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Gender Capability Gaps in Public Space:
Implications for Urban Infrastructure

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Gender Capability Gaps in Public Space: Implications for Urban Infrastructures

OUTLINE

- Well-being, Capabilities, Functionings
- Intertemporality dimensions: Infrastructure, Intergenerationality
- Public goods
- Urban Space
- Providers vs Users
- Wrapping Up

WELLBEING: Quality of Life

? What kind of a life is a person leading?

? What does a person succeed in doing and being?

Actual Functionings

? What are the real opportunities (freedoms) to achieve functionings?

Capabilities

? What are the ways of transforming capabilities?

(towards enhancing opportunities)

Institutions

(A. Sen, M. Nussbaum, I. Robeyns, and followers)

Capabilities and Public Policy:

*«Practical action to convert capabilities into functionings
for every individual»*

i.e. public policies can be instrumental to
expanding set of capabilities
through which promotion of human rights can be achieved

BECAUSE

*«capabilities approach helps clarify the theory of human rights as ethical claims
that impose positive obligations, and provides a robust defense of economic
and social rights.» (Fukuda-Parr, 2011:74)*

CURRENT LITERATURE ON	LESS ATTENTION FUTURE RESEARCH
Gender and Infrastructure	Age Intergenerationality
Age and Infrastructure	Gender Intergenerationality
Gender and Capabilities	Age Intergenerationality Infrastructure
Gender Responsive Budgeting (Well-being GRB)	Age Intergenerationality Infrastructure (Investment)

MULTIDIMENSIONALITY of INTERTEMPORALITIES: Past – Present – Future

INFRASTRUCTURE

Policy mindset, design,
construction,
maintenance, service

FUNCTIONALITIES

Mobility, Safety
Accessibility

pre- (before)

peri- (during)

post- (after)

USERS (beneficiaries):

GENERATIONS: spillovers to
future generations

GENDER

Public goods and services are inputs to capabilities,

hence conversion into functionings

Public policy domains:

1. Physical (Built in) Infrastructure: investment in buses, bus stops and constructing sidewalks, roads, parks
2. Maintenance of physical infrastructure
3. Related service provision

Framework of analysis: Public Economics 101

Characteristic	RIVAL	NON-RIVAL (SOCIAL)
EXCLUDABLE	PRIVATE GOOD (MARKET) • Price	IMPURE PUBLIC GOOD: CLUB GOOD <u>All</u> benefit the same BUT! • Entry fee
NON-EXCLUDABLE (SOCIAL)	IMPURE PUBLIC GOOD: (COMMONS) COMMON POOL RESOURCES Available to <u>all!</u> BUT • No price	PURE PUBLIC GOOD Available to <u>all!</u> <u>All</u> benefit the same • No price

CAPABILITIES in THE URBAN SPACE in Everyday Life:

PUBLIC PROVISION: INFRASTRUCTURE & SERVICES

- Perspective:

beyond able-bodied young/ working age men and women?

gender lens

intergenerationality

- Design and maintenance
- Monitoring - outsourcing, sub-contracting

USER (beneficiary) BEHAVIOUR - externalities

Characteristic	RIVAL	NON-RIVAL (SOCIAL)		GENDER CAPABILITY
EXCLUDABLE	PRIVATE GOOD (MARKET) • Price	IMPURE PUBLIC GOOD: CLUB GOOD public transport • Ticket Price	PROVIDER & USER roles	MOBILITY
			Infrastructure + Maintenance + Services + User behaviour	
URBAN SPACE	IMPURE PUBLIC GOOD:	PURE PUBLIC GOOD	Infrastructure + Maintenance + Services +	ACCESS.
NON-EXCLUDABLE (SOCIAL)	(COMMONS) Park, Sidewalks, • No price Available to all!	Park, Sidewalks, • No price Available to all! All benefit same	Infrastructure + Maintenance + Services + User behaviour	SAFETY

A contrast: SHOPPING MALL vs URBAN SPACE

SHOPPING MALL : PURE PUBLIC GOOD ?

Note: public infrastructure and service by public authority

public city planning (infrastructure)

- Accessible: bus and subway stops in front (if users are safely mobile!)
- Free entry (no price)

Inside:



Inside a SHOPPING MALL: A PUBLIC SPACE

MANAGEMENT

- INFRASTRUCTURE

wide corridors (prams & wheel chairs), restrooms, baby changing, rubbish bins, lifts, escalators, sitting sets, kid entertainment areas
disability access,

- MAINTENANCE : perfect

- SERVICE: real time security monitoring, immediate intervention, cleaning, safety

Elementary AI: “Essential Design Principles for Shopping Malls” says:

- *Shopping malls serve as social spaces for entertainment, dining, and leisure*
- *Proper planning is crucial for blending these spaces into a cohesive environment*

Key Design Elements:

- *Site design includes orientation, parking layout, and pedestrian connectivity*
- *Malls must accommodate all age groups and accessibility needs*

INTERGENERATIONAL

ALL GENDERS (shops target women😊)

REMINDER



The public space checklist of the World Bank (2020:48)

“A city that works well for women, girls, and sexual and gender minorities of all ages and abilities, and that therefore supports their economic and social inclusion, is:

1. Accessible - freely, easily, and comfortably to use the spaces and services on offer.

2. Connected (mobility) Everyone can move around the city safely, easily, and affordably to reach key opportunities and services.

3. Safe - Everyone is free from real and perceived danger, in public and private.”

REMINDER



WELL-BEING SOCIAL INCLUSION SDG 11 Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable	11.2 By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.	11.2.1 Proportion of population that has convenient access to public transport, by sex, age and persons with disabilities.
	11.7 By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities	

URBAN SPACE:

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION:

INFRASTRUCTURE for accessibility and mobility

ACCESSIBILITY: streets

signage, curb ramps, lighting, paving material,
width for prams & wheel chairs, crossings and distances

+ MAINTENANCE

MOBILITY: public transport

lower step-ups for buses, ergonomics inside, reserved seats.

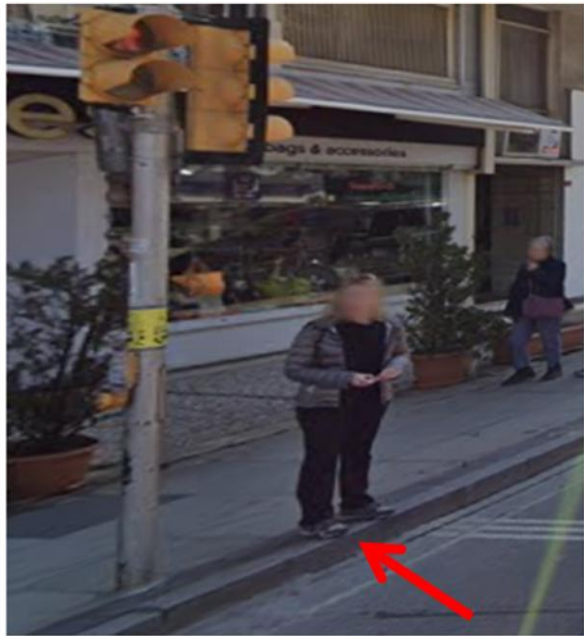
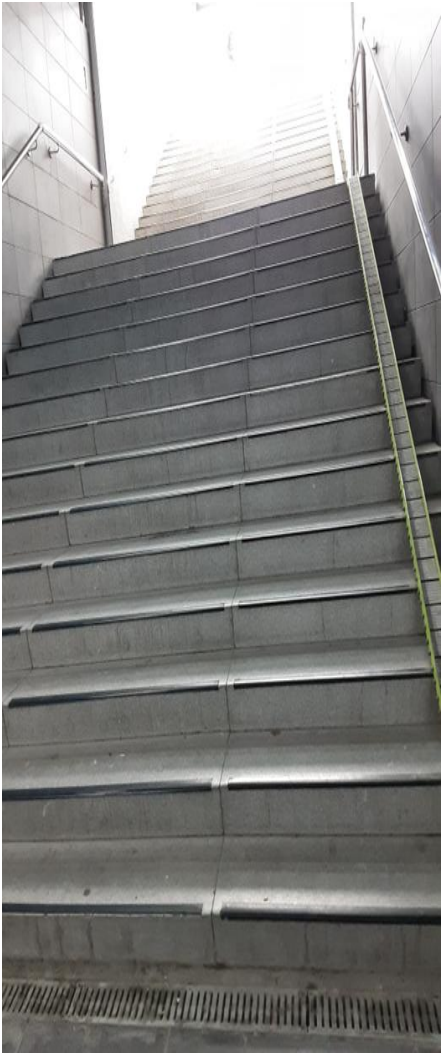
+ MAINTENANCE and SERVICE: transit stops, schedules,
frequency, connectivity, late night service, on demand stops

URBAN SPACE : PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION - INFRASTRUCTURE



Faulty pedestrian crossing, Istanbul

subway exit, Ankara, center,
no escalators& lifts



Urfa (southeast Türkiye) municipality swimming pools & services

Pool no.	Gender policy	Service: Free swimming courses
1	W & M days	
2		boys
3		boys
4		boys
5		boys
6	W & M days	boys & girls, W & M
7		boys
8		boys
9		boys
10		boys
11		boys

PERFECT INFRASTRUCTURE

IMPERFECT SERVICE

GENDER INEQUALITY? –
girls&boys



USER BEHAVIOUR : (Ref: Global Value Chain Analysis)

otherness – user responsibility:

SHOPPING MALL

- Users are non-rival and non-excludable
- Users behave with manners (responsibilities):
 - no negative externalities (litter, loud voice, harassment.....)

URBAN SPACE

- Users can be rival, negative externalities: depletion of commons?

Impure public good

? intergenerational and gender rights and capabilities at stake?

URBAN SPACE

USER BEHAVIOUR

Negative externalities by users:

SAFETY of women: harassment in public transport, dark streets- MEN!

WELL-BEING – ALL!:

- Users: litter on the streets, cars block pass ways & park on sidewalks
- Public space becomes impure public good-like commons (depletion)
- Public & private interrelated:

poor maintenance and monitoring and inattentive user behaviour

USER CONTRIBUTION TO IMPERFECTION OF PUBLIC GOODS
TO CAPABILITY GAPS FOR ALL



Istanbul, my street, but also voiced in the Balkans

POOR MONITORING BY PUBLIC AUTHORITY



WOMEN and GIRLS as USERS in URBAN SPACE

ADULTS

- Accompany kids
- Push prams, strollers
- Carers of older people (women)
- Go shopping (bags)
- Commute to work
- Drive less; more public transport

GIRLS

- Commute to school
- Go outing (shopping mall?)
- Go to social activities, sports

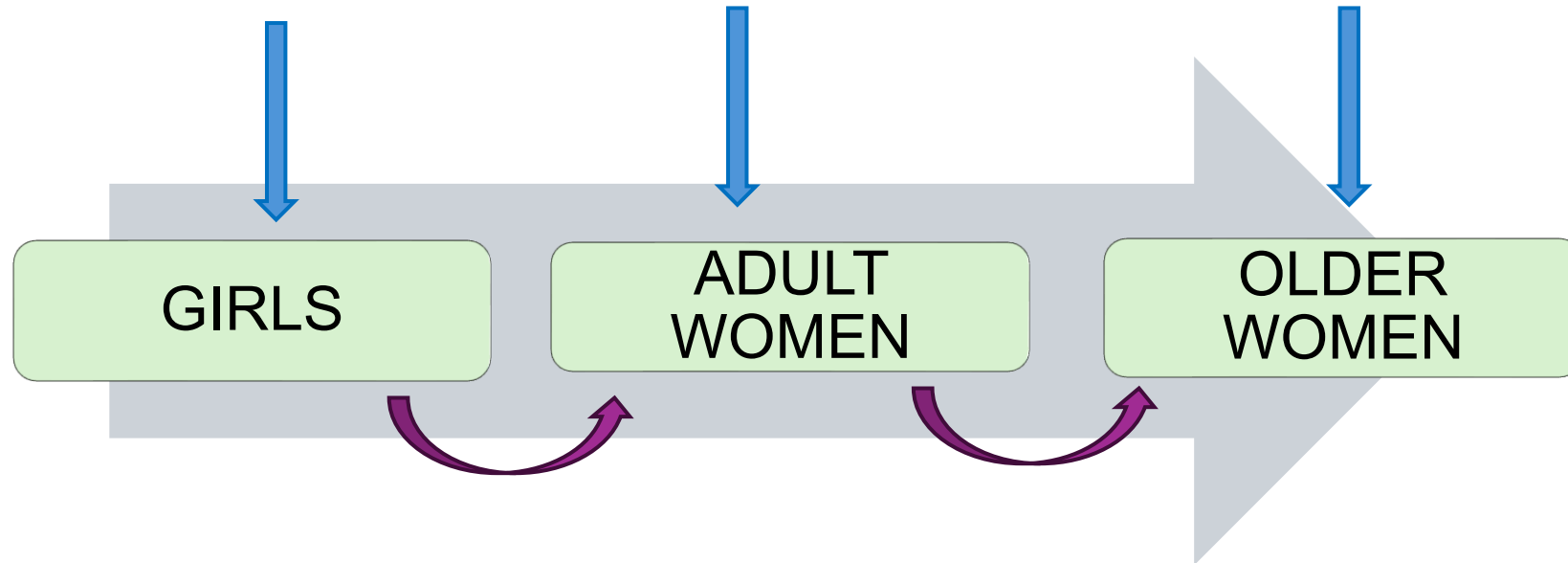
FACE

- Inconveniences
- Mental burden
- Harassment
- Safety issues
- Limited socialization
- Limited mobility spillovers

Dependence on
male company

INTERTEMPORALITY and INTERGENERATIONALITY: Past – Present – Future

INFRASTRUCTURE – Design, Construction, Maintenance, Monitoring



GENDER GAP IN FUNCTIONINGS

INTERGENERATIONAL GENDER GAP IN PERCEIVED CAPABILITY

ADDRESSING GENDER CAPABILITY GAPS

Future Research



ALL? USERS

Gender(s)

Age(s)

Socioeconomics:

Education

Employment

Poverty

URBAN SPACE Infrastructure ?

Socioeconomics:

Zones (periphery)

Spread

Facilities

Sense of belonging?
Sense of publicness?
Externalities?

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION ?

Policy Design and Practice:

Gender lens beyond markers

Organization structure

Technical & Social depts.

Behind satisfaction surveys:

Research (academy, CSOs)

Budget priority with user lens

Right Holders

Duty Bearers

THANK YOU!

COMMENTS WELCOME!



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- <https://www.cambridgema.gov/participatorybudgeting>
- <https://www.re-thinkingthefuture.com/rtf-fresh-perspectives/a1622-10-things-to-remember-while-designing-shopping-malls/>

* Thanks to architects T. Pekiçten, D. Karaca, E. Acar and R. Cengiz for mind opening exchanges on shopping malls in urban life and to C. Şenesen for tips on urban space users in the new times.

For further interest

See below

IBRD/World Bank (2020) Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning Design by Terraza et al.
<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/33197/145305.pdf> pp.83-84

Public Space Checklist

INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMFORT:

- Are there well-maintained and adequate public toilets for both men and women?
- Are there rubbish bins throughout the public space?
- Are there places to sit and rest?
- Is there adequate shade?
- Are there vendors or kiosks?

CONNECTIVITY:

- Is the public space easily accessed from the surrounding neighborhood?
- Are there sidewalks surrounding the public space?
- Do the paths within the park take people where they want to go, or are people consistently walking off paths for more convenience?
- Are there transit stops located nearby for enhanced connectivity?
- Is there adequate directional signage or wayfinding within the space?

World Bank (2020) Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning Design by Terraza et al. pp.83-84

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/33197/145305.pdf>

PUBLIC SAFETY:

- Are there clear sight lines within the public space? Is the interior of the space visible from the street or entrances?
- Is there overgrown or non-maintained vegetation that hinders visibility?
- Are there fences or walls that block clear pathways to exits?
- Is there any visible policing? If so, when are they on duty?
- Are there people or groups of people within the park that make women feel unsafe?
- Is there the presence of alcohol or drug dealing?

World Bank (2020) Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning Design by Terraza et al. pp.83-84

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/33197/145305.pdf>

OCCUPANCY:

- Are there people using the public space, and at what times?
- What types of activities are people engaged in? Is there a mix of physically active and more sedentary recreational opportunities?
- Are people using the space to stop and rest, or are they passing through it?
- What are the areas that people are using the most?
- Is there a mix of men, women, girls, and boys using the public space? What ages?
- Is the space accessible to people with disabilities or with special needs?

LIGHTING:

- Are the existing lights in working condition?
- Are the lights distributed evenly so all parts of the public space are well-lit?
- Are all pedestrian walkways lit?

CAMBRIDGE – BOSTON-USA, PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING-INFRASTRUCTURE AND BEYOND:

<https://www.cambridgema.gov/participatorybudgeting>

“The results of the 12th cycle of Participatory Budgeting were announced at the March 18, 2026 Vote Results Party at Cambridge City Hall. The following nine projects won \$1,032,000 in PB12 funding:

- *[Fixing Sidewalks, Saving Trees \(\\$100,000\)](#)*
- *[More Complete Streets \(\\$200,000\)](#)*
- *[Transportation Assistance Services \(\\$50,000\)](#)*
- *[Cold and Wet Weather Kits \(\\$60,000\)](#)*
- *[Rain and Pollinator Gardens \(\\$100,000\)](#)*
- *[Supporting Continuous Access to School Supplies \(\\$12,000\)](#)*
- *[Residential Rat Control \(\\$110,000\)](#)*
- *[Concrete Barriers for Bike Lanes \(\\$150,000\)](#)*
- *[Basketball Court Upgrades \(\\$250,000\)](#)*

Thank you to the 10,172 Cambridge residents that voted this year!”