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La ciudad: Imágenes e imaginarios

ESPACIO URBANO

Women and Urban Mobility: The importance of recognizing gender differences in urban planning

Lua Bittencourt
(Universidade de Lisboa)

Abstract

One part of the huge legacy left by Jane Jacobs was to give visibility to a very important, but still timid initiative: the participation of women in urban planning. In that line of thought, this paper brings a review about the insertion of the gender differentiated notion in urban planning, especially in the practice of urban mobility. It is easily observed that, despite all the achievements and advances made by women in the last decades, the gender relations, in their complexity beyond binary relations, still present inequalities. These differences are manifested in different scales of cities, which begins within the sphere of the private space and extends in the urban space. If there is something that identifies a thought as feminist and gendered it is the critical reflection on the duality between the public sphere and the private sphere. By focusing on the "women's space" and where they feel secure and belonging, public transport remains an extension of the public sphere—the street—which is historically not their place. By bringing basic theorists and others of feminist discourse, the discussion aims to identify common points and gaps in the discourses to conclude what is already being and what still has to be transmitted today for urban planning that can bring the needed balance on urban mobility, considering the specifications of each gender.

Resumen

Una parte del gran legado dejado por Jane Jacobs fue dar visibilidad a una iniciativa muy importante, pero todavía tímida: la participación de las mujeres en la planificación urbana. En esta línea de pensamiento, este trabajo trae una revisión sobre la inserción de la visión diferenciada de género en la planificación urbana, especialmente en la práctica de la movilidad urbana. Se observa fácilmente que, a pesar de todos los logros y avances realizados por las mujeres en las últimas décadas, las relaciones de género, en su complejidad más allá de las relaciones binarias, todavía presentan desigualdades. Estas diferencias se manifiestan en las diferentes escalas, que comienzan dentro de la esfera del espacio privado y se extienden en el espacio urbano. Si hay algo que identifica un pensamiento como feminista y de género, es la reflexión crítica sobre la dualidad entre la esfera pública y la esfera privada. Centrándose en el "espacio de las mujeres" y donde se sienten seguras y pertenecientes, el transporte público sigue siendo una extensión de la esfera pública, la calle, que históricamente no es su lugar. Al traer teóricos básicos y otros del discurso feminista, la discusión tiene como objetivo identificar los puntos comunes y las lagunas en los discursos, con el fin de discernir lo que ya está siendo y lo que aún hoy debe transmitirse para la planificación urbana, que pueda aportar el equilibrio necesario en la movilidad urbana considerando las especificaciones de cada sexo.

Palabras clave: Estudios de mujeres, Movilidad Urbana, Planificación Urbana, Ciudades y Género
Keywords: Women Studies, Urban Mobility, Urban Planning, Gendered Cities

Introduction

That men and women have always been treated and seen differently is not new. Feminist movements, which over time have played a significant role in important achievements for gender equality, are nowadays growing strong and aligned with other social movements that seek, above all, balance and justice in life in society. In a world that already has more than half of its population living in cities, it seems natural that this called life in society has been increasingly analyzed and criticized.

One part of the huge legacy left by Jane Jacobs was to give visibility to a very important, but still timid initiative: the participation of women in urban planning. In that line of thought, this paper brings a review about the insertion of the gender differentiated notion in urban planning, especially in the practice of urban mobility. As so, by approaching basic theorists and others of feminist discourse, this paper aims to identify common points and gaps in the discourses to conclude what is already being and what still has to be transmitted today for urban planning that can bring the needed balance on urban mobility, considering the specifications of each gender.

Gender equality is a complex and multidimensional concept comprising the range of factors encompassing social, cultural, historical, and economic processes. So, the objective of the present study was to investigate whether women's participation in transport planning is related to gender equality in general as well as to specific domains of gender equality in a city.

For this particular paper, as it is a gender study, it is crucial to start defining that, in addition to the clear peculiarities of what it is to be a woman in each culture whether from different countries or religions or even from different regions of the same country there is still a lack on the gender conception. The woman, who has always been the object of the feminist movements, now understands more than human beings who were born with the female sex besides to which the woman category alone was also built under a vision of male domination. The truth is that different feminist strands still disagree and argue about the definition of gender. Nevertheless, it is extremely important in a study to show what the research object is and what group it is addressing. The solution to this question was to adopt here the concept of the distinction between sex and gender, which has become central to the feminist debate. The first—sex—then becomes a reference to the biological phenomenon and the second to social construction. Being a woman is then understood as a process, both personal and social, that is, in addition to an identity, gender is a social position and an attribute of social structures.

The current study addresses these limitations and try to fill a gap by observing how the differences of both genders on urban mobility have been treated in urban planning. Thus, this work began by addressing the important theme of the construction of what it is to be a woman and its particularities in relation to the city and society. Then it passed through several authors in order to build the current discussion on the relationship between women and transportation.

Development

The struggle of women for recognition as subject of history dates back several centuries, but it was with the feminist movement, articulated mainly in the western world, that a series of demonstrations were unleashed, leading the public to question the society based on patriarchal values—understood here not as a form of political organization associated with absolutism, but rather as the different facets of male domination (Sumi & Pina, 2016). The Feminism, in its various aspects, combines militancy for gender equality

with research into the causes and mechanisms of reproduction of male domination. However, this claimed equality can be understood as the search for the insertion of a universalization that is not neutral, since the standard has already been built upon the "masculine". Women sought to be citizens, but citizenship itself was already built on the basis of the position of man (and, in general, of white and wealthy men) in a society marked by inequalities of gender, race and class (Miguel & Biroli, 2014).

If there is something that identifies a thought as feminist and gendered focused, it is definitely the critical reflection on the duality between the public sphere and the private sphere. By focusing on the "women's space" and where they feel secure and belonging, public transport remains an extension of the public sphere—the street—which is historically not their place. On the one hand, among the wealthiest women, the restrictions on public appearance were intended to avoid direct contact with people of lower social classes and also imposed on them to be accompanied at all times. On the other hand, the reality of the women who needed to work, to complete or even guarantee the whole family budget, was quite different. The treatment given by the police and by the population itself was permeated with violence and public humiliation. Often, these women were prevented from sitting and enjoying the shade and rest in public squares, at the risk of being taxed as prostitutes, suffering physical assault or even being arrested. (Lyra, 2017)

We can easily see, in developing countries for example, that in a short period of time, women have gained new places in salaried work, in the political arena and in domestic and family relations and are moving towards the pursuit of full citizenship. At the same time, there was a marked urbanization process in the country, with cities as the social space for the next few centuries. However, often women in urban space are seen as invisible figures, without the full exercise of the right to the city. In this sense, it is evident the need to value a gender perspective in urban public policies in order to promote a more egalitarian society, since they have the possibility to distribute, systematize social tensions and conflicts, divide and share the costs and benefits social, giving voice and power to women (GIZ, 2013). In addition, thinking about policies with the gender cut is to recognize the power relations that involve the concept of gender, since it can be formed by the intersection of racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities (Butler, 1990), which determine the location of individuals and individuals in society.

But, although society has evident signs of progress and changes in its relations of power and structure (at least in large cities) and it is now natural to see men and women working side by side and occupying the urban space, the woman remains belonging to the private space. In general, men and women are still far from evenly dividing domestic tasks and responsibilities, often leaving women with a double journey: working on the street and at home. But if they remain much more trapped and responsible for the private, how will they occupy the public space? It has been proved that it is not enough to require women's access to what was considered men's activities. It is also necessary to redefine the valuation criteria that make some activities (from men) considered more important and worthier than others (from women) and which cause some forms of behavior (from men) to be seen as universalizable, while others (from women) appear as inevitably linked to a particular social position (Miguel & Biroli, 2014).

In order to understand cities, it is primordial to admit that there are combinations or mixtures of land uses and not the construction of segregated ones. It is fundamental to understand that the mix of uses is necessary to promote urban safety, since public contact and interaction of people need a significant number of components (JACOBS, 2000). Cities need all kinds of diversity and most of urban diversity is the existing plurality of people with very different concepts, organizations and purposes. Although, in approaching the issue of gender differentiation, it is noted that the right to use the city and

the right to belong are quite connected and interdependent: these connections may be implicit and not clearly linked, even in the minds of women, but it seems that the construction of patriarchal powers in the household effects, even if unconsciously, women's sense of freedom of movement and use of public spaces. In addition, it is easily observed that, despite all achievements and advances made by women in the last decades, the gender relations, in their complexity, beyond binary relations, as already showed here, still present inequalities. These differences are manifested in diverse scales of cities, which begins within the sphere of the private space and extends to the urban space.

Since Lefebvre first brought the idea (and the ensuing debate) about the right to the city and what it implies, much has been discussed and said by theorists and decision makers, regardless of the economic system defended or the country in focus. David Harvey (Harvey, 2008) ended up defining that right to the city is much more than the individual freedom to access urban resources: it is the right to change themselves by changing the city. It is, above all, a collective rather than an individual right, for this transformation inevitably depends on the exercise of a collective power to reshape the urbanization process. However, the current argument is that Lefebvre and Harvey lacked, as did the great majority of researchers to date, the insertion of the inherent differences to the collective (Fenster, 2005). In analyzing the idea, the first question that arises is to what extent this notion of the right to the city is sensitive to individual and collective difference. As such, Lefebvre's definition is not related to the notion of power and control, which are related to identity and related to gender. Their definition, therefore, does not challenge any kind of power relations (ethnic, national, cultural) and much less power relations of gender as dictating and affecting the possibilities of realizing the right to use and the right to participate in urban life. It is well known, therefore, that a fundamental part of this conquest to the right of the city is the feeling of belonging, of the notion of the collective, and part of this feeling is, in turn, the perception of security or insecurity. It is noted that insecurity is a theme that touches all the people living in the city, but it is important to consider that there are dangers and fears lived exclusively or more intensely by women (Peccini, 2016). As showed at the beginning of the paper, this is simplified through the social construction of women: the way women are viewed in society and the place where women are placed, the place of the historically constructed woman is the private space, not the public space. In public space, she tends not to feel secure, not feel herself to belong.

Within the framework of the contradictions of gender social relations, there are at stake symbolic and cultural issues that determine urban mobility and questions about the daily displacement of women within the scope of their role in the family space (taking their children to day-care centers or schools), professional and social (occupation of public spaces, squares, parks, among others) (Tavares, 2015). When we refer to everyday life in the city, we come across a scale of study that is closer to the street. By analyzing the mobility of workers—men and women—in their everyday lives, we are focusing on the use of public transportation and the dynamics between this movement of people (pedestrians and then passengers) and the territory. Thus, built environment refers to the set of urban environments that provide the setting for human activity. Defined as the space where people live, work and leisure in everyday life, the built environment encompasses places and spaces created or modified by people, including buildings, parks and transportation systems, not only by design, but also by the land use and occupation of those spaces.

A sustainable collective urbanization is being defined as a built environment that involves compact and mixed land uses, access to high-quality mass transportation and roads that reduce traffic speed and limit the presence of vehicles in key areas. This

encourages the choice of walking or cycling to school, to the park, to the supermarket, to work, to the doctor, etc. In this context, when it comes to gender in public space, the first commonly issue is security. By common sense, security is the perception of being protected from risks, dangers or losses, and, in the case of perception, the subjectivity and individuality of the object becomes evident. From that point on, the discussion about urban policies and practices that touch on the broader issue of the right to the city becomes essential. And in the quest to repolitize the security discourse, we have seen that there is a need for another theoretical approach that moves away from theories and strategies currently dominant and based on simplistic assumptions, such as the need for crowded streets to make the city more vibrant and safe (Gehl, 2013).

Promoting sustainable urbanization can have a strong and positive relationship with road safety (Ben Welle et al., 2015). Human society is subtly organized around various social structures that define and reinforce the individual sense of affiliation and security. Feeling safe is crucial for people to embrace urban space. In general, life and the people themselves make the city more inviting and safer, whether in terms of perceived or experienced safety. The way humans interact with each other and with space and the consequent changes in these relations directly interfere into the urban development of cities. Here, we take as a base then that who practices the space is also the one that produces it and the synthesis that Francesco Careri brings that walking, even if it is not the physical construction of a space, implies a transformation of the place and its meanings. The physical presence of humans in an unmapped space—and the varying perceptions he receives from it—is a form of landscape transformation that, while leaving no tangible signs, culturally modifies the meaning of space and, consequently, space itself, turning it into place (Careri, 2013).

Nevertheless, the most common in studies and research related to urban, spatial and temporal problems is to disregard gender differences and obtain a single solution for the entire population. However, as it is presented here, the perspective of gender in mobility is being proved essential for understand the gap between those who share the city and those who are restricted from occupying the urban spaces by the simple fact of not being a man. This does not mean, however, that women move less in space: several researches of different countries and cultures have identified a higher average number of walking trips per day of working women if compared to men, which might indicate the double burden of work and domestic duties usually devoted to women (Tobío, 1994) (GenMOB, 2016) (Todd litman & Transport Policy Institute, 2015). It has been proved as well that women use public transit more often and made more trips on foot than men and they are also more likely to split their time between work and family commitments like taking care of children and elderly parents (Foran, 2013).

Once the cultural role on the occupation of the public spaces by women is acknowledged, an important step regarding the relation of gender with urban mobility must be taken. Besides the role of scientific research to search for the reconciliation of women with the joy of moving in the city and occupying the public spaces, the practices within transport planning and policy must recognize the gender differences in the way women and men travel in the city (Harkot, M.K., Andrade, M.H., Giannotti, M., Santoro, P., 2017). The gender determines not only the mode of transport that will be used, but also the way the transports are perceived and evaluated by different people. In the case of some countries, religious traditions and cultural traditions can be extremely restrictive, especially the ones attributed to women, such as the non-use of bicycles and public transportation.

In parallel, in the 2010 Latin American Women's Habitat Network meeting, women reported being more fearful than men, being taught since the very early ages they are not

supposed to go alone to public spaces (Women and habitat network of Latin America, 2010). The intensified fear of women narrows their movements, delimiting the use of public space and their trips to other public or private spaces. British geographer Valentine (Valentine, 2012) also specifies the strategies of coping performed by women every day in choosing their path of travel. For the author, woman practices daily a negotiation of the use of the public spaces and all this negotiation and coping strategies is based on the fear of experiencing a physical vulnerability to men, due to cultural and social issues. The city is in eternal construction, the public space is social reflection of the reading and cultural appropriation of the people in relation to the city. There is, therefore, an important step to be taken in relation to urban mobility and gender. The reconciliation of women's autonomy with the pleasure of moving and occupying public spaces must be further studied and explored scientifically.

In this way, given the brief context presented here, it is already evident that there is a confrontation in gender relations, which affect mainly women in the use and access to cities in their daily lives, pointing to the great relevance the inclusion of gender issues in urban planning and, more specifically, transport. There is a need for a more comprehensive and selective look at social demands and the changes and transformations that have taken place in society in recent decades.

Conclusion

The urban space is not neutral. The perception and use of the city, its areas of traffic, rest and socialization is not the same for a child and for an elderly person or for a person with a disability. In the same way, men and women experience the city, the street and the neighborhoods differently. That means that the possibilities of “living and enjoying the city” are smaller for some social groups such as women, where urban resources are not enough or do not consider their particularities. As we have briefly seen here, women's struggle for equality of rights and duties within society has been going on for decades and, although great changes have taken place, they are not enough to talk about women's incorporation into society. There are wage, legal, educational and, of course, territorial differences.

The overlapping roles given to women (mother, housewife, worker, etc.) require certain space conditions for the connection and use of the environment: road infrastructure, service networks, public spaces and equipment that impact on access to urban public services, active participation of citizenship and mainly the perception of women security. In addition, concrete aspects of inequality are observed in urban transport planning and in the possibilities for its use, since the working hours of many women are often partial and combine with other tasks such as taking care and breast-feeding children and caring for or attending if they or other family members are sick. Because of all that, the urgent need is to think of inclusive cities, where the gender dimension is a vitally important component of urban policies and planning, which contributes to making them more sustainable, fair and equitable.

The ways in which society and public managers deal with and plan questions about gender inequalities are currently not sufficient to guarantee the autonomy of women in their movements. This aspect pervades the institutions, the economy, politics, as well as the field of urban mobility, since studies of urban mobility and walking that consider the gender perspective are still difficult to find. Besides that, there is still a huge lack of women and people with a gendered differentiation thought planning and managing cities.

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