

CATALONIAN NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT LAW: THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE AS A PLANNING TOOL¹

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ABSTRACT :The Catalan Law 2 / 2004, improvement for districts, urban areas and villages that require special attention, has been a leading tool to start developing an urban planning with a gender perspective. The point 6 of the law is about the promotion of equal opportunities in the use of public facilities and public spaces by the means of urban renovation.

A comparative analysis of a selection of the proposals submitted so far, and an on-site analysis of the projects already completed will permit to draw the evolution of the application of gender perspective on urban planning.

Summing up, this research could be the opportunity to review what has been done and how, giving as result new recommendations for next interventions to be applying the gender perspective in urban planning.

KEYWORDS: Urban renewal. Gender perspective. Neighbourhoods. Everyday life. Catalanian urbanism.

I/ INTRODUCTION

A close and complex look on urban space is needed; that is, there should be a planning program with no simplifications which includes analysis and interpretations at different levels. Everyday situations, needs of the reproductive world should be considered just the way in which needs of the productive world are considered. The two spheres, that of reproductive and that of productive work, should be put in the same level and thus appraised in equal terms. Disregarding the needs derived from the tasks ascribed to the female gender (as has been the situation so far) results in unequal opportunities and duties which are mainly prejudicial to women and people who depend on others like children, the elderly and people affected with illness.

In order to reverse this situation, it is essential to foster women's involvement in the processes of acknowledgment, exploration and development of neighbourhoods, so that their involvement allows us to draw direct knowledge of urban realities from their very experiences, stemmed from the role traditionally and culturally assigned to women. Women are the social actors who mostly use, enjoy and put up with public spaces and facilities, and often the use they make of public spaces and facilities revolves around the use made of them by others.

The wide variety of activities we carry out and of which we are accountable for leads us to seek routes for optimizing time. We women seek to manage our time in the most efficient way possible, and for this, there should be complex urban spaces combining different uses (shopping, schools, civil and administrative activities, etc.) while being linked to other city areas by means of efficient and varied public transport services.

Public space is the connecting space of activities where people live their daily lives individually or collectively and where they establish social and cultural bonds. Thus, from a gender perspective, public space is not considered a merely functional space but as a space of vital experiences, and that is why it should guarantee equal opportunities and equity of use. In this sense, mixed uses should be sought granting the activity a sustainable mobility which values proximity and prioritizes pedestrian movement, equal

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accessibility for all, a positive perception of safety and an active, interwoven relation with facilities, shops and buildings in general.

As a space of memory and social identity, it should be a referent of women, acknowledging the importance of their contributions. One of the most immediate mechanisms for this is naming public spaces in feminine forms, which highlights the active role played by women in the history of neighbourhoods, towns or cities, which in general is inexistent in current names of streets.

In order to balance responsibilities, organize reproductive tasks assigned to the gender and provide equal opportunities to women and men, facilities should incorporate the concept of “infrastructure for everyday life” by providing new spaces of activities or facilities as society evolves. A reflection on different experiences in the contemporary city broadens the list of needs and makes sure that the physical space of facilities provides room for exchanging, sharing, supporting, integrating and viewing the “time of use” as a determining factor to promote access and participation.

For all of what we have just explained, one of the most innovative contributions of the 2/2004 Law is the inclusion of the gender perspective in planning and urban development legislation. The sixth field of intervention establishes “gender equity in the use of urban space and facilities” as one of the financeable aspects that should be considered in urban reform projects submitted by Catalan town councils. The general aim of the Law is improving neighborhoods, urban areas and towns requiring special attention.

As in the case of every law, the political context in which it has been drafted is a clue, so that a brief explanation follows. In 2004, the Autonomous Government of Catalonia was a coalition government made up by three progressive political forces, within which the Catalan Institute of Women (Institut Català de les Dones, ICD²) responds directly to the president’s office. This situation in the political organizational structure resulted in a broad reach of the gender question in all public policies. A transversal approach is an essential tool for behaving with a gender perspective, as it entails (among other things) that women are not considered a minority or a problem, but an essential constituent of society, and for this, it is necessary to redirect the systems of thought and behaviour in place, which are based on an abstract neutrality corresponding to exclusively male experiences and trends of thought. Thus, the fact that the ICD responded to the president’s office enabled its four women governors to play an active role within government in all spheres, bringing their knowledge and expertise from the women’s perspective to their job. The present Neighbourhood Development Law has been embraced in all of these interventions.

CASE ANALYSIS WITHIN CURRENT LEGISLATION

Within the framework of this law, our aim is to analyze the past, present and future implications of the sixth field of intervention for urban reform proposals and, more widely, the implications of the gender perspective for the urban development project.

As we have already mentioned, the sixth field of intervention is an innovative contribution which has given rise to considerable uncertainties. Throughout different calls for proposals, it can be noticed how progress has been made on these matters, and how some technical teams have gained new valuable knowledge and have incorporated gender as a tool for analysis, understanding and drafting of projects. There is still a lot of work to be done, but the examples we had analyzed shown different ways to approach urban projects from a gender perspective.

In the first years of the call for proposals, most fields of action were restricted to the following:

1. Social activities: Workshops and awareness-raising campaigns on gender. Immigrant women and integration

2. Facilities needed to carry out above activities

3. Safety. In most of the cases, it refers to improving street lighting in dark public space areas

The enhancement of available knowledge and the improvement in the use of gender criteria in projects have been possible thanks to the support provided to experts’ research by different government levels (Generalitat, Regional Council of Barcelona and other town councils), the organization of meetings and workshops, the publication of bibliographic works and the delivery of technical and civic responsibility courses.

² ICD’s President Marta Selva i Masoliver, Deputy President Mercé Fernández i Gesalí, Manager Anna Solà i Arguimbau and Program Director Isabel Segura i Soriano (2003-2006)

Today, August 2009, it is not possible to make a complete assessment of the outcomes achieved by the implementation of these criteria, as only two of the ninety-two projects funded by the Neighbourhood Development Law have finished, namely the neighbourhoods of Santa Caterina in Barcelona and Can Anglada in Terrassa. In any case, the implementation of the law can already be analyzed provisionally in many neighbourhoods included in the first and second calls for proposals. It can also be observed that in the latest proposals submitted, attempts are being made to work in more transversal ways, applying gender criteria comprehensively within the urban reform project.

Projects related to the public space and mobility aimed at improving aspects of people's daily lives show efforts in which the transversality of the implementation of the gender perspective can be traced.

From our analysis from the gender perspective of three cases we would seek to determine if the implementation of the sixth field of intervention improves the public space and facilities for women, and in a further transversal analysis we will seek to determine if efforts in other fields have been made from the gender perspective as well. The cases we have selected for analysis view the implementation of social participation as a tool for urban project development in many different ways.

CASE STUDIES

Neighbourhood: Collblanc/Torrassa, L'Hospitalet de Llobregat (2004-2008):

Regarding its urban typology, Collblanc-Torrassa neighbourhood is a historic site, with a high density of residential buildings dating from the fifties and sixties. Besides the poor quality of many of the buildings, the narrowness of streets hinders inner mobility and affects the quality of public spaces.

The Gender Equity Project, promoted by the Municipal Program for Women, is a proposal which has been submitted by the social policies area aimed at making the program a tool for including social issues and gender perspective in urban projects. With this objective in mind, efforts were made to strengthen the social fabric through exchange and mutual understanding. One of the main primary aims was creating an association of women who lived in the neighbourhood, which (unlike in other districts) did not exist there before.

The proposal includes six related programs:

Coha: Mediation services to share housing

Apropar ("coming closer"): Social involvement of immigrant women

Bellugant-nos ("moving"): Physical exercise and intercultural coexistence

Participa: Promoting the creation of a women's association in the neighbourhood

Xarxa de dones ("women's network"): Involvement of women living in the neighbourhood in planning process from a gender perspective

Estudi de mobilitat ("mobility study"): Mobility adjusted to meet the needs of daily life.

As a characteristic of the social fabric, nearly 30% of the neighbourhood's population is made up of non-EU immigrants, a population which has consolidated in the last six years. In many cases, this gives rise to coexistence issues in the use of public spaces, mainly because people do not know each other and are afraid of each other.

Women's perception of safety is much influenced by this phenomenon. The Information Centre for Women, which runs the Gender Equity Project, aims at promoting mutual understanding among different cultures and enhancing their coexistence.

Within the framework of this program, once the women's association was set up, a report on the perception and demands for improvement of public spaces was drafted and submitted to the town council for analysis. The main points include:

Improvement of public spaces:

Planting trees, placing benches under the shade of trees and improving existing green areas (Guernica square).

Perception of urban insecurity (Marquesa Park).

Cleanliness in the neighbourhood: cleaning services should be deployed in all streets, not only the main ones.

Appraisal of spaces for practicing sports:

Today, they are inadequate, due to the large population and the territorial extension of the district.

Opening up school facilities for the general public beyond school hours, without ruling out the possibility of building adequate sports facilities in the long term.

Providing nursery services or children's play centres in sports facilities, so that women with children can have access to sports.

More adequate facilities for the women's group:

Premises in a central area, outward-facing and visible to the general public, well-ventilated and well-lit.

The mobility study is probably the approach which is most closely linked to the urban development project proper. Carried out by the Institute of Regional and Metropolitan Studies of Barcelona (Institut d'Estudis Regionals i Metropolitans de Barcelona, IERMB) run by Carme Miralles-Guash, assisted by researchers Gemma Solé Masó and Angel Cebollada Frontera. Besides analyzing the uses and perception of public spaces and mobility strategies, the study puts forward eleven proposals for action, among them:

Ensuring safety in public spaces with the presence of people in the streets.

Prevention policies in order to prevent the setting up of unsafe areas.

In the development of public spaces, avoiding out-of-sight hidden areas and areas which may give rise to urban insecurity.

Adjusting and expanding the scope of public services to suit the current needs of the population.

Develop the Urban Mobility Plan with the maximum involvement of the general public.

Improving safety in metro stations and wagons.

Widening sidewalks, putting up handrails in the streets and ensuring street lighting and visibility.

The Gender Equity Project also delivered participatory workshops to women in the neighbourhood where they described their daily lives and shared their knowledge about the neighbourhood from their own experience. Experiences shared at these sessions were then featured in a dossier called "*Urbanismo y género, el papel de las mujeres en la configuración de la ciudad*" ("Urban Development and Gender: The Role of Women in the City Configuration; Zaida Muxí Martínez and Col·lectiu punt6 www.punt6.net). This work aimed at acquainting all women to the reflection on urban issues by offering a tool for the visibility, information and technical training from the gender perspective in urban spaces.



Figure 1: guide book, Urban Development and Gender: The Role of Women in the City Configuration

Neighbourhood: El Congost, Granollers (2006-2010)

The neighborhood is characterized by a high percentage of immigrants who dwell in social housing blocks built in the sixties. Its location between the bank of River Congost and the railway route hinders communications and mobility to adjacent neighbourhoods. Added to this, the neighbourhood has significant urban development deficits due to poor or lack of public spaces and facilities.

One of the main aims of the project is improving mobility, public spaces and facilities of collective use in line with social programs which foster coexistence and equal opportunities.

The Equal Opportunities Plan is the tool used by the Equity Department to carry out activities with the specific aim of involving women in the neighbourhoods to play an active role in urban development in the framework of the Neighbourhood Development Law.

In order to know the multicultural reality of women in the neighbourhood, it was necessary to gather statistic data by sex, as these data were not broken down in most census. Demographic, socioeconomic and family situation indicators were used. This information was further completed with qualitative data gathered from interviews to different groups of women grouped by nationalities (Spanish, Latin American, Maghrebi, and sub-Saharan), representatives of the neighbourhood school and technical staff from the city council. This information made it possible to carry out a previous analysis with a gender perspective.

The first contributions regarding women's needs in relation to their urban experiences can be drawn from the social work carried out by intercultural discussion groups, on the one hand, which created the Intercultural Commission of Women of Congost, and a first experience known as "Banco de tiempo", on the other.



Figure 2: Workshop 1st session in El Congost. The Major assumes the necessities expressed by women as a must for the urban project.

The commission worked jointly with the Gender Equity Department in the Equal Opportunities Plan, by defining the criteria to deliver a participatory workshop with the women of Congost ("Las mujeres hacemos piña"). The aims set by the workshop were detecting issues to be dealt with and listening to women's needs and concerns.

The first meeting included a full day's work attended by 98 women accompanied by 87 children. Children took part in special activities guided by trained staff so that mothers could participate in the full day's work simultaneously.

Discussion groups were set up under the supervision of Col·lectiu punt 6 (www.punt6.net) specialized in urban development and gender, who delivered four thematic workshops: public spaces, safety, mobility, and public facilities, and a workshop including a photographic tour around the neighbourhood on foot for recognizing the area.

The most outstanding outcomes of the first meeting were:

Perception of urban insecurity in public spaces caused by different factors: low walls which are architectural barriers and hinder vision as well; dirty streets; inadequate lighting; street furniture and trees damaged by vandalism; the misappropriation of public spaces by groups which engage in illegal activities; buildings with empty flats; dangerous tunnel under the train which lacks lighting and visibility.

Accessibility and mobility problems: sidewalks and streets in poor conditions; lack of ramps; pedestrian crossing not respected; speeding; lack of public transport to and from densely-concentrated working areas; lack of cycleways; lack of information at bus stops.

The requested facilities were a sports hall, which already exists but is closed and in poor conditions; a playground for young people to play basketball, and a municipal nursery.



Figure 3: unsafe public spaces, El Congost.

During a second meeting, the neighbourhood's office proposed solutions for the requests made at the first meeting. The proposals involved general improvements of public spaces regarding women's demands of good lighting and visibility; civic education campaigns to improve relations within the neighbourhood; improvements in the public transport system and remodeling of the tunnel under the railway lines. As regards facilities, proposals include remodelling the sports hall; putting up basketball hooks in squares; opening school playgrounds beyond school hours as public spaces; a municipal nursery.

At present, the process continues to be conducted with the transversal work group. People living in the neighbourhood are invited to receive information on the project and share their views on every work that is completed, and meetings are held with the intercultural commission of women of the Congost so that efforts are coordinated for improving the neighbourhood.



Figure 4: redesigned sidewalks attending women's needs.

CONCLUSIONS ON THE ANALYZED PROJECTS

The first conclusions we can draw based on the aims established as a starting point are:

There is an essential combination of parallel social cohesion processes, though they were started before the urban development project itself.

These projects have made progress by shaping or strengthening the social fabric that will participate in the modification of its own daily surroundings. We should consider that even though everybody has empirical knowledge of public spaces, it is necessary to teach people to appraise and take part in daily experiences as a wealth of knowledge of a certain reality.

As for the sixth field of intervention specifically, there is a wide range of methodologies for integrating women living in the neighbourhoods into civic and participatory life and, in particular, for reinforcing networks of knowledge and solidarity among them, as well as drawing the value of their experiences as a form of urban knowledge.

The analyzed cases integrate women in more direct aspects of the urban development project to a greater or lesser extent. A more general analysis of the ninety- neighbourhood projects in place by the

beginning of 2009 shows that a great number of projects view women's involvement and gender perspective applied to the urban development project as social integration aspects. The proposals range from training to recreational activities for "women" (cooking courses, knitting courses, etc.) and, in the best of cases, building facilities for carrying out these activities.

The lack of interwoven relations between social aspects and spatial or urban aspects (if they can possibly be set apart) impoverishes the projects and undermines their legitimacy.

The projects which best seem to understand and adopt the incorporation of the gender perspective are those which help integrate all the fields of intervention proposed by the law (which are then broken down for administrative purposes in their corresponding budgets) in the written reports submitted for subsidies.

Points to consider regarding the design of public spaces, facilities and the gender perspective

Carrying out detailed studies of street typologies which allow the drafting of specific, non-generic proposals. In these studies, it is essential to analyze the permeability relations which allow ground-floor buildings both in their design and their proposed uses. Prioritizing pedestrians, bearing in mind that the work unit is the neighbourhood itself, and that efforts should aim at reinforcing its inner structure. Public spaces should be viewed as a space for building relations and gathering.

Integrating public facilities to public spaces of daily use. Enabling visual permeability of school courtyards, for instance, contributes to safety in the streets: it is preferable to use railings than blind walls. Widening sidewalks in the access to public facilities in order to create relationship spaces.

Integrated poorly used or isolated spaces to the most widely used route networks. Reducing stairs, uneven surfaces and walls which hinder pedestrians' way and visual continuity, guaranteeing all forms of mobility with adequate accessibility. A perception of safety can be achieved through intensive and varied use of public spaces.

Integrating a variety of activities in daily routes so that the time of travelling routes is a practical and safe experience.

Planning public facilities with a focus on their visual and spatial permeability in relation to the surrounding public spaces.

Granting visibility to the stamp left by women's actions and lives in the city. Spaces used by women in the past may be recovered, such as old washhouses in towns, and streets, squares and facilities may be named after women as well.

Aspects related to the studies carried out as part of the project

Carrying out qualitative studies to gather more detailed and significant information, setting up work groups made up by women living in the neighborhoods willing to appraise public spaces and facilities of the daily use network.

It is vital to incorporate daily mobility studies that indicate how public spaces are used as a connecting element of different activities carried out by people. It is important to take into account statistical data broken down by sex besides age, as well as to identify which issues stemmed from the perception of insecurity affect the free mobility of women in the neighbourhood.

This information is essential for designing and improving pedestrians' routes, as well as for stops at bus and metro stations.

Knowing the social dynamics of public spaces. The design of a sociogram allows gathering information of how social organizations and bodies of the neighbourhood relate to each other. This information is essential for knowing public space social actors, their dynamics, identities and sense of belonging.

Participatory design. Making direct consultations on specific public spaces in order to set design criteria jointly with users. The special need programs of projects should be based on direct participation processes.

Incorporating the views of the little ones, as they and their caregivers are the ones who use public spaces most and have specific needs to be considered.

Aspects related to management-coordination

The running of the project should be transversal and dynamic, with direct knowledge of the sector in which works are being carried out in order to know social dynamics and the spatial situation directly. Very often statistical knowledge gathered through census and planimetries does not reflect the complexity of reality, especially the different roles and uses of spaces by men and women.

Having an office for delivering information and promoting the project near the community.

Timely information, before and during the implementation of a project, in the cases of public space works, has an impact on the trust of affected people who can participate and get involved directly. Information channels should be as varied as possible so that information reaches every man and woman in the neighbourhood.

Most importantly, the members of the technical staff working in the project should be sympathetic and sensitive. Moreover, they should coordinate their efforts into a flexible organization which makes it possible to adjust to situations or modify their course of action based on the daily experiences on site.

The technical staff should include interdisciplinary teams; the exchange of knowledge and information among the different fields of intervention is vital.

The appraisal of the project should be ongoing so that the project is a living process instead of a closed formula.

Urban development teams and social workers' teams should work in close cooperation. Building on knowledge drawn from previous experiences in the neighbourhood and, as done through the neighbourhood network, learning from other neighbourhood development projects. Guaranteeing equal participation for both sexes, all ages and cultures is vital to carry out the project successfully. The projects should take into account the aspects of daily life of all the people who will use those spaces.

CONCLUSIONS

The Neighbourhood Development Law has allowed the clear identification of women's needs in the neighborhoods. Although there is still a lot to be done to fully incorporate their daily lives and reproduction-related needs in conditions equal to those derived from production, urban development planning has adopted a course of action which will modify and further develop future urban development projects.