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WOMEN AND PLANNING (PART II)

Creating Gender-Sensitive Urban Environments Post-Covid-19: Challenges and Opportunities

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About this research

What is this research about?

This study investigates the role of women in planning. [Part I](#) (published in February 2020) looked at the barriers faced by women working within the profession. Part II looks at the impact of the profession on the day-to-day lives of women. The objective of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the success and failure to implement planning policies sensitive to gender specific needs in urban environments (i.e. gender mainstreaming). Results are discussed in the context of the impact of COVID-19 on women and the design of current urban environments.

Although this study focuses on the female experience, it is important to acknowledge that our understanding of gender has changed over the years and goes beyond male and female identities. Gender mainstreaming has a role to play to ensure all genders are equally represented, and that planning policy decisions are made having regard to all genders. This is a subject that, so far, has received little examination. We recognise, however, that it should form part of future discussions regarding the implementation of gender mainstreaming initiatives and hope that this report can support those discussions.

What kind of evidence was collected?

Qualitative data was collected via semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. Participants included 50 female and 2 male planners working in the private, public or academic sector. The majority of respondents were based in the UK (in England and Scotland) but the study also includes the views of respondents based in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the US.

What are the key findings?

Although started prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, our research addresses current debates in several ways.

Firstly, our results suggest that gender mainstreaming has not been effectively implemented as a means of integrating the needs of women and men equally into spatial planning.

Secondly, the study finds that the integration of a gender dimension into spatial policy-making has been held back by a host of different factors. These include systemic inadequacies of both the education and planning systems, resulting in gender inequalities going largely undiscussed and hidden from view. These inadequacies hinder women's ability to shape policies and progress decisions that have positive implications for gender equality attainment.

To this end, the study argues for the incorporation of gender mainstreaming into all policy, legislative and decision-making practices. This approach would facilitate the attitudinal and systemic changes required to ensure future built environment solutions have equal regard to the experiences of both women and men, particularly as we move into a post-pandemic recovery period.

Introduction

The impact of gender biased design

From smartphones to spacesuits, the many ways that women struggle on a daily basis to function in a world designed principally for men is gaining attention in both academic literature and in the media. The negative impacts of gender-biased design on women's and girls' lives range from feelings of inferiority and insecurity, to physical barriers associated with using tools and equipment not designed with women in mind (Prasad 2019). This, in turn, has significant consequences for women in terms of their personal and professional development; resulting, for example, in lower female enrolment levels in science, technology, engineering and mathematics ('STEM') courses (Beede et al 2011) and reduced promotion opportunities over the course of their careers, contributing to the gender pay gap (Addison et al 2014).

Gender-biased design is also evident in the built environment. The emergence of sprawling car dependent cities from the 1950s onwards has been particularly problematic for women who overall, evidence suggests, drive less and rely to a greater degree on public transport and walking compared to men (Criado-Perez 2019). This enduring focus on the private motor vehicle has implications on ease of access – to employment, services and facilities, which are not always located a convenient walking, cycling or public transport distance from residential neighbourhoods. In addition, with priority given to vehicle movement and access, less attention has been paid to the place function of streets and human movement through them, resulting in (for example) narrow footpaths, inadequate street lighting and fragmented cycle lanes.

In addition, the design of many of our public spaces has failed to consider the different ways they are used by men and women. Design decisions such as the type of sporting facilities offered in public parks, the frequency of benches, the presence of playgrounds and the installation of appropriate lighting all play a role in the use of public spaces by women and girls.

The health implications for women and girls associated with the gendered use of public space was examined in a study conducted by Perez-Tejera et al (2018) of park use in Barcelona. The study found that more males than females frequented public open space overall. Of the women who were observed using public open space, they were more frequently observed in groups with children and elders and utilising playground facilities. Conversely, more males occupied public parks either as individuals or with groups of people of the same age. Males were also observed engaging in a greater range of activities compared to females (such as a variety of sporting activities, relaxing, picnicking and chatting).

The study makes the following observation:

From a health perspective, women’s constraints on outdoor physical activity is of particular concern due to the important benefits on health indicators. A policy challenge is how to engage more women in sports while simultaneously supplying other sources of care for their young children. (Perez-Tejera et al 2018: 12)

The impact of Covid-19

Recent studies have shown that the economic and health disparities between men and women have worsened during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Madgavkar et al (2020) women are estimated to have suffered more than half of total job losses as a consequence of the crisis. This is further supported in a recent report by the Women and Equalities Committee (2021: 9), which found that “women were a third more likely to be employed in sectors that were “shut down” over the first national lockdown” in the UK. In addition, according to research undertaken by Sport England, 42 percent of women reported a drop in activity levels during the pandemic compared with 35 percent of men (Wilson 2020).

The reason for this widening gender gap during the pandemic is largely attributed to the disproportionate unpaid care responsibilities placed on women, who (on average) carry out “75 percent of the world’s total unpaid-care work, including childcare, caring for the elderly, cooking, and cleaning” (Madgavkar et al 2020: 4). The UK is not an exception to this global trend. A recent survey undertaken by a number of women’s organisations in the UK reveals that “15% of mothers said they had to take unpaid time off work, compared with 8% of fathers” (reported in Topping and McIntyre 2021).

While the economic and health impacts of Covid-19 on gender equality are well documented, the impact of the pandemic on gender inequalities in the built environment have received less attention. In many respects, the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities. For example, the decision of some local authorities to close public toilet facilities during the lockdown created additional restrictions for women, as well as carers, the disabled, people with medical conditions and rough sleepers (Barker 2021).

The pandemic has also broadened the impact of certain built environment barriers. For example, narrow footpaths, which have long acted as a barrier to pram, buggy and wheelchair users, have now also become a barrier to the general public at large – impeding our ability to comply with the government’s social distancing requirements during the pandemic. As Maci (2020) comments:

Suddenly we feel out of place in our own cities, with a sense of vague fear and distrust of the other people we meet on the street. It seems that the limits imposed by the COVID-19 make us understand how a woman normally feels in a public space: alert, at the centre of attention, and intimidated.

What is gender mainstreaming?

Gender mainstreaming was first endorsed as a strategy to tackle gender inequality in the UN's 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action' in 1995 and has been the EU's central policy approach to gender equality attainment since The Treaty of Amsterdam 1997. The Treaty requires "all Member States to promote equality between women and men in all EU activities" (Sterner & Biller n.d.: 2). This commitment is reinforced in the EU's *Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025*, stating that:

The Commission will enhance gender mainstreaming by systematically including a gender perspective in all stages of policy design in all EU policy areas, internal and external. (European Commission 2020: 2)

But what is 'gender mainstreaming'?

The term was defined by the Council of Europe in 1998 as follows:

The (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making. (Council of Europe n.d.)

In other words, gender mainstreaming recognises the different needs of men and women having regard to other differences (such as age, ethnicity, race, religion etc.) at every stage of the planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes, and projects to ensure that gender equality is enhanced and that both men and women benefit equally.

There has been some debate about the efficacy of gender mainstreaming over the years, including its benefits over and above a broader focus on diversity. Whereas diversity management approaches equality attainment by examining all differences equally, gender mainstreaming advocates for looking at gender first and other differences second (City of Vienna n.d.a).

There is consensus, however, that gender mainstreaming is an important tool towards gender equality attainment. In particular, gender mainstreaming can have transformative potential with respect to reshaping existing decision making structures and processes which, to date, have allowed little scope for women to have an equitable share in decision making practices.

This study explores the extent to which gender mainstreaming practices have been successfully incorporated into planning policy and decision-making practices, the current barriers to the creation of female friendly environments, and the opportunities that exist to integrate a gender dimension into current and future planning initiatives.

Method

Aims and objectives

The aim of this research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the success and failure to implement planning policies sensitive to gender specific needs in urban environments.

Data collection

We used in-depth interviews with women working across the planning profession. We also advertised the research on the RTPI website via a [blog post](#) and invited potential participants to take part in the research via social media and through dedicated networks. Where possible, we conducted face-to-face or telephone interviews with participants. When geographical and/or time constraints did not allow face-to-face interviews to take place, we sent the interview topic guide (or 'questionnaire') to participants asking them to complete it and return it to us via email.

We asked participants (predominantly female planners) for their views on the extent to which positive progress has been made towards the integration of gender considerations in spatial planning policies in their countries of employment.

More specifically, questions 5 and 6 in our interview topic guide (copied below) asked participants to reflect upon challenges and potential solutions to creating female friendlier environments.

Q.5. Thinking now about the integration of gender mainstreaming in planning policies – what are your views regarding how current planning policies address (or fail to address) gender specific needs? (e.g.... from the provision of public toilet facilities, female friendly public transport infrastructure...to safe urban areas for women).

Q.6. According to you, which challenges are lying ahead to create female friendlier environments? How would you propose to address them?

Overall, we conducted 11 interviews and received 41 completed questionnaires from respondents. 50 women and 2 men across 6 countries took part in our research. The vast majority of our respondents were based in the UK (29 in England and 5 in Scotland). We also gathered the views of 2 respondents in Australia, 8 in New Zealand, 7 in Canada and 1 in the United States.

In addition to information related to gender and country of residence, we asked participants to provide information regarding their professional background (i.e. public, private, third sector, academic, mixed sectors) and their age range (i.e. >25 years old, 25-34 years old, 35-44 years old, 45-54 years old and 55-64 years old).

Data analysis

Interviews were analysed using traditional qualitative data analysis methods (i.e. thematic analysis and qualitative content analysis). Types of answers (or 'categories of argument') were sourced from the data following an iterative process. For instance, the inclusion of a gender dimension into the education system was identified as a category of argument because of the recurrence of this type of answer in the interviews.

Study Results

What barriers do women face in the built environment?

Many of the study respondents appeared to agree that inequalities associated with women's movement through, and enjoyment of, the built environment stem from society's car dependency. With the design of cities principally focused around creating and improving road infrastructure for the private motor vehicle, this not only presents problems for the walkability and safety of neighbourhoods, but also for women's access to employment and educational opportunities with implications on career advancement.

“Traffic engineers typically being male mean cities are car focussed – What about push chairs? Walking to school? Stairs that are giant steps for women? Safe playgrounds? Culturally appropriate facilities? There is so much work to be done here.”

“Harsh car – focussed infrastructure cuts through the intimacy of neighbourhoods where quality of life is created. Part time employment and CPD opportunities are needed at the most local of levels so that women can plan these into their daily lifestyles without long and difficult commutes and challenging evening excursions.”

This focus on car infrastructure also contributed to reported feelings of insecurity when moving around the city or neighbourhood, with one respondent commenting as follows:

“I cycle a section of my commute and this requires me to share a road space with buses and taxis, the majority of drivers being male (currently). I have experienced whistling and honking where I feel that being a man I'd be unlikely to do so. I realise that sometimes this can be due to frustration that cyclists are slower than cars rather than a gendered aggression, but it is frustrating to be attempting to lower my carbon footprint, improve my health and release land from inefficient traffic but feel threatened in some way for doing so. Women are smaller than men, generally, and may also be slower at activities like cycling – and feeling like there is insufficient provision of segregated space for cycling etc. is one example of how women can be put off pursuing better alternatives.”

Study respondents also reported safety concerns with respect to public transport, lack of public surveillance in town centres, and inadequate street lighting that make the built environment awkward for women.

“...retail policy requirements for primary frontages ... make town centres no-go areas

in the evenings because of lack of surveillance/activity.”

“...the low-income demographic are most impacted by these oversights [relating to women’s safety on public transport] because they are more likely to rely on the public transportation system. Ride-share programs that have been set up in some communities to accommodate women with financial constraints have been shown to be unsafe ventures.”

In addition to safety concerns, lack of locally accessible employment opportunities, childcare facilities, public transport services, public toilet facilities, as well as inadequate pedestrian infrastructure were frequently cited by study respondents as significant barriers to women’s access to equal opportunities in the built environment. This was particularly the case for those with caring responsibilities. Although respondents acknowledged that these are also barriers for male carers, there was recognition in the study that women continue to bear the majority of caring responsibilities.

“Long commutes far from childcare providers mean women (and men) are unable to take up employment opportunities due to caring responsibilities...Females have disproportionate caring duties for young children, as well as older parents.”

“Take the fact that a lot of public toilet facilities have either closed down or are now fee paying – this is very short sighted because it will inevitably have an impact on women, especially those with young children.”

“As a parent, it became obvious that public spaces are not always designed well when trying to move around with buggies and young children, but this is not a gender issue as my husband experienced the same challenges with things like narrow pavements, inadequate road crossing points, inaccessible shops/buildings and poorly designed open spaces.”

These barriers, in turn, have implications on the future career prospects of women, with one respondent commenting:

“When I think about the possibilities for me to work as a planner – even as a part-time consultant from home - if I had gotten married and had children after earning my master of urban and regional planning degree, I find such a life balance impossible to imagine because of the lack of such spaces in my immediate community and the surrounding ones.”

Gender mainstreaming in planning policies

When asked about the extent to which current planning policies address (or fail to address) gender specific needs, the majority of study respondents agreed that current policies do not appear to

consider gender and, as such, have not integrated gender mainstreaming practices. In particular, the absence of gender mainstreaming in the areas of public space and transport planning were identified as being of particular concern; both having the potential to significantly affect women's daily lives, including their freedom of movement through and use of the built environment.

“...when it comes to gender equity – we have not ‘dared’ to go there truly yet in most countries. And, we need to – it is almost as though we have skipped over the most obvious, evidence-based inequity to dealing to other sub-issues. We can, for instance, acknowledge systemic racism and work to correct this through policies – and yet – with gender – well it’s more done through board room governance and ‘soft’ politics – because – well we’re just not there yet.”

“Women, who rely on the bus system, are also another demographic that is considered to be high-need in planning circles, but there are no planning policies that take into consideration their safety.”

“I don’t think gender has truly been mainstreamed into planning policies. There are no planning policies, for instance, that specifically address child-friendly or youth-oriented spaces that make it easier for women to be stay at home mothers as well as career women...”

Respondents cited many possible reasons for the absence of gender considerations in current planning policy, including inadequate attention to gender equality in education settings.

“Today students can still complete an economics degree and not even hear of feminist economics.”

“Geography of gender should be taught as part of planning courses and should be part of CPD for all Planners. I have a real fear as more emphasis is placed on one year post graduate courses we will lose the rich in-depth ability to unlock some of the spatial issues that undergraduate sources give us.”

By failing to educate future generations about gender inequality and the importance of gender mainstreaming, respondents commented that we have generated a belief that we are already doing enough to address gender inequality, thereby perpetuating an unconscious ignorance regarding the different needs of women and men.

“Many practicing planners continue to think that planning has no social implications beyond economic benefit, despite decades of research of unequal impacts from planning...”

“I have also found that sometimes male colleagues – whether planners or in other disciplines – are shocked to understand that there is a gap between what studies say

about e.g. safety and actual lived behaviour. A good example of this is that an engineering colleague said that studies show crime rates around the station do not tend to differ based on lighting brightness. He was then taken aback that I said feeling safe was more important than statistics about safety and that would be what ultimately shaped whether a woman was happy to use facilities, would avoid them, or would use them reluctantly.”

This lack of awareness, in turn, results in the continued proliferation of inadequate systems, processes and measures to tackle issues of gender inequality. Many respondents commented that even when measures do exist, they lack sufficient weight or supporting guidance to assist planners and developers with their implementation.

“Where policies are created to address a social implication of planning (such as for health and wellbeing) planners often do not know how to implement these policies on projects. There is even less understanding of how to plan effectively for differential social experiences and needs.”

“Those assessing Government funding applications through MBIE for instance are asked (but not required) to view an online unconscious bias video. But the funding itself and the investment signals which government departments are not required to show how they address gender issues. Research teams do not need to be gender balanced and there is no facility for co-principal investigators.”

Study respondents identified a number of negative consequences stemming from this absence of gender in the education and planning systems, including a failure to understand the breadth of issues women face on a daily basis, resulting in planning policies that are too narrowly focussed and/or reactionary in nature.

“Women’s issues if they get addressed at all generally focus on safety and the perception of safety in cities. CPTED has had some profile here but needs reviewing and updating ... What we still need is systematic gathering and analysis of gender disaggregated data and information including issues in all policy areas by gender. When we look at the age friendly city and the accessible city and child friendly city we need to ensure that there is a gender dimension in each of these.”

“We don’t see many policies and designs that truly look to the needs of safety and protection (CPTED) from a gendered analysis at the local level or beyond. And, even where there are – implementation and regulation tend to be complaints driven.”

In addition, respondents noted that this absence exacerbates other inequalities relating to income, race, religion, age and ethnicity, with women in lower income brackets and other groups likely to be disproportionately impacted by ingrained systemic and built environmental inequalities.

“I am also keenly aware that multicultural Britain has many different minorities who may not be able to access the planning system and that sometimes we might need a more nuanced view of how cultural assumptions work regarding what equality for women looks like and how that plays out in private and public spaces.”

“...the low-income demographic are most impacted by these oversights because they are more likely to rely on the public transportation system. Ride-share programs that have been set up in some communities to accommodate women with financial constraints have been shown to be unsafe ventures.”

Many respondents also considered that many of the gender inequalities in the built environment are beyond the scope of the planning system, and cannot (and should not) be resolved through planning alone.

“...the specifics you refer to (provision of public toilet facilities, female friendly public transport infrastructure...), this is not within the discretion of a resource consent planner. We are restricted to matters of discretion identified within the district plan. I do not believe this question is applicable to me.”

“I also think on certain issues – planning itself is not necessarily the problem. For instance, women should not feel unsafe because they are walking alone in a dark street at night. This is not a planning issue, it is a public health issue – women should not feel threatened in the first place – this is a public health issue. Trying to address this from a planning perspective might just perpetuate the problem rather than tackle it.”

“It does seem to me that planning is taking on a role that ultimately it has no real knowledge, particularly if it is not only required to work out how many [public toilets] should be provided but also to become involved in the layout too. How would planners work out how many should be provided (per population numbers? Or?) I find this difficult to understand how this would work since public toilets are usually separate and not associated with a development. Therefore, is its provision to be covered by CIL/planning obligations? Who is going to fund their future management and maintenance?”

While some study respondents considered the issue of gender equality to sit beyond the scope of the planning system, other respondents were of the opinion that it is precisely this limited scope that has resulted in the system’s failure to tackle the issue of gender inequality. In particular, many respondents were of the opinion that the planning system needs to do much more to address gender inequality – identifying a number attitudinal and regulatory inadequacies requiring change.

“I think that austerity and cuts in public expenditure contribute massively to the

implementation of planning policies which address gender-specific needs... We should seek MUCH more from developers and insist via regulation that these normal facilities are provided in new housing, as well as city centres.”

“Planning applicants are typically focused on maximising profit from development, and will not invest the time and resources needed to effectively address social issues without being required to do so by law or consenting authorities.”

“Until Planning as a profession stops measuring itself on the amount of successful applications processed nothing will change!! Planning was never set up to count planning applications – it was set up to ‘Improve the Quality of Place’ and measuring the success of a profession on counting planning applications – will not provide public toilet facilities, female friendly transport etc.”

Challenges to building female-friendly environments

Study respondents identified a number of potential challenges to the creation of female friendlier environments. Frequently cited was the systemic inadequacies of both the current education and planning systems, which has resulted in gender inequalities going largely undiscussed and hidden from view. This has resulted, according to respondents, in the creation of a mindset that no gender equality issues exist, or that current movements such as #MeToo and Women’s March are sufficient to address them.

“The challenge is the systemic change that is required to advance gender equality. There is a widely-held belief that there is not an issue with gender inequality in planning, even in our own planning organisations.”

“There tends to be a perception that because there is now the Women’s March and the Me too movement that due to it being more discussed in broader society then it is already being addressed and doesn’t require changes at levels of government, the non-profit sector and private sector.”

“Understanding women’s lives and mobility, gender-specific needs, and how they navigate spaces in order to balance their lives. These are the most challenging questions that continue with respect to women friendly environments. I don’t see much effort in the planning research or practitioner communities to even understand women in these contexts. Gender-centred research is lacking so questions regarding women’s experiences in urban and regional social environments is not understood by planners at all.”

According to respondents, this mindset results in the perpetuation of a system in which wellbeing is given secondary consideration to profit gain, with legislative processes and mechanisms that render planners incapable of tackling issues of inequality through the current system.

“The challenges on creating female friendly environments are the fact that we live in a capitalist...society that promotes money over wellbeing, which will mean we will need to provide substantial evidence and consistently push companies to improve their working environments to be female friendly.”

“There may be solutions that are female friendly that also meet other group’s requirements. Likewise, there may be conflicting requirements. The challenge is how planners can become involved in this work bearing in mind some actions may not be development requiring planning permission.”

This is reinforced, according to study respondents, by the under-representation of women at the decision-making levels of the built environment profession and in politics, as well as a lack of recognition of female achievements in these professions. In other words, respondents questioned how the current system can tackle issues of gender inequality in the built environment when the system itself embraces similarly inequitable practices.

“I wonder if environments that are female friendly are actually being designed by men??!! It is hard to understand the nuances of issues when you don’t face the challenges yourself. Sometimes aspects such as females feeling safe at night walking through a city centre is very subjective and not one that can really be described or understood unless you have experienced it.”

“Not having enough women in decision-making levels – and women who challenge the status quo being seen as angry or moany! I’d love to see the RTPI invest in women’s leadership initiatives – not because male leadership isn’t valid (it is!) nor because women are unable to lead in a way that benefits men (they are!) but because having space for the conversations that are specific to the female experience is so crucial. I also think...that there is often a lack of female role models – not because they do not exist, but because they are less frequently seen on public platforms. I also think it might be a case of cross-organisational working with related disciplines e.g. transport planners and engineers to think about how their own initiatives can work together with planners. Often cross-disciplinary working contexts present very male environments, so the barriers to women in planning are wider than just the planning profession itself.”

“I feel that I and other women colleagues have achieved a lot but because we are not high enough up the tree; not bright young things or not at the cutting edge that there is limited recognition for our achievements.”

Without a change of mindset and the creation of opportunities for women and other under-represented groups to have meaningful involvement at the decision-making level and have their achievements recognised, the type of systemic change required to tackle inequality is unlikely to

occur. Respondents also noted the potential for current unconscious biases to carry over into endeavours to improve the current system through, for example, digitisation programmes.

“My biggest concern is that digital technology which influences solutions, roles and behaviours is heavily male dominated. We need to challenge/keep an eye on all related professions (architecture/engineering) which influence design, services and infrastructure, means of access to information etc. to ensure they are inclusive.”

“The move to big data and smart technology means that there is a potential danger for planning going back to be more technocratic and less focused on diversity and humanity. To me, planning should be about people-friendly to different groups e.g. women, elderly, children, disabled too.”

Adding further complexity to this issue, respondents also observed that experiences of bias in the built environment and workplace are not universal to all women, and women are just as likely to facilitate decision-making practices that promote gender-biased outcomes. It is therefore insufficient to assume that a female presence will somehow address the needs of the entire female population without looking deeper.

“...it’s not enough to have a woman at the table. Instead, we need feminists at the table, because women are just as likely as men to make biased decisions that favour men. White women who think that a gender-based analysis is sufficient without deeply incorporating an intersectional lens are also not helping, because they are alienating women of colour who bring deep experience and expertise.”

Recommendations for building female-friendly environments

Respondents agreed that inequalities in the built environment are not only specific to gender and, consequently, not all women experience the same inequalities. As such, when asked how the planning system can address the challenges women experience in the built environment, the majority of study respondents adopted the view that we need to plan with everyone in mind (and not just women).

“...gender-based analysis is necessary but not sufficient work. A black Muslim woman traveling by wheelchair is going to have a much different urban experience than me, an able white non-Muslim woman.”

“I believe that planning policies should be based on equality for all and it should not be necessary to plan specifically for one group. Yes, look at all the issues for everyone but don’t focus policies on one group. By doing so, would it not potentially prejudice another group? I know one size doesn’t necessarily fit all but is it possible or practical to design different areas for different groups? Does that not end up with segregation and friction?”

“...if it is for safety and quality of life, then it should not just be for women, it is for everyone, including children and elderly as well. There is a fundamental need to respect diversity and actually super-diversity in a multi-cultural society.”

As well as the concern that focussing on only one group could prejudice other groups, respondents also acknowledged that focussing on inclusivity and equality generally will generate wider benefits to women and communities as a whole.

“Personally I think it is better to focus on inclusiveness in general-not just for gender specific reasons. If you design something suitable for a person in a wheelchair, it is therefore by default suitable for someone carrying something heavy, has a pram, cannot go up steps easily... Designing for the blind benefits those with vision as well.”

Likewise, respondents also commented that efforts to create female friendlier environments could have a similar positive ripple effect with respect to creating friendlier environments for everyone.

“Education is required regarding why female friendlier environments are important (including because, I suspect, they’re also friendlier for everyone).”

“I think the challenge is creating a people friendly environment for everyone regardless of e.g. age, sex, gender, abilities, etc. Consultation is the key. There may be solutions that are female friendly that also meet other group’s requirements.”

For example, increasing the provision of well-maintained public toilets would not only benefit women, but also the elderly, carers (male and female) of young children and other dependents. Improving the frequency and safety of public transport would have benefits for all those who use these services – including children, the disabled, and the elderly, as well as other groups who all too often experience abusive behaviour while using public transport. Creating safer and segregated cycle networks would allow for slower travel speeds that could also benefit young children and increase their use of the cycle network. Whole communities would also benefit from the provision of accessible and useable outdoor recreational spaces, including women, men, children, the elderly, and those with a mobility impairment.

“We should be addressing as a society policies for universal access, disability, and other...Provision of public toilets; childcare facilities in public buildings; reduction of dark areas in cities, underpasses etc.; reduction of private cars; increase in public transport; safer and licensed taxis; safety of streets for children to play and pedestrians to walk; provision of children’s playspaces scattered throughout housing areas; new housing which provides for families and takes walkability into account, as well as reduction in crime; lighting; speed limits.”

To facilitate the creation of female friendly environments for the benefit for society as a whole, it

was also acknowledged by study respondents that we need to create spaces and opportunities to discuss these issues and bring them out into the open – as they are more often than not, hidden in plain sight.

“We need to name the things that are hidden – yes, there is a need for more toilet facilities. We also need to acknowledge that women still carry most caring responsibilities – going to shopping centres/ cafés when they (or children) need the loo is not always going to be easy especially in an age of austerity.”

“I am keenly aware that there is an inherent risk of proliferating injustice in planning decisions, which is something I really grapple with. Clearly this is tied up with personal positions and ethics, but I think there needs to be space to discuss this.”

One respondent commented that although gender equality research is undertaken, it does not gain the exposure required to ensure the messages are being relayed to the public, built environment professionals, and decision-makers to facilitate change.

“Yes, to non-gender public toilets. Yes, to public transport that has sufficient staffing and security to discourage/handle street harassment. Yes, to public parks and plazas that are designed for women and children. These ideas need to be researched, communicated and mainstreamed. Another professional planner and I... have been doing this work, unpaid, and pitching it to planning conferences as sessions (and not having uptake!). We should be getting paid to do this work, and we should be given broad audiences to communicate it to.”

Consequently, the majority of respondents considered education to be the key to exposing the inequalities in our built environment that have so far remained largely hidden behind generational norms and accepted inconveniences. By changing society’s mindset at the early stages of their education, respondents were in agreement that we can generate increased diversity into the profession, including within senior management levels. This will in turn generate positive impacts on the decisions that are being made at the highest levels of the public and private sectors.

“Changing attitudes/more education is needed to ensure equalities are considered from the very start of all project briefs and policy making, plus accountability and enforceability is needed for where there is misconduct.”

According to respondents, this attitudinal shift can only achieve positive actions on the ground if accompanied by systemic change. This should start at the government level, with policy and legislative action aimed at actualising data on female friendly environments. This should be coupled with the creation of practical guidance on implementing gender mainstreaming equality measures, including details about gender inequalities in the built environment and approaches to address them. In addition, the provision of resources is required to enable local authorities to

demand high quality consideration of the social implications from planning applicants. This should include ways to involve women and girls in all phases of planning through increased consultation.

“The biggest challenges may be actualising data on gender inequity to actually affect doing things different.”

“Even where there is legal basis (as in equality impact assessment, which requires consideration of gender) there is limited expertise and guidance on how to implement Equality Impact Assessments effectively. Without guidance, a legal basis and committed local authorities, social policies such as gender mainstreaming will continue to not be implemented effectively.”

“Challenge: Not enough knowledge of how to address gender and other social difference in planning. Responses:

- *“Updated practical guidance on gender mainstreaming, with details on common gender-based inequalities in the built environment and practical steps on how to address.*
- *“Resources to allow local authority planners and other consultees to demand higher quality consideration of social implications from planning applicants.*
- *“Ongoing advocacy of the importance of social implications in planning, including gender but extending into other social characteristics for which there are unequal impacts from planning, such as minority ethnic and faith groups. This will importantly move a consideration of gendered implications of planning onto an intersectional understanding of social difference (and power).”*

Finally, many respondents advocated for the celebration of best practice examples of equality; showcasing women, workplaces and projects that are taking positive steps to achieve gender equality in the workplace, profession and in the built environment.

“Successful developments, which have included gender specific needs in their design, need to be celebrated and shared as an example, to encourage and educate others in doing the same.”

“Introduce RTPI support and awards for family friendly workplaces”

“We need to get more women into the profession; recognise the achievement of women throughout their careers and shine a lens onto their achievements.”

Discussion

What have we done about gender mainstreaming and equality in the UK?

The *Equality Act 2010* is the principal anti-discrimination legislative instrument in the UK, replacing a number of other equality instruments including the *Equal Pay Act 1970*, the *Sex Discrimination Act 1975* and the *Race Relations Act 1976*.

Prior to its enactment, the *Equality Act 2006* introduced a Gender Equality Duty into the *Sex Discrimination Act 1975*, requiring all public bodies to consider gender equality when carrying out their functions. This Duty could be seen as a positive step towards the integration of gender mainstreaming into legislative and policy practices.

The enactment of the *Equality Act 2010* replaced the Gender Equality Duty (together with other duties relating to race and disability) with the Public Sector Equality Duty ('PSED'), widening its scope to capture all nine protected characteristics relating to sex, age, race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, and marriage and civil partnership. The only UK nation not subject to the PSED is Northern Ireland, which (nevertheless) is bound by a similar general duty under Section 75 of the *Northern Ireland Act 1998*. It could be argued, therefore, that the UK has taken a step back from gender mainstreaming, adopting instead a broader equality mainstreaming approach.

Local authorities across the UK have adopted (in one form or another) an equality policy, framework or strategy, outlining their ambitions to advance equality attainment within their respective municipalities, in accordance with the PSED. For instance, Glasgow City Council's [Equality Outcomes 2017 – 2021](#) seeks to tackle inequality and discrimination through the following "improvement aims":

1. *Improve economic outcomes for people with protected characteristics.*
2. *Increase people's knowledge about equality and fairness.*
3. *Improve access to Council Family services by people with protected characteristics.*
4. *Promote and Enforce Respect and Diversity in Glasgow.*

(Glasgow City Council 2017: 4)

Another example is Brighton & Hove City Council's [Equality and Inclusion Policy](#), which focuses its equality strategy on five key areas:

1. *Open and equitable services*
2. *Inclusive employer*
3. *Services that understand our diverse population*
4. *Strong and fair leadership*
5. *Effective partnership working to reduce inequality*

(Brighton & Hove City Council n.d.: 9)

In many respects, this broader focus on equality mainstreaming aligns with the attitude of study respondents: that we need to plan for everybody, rather than focusing on one particular group. Glasgow City Council echoes this view in [Equality Outcomes 2017 – 2021](#):

The experience of inequality and its impact on life experience is complex. Some people may fit within a protected characteristic but may not define themselves that way. Similarly, other people may define themselves by more than one protected characteristic and experience multiple inequalities and discrimination. It is important that protected characteristics are not only each viewed separately but the connections and their collective impact are considered. (Glasgow City Council 2017: 3)

Although this broader equality mainstreaming approach appears justified on the basis of achieving equality for all, the extent to which this broader focus has brought about positive change is open to debate. With respect to gender equality, the UK has received criticism for not doing enough to incorporate a gender dimension into its policy and legislative practices at the national level, resulting in a fragmented approach to gender equality attainment across the different government levels within each nation (EIGE n.d.a). Concern has been expressed that the UK's exit from the EU will only exacerbate this fragmented approach and put the UK on the back foot with respect to progress on gender equality attainment. According to an independent report commissioned by the Scottish Government, without a strong commitment to gender equality attainment at the national level, the UK is at risk of falling behind as the EU continues to make legislative advancements towards gender equality (Hepburn 2020).

This fragmented approach is, perhaps, visible through an examination of the Equality Impact Assessment ('EQIA'). The EQIA is the key tool used by local authorities across the UK to ensure equality is effectively mainstreamed into the delivery of policies, programmes and projects. Although widely adopted however, the approach to the EQIA varies between each local authority. For example, Glasgow City Council and Brighton & Hove City Council's EQIA templates reveal very different approaches to the equality assessment process. While Brighton & Hove's EQIA template requires a reflection back on previous actions undertaken and the successes of those actions,

Glasgow City Council's EQIA does not appear to require the same type of reflection. In addition, although the EQIA templates of both local authorities require consideration of the current situation as well as the outcomes of community engagement processes, they do so in very different ways.

Glasgow City Council's template asks the following questions:

Please name any research, data, consultation or studies referred to for this assessment

(Glasgow City Council 2019: 20)

and

Do you intend to set up your own consultation? If so, please list the main issues that you wish to address if the consultation is planned; or if consultation has been completed, please note the outcome(s) of consultation.

(Glasgow City Council 2019: 20)

These questions are presented in such a way that focuses on the EQIA process rather than the outcomes of the process. Instead of asking the user what knowledge they have gained from the research, data, consultation or studies, it asks the user to simply name the research, data, consultation or studies. In addition, the EQIA is able to be undertaken before a consultation process has been carried out. This, consequently, reduces the likelihood that the EQIA recommendations will be based on a rigorous engagement exercise that highlights the hidden inequalities present in society.

Conversely, Brighton & Hove's EQIA template asks the user a series of questions:

What do you know?

What do people tell you?

What does this mean?

(Brighton & Hove City Council 2018: 3)

Although addressing similar themes (i.e. the existing situation, the outcomes of community engagement, and the potential impacts – positive and negative) this information is sought in such a way that triggers a more in-depth description and analysis of the knowledge obtained from the EQIA process rather than a description of the process itself. It could be argued, therefore, that the Brighton & Hove EQIA is more likely to encourage the user to look beyond the surface, facilitating a different way of thinking that goes beyond the parameters of mere process to gain an appreciation of the unique experiences of the different protected characteristic groups. This, in turn, is more likely to bring out the type of hidden inequalities that may otherwise be overlooked in an EQIA that

encourages consideration of process alone.

The above is not an in-depth analysis of the EQIA process, but rather a brief examination of the EQIA templates available on the Glasgow City Council and Brighton & Hove City Council websites. A detailed assessment of completed EQIA's and their effectiveness at achieving equality attainment goes beyond the scope of this report. Such an assessment, however, would contribute to our understanding of the EQIA tool's effectiveness at advancing equality attainment according to the different approaches taken by local authorities across the UK.

What this brief assessment does seek to demonstrate is how the use of the EQIA tool has the potential to generate different outcomes depending on the approaches taken to ask similar questions. Although a standardised 'one size fits all' approach may not be appropriate, an EQIA guidance document could help to ensure that the right questions are being asked in the right way in order to encourage the type of attitudinal change study respondents have argued is required to bring about long-term equality attainment.

Putting Gender mainstreaming into practice

When looking for best practice examples of gender mainstreaming, European countries were frequently cited by study respondents.

Austria in particular has taken a very different approach to the UK with respect to gender equality attainment. Unlike the UK, gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting are enshrined in Austrian Federal Constitutional Law. The Department for Women and Equality (formed in 1997) currently sits in the Federal Chancellery and is responsible for the dissemination of information, raising awareness, undertaking research and monitoring and reporting on issues of gender equality (EIGE n.d.b).

In addition, gender mainstreaming is now being integrated into research and teaching practices through the use of performance agreements. According to Palmén et al (2020: 4):

For the period 2016–2018, goals were set in the field of gender dimension in teaching for the first time. Some universities have already committed themselves to explicitly defining targets for the inclusion of the gender dimension in research and teaching. The formulation of a specific requirement by the government to emphasise gender content in university teaching is an attempt to scale-up respective activities that already take place at some universities, to the whole university sector.

The degree to which these endeavours have been successful are perhaps open to debate. Austrian universities have taken different approaches with varying degrees of success (Palmén et al 2020). However, it does indicate a step in the right direction to integrate gender mainstreaming into educational practices to facilitate the type of attitudinal change that study respondents agreed is required to bring about long-term and positive change.

The integration of a gender dimension does not just apply to tertiary education. The City of Vienna has gone even further by integrating a gender dimension as early as kindergarten level. In this regard, efforts are made to ensure an equal number of male and female staff with an equal division and exchange of responsibilities between them. In addition, efforts are made to create flexible play spaces that do not encourage the segregation of traditionally male and female toys and to ensure that activities provide girls and boys with equal play opportunities (i.e. encouraging both girls and boys to build skyscrapers and to take care of their dolls). (City of Vienna n.d.b)

These efforts to facilitate attitudinal change from kindergarten through to tertiary education are further supported by the City of Vienna through its ongoing commitment to integrate gender mainstreaming into its working and policy-making practices.

Vienna has adopted [The five principles of gender mainstreaming](#), which are set out on the City of Vienna website as follows:

- 1) “Gender-sensitive language” to ensure women and men are equally visible.
- 2) “Gender-specific data collection and analysis” to ensure that gender differentials are revealed during the initial assessment process.
- 3) “Equal access to and utilisation of services”, to ensure the different ways that women and men use and benefit from various services and products, including the ways in which their different needs are met (or not met).
- 4) “Women and men are equally involved in decision making” to ensure a “balanced gender ratio at all levels of decision making”.
- 5) “Equal treatment is integrated into steering processes” to ensure the different circumstances of women and men are given due regard.

Accompanying these five principles is an array of guidance documents, providing practical advice with respect to putting them into practice.

For example, the City of Vienna’s manual entitled [Gender mainstreaming made easy](#) provides guidance for City employees as to how gender mainstreaming can be applied in all daily activities and at all levels regardless of department or position. This manual provides guidance ranging from the gathering and analysis of data and statistics to organising meetings and events and carrying out consultations (to name but a few). This manual successfully unveils the hidden inequalities that form part of daily routines and which go largely unnoticed. By shining a light on these inequalities, this manual encourages its employees to stop, think and reassess traditional norms and to encourage a mindset adjustment that attempts to avoid potentially gender biased actions.

Another example is the City of Vienna’s [Manual for Gender Mainstreaming in Urban Planning and Urban Development](#), which considers gender mainstreaming a “‘vertical issue’ that supports the

overall consideration of gender-sensitive aspects in all steps of the planning process so as to ensure high planning quality” (City of Vienna 2013: 51). The manual includes practical guidance on integrating a gender dimension into the development of visions, concepts, and masterplans, as well as when and how to integrate a gender dimension depending on the scale of development (from small-scale plot specific developments to large-scale urban development projects). The manual also provides practical guidance regarding the incorporation of a gender dimension into the planning and design of public spaces with direct walking routes, barrier-free public toilets and drinking fountains, “play on the go” equipment, and “communication-fostering arrangement of seats and benches” (City of Vienna 2013: 81).

The manual also considers housing design, recommending barrier-free, clearly organised and visible entranceways, attractively designed corridors and stairways with natural lighting to encourage communication between residents, direct and barrier free access to gardens, courtyards and car parking areas etc. (City of Vienna 2013).

The list goes on. However, the above demonstrates the type of design measures that can foster the creation of female friendly environments, and which address the type of barriers identified by study respondents in the “Study Results” section of this report.

There is evidence to suggest that these various initiatives are resulting in positive impacts on the ground in Vienna with respect to gender equality in the built environment.

Aspern Airfield is probably one of the most well-known examples of the City of Vienna’s initiatives to incorporate gender mainstreaming into neighbourhood design. Chosen as a pilot project for gender mainstreaming in 2006, Aspern is a brownfield development on the urban fringe of Vienna expected to be home to 20,000 residents covering an area of 240 hectares by its completion in 2028. The masterplan for Aspern incorporated an “everyday route check” to visualise different trip chain scenarios for employed adults with carer responsibilities. This was used to ensure the equitable distribution of housing, parks, schools and public transport services (City of Vienna 2013). Using this method, Aspern has been designed with an emphasis on active and public transport travel, with the masterplan envisioning that private motor vehicles will comprise only 20% of total journeys (City of Vienna 2008). Multi-function parks, wide pavements, short travel distances, flexible spatial structures are just some of the features that have been incorporated into Aspern’s design which make it an excellent example of a female-friendly neighbourhood (City of Vienna 2008).

Aspern Airfield is only one example of the 60 plus projects the City of Vienna has undertaken to integrate gender mainstreaming practices into urban design. The way in which the City of Vienna has gender mainstreamed practices at all levels of planning, decision making and design levels demonstrates the point made by study respondents that integrating a gender dimension does not only benefit women. The creation of barrier-free, accessible, attractive, well-lit, well-equipped

internal and external spaces has significant benefits for children, the elderly, disabled, as well as able-bodied men and women alike. As Hunt (2019) writes:

Aspern doesn't feel like a "feminist utopia"... Rather, it comes across – in its cohesion, sense of established community and lively public spaces – as simply a very well-designed neighbourhood. Therein lies the importance of gender mainstreaming, ... as well as the difficulty in arguing its case: "If it didn't happen, we would feel it. But as long as it happens, we don't see it."

What has Covid-19 taught us?

The notion "if it didn't happen, we would feel it" is precisely the predicament in which many cities have found themselves during the Covid-19 pandemic. Rather than creating new inequalities, it could be argued that the pandemic has shone a light on the inequalities that were already present and (in many respects) has exacerbated them; widening their reach to capture a wider segment of the population. As previously mentioned, the decision of some local authorities to close public toilets during the lockdown created additional restrictions for women, carers, disabled persons, people with medical conditions and rough sleepers (Barker 2021). In addition, narrow footpaths have created a barrier for everyone (not just pram and wheelchair users) by providing insufficient space to comply with the government's social distancing requirements.

In addition to drawing attention to the inequalities present in urban environments, the Covid-19 pandemic has also highlighted the important role of planning in supporting public health measures:

One of the most surprising results of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the tremendous growth of demand for public space. A few forward-looking cities have already started closing street space to cars to make it easier to walk, cycle, and move around at a safe distance from other people. Once the outbreak has relented, and as we look toward long-term community health and well-being, we must invest in welcoming lively, meaningful public spaces for all. (Maci 2020)

Such measures have been implemented in many countries around the world. For example, Bogota installed 76km of temporary cycle lanes to help reduce overcrowding on public transport. Paris installed 650km of cycle ways and pop-up cycle lanes have appeared in many UK cities, including London and Liverpool. In addition, road closures have been a popular measure to facilitate adherence to social distancing requirements. For example, Bristol, Cardiff, and Liverpool have all used road closures as a way of creating additional space for pedestrians during the pandemic. Another example is Edinburgh City Council's spaces for people initiative, which includes road closures and pavement widening at key locations of the town centre:

to make it easier and safer for people to move around our streets, these changes to our pavements, pathways and roads will create space for everyone, whether they are

walking; cycling; using a wheelchair or other mobility equipment; using a pram. (The City of Edinburgh Council 2020)

These measures have received mixed reviews, with many welcoming them and wishing to see them made permanent. Others, however, have criticised the measures; with many street traders observing that reduced traffic has resulted in reduced trade (The Newsroom 2021).

These emergency social distancing measures which allow additional space for walking and cycling have also received some criticism for being discriminatory to certain groups of people. For instance, footpath widening measures have had implications for on-street parking availability, resulting in the creation of additional access restrictions for those who cannot easily walk or cycle to their destination – such as the elderly and disabled (Churchill 2021).

A number of observations can be made about these temporary emergency measures and the resultant public reactions.

- Firstly, despite the UK's efforts to enshrine equality into legislative and policy-making practices, the urban environmental inequalities uncovered during the pandemic reveal that we are falling short of the actions necessary to drive real positive change on the ground.
- Secondly, many of the emergency measures put in place by local authorities during the pandemic mirror components of the female-friendly city – as described by study respondents and also as seen implemented in Vienna. This gives credence to the view of study respondents that the characteristics of the female-friendly city have the potential to benefit everyone (and not just women).
- Thirdly, the fact that these measures were undertaken as a reactionary response to the Covid-19 health crisis is evidence of study respondents' claim that positive actions to create female friendlier environments are often undertaken as a reactionary response to a complaint, incident or crisis, rather than as a proactive measure to prevent future injustice.
- Finally, the resistance that these measures have received from groups within the community supports the view of study respondents that having a single-minded focus with respect to their implementation can result in negative (albeit unintended) consequences. Although well intentioned, such reactionary measures run the risk of exacerbating inequalities experienced by certain groups (such as the elderly and disabled) if not given the proper consideration at the planning stage. Consequently, this reinforces the key recommendation made by study respondents – that we need to plan with everyone in mind as part of a long-term proactive (rather than reactive) equality strategy.

Implementing the right tools

In 2003, the RTPI published a [Gender Mainstreaming Toolkit](#). This Toolkit provides practical guidance for the incorporation of gender considerations into the plan making process. At the time of publication, it was envisaged that this Toolkit would become part of local planning authorities' usual processes and would continue to evolve and improve over time with continued feedback. Although the Toolkit does not appear to have entered into the mainstream of local government's policy and plan making practices, it remains a valuable resource that demonstrates how a gender dimension can be injected into plan and policy making processes.

The Toolkit itself comprises a series of questions that stimulate a particular way of thinking that recognises and has regard to the different experiences of men and women. These questions are as follows (Greed et al 2003: 10):

- 1) *What are the different experiences and roles of women and men and/or boys and girls which might affect:*
 - *The issues and problems which need to be addressed by the plan*
 - *How women and men might benefit from a policy proposal*
 - *How the policy or proposal is implemented*
- 2) *What are the implications of these differences between women and men?*
- 3) *What are the implications for planning policy?*
- 4) *What policy recommendations would help ensure gender equality?*
- 5) *Who will assume responsibility for implementation?*
- 6) *How will success be measured?*

The Toolkit then provides a series of example situations for which it could be applied – including office developments, waste recycling projects and recreational spaces.

The extent to which this Toolkit successfully incorporates a gender dimension into the planning process such as to produce positive gender equality outcomes perhaps requires fuller investigation. However, it does demonstrate the importance of asking the right questions from the outset in order that issues of equality (including gender equality) can take a meaningful and prominent position at the start of all policy and project proposals. For instance, the toolkit encourages users first to think about the different experiences of men and women having regard to the proposal in question before then moving onto consideration of the implications (positive and negative) for women, men and planning policy.

Although the EQIA tool similarly requires users to collate data relating to the current inequalities

experienced by various groups of people who sit within the nine protected characteristics, the format of this tool varies between local authorities (as previously discussed). As such, so too does the depth of the analysis undertaken, which has implications on the findings and recommendations of the EQIA. In addition, there is a risk that trying to address all nine protected characteristics in one analysis will result in a watered down and overly simplified outcome that only skims the surface of the issues faced on the ground.

A detailed analysis of the EQIA tool's effectiveness in addressing and reducing inequality levels across the UK is yet to be undertaken, and would be a useful future exercise. However, what can be established from the brief analysis of two EQIA templates (set out previously in this report) is the importance of asking the right questions from the beginning of the process; to expose the hidden inequalities and encourage a shift in mindset that many study respondents argued is required to bring about positive change on the ground.

The Guidance documents that accompany these EQIA's similarly concentrate primarily on purpose and process, and fall short with respect to encouraging a shift in attitudes and mindset at the planning and decision making levels. As such, it is vital that the EQIA process remain under continuous review to ensure it does not fall into the trap of becoming an automatic "check the boxes" and/or "cut and paste" exercise that takes on more of a tokenistic gesture towards equality attainment, rather than the rigorous exercise it was intended to be.

Notwithstanding the above, there is evidence to suggest that we are increasingly adopting a female friendly mindset with respect to the way that we think about and plan our urban environments in the UK. For instance, the increasing emphasis on a place-based approach to planning is people-focused and "recognises the importance of local knowledge, cultural characteristics, community capacity and social capital" (Chand 2018: 160). This people centric approach allows greater opportunities to look at places and policies through a gender lens. Study respondents, many of whom identified Scotland's Place Standard Tool as a best practice example, recognised this.

According to the [placestandard.scot](https://www.placestandard.scot) website:

The Place Standard tool provides a simple framework to structure conversations about place. It allows you to think about the physical elements of a place (for example its buildings, spaces, and transport links) as well as the social aspects (for example whether people feel they have a say in decision making).

Although the Place Standard tool is not particularly focused on gender (other than allowing users to indicate their gender at the start of the assessment), there is potential that the tool could be used to identify gender differentiations between the responses given on the 14 themes of:

- Moving around
- Public transport

- Traffic and parking
- Streets and spaces
- Natural spaces
- Play and recreation
- Facilities and amenities
- Work and local economy
- Housing and community
- Social contact
- Identity and belonging
- Feeling safe
- Care and maintenance
- Influence and sense of control

Using the tool in this way would integrate gender mainstreaming into the community plan making and engagement process to a significant degree. It also has the potential to highlight built environment inequalities and create the space to discuss them as per the recommendation of study respondents.

In addition to the integration of a gender dimension into the information gathering and engagement process, there is also the potential to integrate a gender dimension into the implementation of actions to address them. For example, the 15-minute and 20-minute neighbourhood concept is gaining traction both in the UK and internationally; the key concept of which is to create neighbourhoods in which residents can meet the majority of their needs within a 15 to 20-minute trip - walking, cycling, or on public transport. The Scottish Government has made a commitment to delivering 20-minute neighbourhoods as part of its place-based initiatives, and “walkable neighbourhoods” form part of the Welsh Government’s recently published land use planning policy document, *Planning Policy Wales* (2021). In addition, recent RTPI research on [Net Zero Transport](#) looked at international examples of this concept as one of the foundations upon which net zero transport networks can be built.

Based on the evidence, which suggests that women drive less, walk more, and take on greater caring responsibilities that require greater flexible working and travel patterns, it is perhaps not surprising that the creation of accessible neighbourhoods with a focus on local living would tick all the right boxes with respect to the creation of female-friendly environments.

There is opportunity in the 15 and 20-minute neighbourhood approach to place a microscope over our existing urban environments to highlight the barriers that currently exist. As Yates (2021: 30) notes:

...piloting the approach should not be an exercise in highlighting neighbourhoods that already align well with these principles [of the 20-minute neighbourhood]. It should instead aim to identify key barriers to the widescale implementation of 20-minute neighbourhoods and how these barriers might be overcome.

It is vital that place-based initiatives such as the 15 and 20-minute neighbourhood integrate a gender dimension throughout the process (including the barrier identification and implementation stages). Otherwise, there is the risk that the barriers identified will not have proper regard to the different experiences of men and women and could potentially result in the adoption of 'solutions' that perpetuate (albeit unintentionally) gender-biased design in the built environment.

Conclusion

Gender mainstreaming has been a central EU policy objective since The Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 and there is broad consensus that gender mainstreaming is a key tool towards gender equality attainment. While a number of countries within the EU have mirrored this commitment to gender mainstreaming by incorporating a gender dimension into their governance structures and decision and policy-making practices, evidence suggests that the UK has stepped away from this gender mainstreaming approach.

Instead, the UK appears to have adopted a broader equality mainstreaming approach based on an equal consideration of all nine protected characteristics provided for under the *Equality Act 2010*. The UK has received criticism for not doing enough to incorporate a specific gender dimension into its policy and legislative practices, resulting in a fragmented approach that has the potential to worsen now that the UK has left the EU.

This fragmented approach has implications for the way in which women are represented throughout the plan, policy and decision-making stages of projects and the outcomes that are achieved on the ground. Study respondents cited a number of ways in which women are disproportionately challenged on a daily basis as a consequence of deficient actions to incorporate a gender dimension into planning policies. Inadequate access to public transport services and employment opportunities, as well as feelings of insecurity using cycling infrastructure and navigating through poorly lit streets are just some examples of the challenges women face and how gender-biased design persists in our built environments.

Study respondents also identified the many challenges that planners face with respect to building female-friendly environments, including a prevailing mindset that gender inequality is no longer an issue. In this regard, education was seen by study respondents as key to encouraging an attitudinal shift, exposing the hidden gender inequalities and addressing the gender gap that exists in the built environment profession at the highest levels of the public and private sectors. This also needs to be accompanied by systemic change to facilitate the actualisation of data on female friendly environments, including the creation of practical guidance on implementing gender mainstreaming measures and providing local authorities with adequate resources to action them.

The key message put forward by study respondents is the need to plan with everyone in mind (and not just women). In making this case, respondents appeared to be somewhat split in their thinking. While acknowledging that focussing on inclusivity and equality generally (i.e. not specifically on gender) would likely generate wider benefits to women, study respondents also acknowledged that

the creation of female friendlier environments could result in the creation of friendlier environments for everyone.

The latter position is one that Austria and (in particular) Vienna appears to have adopted. In this regard, the integration of a gender dimension in the education system and daily working practices has helped to facilitate the type of attitudinal change advocated for by study respondents. It has also resulted in female-friendly development initiatives that have significant benefits for children, the elderly, disabled, as well as able-bodied men and women. Consequently, there is a strong argument that gender mainstreaming does not place women's needs above (and therefore risks undermining) the needs of other protected characteristic groups. On the contrary, incorporating a gender dimension at all levels of planning, decision making and design recognises the multi-faceted nature of discrimination and the complexities associated with equality attainment, encouraging us to think about the different needs of women and men at all ages, of all abilities, and of all races, religions and beliefs.

Although the UK has been criticised for its fragmented approach to gender equality attainment, it is important to recognise that it is not necessarily the case that the UK must wipe the slate clean. The UK has a strong foundation upon which it can continue to strive for equality attainment by incorporating a gender mainstreaming approach. For instance, the EQIA tool is used by the majority of local authorities throughout the UK to ensure equality is effectively mainstreamed into the delivery of policies, programmes and projects. However, in order to ensure that this tool serves its function effectively, it is important that the methods and processes used by local authorities are re-evaluated. This can help to ensure the findings from the EQIA process have a meaningful impact on policy and project outcomes with respect to their contribution to overall equality attainment. In addition, there is an opportunity for tools such as the EQIA and Place Standard to incorporate a gender dimension to highlight built environment inequalities and create a space to discuss them openly in a transparent forum.

There is also the potential to integrate a gender dimension into the number of place-based initiatives that UK governments are increasingly exploring to facilitate a joined up and collaborative approach to planning, such as the 15 and 20-minute neighbourhood. This is important to ensure that such initiatives provide built environment solutions that have regard to the experiences of both women and men and break down (rather than perpetuate) the gender biases that are present in the built environment, which have only been further exacerbated by the Covid-19 health crisis.

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