

## Sex (Roles) and the City

Chiara Belingardi<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>DiCEA, chiara.belingardi@uniroma1.it

**Abstract:** In the last years a new wave of feminism arise, showing how the violence against women is still present in contemporary society. Violence against can be intended both as direct (domestic violence, harassment, ...) or structural (pay gap, less opportunity, less listening in the public arenas). The paper aim to show different aspects of structural violence affecting women, coming from urban environment. They can be recognized in more difficult in access to houses, to public spaces, to spaces of self-organization; in the preference given to private transports than to public ones in the mobility management of the cities; in the difficult to conciliate productive and reproductive activities; the lack of representativeness of women in the design and planning disciplines. The last issue is object of different international research in recent years, and can be one of the causes of the little attention payed by planners to gender issue.

**Keywords:** gender issues, violence on women, city of difference, wellbeing

### Introduction

In recent years the debate about the violence against women arise internationally, spreading at institutional and grassroots level. Researchers in various disciplines (both social science - humanities and STEM) started to rethink about their way to do scientific investigations and the role of women in the professions.

In 2011 it was held by the Council of Europe an international conference in Istanbul about violence against women. The charter emerging from the debate was ratified in most country of Europe. The *Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*, known as *Istanbul Convention* is a point of reference in the debate. In the Preamble some definitions of different forms of Violence against women are provided. Beside the blame of any form of direct and domestic violence against women, it is written: *Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men, which have led to domination over, and discrimination against, women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women; it has to be recognised the structural nature of violence against women as gender-based violence, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men* (Council of Europe, 2011).

In 2015 starting from Argentina a new feminist wave arise. *Ni una menos* is a *collective scream against the violence against women*. Starting from Latin America the scream spread all over the world. In Italy in the same year many women unite themselves in NonUnaDiMeno, a feminist movement. The first acts of the movement were the organization of a big march and the collective writing of a *Feminist plan against male violence against women and gender-based violence* (Piano femminista contro la violenza maschile sulle donne). Also this document deal with the concept of *Structural violence*, meaning all the direct and indirect forms of violence: *When we affirm that violence is systemic, we mean that its forms of expression are multiple and transversal: in fact, they touch all the areas of our lives, constantly weaving between them.* (NonUnadiMeno, 2017).

This paper deals with some of the forms of structural violence against women emerging by the urban environment. Since many years it has been underlined that urban environment is not neutral, but it is instead designed under the exigences of a certain type of user: male, white, adult (Sandercock, 1998). This has been claimed in several scripts, as *Making space: women and the man-made environment*, wrote by the collective Matrix in 1984 (Matrix, 1984), or the seminal text *What Would a Non-Sexist City Be Like? Speculations on Housing, Urban Design, and Human Work* wrote by Dolores Hayden (1980), and in some international documents, as the *European Charter for Women in the City* (1994). These documents denounce the invisibility of women in urban environment both as user and producer.

The paper will deal with both forms of invisibility (violence) and is structured as follow: the first part is about the professional gap among men and women in the design professions (architects, planners); the second part is about the demand of women as city users; the conclusions will provide some suggestion on how planners and policymakers could act against violence against women.

### **Room (of one's own) at the top**

The title of this chapter is the mesh of two title of texts: one is the renown *A room of one's own* (Woolf, 1929), the other is *Room at the top? Sexism and the Star System in Architecture* (Scott-Brown, 1989). The text of Virginia Wolf deal with feminine creativity: the author wrote that the creativity need room (in physical and metaphorical meaning) in which the creator can be alone for all the time needed for the creative activity. This kind of space is traditionally denied to women, as they could be constantly distracted by demands and exigences of husbands and children. Actually the problem of the conciliation of time to be dedicated to family and professional work is at the centre of feminist debate since the first women started to work out of home. The lack of room and time is one of obstacles for women professionals, but not the only one.

The roots of the problem are to be looked first in the denial for women to access the professional education and to the profession. It was not possible to women going to university, especially the technical ones. The first schools opened to women were in the United States (1873 Illinois School of Architecture; 1888 American Institute of Architects). In Europe the first graduate was Signe Hornborg in 1890 a Helsinki (Mattogno, 2013). In Italy the first graduate in Engineering was Emma Strada in 1908 at Turin Polytechnic (Galbani, 2001). In Rome, it was possible to access the faculty of Engineering in 1910. The first was Elena Sadowska, who after her degree went back in Russia. The second one, Bice Crova, had a long professional and scientific life, but notwithstanding the long enrolment as "free lecturer" in the Faculty, she never achieved a permanent position, neither was appointed as professor.

After the graduation the second obstacle were (are) the prejudices conscious or unconscious women face. To many people once they get their graduation, still don't have the capacity to going larger than interior design (Mattogno, 2013; Rodano, 2010). Mostly they design with their husbands, fathers, brothers or colleagues, and they don't sign the projects. For this reason a lot of the projects women did in the last century is forgotten, unknown, overshadowed or credited to the male partner. Also this is one of the reason the Architectural world is a male world: because women architects are mostly unknown. In 1989 Denise Scott-Brown, partner and spouse of Bruno Venturi, wrote *Room at the Top? Sexism and the Star System in Architecture* (Scott-Brown, 1989). It took 15 years to decide to publish it. A sentence is exemplary: *I watched as he was manufactured into an architectural guru before my eyes, and, to some extent, on the basis of our work* (Ivi: 237). The work architect Scott-Brown did was so little recognized that only he, of the design couple, received the prestigious Pritzker price in 1991.

In 2013 Ines Sanchez De Madariaga and Marion Roberts edited a book about gender and city planning (Sanchez de Madariaga, Roberts, 2013). In her introduction Marion Robert indicated the lack of women in design and planning professions as one of the main problem in the conquer of a *fair shared city* (Roberts, 2013). The topic was reprised by Ines Sanchez de Madariaga (2013), who in her contribution to the book presented the problem

more in deepen: *Contemporary research tends to see the processes of professionalisation as a form of control of occupations through which carefully designed jurisdictions and privileges guarantee the autonomy of a few, masked under a rhetorical discourse of objectivity and political disinterest* (Layne, 2009). *In this way overwhelmingly male elites have ensured their place in the hierarchy through patterns of homo-social reproduction* (ivi, 156).

However gender inequality in the design disciplines means not only the number of successful women architects, engineers or planners. It means the predominance of a “male” way of designing and planning, which is less sensitive to daily problems and challenges of being women (as it will demonstrated in the next paragraph). Male problems are considered as universal, while feminine once are considered as partial. So women designers should adapt themselves to male professional and design practice, with only few space for thinking on their own feminine practice and problems. Encourage and empowering women design means to encourage a different way of thinking urban spaces and citizens wellbeing.

Basing on the scripts left by women architects on their own way of designing (see Belingardi, forthcoming), it is possible to affirm that the way of being a women architects comprehend: adopting a situated looking and questioning traditional rules; starting from oneself, recognizing one's problems as collectives and designing the solution; designing in a not hierarchical way, enhancing different knowledges (see Dwyer J., Thorne A., 2007); focusing on listening, the relationship, the human (see Lonzi, 1982 and 2006). There could be more aspects, but starting to using and teaching these tools could start a revolution in the design professions.

### **Women's place is at home**

Thus women are not intended as city users.

Thinking about violence against women in city, generally means to deal with physical violence perpetrated by unknown men in public space. This is why public policies generally address the prevention of this risk through policies of public order (increasing police, exclusion of populations considered as indecorous, order). These policies have the effect of limiting women's freedom of movement and increasing the perception of risk. For this reason, in the face of a non-increase in the number of crimes, the autonomy of movement in urban environment of the categories at risk or of weak street users: children, elderly and even women in part have decreased. Policies and projects made to act against this kind of violence comprehend: maps of risk (even made through app), manuals to go on the streets, “rape-prevention tips”, and so on. These kind of devices have the main effect of giving to women the responsibility of the violence act and enforcing victim blaming.

Focusing on the statistics, it appears that the less safe place for women is their home, and that women have more possibility to be harassed or beaten by their husbands or man they know. Just to delivery an example, in Italy in 2016 149 women have been killed, 109 of them have been killed by their partner, ex-partner or relative (Alleva, 2018). It is safer for a women stay in public or collective space then at home, even thinking about the possibility of being helped by anyone (friends, strangers, police). So one of the challenges for planners to acting against violence against women should focusing on domestic violence.

Moreover, thinking about violence against women in cities it is important to shifting the focus also on structural violence. That means that cities are designed and planned for white, adult men (Sandercock 1998). That means that are planned to ease the problem of productive work, instead of reproductive one. Most of women in the contemporary ages still face the problem of conciliate the productive work with the reproductive one (Macchi, 2006): they have the charge of their job and also of cleaning home, providing meals, caring of children or elderly. Planners cannot deal with family agreements, but they can do something about public services and facilities and their locations in the city, about paths people have to cover (in terms of difficult and length/duration), about collective spaces.

Lack of safety and wellbeing in public spaces and in the streets can also affect women's daily life, not for their being weak users, but for their task of accompanying truly weak users (children, elderly, ...). About the mobility in the city, Silvia Macchi defined women's mobility way like "costal navigation": not long travel as commuters, but many little transfers (Macchi, 2006). This kind of mobility is considered as irregular, unexpected by current mobility design and technics, but for most women correspond to their daily path, due to the different duties to be completed during the day.

Also public space are designed with men as parameters, as it has been demonstrated by the case of Einsiedlerpark in Vienna (see Irschick, Kail, 2013). The park had facilities geared to interests of boys and male adolescents, with the results that girls and female adolescents didn't use it. Or: girls and female adolescents had less possibilities in using the park even if it was a public space in a neighbourhood densely built up, due to the male made design of the park. As a result of two workshops involving specifically girls it emerged that girls, for example, had problems in using an enclosed cage playground to play with the ball due to the predominance of boys and overall to the presence of only a door to in-going and out-going. Also sports facilities were made for male-preferred sports. So the city organized a competition to re-design Einsiedlerpark and another park, named Saint Johann by taking in account what emerged in the participatory workshops. Moreover the city offices wrote the *Guidelines for Gender-sensitive Park Design*. Since 2007 these recommendations, together with the general Park Design Guidelines, constitute the planning basis for all new project (ivi).

### **Conclusion: a planners' plan against violence against women**

In the first two parts of the paper, gender - inequality was shown in the planning and design of cities. it has been said that this is primarily due to the minoritization of women in the project disciplines, to the greater difficulty they face in the construction of their careers and to the lack of recognition of their work. So one of the first actions to do to build a fair shared city, or to take action against violence against women in urban environment, is to reduce this gap, not only in terms of the number of women architects and planners, but above all in terms of how to design. It means to let female designers formulate projects starting by their own experience and point of view.

With regard to urban environment it has been said that women suffer direct violence (especially in the domestic environment) and indirect violence, due to the fact that cities are built only for others (male).

About the domestic violence, it appears urgent to design some policies to facilitate the access to social housing, or housing at low price for women (and children) at risk to suffer violence. In this way women, who generally are the economically poorest part of a couple, could be facilitated to move in safer space and to conquer their independence. It appears also useful to increase places in which women can meet and stay together, intertwining relationships of sisterhood among themselves (this is useful also for fighting against structural violence).

About public spaces, it should be important to stop using the image of women as potential victim in public spaces, also to justify security interventions. It is instead important to create safe and pleasant places in which women (and men) feel good. In this way people could use public spaces and create the sense of wellness and neighbourhood safeness of which spoke Jane Jacobs (1961). To create comfortable public spaces also for girls and women (public space, parks and playground), it is important to incorporate their point of view in the design, basing of their real participation and not in stereotype. As it was shown by the example of Einsiedlerpark in Vienna, this point of view is rarely taken in account, as it is assumed the male one as universal.

About urban mobility is seems important to care for and encourage short travel path made by foot, bike and public transport or mixing the way of moving. In this way they would be ease the routes made in the neighbourhood, and children and youngsters autonomous mobility. Positive consequences of these decisions would concern environment and people wellness.



Finally is important to create collective spaces: a women's home in every neighbourhood. Born as separate spaces of feminist movement, at present women's home opened their activities also to queer persons, children and men. These these places are not spaces of service, in which to go in the moment of need, or to solve some problems, but places "of desire", in which it is possible for every woman to realize the desire she has for herself and for her environment (social and physical) of life.

## Acknowledgements

What is wrote in this paper has been deepen through common research and thought shared with Federica Castelli and Serena Olcuire (Atelier Città, Iaph Italia), Claudia Mattogno (DICEA Sapienza), and Le Pantegane.

## References

Alleva G., 2018, *Donna oltre il silenzio. Riflessione multidisciplinare sul fenomeno della violenza sulle donne*. Date of access: 04/06/2019.

[https://www.istat.it/files/2018/03/Violenza-di-genere\\_Prof.-G.-Alleva.pdf](https://www.istat.it/files/2018/03/Violenza-di-genere_Prof.-G.-Alleva.pdf)

Belingardi C., forthcoming, *Architetta non si nasce, lo si diventa*. In: *La libertà è una passeggiata*, edited by Belingardi C., Castelli F., Olcuire S. (Roma: IAPh Italia).

COE, Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Preamble), Istanbul May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011, Date of access: 30/05/2019.

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/090000168008482e>

Dwyer J., Thorne A., 2007, *Evaluating Matrix: notes from inside the collective*, in *Altering Practices* (London: Routledge).

Galbani A. M., 2001, *Donne al Politecnico di Milano: studenti e docenti dalle origini al 1950*. In: *Donne politecniche. Atti del Convegno e Catalogo della Mostra*, Milano, 22 maggio 2000, edited by A. M. Galbani (Milano: Scheiwiller).

Hayden D. (1980). *What Would a Non-Sexist City Be Like? Speculations on Housing, Urban Design, and Human Work*. In *Signs*, no. 3, vol. 5, pp. 170-187.

Jacobs J., 1961, *The death and life of great American cities*. (New York: Vintage book).

Irschick E, Kail E., 2013, *Vienna: Progress Toward a Fair Shared City*. In: *Fair Shared Cities. The impact of Gender Planning in Europe*, edited by M. Roberts, I. Sanchez de Madariaga. (London-New York: Routledge)

Lonzi M., 2004, *Autenticità e progetto*. (Milano: Jaca Book).

Lonzi M., 1982, *L'architetto fuori di sé*. (Milano: Prototipi. Scritti di rivolta femminile).

Macchi S., 2006, *Politiche urbane e movimenti di donne: specificità del caso italiano*. In: *La città delle donne. Un approccio di genere alla geografia urbana*, edited by G. Cortesi, F. Cristaldi, J. Droogleever (Bologna: Patron).

Mattogno C., 2013, *Muse, committenti, progettiste. Il lungo percorso delle donne in architettura*. In *TRIA 10* (1/2013), Napoli, pp. 71-84.

Matrix, 1984, *Making space: women and the man-made environment*. (London: Pluto press).

NonUnaDiMeno, 2017, *Abbiamo un piano. Piano femminista contro la violenza maschile sulle donne e la violenza di genere*, Date of access: 30/05/2019.

[https://nonunadimeno.files.wordpress.com/2017/11/abbiamo\\_un\\_piano.pdf](https://nonunadimeno.files.wordpress.com/2017/11/abbiamo_un_piano.pdf)

Roberts M., 2013, *Introduction: Concepts, Themes and issues in a Gendered Approach to Planning*. In: *Fair Shared Cities. The impact of Gender Planning in Europe*, edited by I. Sanchez Madariaga, M. Roberts (London-New York: Routledge).

Rodano M., 2010, *Memorie di una che c'era. Una storia dell'UDI*. (Milano: il Saggiatore).

Sanchez de Madariaga, 2013, *Opening the Gates: A case-Study of Decision-making and recognition in Architecture*. In: *Fair Shared Cities. The impact of Gender Planning in Europe*, edited by M. Roberts, I. Sanchez de Madariaga. (London-New York: Routledge).

Sandercock, L., 1998, *Toward Cosmopolis. Planning for Multicultural Cities*. (London: John Wiley and Sons)

Scott Brown D., 1989, Room at the top? Sexism and the Star System in Architecture. In: Architecture: a place for women, edited by E. P. Berkeley. (Washington- London: Smithsonian Institution Press).

Woolf, V., 1929, *A room of one's own*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company).

