### Towards a women-led urbanism: new agenda, new priorities.

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In September 2023, UN Women and UN DESA published their latest report on the 'Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2023'. It unfortunately revealed that gender equality is still far from being achieved across the globe. The report estimates that 8 per cent of the world's female population will be living in extreme poverty by 2030 and that one in four women will experience moderate or severe food insecurity. While the gender gap in power and leadership positions remain significant and unchanged, women will have to face additional burdens, being predicted to spend on average 2.3 more hours per day on unpaid care and domestic work compared to men (Azcona et al., 2023). As the UN press release stated: "The world is failing girls and women" (United Nations, 2023). The claim sadly resonates with gendered inequalities in the built environment which remains too often unfit for purpose for women and leads to issues of safety and violence, accessibility struggles and dire living conditions. Indeed, "by 2050, urban areas are expected to house 70 per cent of the world's female population, totalling 3.3 billion. Alarming trends suggest a third of these women and girls could find themselves living in inadequate housing or slums" (Azcona, 2023, p.21).

Several key flaws can be identified as triggers for such failures. Gender inequalities have always characterised societies and urban environments and limited progress has been made, globally and locally, with women still experiencing an unequal position in society (Beebeejaun, 2017). Gender inequalities are path-dependent of other inequalities and are embedded into cultural, socio-economic and political norms. Many of these aren't structural and take the form of routines, perceptions, behaviours and assumptions – all constructed upon gendered conceptions - that cannot only be changed through political turns or regulatory advancements (Fisher and Ryan, 2021). Gender inequalities operate across sectors, at various scales and in various places (home, work, society). There are hence hugely complex, of diverse nature, and rest upon a juxtaposition of burdens. Such sustained pressures have accumulated effects on women's everyday lives, struggles and working conditions. As a result, women's rights and needs often are not addressed and women tend to be put at further risk. While such vulnerabilities are entrenched into long-lasting structural and societal inequalities, they are also further intensified in times of crisis.

Crises can be of various forms but all share the commonalities of dramatically affecting women and their survival. Crises can be economic, impacting everyday living conditions and furthering poverty. They can be geopolitical, linked to wars and associated to displacement. They can also be unprecedented global health crisis, as the Covid-19 pandemic. The role of crises takes us back to path dependency and intersectionality in regards to how women's (basic) rights are left in jeopardy in times of emergency hence furthering their everyday struggles. Episodes of crisis reveal existing fissures in social systems but also critical junctures and trade-offs in how crises manifest and what responses are provided (Chiozza and King, 2022). The recent health pandemic was the latest and most significant expression of human rights gendered gaps. Brysk

(2022, p.283) demonstrated that it led to "a surge in patriarchal repression for women worldwide, with marked increases in gender violence, gendered job loss and deterioration in labor conditions, regression in health care access and reproductive rights, and backlash against feminist consciousness." More importantly, it led to "pandemic patriarchy", in other words, a global cumulative deterioration in women's rights conditions with increased interdependence among them. This has been a global phenomenon even if women have been put at further risk in context of illiberal nationalist polities (Brysk, 2022). Such pandemic patriarchy is societal but also embedded into wider national politically-driven drawbacks on women's rights (for example abortion rights in the US). This translates into what we will name a new crisis patriarchy for women. This crisis patriarchy is global but also highly localised as rooted into the everyday and the domestic sphere.

As noted by Fisher and Ryan (2021), it is the domestic sphere that anchors inequality and prevents further progress toward gender equality. Here, several gendered factors play a key role: men's reduced participation in the domestic sphere (Meeussen et al., 2019) as well as men's overall behaviour that translates into "gender stereotypes, roles, and expectations (...) which can cause undue harm, especially during times of crisis" (Fisher and Ryan, 2021, p. 243). Now, the landscape of gender inequalities during the Covid-19 pandemic was enforced further by a lack of gender-sensitive policies overall (Azcona et al., 2020) to which were added other intersectional vulnerabilities including race, class, levels of education and type of employment. All have converged into increasing everyday pressures, threats and constraints for women living in urban settings. Scrutinising crisis patriarchy, intersectional burdens and the way women's rights and needs are eroded is urgent. Similarly, understanding how women adapt, cope and fight back on an everyday basis is crucial. Here, the built environment plays a key role, not only as the everyday spatial setting within which women navigate, adapt and survive but also as a space that they can shape, produce and construct as shelter, both physically and psychosocially. From a built environment perspective, unpacking the everyday spatialities of gendered inequalities isn't only about mainstream planning but goes beyond it.

Attention to gender in planning practice isn't new and has been informed by feminism since the 1970s (see for example Leavitt; 1986; Wekerle, 1980; Hayden, 1981, 1984). This work primarily criticised how urban planners participated in creating gendered environments predominantly suited for the needs of men and the heteronormative family (Beebeejaun, 2017). It didn't fully engage with planning theory per se. Sandercock and Forsyth (1992) were one of the first scholars to claim that planning theory perspectives were deficient in incorporating feminist critiques and feminist literature into the debates (Sandercock and Forsyth, 1992). Sandercock took this stance further when she developed her approach to cosmopolis and multicultural cities (1997) positioning gender within other priorities in urban making, including diversity; by doing so she took the gender lens away from a sole focus on women' rights and needs. Surprisingly, gender has remained a neglected focus for theory and practice in shaping cities (Beebeejaun, 2017). This has resulted with planning and built environment experts primarily looking at practical gendered problems through the lens of urban design, masterplanning, education or policy making. This has included interest given to accessibility and mobility (including cycling), safety, but also education and practice including the barriers

encountered by women planners (Bicquelet-Lock et al. 2020). What those studies have been often missing out is an in-depth understanding of women's everyday lives in cities (Beebeejaun, 2017), specifically their spatial practices in and out of home, the way they engage with space, experience their rights and needs being neglected or denied but also find ways to have them exercised. As Beebeejaun (2017) notes, "the city is gendered through multiple actions and experiences of its inhabitants". The role of built environment experts and scholars is to understand those actions and experiences, particularly their complexity and intersectionality. To do so, and within a feminist framing, it is crucial to take a step back and focus specifically on what built environments mean for women living, working, socialising, shaping and navigating in urban spaces. In other words, to which types of urbanism should women be entitled and what should be the underpinnings for a *women-led urbanism*.

The aim of this issue is to reflect upon the future directions for research, policy and practice that built environment experts need to engage with in light with the significant transformations that are affecting urban spaces, cities and hence women's everyday living conditions, not only in a post-pandemic context but also in a context of accumulated crises which have been affecting women dramatically. Women-led urbanism needs to be understood in a systemic way and be inclusive of the micro, meso and macro scales within which women's everyday living is situated and impacted. Such a systemic approach is essential so as to allow comparative and interdisciplinary discussion amongst built environment scholars with deep understanding of very diverse urban contexts where women deserve more attention and care than we see currently. The term *urbanism* is important. Let us remember here that Peter Hall (2013) used this term (and not 'planning') to engage with the idea of good cities. He viewed and understood urbanism as a process and a range of dynamics entrenched in the aim of creating liveable places (rather than regulations and control which in essence have always been all about permanence and stability). Urbanism is also a commonly used concept in urban theory when referring to the grammar of the city (McFarlane, 2011) and the reading of the urbanisation process. Engaging with the underpinnings and directions of a women-led urbanism thus responds to Beebeejaun's (2017, p.323) call for "fuller recognition of the contested publics that coexist within the contemporary city and the gendered mediation of everyday experiences [which] could enable planners and policy makers to undertake more inclusive forms of intervention in urban space."

### A framework for women-led urbanism

So, what is and should be a women-led urbanism? Women-led urbanism is to be understood as a process of producing liveable places that accounts for women's every rights and needs and by doing so nable women to better protect themselves from the various pressures and threats they encounter. It is also a form of urban making that allows women to adapt, thrive and empower.

Fundamentally, and in line with the approaches authors have adopted in this special issue, women-led urbanism is constructed upon three core pillars: feminism, intersectionality and a

decolonial approach to reading cities and the production of space. As such it fits within wider calls for a "feminist analytic requires the promotion of a new kind of global urban studies that takes seriously women's struggles, strategies and everyday desires" (Peak, 2016, p.219). The feminist lens allows illumination of the varying over time and interconnected processes of social reproduction and production often overlooked in urban theorization (Nasya et al. 2023); this encompasses women's practices and actions in their everyday life (Arruzza et al., 2019) including paid and unpaid labour in society and their role in creating and sustaining social relations allowing capitalism to continue (Ferguson, 2008; Norton & Katz, 2017). It highlights the importance for urbanists to engage with the crisis of care (Fraser, 2017) arising from the gendered and racialised social reproduction of labour that has been rendered invisible through normalized patriarchal and (neo)colonial relations (Nasya et al. 2023 citing Federici, 2014).

This crisis of care is embedded within dire and precarious living conditions for women. It concerns all cities and urban contexts but is exemplified in the Global South where the state provision of good and services is incomplete (Nasya et al. 2023), where rising entrenched inequalities push vulnerable poor households to use informal coping practices and survival mechanisms (Andres et al. 2023) and where, as a result of these disfunctions, dynamics of social reproduction fall on women (Miraftab, 2005). Marginalisation, everyday survival and wider structural inequalities means that women's rights and needs are left aside (Chant & McIlwaine, 2016; Razavi, 2020; Tacoli & Satterthwaite, 2013, Holliss et al, 2023). Such inequalities have been reinforced further with the COVID-19 pandemic during which women faced increased violence, immobility and under-representation (Bichard & Ramster, 2021, Holliss, 2021, Parker et al., this issue, Üçoğlu et al., 2021). The decolonial lens inherent to women-led urbanism is here crucial to unpack systems of power and domination and also the forms of knowledge production leading to gender inequalities (Koleth et al., 2023). It is also crucial in giving voices to those women through participatory research methods to enable cocreation and South-South / South-North dialogues. Similarly, intersectionality is key here and has been central in feminist theory to analyse women struggle and how they connect to intersecting factors (e.g. age, sex, gender, ethnicity, disability, and socioeconomic status). Those factors are shaped by processes and structures of power (e.g., law, policies, state governments, religious institutions, media) to create an interplay of advantages and vulnerabilities (Hankivsky & Kapilashrami, 2020; Castan Broto and Neves Alves, 2018). Being able to assess the intersecting factors leading to women's crisis of care fostered by crisis patriarchy is an integral part of women-led urbanism.

Women-led urbanism is also about giving a stronger voice to women, acknowledge, address and promote their rights and needs. Doing so involves unpacking visible and more hidden vulnerabilities affecting women's spatialities and ability to take equal part in the production of urban spaces. It thus differs from dominant approaches to planning and urban design who have approached this solely through diversity and inclusivity, typically in the UK context (Beebeejaun, 2017). The promotion of rights through pro-active engagement with women's needs in urban spaces and a focus on their wellbeing and safety as well as their empowerment and productivity aligns with Irazàbel and Huerta's (2016) and Beebeejaun's (2017) approach to planning as a way of contributing "to progressive struggles for greater rights to the city and

socio-spatial justice for minoritized people" (Beebeejaun, 2017, p. 725, citing Irazàbel and Huerta, 2016). Women-led urbanism, its connection to everyday rights and the production of good and socially just cities, is intrinsically anchored in more traditional urban theories, typically Lefebvre's (1991) and De Certeau's (1984) approaches to the everyday production of space; it resonates with the way spaces are shaped through struggles and expressions of rights but also thanks to diverse temporalities also informing urban practices and routines (refering here to Lefebvre's (2004) rhythmanalysis).

Women-led urbanism thus offers a new appreciation of women's agency. It offers a feminist lens on lived experiences and knowledge frequently overlooked as 'ordinary'. It also allows moving away from irrelevant 'great man' assumptions embedded in the dyadic leader-follower model oriented towards relationality (Raelin, 2011, 2018, Rosile, et al. 2018, Ospina & Foldy, 2010). As a type of urbanism constructed *for/by* women and framed with the view that women are entitled to have their rights and needs met in urban setting, it re-questions power relationships. Empowerment isn't about the rules and enforcement inherent in hierarchical leadership, but pertains to participation and contributions to urban-making. Agency isn't then constructed as a matter of autonomous political actors acting for individualised interests, but through women's enactment of the self within social belonging and emergent collective interests, in the tradition of post-heroic leadership (Fletcher, 2004). In addition to greater voice, women's agency is *de facto* engaged through leading within collective activities and power relations (Ospina et al., 2020, Quick, 2015). These are intrinsically connected to how women use, produce and evolve within urban settings, on an everyday basis.

As Beebeejaun (2017) notes, feminist scholarship hasn't fully engaged with everyday temporalities and how those temporalities emerge as contested sites for identity and rights. Indeed, "It is within the everyday that a complex set of spaces, feelings of belonging, and rights to the city can emerge or be challenged" (Beebeejaun (2017, p.328). It is thus within the everyday temporalities of urban making and the crisis of care that women-led urbanist sits and offers a new lens for urban scholars and built environment expert to engage with its future directions.

# A comparative and international approach to women-led urbanism

The papers included in this special issue offer an international set of cases that empirically illustrate the diversity of women's everyday urban experiences. They also unpack the intersectional burdens and structural barriers that women face inhibiting or triggering reactive transformational change. These contributions illuminate the risk-taking involved, and women's courage - both physically and psychologically - in reshaping patriarchally dominated urban processes and providing alternative leadership. Together, they demonstrate the significant power of women-led urbanism to take ownership of their everyday, and express their rights, needs, and agency.

To begin, Brenda Parker, Magdalena Rivera and Martín Alvarez in their paper 'Bodies Holding up Communities', provide a deep exploration of women's caring work. They

demonstrate how responsibilities of feeding and nurturing their own families and others overwhelmingly falls on them. They unpack the physicality of caring duties in settings where women need to carry water and waste, care for others while financially managing other tasks in peripheral neighbourhoods in Santiago, Chile. By investigating social and spatial dynamics, the experiences of carers in social housing projects are examined, focusing on gendered inequalities and violence, which were amplified during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Chilean case demonstrates the neglect of women's needs through the conspicuous lack of care, not just seen as a lack of caring support (a long-standing issue) but as a violence that is 'invisible' and 'slowly accruing'. This results in intersectional burdens being amplified by having to share poor quality, unhygienic, and over-occupied living spaces, which manifests in two ways. Firstly, in the unavailability of public and third space to conduct caring duties, including children and others under their care. Secondly, in the poor transport provision that causes isolation and low mobility, deepening barriers to accessing everyday amenities of sanitation and household supplies. In carrying the brunt of caring, and especially where the state is absent, women's health and well-being are degraded, which Parker, Rivera and Alvarez conclude is a form of 'slow infrastructural violence'. The policy recommendations proposed centre on giving space to women's voices and agency, by pushing back against the devaluing and demeaning of caregiving with discursively constructed understandings of the infrastructures and actors involved.

Turning to Paul Moawad's paper 'Empowerment through Waiting Modalities', the everyday experience of women is approached with a Lefebvrian 'rhythmanalysis' lens and an ethnographic examination of waiting practices amongst Syrian female refugees without access to legal or socio-economic rights. It pays particular attention to the chilling effects of patriarchal factors on self-empowerment, and the forces of resistance that persist even where material choices are extremely constrained for refugees living in informal tented settlements, in the Lebanese-Syrian borderscape. The study illuminates the multifarious forms of control over men and women, including gender norms of employment and sectoral engagement, the dire need for earnings, the insecurity of tenure and racketeering landlordism. Within this context, and as a mode of coping and empowerment, women engage with socio-economic practices previously forbidden or restricted to them. Location is important here and especially with the proximity to the homeland. This allows women to engage in rhythmic activities challenging previous gendered roles. They reclaim space through remembered cultural practices and engage with traditionally male roles. Women also reshape their temporary constructed living spaces (albethey extremely impoverished) by garnering their sense of agency as individuals and using newly built socio-cultural networks. Doing so allows them to change their modes of waiting from passive to active and enabling various forms of small-scale empowerment.

The next two papers provide studies from Colombia and the first of these is Friederike Fleischer's investigation entitled 'Home, Shelter, Trap'. It centres on feminist critiques of domestic ontologies of home, where home isn't a place of living, a place for the family or a place where a woman is safe. The author focuses on gendered issues of well-being and personal security and revisits pandemic experiences of women employed as 'domestic workers' in

Bogotá. Fleischer draws out the intersectionality of gender and social class highlighting its significance for women in domestic labour who mainly live in peripheral places of high density and in poor-quality built environments, far away from the central residences where they perform cleaning duties. She analyses how their deprived living conditions are further exacerbated by poor amenities and a lack of social provision, with homes located in geologically unsafe locations (e.g. prone to landslides), and generally lacking access to public services. Her study of lock-down labour and everyday experience of home, accounts for the impacts of health-related protective measures - typically 'stay-at-home', sanitation, and social distancing - and women's responses to them. During this period, employment in domestic labour fell dramatically, leading to job loss without compensation. For women whose domestic labour continued, their cleaning duties increased and social distancing measures created further burden as transit became more limited/infrequent. In such a context, women were found to take up unsafe alternative means of income. Alternative strategies, or 'pro-social behaviours', involved neighbourhood solidarity and women (typically mothers) falling back on social ties.

Lirio Gutiérrez Rivera's work on 'Responding with Care' covers neighbourhoods of Medellín where criminal groups impose exclusions, co-opt spaces and perpetrate domestic violence against women and girls. The paper echoes some of lessons from Parker, Rivera, and Alvarez around caring as an embodied, normatively gendered and under-valued practice. It analyses women's responses (here community leaders) to the everyday threats they encounter and their adaptations to caring needs. Violence in this instance is the trigger for a faster and criminal (albeit normalised) reduction of access neighbourhood amenity rather than low or poor quality built environments per se. Patriarchal norms and structural barriers for women in community leadership roles are dictated by the power hold by male gangs or *combos* who exert dominance over public spaces for illicit activity involving drugs and firearms. By their actions, they limit access for play or right of way. Women's coping and adaptative responses include providing shelter from partner violence and organising everyday resilience tactics, including reclaiming spaces, cleaning them and facilitating sports and cultural activities, thus expanding access for themselves and others. Courage plays a crucial role in exerting agency as the perpetrators of violence are part of the community and exercising physical threats to those who challenge them.

Our final two papers both review and critique iconic feminist causes in the UK. Karen Horwood and Charlotte Morphet explore the antagonisms surrounding 'Women's Safety', both as a driver and a break on inclusion of women and women's needs in the work of planning. They argue that safety tends to be viewed as a stand-alone issue, separated from others, which is problematic. While the threat of violence is all too real, the implication of technical design fix (e.g. with more lighting) overlooks the deeper patriarchal forces and exclusion of women from spaces of leadership. The paper revisits this in line with the evolution of the Women and Planning movement. By mobilising the capabilities model (Sen, 1992), the authors emphasise the importance of agency through choice, in contrast with paternalist precautionary policy. Critical areas for gender equality are noted, which reflect the findings in other papers, particularly mobility, time-autonomy, body integrity, and domestic work. Horwood and Morphet draw out the situated nature of issues, where local specificities matter greatly, and

emphasise the cross-cutting nature of women's needs when seen as capability considerations for planning (e.g. bringing together transport with housing and employment). They emphasise the need to go beyond narrow modelling of 'what it is to feel safe', and their analysis demonstrates the need to engage with lived experience.

The final paper from Clara Eirich, 'I Need to Pee', presents the everyday reality of gendered inequalities with the example of accessing public toilets in London. This basic requirement for all people to have convenience in the built environment is a recurrent topic in built environment debates, and here the intersectional nature and lived experience of women of diverse ages is foregrounded. Access to toilets is framed as an embodied and mundane dimension of the right to the city, and the visceral nature of structural exclusions of women's needs is revealed. Following on from a history of the privileging of male needs, recent London trends, and pandemic experiences, the paper demonstrates how women's needs go way beyond individualised bodily relief to include others' needs (i.e. mainly children). The way these needs are often ignored means that women's right to enjoy the city freely is affected; knowledge about toilet access becomes a crucial factor in planning trips along with other forms of coping and adaptation, including 'just in case' tactics. Eirich emphasises the need to embrace diverse intersectional struggles, which builds forwards from previous women-focused issues of Built Environment (Bowlby, 1984, 1991, Reeves, 1996), particularly Bowlby's (1991) analysis of the stylistic and functional norms assumed by a paternalist gaze for women and girls activities. Eirich's work reinforces the need to go beyond abstracted technical design fixes arguments, and have an appreciation of the everyday needs and right of women and their collective activities.

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