison Page and Nik Lachajczak, is a celebration of the Indigenous rituals, ceremonies and story that has been practiced in Country for thousands of years (Barangaroo Reserve, website). Following Indigenous beliefs of time, the video has no beginning and no end, it is constant and eternal (Dickie, 2019). For the creation of this art piece, the artists worked and engaged with the local community to accurately represent their culture and views, able to transmit the true meaning, power and their cultural heritage (Ciampi, 2019). Visitors are welcomed to the Gadigal Country and pay their respects to the Traditional Custodians of the land, while also doubling as educational context for visitors (Dickie, 2019)

The multimedia Ngangamay experience is embedded in the sandstone of Barangaroo Reserve. The piece, which is the outcome of collaboration between artists and members of

Sydney’s and nearby tribes, combines short films about the sun, moon, and women with contemporary, traditionally carved rock inscriptions called petroglyphs (Azar, 2017). Artists combined old and new technology, mimicking how we experience today the original culture of the land. The accompanying film for each concept will play on the geolocation app when you get closer to a petroglyph. (Barangaroo Reserve, website)

The story of Barangaroo, the Eora First Nations woman after whom the precinct is named, is honored through Ngangamay. Amanda Jane Reynolds, Aboriginal artist and co-curator of the piece, envisioned the work as a way of celebrating Barangaroo, her story and her teachings, showing visitors the deep and ongoing connections Aboriginal women of Sydney have to the place. (Azar, 2017)

The Reserve also offers free Aboriginal cultural tours,



Fig. 14 Barangaroo Reserve overviewbarangaroo reserve.PNG

offering visitors the opportunity to learn the story of the people who first inhabited the land, their cultures, traditions and legacy. Through remembering and education, Barangaroo intends to empower the Indigenous Australians into their rightful place in society and in Country. It hosts several art shows and cultural events with the purpose of empowering, remembering, celebrating, honoring aboriginal stories and culture. (Morelli, 2018)

### *Central Barangaroo*

Central Barangaroo is the final stage of the project to be developed. It is the civic and cultural hub of the Barangaroo precinct, and it will act as a link between Barangaroo Reserve and the economic district of Barangaroo South, providing spaces for public life in coexistence with business and services. Its 1.85 hectares will be home to a unique waterfront park, a mix of apartments, retail options, restaurants, a new metro station and a landmark hotel, several open public areas for social life, and a large waterfront side park that will be designed by First Nation led group AKIN group in collaboration with Studio Chris Fox, Architectus, Yerrabingin, Jacob Nash Design and Flying Fish Blue with . (Central Barangaroo, website; Outdoor Design Source, 2023)

Plans for the redevelopment of the area are to be approved by 2024, and the project should be completed by 2029. (The Sydney Herald, 2024)

Through design, social collaboration, public art and public spaces, Barangaroo represents a major example of strategic Placemaking that puts people, culture and economic opportunities at the center, creating spaces that are multifunctional, diverse and accommodate social life and work life for the new fast paced lifestyle of today's

world.

### **Findings**

With the first two districts of the project completed (Barangaroo South and Barangaroo Reserve), the development has rapidly established itself as Sydney's major financial and business hub, and Barangaroo Reserve has positioned itself as a beacon of hope and representation for Aboriginal culture and a place for community, belonging, reflection, foregrounding the natural environment and connection to country. (Harrison, 2024; Barangaroo, website). The acknowledgment of Australia's white history and the responsibility towards the First Nation people is represented through names, art, and the design of the spaces. (Morelli, 2018)

On completion, the Barangaroo precinct will provide more than 20,000 jobs, provide a diverse of housing options, creating vibrant, livable and community neighborhoods for around 3,500 people, and contribute \$2 billion to the NSW economy each year. Nevertheless, Barangaroo precinct operates on a small scale and does not really face the challenges as other large urban settlements, but the Strategic Placemaking interventions applied to the project and their success can be the starting point for the future of sustainable developments in Australia. (NSW Infrastructure report Barangaroo Realising the Vision, 2020)

The collaboration and inclusion of Indigenous Australians in the design process and the placemaking interventions have made the space unique and really represent the culture as it should be, shaped and delivered by the same people the space and the authorities are trying to represent. Soft interventions like the use of the local Darug language through the whole precinct honors the local heritage of

the site and the original people, conveying their significance through a sense of identity, history and connection between people and place (Sydney Metro report Heritage Interpretation Plan for Barangaroo Station, 2022).

Negative media portrayals have reinforced harmful stereotypes about Indigenous people, undermining their rights and creating a climate of inequality that especially impacts Indigenous women, girls, and the LGBTQ+ community. (Reclaiming Power and Place, report, 2019)

Soft interventions like renaming the harbor after a strong and influential Cammeraygal woman aims to weave back women and aboriginal women into the social fabric of the city and community, bringing them back to the public life through representation. (Harrison, 2024) Her story and contributions are told by influential contemporary Aboriginal women living and working in Sydney who are inspired and influenced by Barangaroo. (NSW Infrastructure report Barangaroo Realising the Vision, 2020)

As of 2019, more than 3.6 million have visited Barangaroo Reserve since it opened in August 2015. For the night of New Years Eve, Barangaroo Reserve welcomed 8,575 visitors. A Barangaroo Delivery Authority survey regarding the visit and the space showed that 91% recommend NYE at Barangaroo, 82% said their expectations were exceeded, 69% attended with family and 95% consider the space to be adequately family-friendly. (Barangaroo Delivery Authority report, 2019). These numbers reflect the community acceptance and adoption of the space as one they are attracted, welcomed, and incentivized to use.

Throughout the planning of the development, sustainability was also addressed. The precinct targets sustainability through accessibility, with a target of only 4% of work-

related trips done by car, compared to the 20% of the CBD. To make so, the plan incorporated several public transport options like a new metro station, a ferry hub, pedestrian and bike lanes. (NSW Infrastructure report Barangaroo Realising the Vision, 2020) In 2019, Barangaroo became the first Australian carbon neutral precinct (Jhonston, 2020)

When speaking of Strategic Placemaking, it usually overlaps more with the urban planning realm, however, placemaking interventions, which are predominantly hard interventions, are at the core of all developments to make the link between the built environment and the social component of the communities they are supposed to be designed for. Additionally, through Strategic Placemaking it is easier to incorporate and target factors like sustainability and infrastructure accessibility. Due to the nature of the project, Barangaroo Precinct can be considered an already inclusive project, whose design practices and process involved the community they wanted to represent.

Following Kern's (2019) ideology, feminist cities wrestle with a set of intricate power relationships, to design for women is too to understand how "to "claim" urban space for women could perpetuate colonial practices and discourses that harm the efforts of Indigenous people to reclaim lands taken and colonized" (ibidem, p. 133). Barangaroo Precinct's (re)design embraced this statement and throughout the whole process focused on deconstructing white colonialism marginalization, and empowering indigenous communities, culture and traditions and the role of women as power players in society.

Incorporating the voices and perspectives of women and marginalized groups into the design and planning of urban spaces, ensuring that their cultural heritage is reflected in

the built environment is in line with the pillars of feminist cities. (Kern, 2019)

By renaming the area after an Aboriginal powerful female figure, the project focuses on incorporating women back into the public scene, and acknowledging the importance of women's role as leaders, shapers and members of the community, both for the First Nation People, and for current Australian society. It cannot be said that the whole project is of feminist nature, however, with inclusivity, accessibility and representation as main drivers and pillars, it can be said that the inclusion and representation of women and minorities was an important pillar for the design process of the project.

## 4.4 Fittja Square

### **Background context**

Fittja is a suburb of Stockholm built during the Million Program era, and in 2017 it was listed by the Municipality as one of the "vulnerable areas" of the city. A vulnerable area is defined as areas of low socio-economic status where criminal activities impact the social order of its community (Wrangsten, 2019). Approximately 50% of Swedish women report feeling unsafe in such areas. However, Fittja's neighborhood was considered by the Swedish police as particularly vulnerable, with increasing crime rates, like drug dealing and shootings, especially during evening times and around Fittja square.

Located in the outskirts of Stockholm, it is considered to be a very culturally diverse neighborhood, where more than 100 different languages are spoken and approximately 59% of the population are foreign born or have two foreign-born parents. (Botkyrka kommun, 2019; Wrangsten et al, 2022). Fittja's population is relatively very young,

approximately 25% of its residents are under 18, and the average age is 37.6 years.

In 2018 the Municipality ran a citizen survey related to their neighborhood. Using a rating score, (Very Low / Low / Approved / High / Very High) participants were asked different questions regarding their community. The residents of Fittja gave the lowest scores to the statement "It is safe to live in my residential area", and gave similar scores when asked about littering and trust perception in their area (Botkyrka Municipality A 2018). An interesting insight from the survey showed that in general, men feel less safe than women in the area because crimes that occur are targeted to men and not women (Wrangsten, 2019). When asked about the future, 20% more women than men answered that they would like to remain in Fittja. (Botkyrka Municipality A 2018)

In previous years, youth centers in the neighborhood had been closing, limiting especially the younger generations their access to public spaces, outdoor and community activities and social life. The combination of a an extremely diverse population, a high percentage of young people living in the area, the unsafety perception levels and the high percentage of women's willingness to remain in Fittja in the future were drivers for the project, supported by women's intentions of wanting to reclaim their access and right to the city.

**Location** Fittja neighbourhood in Botkyrka, Sweden

Fittja is a neighborhood located in Botkyrka Municipality, Sweden, just outside of Stockholm. It was built in the 1970's as part of the Million Program era and its architectural landscape is mostly dominated by rental apartments,

making it an affordable option for many residents. In fact the average income of Fittja residents is 277,000 SEK per year, which is below Stockholm and the national average (Wrangsten, 2019). Fittja is known for its diversity, with a significant portion of its population having roots outside of Sweden.

### ***Organizing body***

Young girls and women from Botkyrka municipality took into their hands the initiative to intervene and (re)design their neighborhoods public spaces that had been subject to a recent spike in crimes.

They collaborated with UN-Habitat (as part of their initiative "Urban Girls Movement") and the municipality of Botkyrka, specifically the Swedish Innovation Agency (VINNOVA), to improve the safety conditions in the Fittja neighborhood, which had been previously listed as a particularly vulnerable area by the Municipality of Botkyrka (UN-Habitat, 2021).

### ***Target users of intervention***

The project aimed to target young girls and women in general who lived in the Fittja neighborhood. Due to the high percentage of young residents, most of the project participants were aged 16-23 as they were considered "place experts" (Wrangsten et al, 2022) and their insights and perspectives were central to the project's intent of improving the public space for young girls, women, and everyone. However the real age range of participants was 16-64 years old.

### ***Stakeholders involvement strategy***

The girls and women from Fittja and the Botkyrka Municipality partnered with Swedish think tank Global

Utmaning to conduct a series of social labs, exhibitions and research regarding the urban field and feminist inclusive practices to involve women and girls in the (re)design of their neighborhoods public spaces.

The 30 participants were recruited by a local NGO called Changers Hub and were economically compensated for their participation. The number fluctuated between each workshop, ranging from 4-20 participants and around 10-15 professionals, (Wrangsten, 2019), where 83% were women (Urban Girls Catalogue, 2019)

Following the Urban Girls Movement nine step methodology, the project consisted of a series of innovation labs involving local stakeholders from both the public and private sector, as well as local and international NGOs like Changers Hub and UN-Habitat. The involved partners in the workshops included local residents, researchers, planners, civil rights activists, architects, professionals, scholars from several Swedish universities like Stockholm University, Uppsala University and Södertörn University.

Additionally, they partnered with Block by Block Foundation using digital tools like SketchUp and Minecraft, where they would digitally recreate the spaces for girls and women to experiment their ideas.

White Architects, Swedish Union of Tenants and MethodKit collaborated specially in the later stages of the project, coordinating efforts to design and develop a toolbox for mainstreaming youth, gender and socioeconomic perspectives by involving girls and young women in urban planning and design (UN-HABITAT, 2021)

The project was financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) (HerCity, 2021). Other partners include Fryshuset, Kounkuey Design

Initiative, KTH, Plan International, RISE, and WWF (Fabre et al, 2019).

### ***Type of placemaking***

#### *Tactical and creative placemaking*

Over the course of 6 months, the team conducted a series of 9 workshops where young girls and professionals worked together to analyze the space and co-designed possible interventions, and virtually tested their ideas (Sweco, 2023). The workshops helped professionals empathize with young girls and women to better understand their key needs, involving them to help frame the problem and identify the areas of opportunity, like improving safety, the need for places to socialize and hang out and places for local culture (Nyberg, 2020)

Following the initial innovation labs, the project set out to collect information to understand the area and the residents' needs, specially focusing on young girls and women perspectives of their urban spaces.

The first workshop focused on introducing the concept of feminist urban development and providing background context of successful feminist placemaking and good feminist urban practices, and exploring the site of the future project. The second workshop focuses on the challenges and needs of the space through a series of brainstorming sessions. The third workshop dives into the potential of the space and envisions future possibilities. The fourth workshop is supported by the Block by Block foundation, using Minecraft and other digital tools to recreate the space and try and test their different ideas. During the fifth workshop, the results of the previous workshops are shown as a presentation or exhibition to share the mid-

term results in order to collect more user feedback directly from the residents and target community. During the sixth workshop the participants focus on drafting concrete policy recommendations for decision-makers and brainstorm on initial guidelines for the project. The seventh workshop involved private stakeholders like architect firms and focused on developing drafts, sketches, plans, and visuals, materializing the project's vision. The eighth workshop is about presenting the outcome to the general public and the stakeholders involved. During the final workshop the project is evaluated through specific indicators and closes the project by providing feedback and sharing lessons learnt for future projects. (Fabre et Derner, 2021)

### ***Intervention outcomes and results***

The workshop's outcomes identified the main square, the mall, the metro station and one back alley as the four main public spaces that women considered unsafe that fitted the project's goal and scope.

Fittja square is one of the main plazas of the neighborhood, it is furnished with basic elements like orange benches, bins, trees, flower pots, and tall light poles. The square is encircled by a few stores and a bus stop .

When asked about it, girls described Fittja Square as "a gray transit-area mainly dominated by boys" (Wrangsten et al, 2022). They found it "gray and boring" and expressed feeling "very insecure" due to the presence of groups of young men who would often stare at them. The square was primarily seen as a transit space, used only to get to the mall or the bus, rather than a place to linger and enjoy. They also noted a lack of visual appeal, stating there was nothing at the square to "look at.

The square was also noted for its lack of active use. Few people lingered there, and those who did were mostly men, contributing to a sense of insecurity and exclusion for girls and young women.

To start the process, the team of girls and professionals worked together to collect data about the space. Through observation, interviews, explanatory walks and safety audits (UN-Habitat, 2021) the primary activities observed were people hurrying across the square or waiting for the bus, highlighting its function as a thoroughfare rather than a destination, the dominance of groups of men over the square, and even verbal aggressions towards women, as one local stakeholder said during an interview “This is how they let us know that this square belongs to them” (Wrangsten et al, 2022, p.11). Because there is not much for girls to do in Fittja square, girls tend to go to nearby malls to hang out and socialize.

During cold weather, girls commented that the only place that protects you from the cold and wind is the bus stop, which is usually governed by groups of men wearing scarves that cover their faces hiding from cameras and authorities, and they do not feel welcome or safe around the area (Wrangsten et al, 2022)

While the workshops progressed, especially from the fourth to the sixth that correspond particularly to the design phase of the project, they started identifying what elements they considered to be key to the redevelopment of the square.

During the fourth workshop the girls were split into several groups to translate their ideas from previous workshops into visual representations using Minecraft. This digital version was used as a trial and error where girls and

women could experiment and find improvements for their neighborhoods by building them in this virtual world before bringing them to life in the real world (Urban October, 2020)

The girls’ designs focused on the integration of greenery, hangout spaces, and activity opportunities, and stressed the importance of the space being accessible for people in a wheelchair. They envisioned the square as a space to visit and not as a form of transit. They designed the space to be multipurpose to be attractive to people from various groups because for them entertainment was an important factor for quality of life. Through their designs, there was a noted consistency for the need of spaces that allowed people to be passive before deciding to engage or not in an activity. Overall, the girls designed focusing on walkability, beautification of the space and highlighted the importance of entertainment and socialization in the public realm.

Recurrent themes in the girls’ design included public art, digital signs showing social events, wind and weather protecting elements, green spaces, improving lighting conditions using color and playful elements, aesthetic coffee shops and local businesses to attract more people to the square and by consequence, making the space less appealing for the men who hang around it hiding from the authorities and making them feel uncomfortable and unsafe. While girls’ concepts didn’t specifically tackle increasing safety levels, they focused on liveability and saw safety as a direct consequence of rendering the space more livable and attractive (Wrangsten et al, 2022).

The girls’ designs reflected their desire for a public space that was not only functional and safe but also beautiful, engaging, and reflective of their community’s unique identity. They valued spaces that fostered social interaction, encouraged creativity and self-expression, and promoted

a sense of belonging and pride in their neighborhood (Anneroth, 2019).

Beautification is not a new concept, nice looking environments are human needs and there's a reason why the concept is common amongst girls designs (Kahla, 2019). Bright, colorful and green spaces attract people to use, engage and take care of the space, this includes garbage collection systems that work properly and establish systems in place to prevent the spaces from looking too worn down and broken (Wrangsten, 2019).

While the girls worked independently from the adult professionals, the adults were present to provide guidance and support when needed. This created a balance between empowering the girls to take ownership of their designs and offering them the expertise of professionals in the field. In contrast, the fifth workshop aimed to refine the Minecraft designs into more concrete architectural plans. It was held at White Architects' office and began with a presentation on inclusive architecture. Participants were then divided into mixed groups of girls and professionals, each focusing on a specific theme at different workshop stations. These stations included a computerized sketching program, a

physical model-building area, and a virtual reality room for experiencing the Minecraft designs. (Fabre et al, 2019). The workshop fostered direct collaboration between the girls and adult professionals, allowing for a deeper level of engagement and the translation of ideas into feasible plans.

The project was finalized with three main proposals. The first one, called Greenhouse 145 & Co, aimed to transform the underutilized and unsafe Fittja Square into a vibrant community hub. The design prioritized the creation of a multifunctional greenhouse that would serve as a radio station, café, and urban gardening space (Esposito, 2020; Fabre et al, 2019). When asked why a radio station, girls and locals highlighted the connection between music and Botkyrka, noting that many artists, especially hip-hop artists come from the area (Anneroth, 2019).

The proposal also emphasized the need for increased greenery, improved lighting, and better pedestrian infrastructure. The goal was to create a safe, welcoming, and engaging space that would cater to the diverse needs of the community, particularly young girls and women, and promote a sense of belonging and community pride (Fabre et al, 2019)



Fig. 15 Screenshot of Minecraft design of Greenhouse 145 & Co by Block by Block

The proposal aimed to achieve this by leveraging Fittja Square's potential as a pedestrian-friendly area and incorporating elements that encourage social interaction, recreation, and ecological sustainability (Esposito, 2020). The Greenhouse 145 building, with its diverse functions, was envisioned as the centerpiece of this transformation, providing a space for entertainment, cultural exchange, and community building.

The second proposal called Mall for All, aimed to address the perceived unsafety and lack of appeal of the Fittja Centrum shopping center. The girl's vision was to transform it from being a transit space into a welcoming and vibrant community hub that catered to the needs and interests of all residents, particularly young people and women (Fabre et al, 2019).

design and installing new and improved lighting throughout the center while also using light as a playful, interactive and fun experience (Wrangster et al, 2020). The mall would have a range of services like coffee shops, food courts, and more gathering spots including transforming the rooftop into an eco-friendly space with greenery and beehives, an interactive Fittja Sign that read "Fittja=Home" (Esposito, 2020). The sign message was the girls' way of challenging the bad reputation and media coverage of their neighborhood, as one participant said "People jokingly say that the national anthem of Fittja is the sound of police helicopters. Well, we designed this to remind those helicopters and the media that this is our home" (Wrangsten, 2019, p. 36)



Fig. 16 Overview of Fittja Square, Fittja Station and Fittja Centrum shopping center of Minecraft design

The primary design focus was on improving the entrances, the overall ambiance of the center and the flexibility of the center to foster different activities, art and experiences. The proposal prioritized rebuilding the main entrance with new sliding doors and a curtain heater to create a more open and inviting atmosphere. Additionally, it suggested analyzing the usage of side entrances to optimize their

On the other side of the mall and the adjacent rooftop would be used for recreational activities like a dancefloor, public seating, an outdoors screen, a skatepark and multipurpose spaces (Anneroth, 2019; Fabre et al, 2020).

Additionally, the back alley of the mall was redesigned, adding seating areas and spaces for occasional events and



Fig. 17 Overview of Fittja Centrum shopping mall's rooftop with a dancefloor, an outdoor cinema, green spaces and seating areas

installations, like food trucks or public art specially in the back alley of the station to increase the flow of people and creating welcoming spaces for people to socialize and hence, improving safety (Fabre et al, 2019).

Young girls and women already used the center as a hanging and socializing spot, however, they were pushed to

gather in the mall because Fittja's square made them feel unsafe, uncomfortable and was not welcoming because of groups of men taking over the space (Wrangster et al, 2022). The center was still not ideal and not welcoming for girls and women, however it was still the best of both options. The goal was to make the center feel brighter, safer, and more welcoming, encouraging people to want to



Fig. 18 Back alley of Fittja Centrum shopping mall with seating areas and food truck area

spend time and socialize there by choice and not by force (Fabre et al, 2019).

By improving accessibility, creating comfortable spaces, and offering a wider range of activities, the proposal aimed to transform the center into a true community hub where people could gather, connect, and feel a sense of belonging. The focus on improving entrances and lighting was crucial in achieving this goal, as it directly addressed the issues of safety and perception that were hindering Fittja's Centrum shopping center's potential as a community space (Anneroth, 2019; Esposito, 2020).

The cubes would be located in a pedestrian street outside of the subway station building with space for public art and surrounded by creative, interactive and playful light installations that double as art and quality lighting for the space. The cubes had different themes, including one for art exhibition, a library of children's books, and a gaming hall (Anneroth, 2019) The wall surrounding the cubes was also a dedicated space for creative placemaking interventions like graffiti art or installations. For the girls, the space was a way for integrating the local community of artists as young local artists rarely get a platform to showcase their work (Anneroth, 2019)

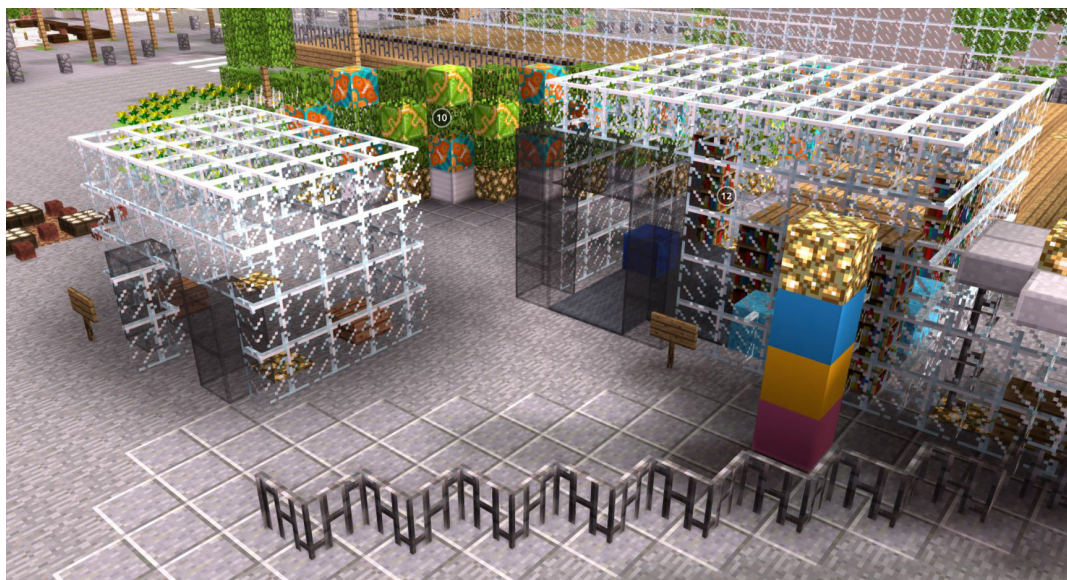


Fig. 19 Activity cubes" made of glass and art wall, outside Fittja subway station

The third and final proposal, called New Station, sought to transform the Fittja Square bus stop from noisy and unsafe transit spots, into welcoming multifunctional community spaces. The Minecraft design included a new location and design for the bus stop to reduce noise in the area and repurpose the space for recreational activities. According to the participants, the current location and visual appeal of the bus stop was causing stress and was identified as one of the unsafe spots of the area (Esposito, 2020). The girls' design included what they called "activity cubes" made of glass to improve visibility, transparency and safety.

Additionally, the subway station building would be redesigned as well, improving visibility, lighting and signage, with an arcade style waiting room. Wider front and back entrances and adding green spaces, comfortable seating and relaxation areas (Wrangsten, 2019). Through these creative and tactical placemaking interventions, the goal of the proposal was to create a better and safer station, repurposing the indoor and outdoor areas as spaces for socializing, engaging, hanging out and not a place that people are scared of, avoid or feel unsafe and unwelcome. The project wanted to address the first impression of Fittja

as a welcoming, inclusive, safe space and challenge the bad reputation of the area (Esposito, 2020; Fabre et al. 2020). While the proposals remained as ideas, the municipality tested the Greenhouse 145 & Co proposal through a pop-up installation in the summer of 2020. The installation was so well received by the local residents that the municipality decided to repeat the installation the following year, with hopes of implementing it as a permanent integration to the area in the distant future (Esposito, 2020).

### **Findings**

During the workshops, there was a clear difference of priorities between the girls' designs and the professionals' opinions. While girls and women had rated Fittja neighborhood as "not safe to live in", during their re-design and envision of Fittja square they focused on accessibility, liveability and nice looking places to hang out and socialize, rather than designing for safety. It was noted that for girls, liveability means more than just safety (Wrangsten et al, 2022).

However during the fifth workshop when both groups of girls and professionals worked together, the sharing of ideas led professionals to question their original designs, priorities and approach.

The implementation of the pop-up highlighted the potential for transformation and creating a sense of possibility. Many participants said that when they were asked to participate in the project, they thought they were going to end up taking a more background and listening role rather than participating and being heard (Anneroth, 2019), however when the project was finalized, many participants were skeptical towards the outcomes and commented that the effort, resources and time put into the project was not

worth it given that no project was implemented at the end. While many participants knew that the possibility of the municipality implementing any proposal was slim, it was still disappointing. To build trust and establish a good relationship with the community and citizens, it is important that when such type of projects occur, the learnings and insights are translated into an implementable placemaking outcome (Anneroth, 2019).

Tomas Melin, Global Utmaning advisor said the objective of the process was not to build something, but to highlight the importance of including girls and women in placemaking of their own environment, understand issues that were previously ignored, and generate conversation around feminist and participatory placemaking and its importance in policy makers agendas (Anneroth, 2019). The project had a symbolic nature that looked to serve as a tangible reminder of the ongoing efforts to improve the area and leverage from local girls and community knowledge as relevant actors in shaping, designing and claiming back their right to their public spaces.

The methodology and interventions were so successful they developed in coordination with NGO Global Utmaning and VINNOVA, a digital toolbox accessible online for all cities around the world, as well as organizations, both private and public, and community-led initiatives to implement in their communities.

Currently more than 430 cities in 120 countries have used the toolbox and form part of HerCity network with more than 350 initiatives implemented. The HerCity platform has more than 1380 active users as of August 2024, and the community continues to grow (HerCity, website).



Chapter Five

**Discu**

ssion

In this paragraph we discuss the main key findings, insights and overlapping ideas and concepts that are the result of an extensive literature review and case study analysis of feminist placemaking and the possible incorporation of a feminist lens applied to contemporary citymaking concepts of the 15-minute cities.

Integrated and livable cities go beyond their physical component and the built environment, it is about the environment that shapes them and builds an abstract intangible idea in the mind of people who live, use, interact and experience the space (Cartel et al, 2022). How a place is perceived and lived is the direct result of the built environment influenced by personal experiences and ideas associated with the same space. (Wyckoff, 2014)

Through behaviors, people shape spaces and the space is shaped by how people interact with them (Relph, 1976). Spaces are constantly evolving, changing and are dynamic. Because a space is defined by more than just its physical dimension, it is imperative that authorities in charge of creating and designing spaces take into consideration the social and human component attached to them. More often than not, places are functional on paper but fail to meet residents' needs, as a result of a top-down design practice, rather than a bottom-up co-design process.

However, thoughtful placemaking interventions have the power to quickly transform a space and area and (re) shaping and rebranding the space in the mind of the people, transforming it into a space for community building, social life, while improving safety. (Gieryn, 2000)

When designing an inclusive space, as Wei (2023) said, designing for women is designing for all. Different people

have different needs and interact with spaces differently. This differentiation is not only true for men and women, but also for minorities and underrepresented groups in society, as behaviors change from one group to another, influenced not only by gender, but by cultural and ethnic diversities and backgrounds.

It can be said that the 15-minute city concept is focused on providing all services and amenities required for urban and social life within a 15-minute radio by bike or foot travel, however, it is criticized that this approach does not fully take into consideration the diverse needs of women and men and fails to integrate a gendered approach into its design process. (Pozoukidou & Chatziyuannaki., 2021)

Accessibility to public spaces, opportunities and services to live, thrive, work, relax and build social connections, is key for integrated cities, community building and sustainability (Pozoukidou & Chatziyuannaki, 2021). The concept encourages walking and cycling as a means of transportation (Balleto et al, 2021), limiting the need of polluting transport methods for day-to-day needs. The 15-minute city concept divides cities into smaller living units, neighborhoods, and seeks to make self-sufficient, multipurpose living areas (Deloitte, 2021), that improve the locals quality of life.

Placemaking and the 15-minute city concept share the premise that urban areas should be seen through the eyes of the people who use them in order to successfully and accurately be of use to local residents, and not expecting people to change and adapt their behaviors to the given space. While 15-minute cities are designed to focus on location, proximity, safety, economic prosperity, social inclusion and sustainability (Kowaleski-Jones, 2018; Moreno et al., 2021), feminist placemaking looks after

inclusivity, representation, safety and community building through a gendered lens.

It can be argued that these concepts are complementary to one another. Both methodologies embrace a bottom-up design approach, and acknowledge the untapped potential and unexplored knowledge of community members as empirical designers and shapers of place. We argue that 15-minute cities can benefit from feminist placemaking as an extra pillar in their design methodology and process. As the 15-minute city concept struggles to be easily replicable and implemented because cities face different issues (Pozoukidou et Chatziyuannaki., 2021), feminist placemaking can be incorporated in the design process to target this gap and be the link between the built environment and the local communities through placemaking projects and activities.

As urban planning continues to be a predominantly white men practice, city planning continues to be gender biased (Perez, 2020). Building on already gender-biased infrastructure, cities face the challenge of providing access and services equally in order to give back to women their Right To The City (Sedini & Colleoni, 2024). Acknowledging that women and men have different needs and fears and therefore interact with spaces in a variety of different ways is the first step to inclusive design practices. Women's behaviors and patterns while navigating public spaces differ in time, motive, frequency and locations. Their interactions with spaces are ruled, and limited, by their fear of safety, and their access to transport networks that shape their mobility patterns (Day, 1998).

Most public transport networks across the world are inefficient for women, resulting in women being more likely to walk from one place to another than men. When women

use public transport, they tend to trip-chain, and inevitably spend more time than men navigating the transport network. Therefore, designing for women is equivalent to designing for pedestrians (Wei, 2003)

Because cities were not designed with women needs, nor pedestrian needs, in mind, it often adds to the daily struggles of women, like sidewalks not being wide enough for strollers, broken and uneven streets and sidewalks that become inaccessible for people with mobility issues, poorly light areas that are vulnerable spots for women and contribute to their sense of fear (Perez, 2020). Public spaces, more often than not, limit the will and the actual possibility of women to enjoy and make use of them and subsequently marginalize them from public life.

Therefore the 15-minute city concept focuses on the (re)location and organization of services and business and strategically addresses mobility issues, and feminist placemaking addresses the physical components of public spaces that impact on the psychological perception of space, improving the sense of place, belonging, representation, sense of safety and community building.

As discussed through the case study analysis, placemaking interventions are divided in three categories, Creative, Tactical and Strategic Placemaking. (Wyckoff, 2014) Creative and Tactical Placemaking projects and activities are targeted fast approaches for which a gender lens can be successfully integrated. Investing in feminist placemaking interventions is investing in the social capital of cities, communities and spaces (Sedini, 2020; Rullani, 2006). Involving women in the design process of their communities help weave back women's representation and belonging in the public realm, offer gender equal opportunities and spaces, improve the safety levels that cities should guarantee for all, and

improve their quality of life and contribute to the ongoing fight of social and gender equity.

Through creative interventions like incorporating public art, multipurpose areas for cultural and creative practices like shows, events, exhibitions, places have the potential to contribute to the sense of belonging by accurately representing their community. When feeling seen in the public space, people are more attracted to interact with it and reduce the fear of crime in spaces (Zitcer, 2020; National Endowment for the Arts, website). The more people are seen or use a space, the more inviting, welcoming and active the place becomes. By creatively intervening public spaces, communities feel represented by it and build a personal connection with it. As a consequence, people are more keen to take care of the space as it evolves to having a special, personal meaning and bond.

Tactical placemaking is useful to target the fear of safety and make spaces more gender inclusive, welcoming and holistic. Adding proper public lighting, making public transport stops strategically placed in places that do not reinforce social prejudices and make women and other users feel vulnerable, the re-configuration of public spaces so girls, women and vulnerable groups feel represented and invited to use because it offers attractive spaces, opportunities and activities that are appealing for them. Through reducing the sense of fear and offering appealing activities, services and spaces for everyone, women feel safer to go back to public social life, and to enjoy and make use of public spaces. (Pallit, 2019)

However, the struggle of power dynamics between authorities in charge of developing, funding and coordinating placemaking projects and community involvement still stands. Feminist placemaking strategies face the challenge of becoming overly bureaucratic and

being counterproductive, falling into the previously vicious cycle. (You & Rios, 2003)

## 5.1 Service proposal

We find an area of opportunity by proposing a Feminist Placemaking Design Manifesto with a focus on Proximity Design, as a general guideline for best Feminist Placemaking practices. As interventions cannot be standardized and each project is designed for specific different people and communities, we intend to complement this Manifesto with a geolocalization service for women and members of the community to use, with the common interest of (re) designing and improving their public spaces.

The service will act as a platform called “MIA” which is feminine for “mine” in Spanish and Italian, making the connection of users claiming the spaces as their own, targeting specifically women and girls, where users can report spaces with high and low sense of fear, through a 1-5 rating scale, with possibility to add comments, suggestions and pictures.

Users can use the Explore section to see a heat map of high and low places around their city, to help them navigate beforehand. They can read comments and reviews and go



through the photo gallery of the spaces to better understand the space and the area. Through the Report section users can create reports of worn out infrastructure, low and high safety levels, leave suggestions for improving the space or celebrating good designs. The Connect section is a digital bulletin board for community-organized events to foster community engagement, the use and repurpose of public spaces and bring life back to the public and social realm, increasing sense of belonging, community participation and placemaking activities and projects.

Through the mapping of “low” and “high” places, 1) communities have access to a platform where they can rate spaces with negative and positive perception and sense of place 2) report places and infrastructure that requires maintenance like broken lights, uneven roads, etc. 3) connect directly with local authorities by making petitions concerning their neighborhood, 4) organize events for their community, like meetups, social events, initiatives, placemaking interventions and more, and 5) authorities and non-governmental organizations involved in placemaking interventions can have access to actual, constant data from local residents on which spaces are perceived as good or bad, and why, identifying unsafe places and learning from places that are positively rated by the community.

Additionally, public offices can have access to direct reports of infrastructure that needs maintenance or technical intervention, streamlining report processes, making it more direct, transparent and responsive. Users can leave suggestions for possible interventions, upload photos of the space for public view, or use the platform to organize initiatives and events involving their community and public spaces.

Moreover the platform can collaborate with Fem Urban

## Service Offering Map

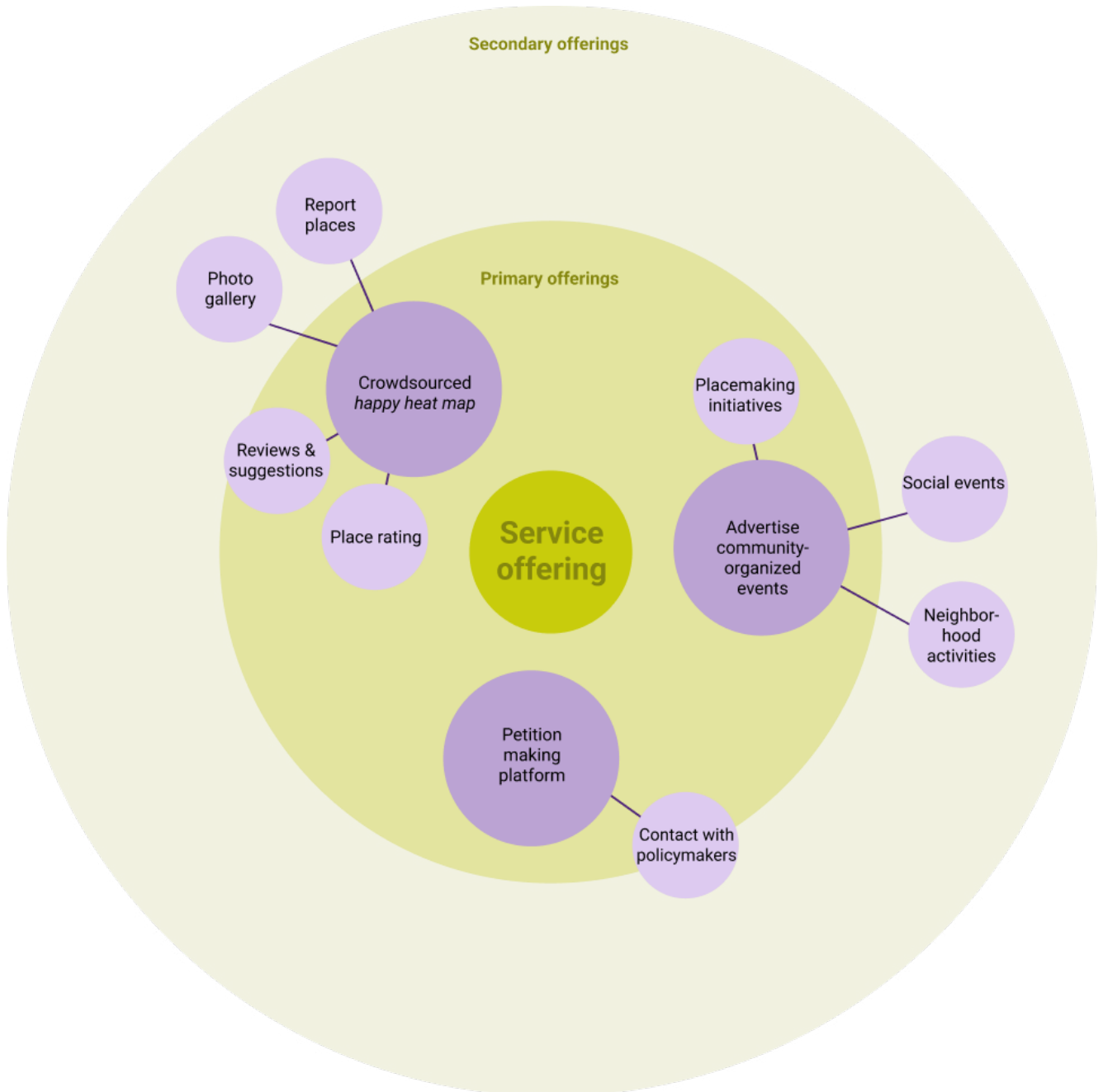


Fig. 16 MIA Service Offering Map

Atlas, a digital platform from The Gendered City with similar goals. The platform aims to create digital maps by citizen and community participation localizing perceived harassment areas in order to collect feminist data through community engagement

The platform holds the potential of improving the public space by users actively reporting their perceptions of good and bad practices and spaces, and become a social app that fosters community engagement and social life through events, activities and initiatives for and within the neighborhood.



Fig. 17 MIA heatmap of high and low places

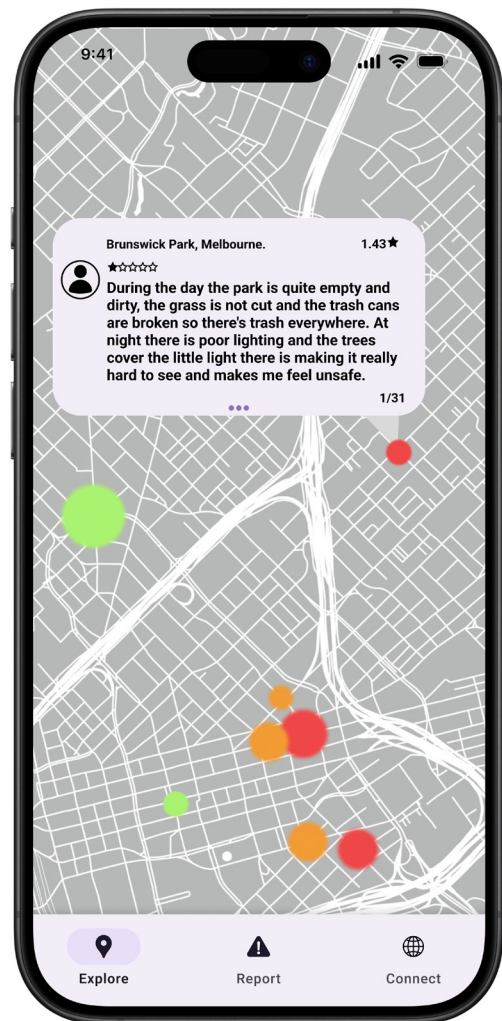


Fig. 18 User review in MIA map

We see the potential of MIA to compliment the platform by sharing data to potentialize efforts, resources and impact, as well as the possibility of adding to their platform as their app version, including the more interacting tools like suggestions, feedback, photo gallery and community events.

By sharing their perceptions of safety and sense of place in different locations, they generate a real-time, crowd-sourced database that empowers individuals, informs data-driven decision-making and design processes, and fosters community building and advocacy.

The data collected from the platform aims to be a starting point for organizations to pinpoint areas of interest to be intervened, to start understanding the cultural and social context of the space, and to empower community

involvement, participation and co-design, always using a bottom-up design approach.

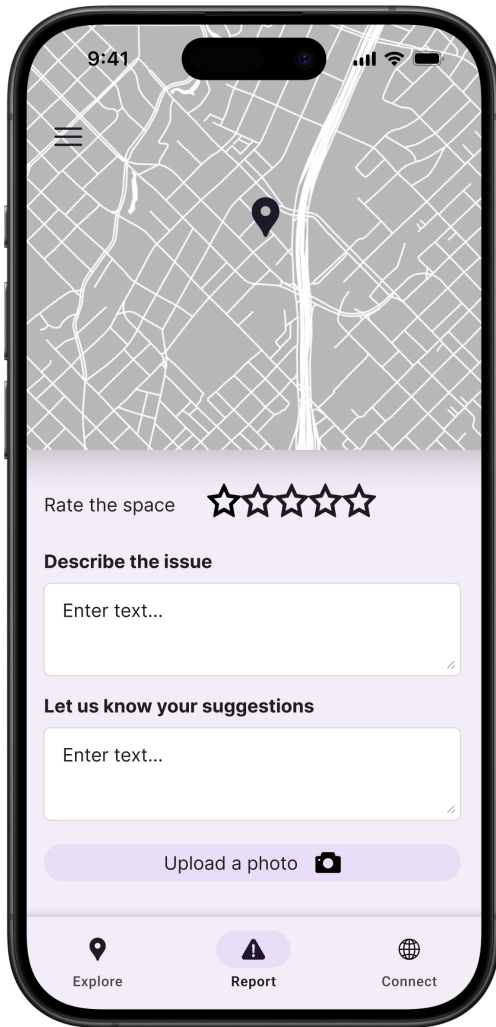


Fig. 19 Place rating section in MIA

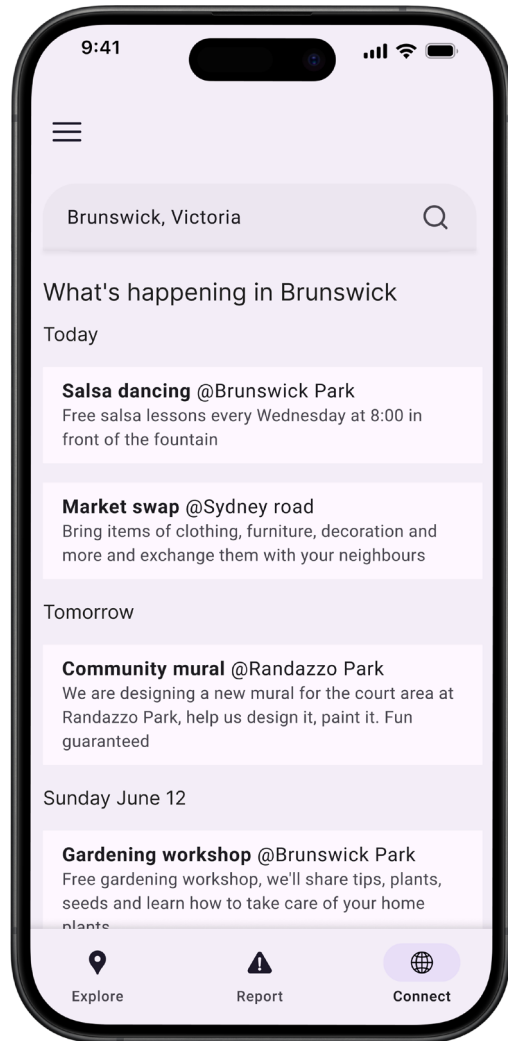
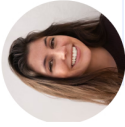


Fig. 20 Explore section with community-organ

### User Journey Map




The following map corresponds to the user journey of a potential MIA user, highlighting before, during and after stages of interaction with MIA platform, differentiating touchpoints and mentioning possible obstacles and barriers.



### SCENARIO

Monica - 26 y.o  
Business Analyst  
Medellin

Monica is a full time student in Medellin and she has a part time job to help her pay through her studies. She usually works night shifts 3-4 nights a week and leaves work after dark. She relies on public transport and has to walk 20 from the bus stop to her house everyday, she usually cuts through the park because it saves her 8 minutes, but at night she prefers to take a longer route because the park is dark and sketchy. She lives in a quiet residential neighbourhood with some small parks around, but she avoids them because there is nothing to do there. She loves going for picnics with her friends but does them very seldom because the nice park is on the other side of town.

Phase	Before			During			After					
	Download MIA	Open MIA	Log in MIA	Explore MIA	Open MIA	Report infrastructure	Rate a space	Leave a suggestion	Upload a picture	Explore community events	Explore heatmap and reviews	Participate in events
 Mobile	Download MIA	Open app on cellphone	Log in with social media		Open app on cellphone	Select location on map	Rate the spaces good or bad perception from 0-5	Option to leave a suggestion or comment on the space perceived quality, infrastructure or possible ideas to repurpose of the space	Upload picture from gallery or take directly through MIA app	Explore the upcoming events through <i>Explore</i> section	Browse through the map and identify unsafe areas and good areas for future journeys	Explore events and join
 Public space						Identifying broken infrastructure because of poor maintenance / Sense of fear and unsafety	Analyse the spaces good or bad design		Take picture of the space		Digital interaction with the space through photo galleries and reviews	Re purpose public spaces for social life, gatherings and placemaking projects
 Community	Friend recommend a new app for traveling safer and find events near you									Getting familiarized with interest in common with neighbors and feeling part of a community		Join event and create new relationships and sense of community
	Slow downloading time		Having to make an account or concerns about data privacy		Slow loading time				Might rate the place after and forget to take a picture	There might not be events going on yet	Some reports might be outdated	Feeling wary of participating because its with strangers

In the following matrix we map the potential primary and secondary stakeholders, divided in four realms, Citizens and community, Municipality and government, Public parties and institutions, Private parties and institutions.

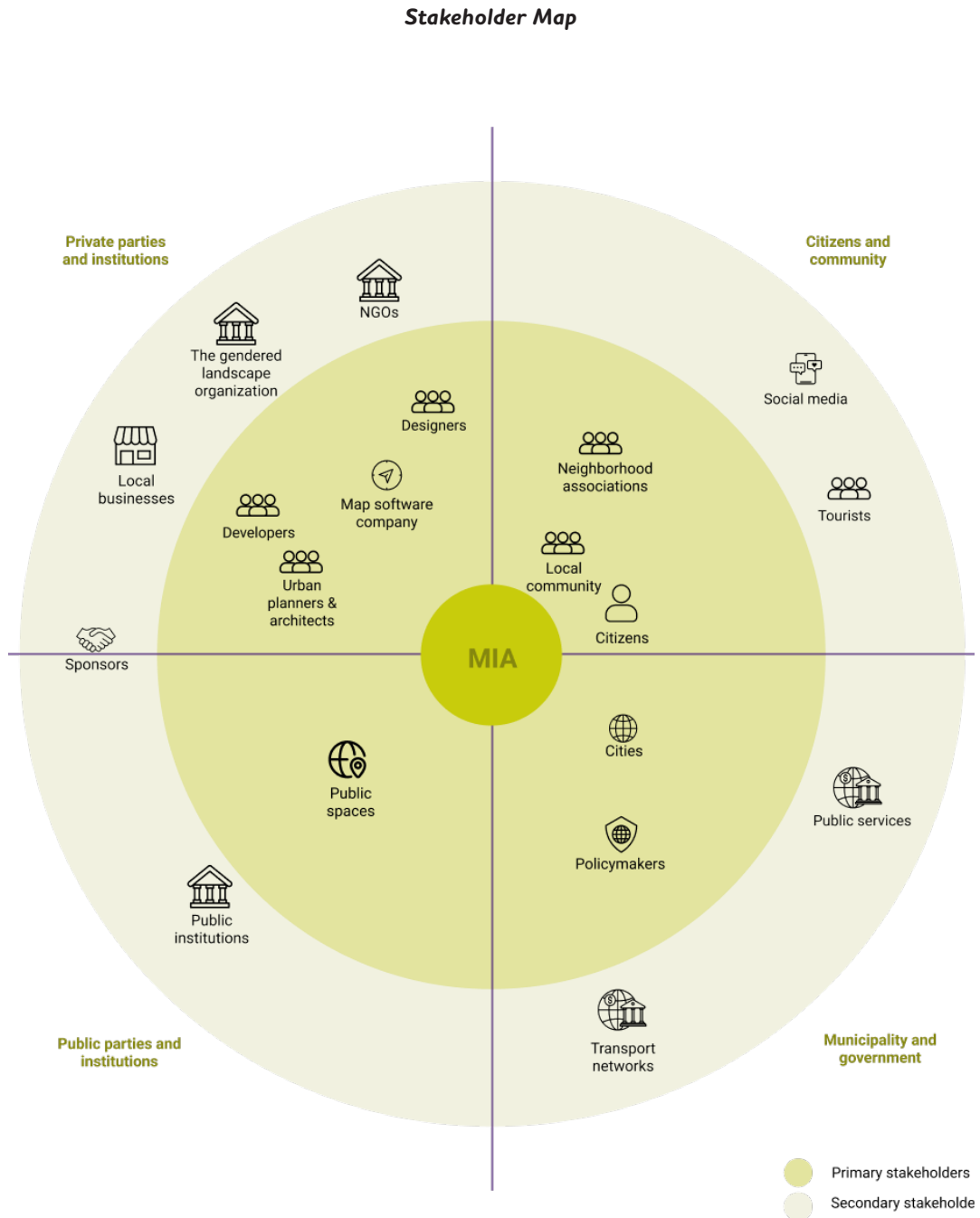


Fig. 22 MIA Stakeholder map

The following diagram corresponds to the Stakeholders influence / interest matrix. We map the relationship and involvement level of each stakeholder with the project to understand the relationship and positioning each of them have in order to establish priorities, involvement and relationship strategies with both internal and external stakeholders.

**Stakeholder influence / interest matrix**

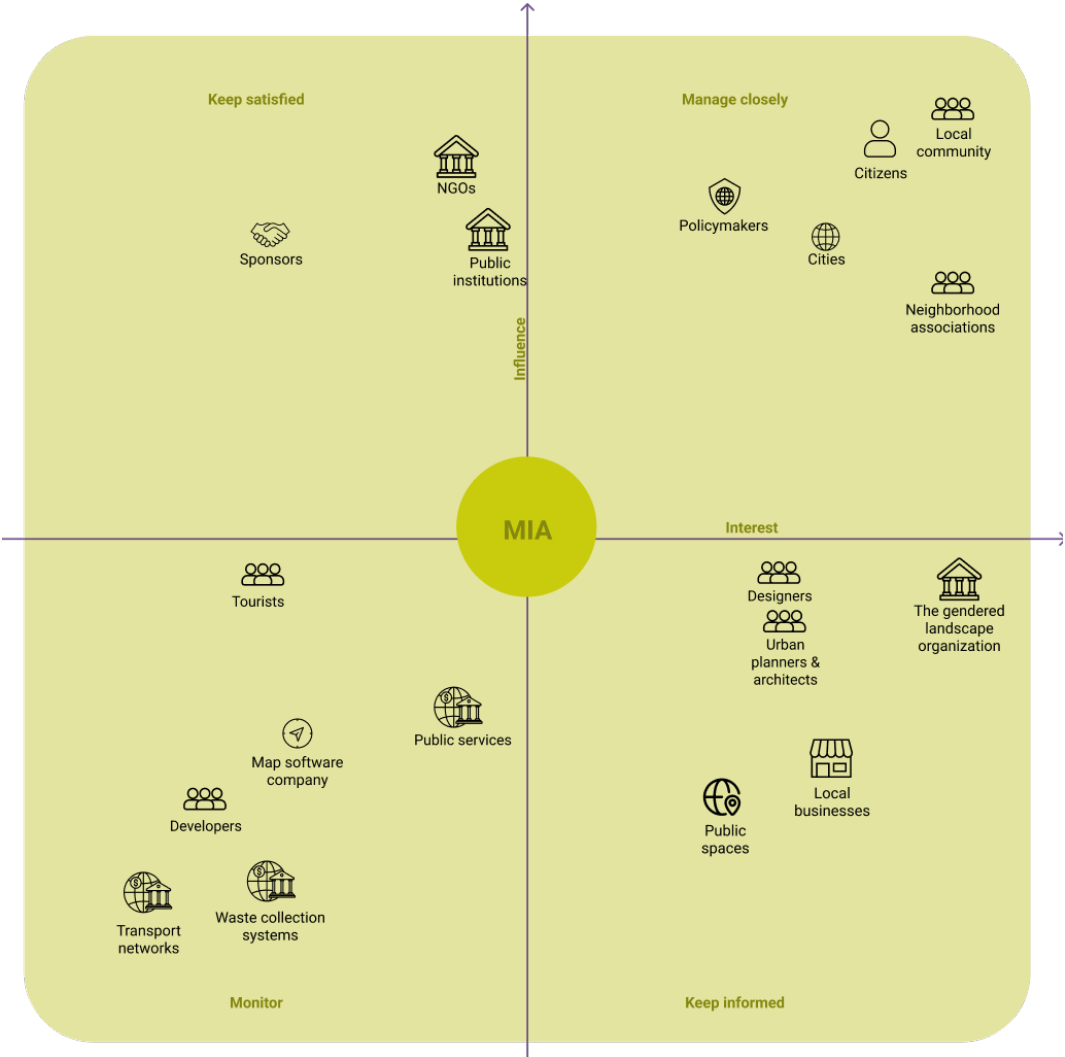


Fig. 23 MIA Stakeholder influence / interest matrix

This approach not only amplifies the voices of those often unheard but also provides valuable insights for urban planners, policymakers, and community organizations. It promotes transparency and accountability, ensuring that authorities are held responsible for creating and maintaining safe public spaces. By explicitly addressing intersectionality and prioritizing privacy, security, and accessibility, the project ensures that diverse voices are heard and protected. Collaboration with existing organizations and technology partners will further maximize its impact, fostering stronger, more connected communities actively engaged in shaping their neighborhoods.

Continuous evaluation and iteration based on user and stakeholder feedback will guarantee the platform's adaptability and responsiveness. Ultimately, the platform. service and project can be a catalyst for change, fostering a more just and equitable built environment that reflects and supports the diverse needs of all its users, and adding a layer of connection, transparency and trust between community and authorities, fostering a sense of active citizenship, because their efforts and voices are taken into consideration and there is a tangible outcome that will lay as a foundation for better policies, better cities, better neighborhoods and more

Through the integration of feminist principles, community knowledge, and technology, public spaces can truly transform into inclusive and empowering havens for everyone.

## **5.2 Feminist Placemaking Design Manifesto**

The fusion of a Feminist Placemaking Design Manifesto and a dedicated geolocalization service offers a revolutionary

approach to transforming public spaces. This project centers the needs, perspectives, and safety of women and marginalized communities, recognizing their vital role in shaping inclusive and empowering environments.

The Manifesto will articulate a set of core principles and best practices for creating public spaces, emphasizing Proximity Design's community-led, context-specific approach, feminist bottom-up collaborative design approach. In parallel, the geolocalization service will function as an interactive platform where women and community members actively contribute to shaping their surroundings.

# Feminist Placemaking Design Manifesto

1. Challenges the status quo
2. Questions traditional urban planning and design processes
3. Puts womens and minorities needs at the heart of (re)design projects and processes
4. Follows a bottom-up approach, uses participatory, community-driven design methods
5. Ensures all voices and lived experiences are considered in the design process, participants accurately represent the target social group
6. Invests on community knowledge and recognizes citizens as space experts and empirical designers. Professionals play a secondary role
7. Celebrates diversity, cultural heritage and the spaces unique context, and leverages from it to design quality places, integrating art, nature and playfulness
8. Understands spaces dual physical and psychological nature
9. Designs for safety, security and accessibility, both physically and psychologically for all
10. Re-envisions public spaces as multi-functional, flexible and adaptable and integrates community services through a feminist, proximity lens, promoting community engagement, belonging, and social life

Chapter Six

**Conclu**

**usions**

Urban and city planning has, and still is, a male dominated field. Women as community members and city users have been marginalized through decades of gender biased urban planning and city zoning. It is undeniable that there is a direct influence between the built environment both in proximity, accessibility and aesthetic that constantly limits women's access to public spaces and public life, and determines their daily experiences when navigating their city. This has come as a consequence of a lack of female and minority representatives to challenge the status quo male-centric point of view and advocate for the needs of the underrepresented in the higher levels of policy making and government.

Designers and service designers are indispensable in facilitating feminist placemaking and shaping gender-inclusive public spaces. They possess the unique skills to translate community needs and aspirations into tangible design solutions. By actively listening, empathizing, and collaborating, they ensure that diverse voices are heard and incorporated into the design process. They play a crucial role in challenging traditional design norms and power structures, promoting equity and inclusivity throughout the project. Moreover, designers must question their "best design practices" and invest in community knowledge and people as space and design experts to make sure every voice and need is represented and heard.

Overall, designers have the power to influence design decision making in medium and high levels of government and even policymaking, therefore, they have the social responsibility of advocating for the citizens, including them in the process and recognising that everyone can be a designer. It is up to designers to challenge the traditional academic, best practices, should-be design methods and processes and understand that good design practices, more

often than not, fall outside of traditional methods, specially when it comes to feminism, inclusivity and designing for spaces with diverse socio-cultural contexts.

Service designers, in particular, bring a human-centered approach to placemaking, focusing on the experiences and interactions within a space. They understand that true inclusion goes beyond physical accessibility; it requires considering the emotional and social needs of diverse users. By analyzing user journeys and incorporating inclusive service design principles, they ensure that public spaces are safe, welcoming, and empowering for everyone. Their expertise in facilitating co-creation and fostering community engagement is invaluable in creating spaces that genuinely reflect and serve the needs of all. Additionally, service designers can integrate community services into the intervening public spaces, or design specific services that complement placemaking projects to further foster a sense of belonging and improving safety. As spaces are more than just a physical environment and have a psychological component too, and placemaking is both a process and a mindset, to truly design inclusive, accessible, welcoming spaces, spaces must be coherent in the services that they offer, like community activities, public facilities, exhibition spaces and more, and the physical environment. It is the role of service designers to integrate spaces and public and private services into the space ecosystem to start the transition into a more sustainable environment. When placemaking interventions have a social and economic impact on the area, it raises interest and engagement from public and private parties. Placemaking interventions should strive, when possible, to have a continuance and possible further developments that add to community building and gender-inclusive neighborhoods and communities, however depending on the socio-cultural context of the space this might not be applicable for every project.

The gender biased urban planning of cities is a tangible consequence of a patriarchal system present in both public/private and work/home spheres, and reflecting the perceived social status of women. The division of work/home spaces has furthermore marginalized women and their access to public services and life. Focusing on accessibility by proximity, women can start regaining their position as active members of their community and out of the background.

The integration of services back into communities and adopting a proximity approach is a socio-ecological sustainable approach to city making and city life. By bringing services closer to people, people are more inclined to walk to do their daily activities, reducing the need to use cars or public transport. This results in a) less carbon emissions b) bringing people back to the streets and creating social connections and public life and promoting walking as a mode of transportation and physical activity c) reduce noise pollution d) the possibility to repurpose street space for public social spaces like social hubs, parks, bigger sidewalks etc; e) create economically vibrant spaces due to more people using the streets and the need to cover local needs, f) improve safety perception and safety levels of neighborhoods, and g) create more sustainable, self-reliable neighborhoods and lifestyle

By adding proximity as a driver for designing spaces, women are automatically more involved in their community, and (re) designing public spaces through a feminist lens, designers must exploit the potential of spaces of becoming more than just transit spots and unused spaces, they can add a level of safety, security, belonging, representation, accessibility, economic opportunities, community engagement, social and economic hubs, adding a step towards closing the gender gap and bringing girls, women and minorities back

to the public light.

Nevertheless, bringing services closer to communities and designing for accessibility by proximity is not enough to attempt to close the gender gap and make women more involved in public life. Places need to be pleasing, welcoming and safe for women and everyone in order to truly foster an equitable access to the public realm and public sphere.

There is a need to adopt a bottom-up design approach to all matters concerning decisions that directly impact citizens, with placemaking being one of them. There is no one more qualified to design for their needs than the people with those needs themselves, hence it is of utmost importance that designers integrate a diverse set of representatives of the target users that intent to be addressed through the placemaking intervention as part of the design team, as both space and design experts, and challengers to the status quo. By involving women and minorities in design teams, designers can, and should, translate their needs and visions into actionable insights to render the space more livable, vibrant, inclusive and that accurately meets their needs and empowers them to use, claim and belong to the urban spaces.

Placemaking has the potential of transforming spaces at a low cost and fast implementation into livable, welcoming, safe spaces that foster a sense of belonging and representation. However these interventions need to be carefully designed in order to prevent from falling into stereotypes and over bureaucratic processes that, by accident, end up overruling the real needs of the community and designing spaces that are not appealing to the local community, or too appealing to a certain social group that will eventually claim the space and enter a new vicious cycle of social inequality powered by the built environment.

Acknowledging each space is more than just its built environment but a combination of social relationships, political decisions, economic scenarios, ethnic mix and a set of attached psychological characteristics and mental constructs, each space becomes unique and it is impossible to design a one-size-fits-all frameworks, however, the “Feminist Placemaking Design Manifesto” is a starting guideline for approaching feminist placemaking projects, it is flexible and adaptable to the specific context where the project will take place in.

Additionally, cities could implement MIA as a local platform to promote citizens’ engagement with their community and promote community-led placemaking projects, centralizing communication and advertising channels for communities to report unsafe spaces, infrastructure in need of maintenance, recognize well-designed places, and build social connections within their neighborhood. On the backend, municipalities can have access to a crowdsourced data base with real input and real insights as a starting point to understand what places should be intervened first, and have a first glimpse of the mental construct of said space in the mind of the community and identify the underlying reasons via data collection and eventually through the co-design workshops. It is a knowledge sharing tool that has the potential to improve transparency, accountability and citizen participation in public processes and a first step to build a relationship of trust between government and community.

## **6.1 Study limitations**

While the study explored the field of feminist placemaking as a driver for policymaking and city planning, and reducing the influence and impact the built environment has on the gender gap to give back their right to the city to girls,

women and minorities, there is a lack of government incentives and participation in the macro sphere.

The study does not analyze independently the differences of feminist placemaking projects in the global north and global south, focusing more on examples and information available primarily on the global north. We argue that differences exist and feminist design principles may vary in the global south due to cultural, social, political and economical differences that shape societies and cultures. Additionally the systemic approach to feminist placemaking interventions may not be applicable to all socio-cultural contexts in the global south and the proposed “Feminist Placemaking Design Manifesto” may not be accurate or applicable to such contexts, as it was developed taking into consideration current available academic research and literature that speaks mostly to a global north context.

The study does not look into the incentives or government programmes that may or may not exist to finance and advocate for placemaking projects, while we acknowledge some countries and cities have offices in place responsible for placemaking, the study focused mostly on community participation and placemaking interventions coordinated by parties outside the government sphere.

## **6.2 Recommendations for future research**

We recommend further research to explore feminist placemaking projects from both the north and global south, as little academic research has been done in general on the topic of feminist placemaking, and that which exists does not differentiate between the global north and global south needs, approaches and differences. We argue that cultural, social and political differences from the

global south influence how feminist placemaking can be implemented in such contexts.

Additionally we suggest further research can test placemaking approaches in the global south, considering womens behaviors, patterns towards and within spaces. Understanding mobility patterns of women in the global south is crucial, as cities are overall built different than those in the global north and placemaking projects may take a different nature due to facing greater challenges regarding the urban field, like lack of sidewalks, lack of parks, a predominantly car use and highways, and daily behaviors considering services proximity. Additionally as patriarchal systems tend to be more rooted in countries from the global south, recruiting participants for placemaking projects may become more challenging and a different systemic approach may need to be developed that aligns with both social-cultural differences and timeline.

Most placemaking projects commissioned by the government usually involve the lower levels of government hierarchy, meaning municipalities. There is a clear disconnection and lack of coordination and incentive from the top tier government authorities to invest in feminist placemaking projects as well as lack of funding from public and private organizations. We see an area of opportunity to develop new research projects in coordination with public offices of all levels to open a door for authorities to get actively involved and create awareness within policy makers, as well as an understanding of where feminist placemaking is positioned in governments agendas and what are the systemic approaches they take toward it and create a channel for communication and knowledge exchange.

Additionally, future research can test the service proposal

to understand users' level of engagement and commitment from policymakers. Conducting A/B tests, prototyping and co-design sessions with both users, public offices and policymakers to redefine the service proposal and develop an accurate business plan.

Furthermore the thesis does not delve into the specifics of user registration and verification processes. Safety and security concerns are crucial to ensure the app's purpose and goal is met without compromising users' safety. While we consider the main target users as girls and women, we do not intend to design an app solely for women, as it is a tool for community interaction and bonding, community crowdsourced data and the views of all social groups is welcome, needed and valued.

The risk of fake profiles exists and should be addressed. Nevertheless, the app's features of reporting and rating places do not pose a high level of threat to other users and can be useful for everyone, as reporting worn down infrastructure is a responsibility of all and in benefit of all. However the Explore section needs special attention and consideration to make sure events and organizers are legitimate community members with no ill intentions, as well as protecting organizers from fake profiles or non desired interactions with individuals that put at risk their safety and security. We propose an algorithm similar to those of dating apps where a profile is needed to interact to increase accountability, transparency and if needed, restrictions, where a specific profile is created and the data is useful too to analyze even deeper how different groups of users live and experience places, to validate or dismantle biases on the collected data.

The study acknowledges that these aspects, while crucial for the app's success and user well-being, were not addressed

in this study due to limitations in time and resources. The complexities surrounding user safety and data privacy require careful consideration and will be thoroughly investigated in subsequent phases of the project.



# Chapter 7 - References

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