



Women's Liberty and Safety in Public Space

- summary

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#safeforall

What you are about to read is a summary from the webinar "Women's Liberty and Safety in Public Space". The webinar was organized by the Safer Sweden Foundation, through the Network for Feminist Urban Planning, amidst the global measures taken to inhibit the spread of Covid-19. Although the virus has created despair for families and friends around the world, it also ignited a digital movement which made it possible for 300 participants from 39 countries to connect and share a moment together.

Sweden is often spoken of as one of the most equal countries in the world. This statement is not unfounded. However, evidence shows that liberty and safety for women in Sweden still is something we need to fight for, and defend. Through this webinar, our hope was to share our experiences and create knowledge together. The speakers might not have a full-coverage over the struggle and oppression facing women throughout the world, but they are a stepping stone to understand where the feminist movement stands in our contemporary society.

The ideas and thoughts presented are the speakers own. Hopefully you will find something worthwhile to hold on to. And we hope that this summary will not weigh you down, but instead ignite the fire within that's needed to keep on fighting. Use this summary as inspiration in your work and share your thoughts and ideas with the person sitting next to you. In that way, the brief moment shared on May 25th 2020 will not be so brief at all.

Marika Haug &
Criminologist
Safer Sweden Foundation

Cornelis Uittenbogaard
Urban Planner
Safer Sweden Foundation

48%

[Almost half of the women in socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Sweden feel unsafe in their neighbourhoods at nighttime, compared to 22% men.](#)

.....

16

[In 2019, 16 women in Sweden were killed by their partner/ex-partner](#)

.....

80%

[When it comes to spontaneous activity grounds in Sweden \(footballfields, skateparks, etc.\) 80% users are men/boys](#)

.....

[Register as member in the Network for Feminist Urban Planning by following this link.](#)

COVID-19

Gender Impacts of the Covid-19 Crisis Now and Later

Sally Kneeshaw, Urbact

Urbact recently published the report [Gender Equal Cities](#), which contains ten actions to create more gender equal cities. In connection to that, Sally is reflecting on the impacts of Covid-19 on both women and men. She is concluding that men are at more risk of getting sick as well as die of the virus. However, she's also stating that the crisis impact women financially and socially. Women are overrepresented in essential services where the risk of infection is high, while also being underrepresented at the decision-making level. More women than men are also in precarious jobs in the European Union. Closing of schools, shops, restaurants, etc. can have a negative financial impact on women working in those sectors. It can also have a negative impact on single mothers who need to quit their jobs to look after children when schools aren't open. Domestic violence is another factor that affect women in the crisis.

When it comes to public space questions are still unanswered. Sally is suggesting that the decrease of violence might increase women's perceived safety. However, fewer eyes on the street can also have the opposite effect. We shall have to wait and see what the future brings.

Q: Which tools do we need to implement gender budgeting on a local level?

Sally: [Here is a link to the EIGE resources on gender budgeting.](#)

25%

"Women who live in their country of birth (native born) work in precarious employment more often than any other group of men, including non-EU born."

Sally's tips for handling the coronacrisis:

Centre women's voices /needs

Use sex disaggregated data

Gender budgeting

Invest in public infrastructure

Apply an intersectional approach

Coronavirus and the Tension Between Women's Safety and Freedom

Dr. Fiona Vera-Gray, Durham University

Fiona has been working with and studied female survivors of sexual violence for a long time. During her presentation, Fiona is emphasizing the importance of looking at women's freedom and safety as correlated and dependent of each other. If overlooked, safety measures may instead undermine women's freedom. Fiona is explaining the role society have in shaping women's latitude. Women are taught, from a young age, that they may be blamed for their victimization if they aren't following the unwritten rules existing in society. Women often use strategies to avoid risks. However, they can't be too worried since they might be considered as being hysterical. Fiona conceptualizes this as women needing to have *the right amount of panic* to be socially accepted. This subject is something that Fiona has written about [in this book](#).

According to Fiona, the strategies women use to avoid violence are highly developed. When connecting this to the coronavirus, while limiting women's freedom, lockdowns may also take away some of the tool's women have in their safety box. Fiona is suggesting that the increase of reported domestic violence, which is seen in some countries, actually gives light to the extensive safety work women usually perform successfully in their homes. Another worrisome outcome of lockdowns is that they make it more difficult for women to connect with help centres.

Q: What subject of research do you wish to see after the crisis?

Fiona: After the crisis we're going to need research on how specialist services adapted during lockdown and what the impacts have been both on victim-survivors and workers themselves. This will help give us a sense of what good practice looks like should something like this hit again, and some of the lessons may also be translatable to offering support for women who have experienced violence and are in other lockdown contexts such as prisons or detention centres.

Quote

"When a woman is walking home during nighttime, she often trades her freedom for safety. Maybe she wants to walk in a dark alley to feel alone or maybe she wants to engage in a conversation with strangers. But usually she won't, due to strategies undertaken to avoid risks. If victimized when expressing her freedom, she might get blamed for taking the risk."

30%

[During the corona crisis, domestic violence reports to the police has more than tripled in the Hubei province, China.](#)

Toward the Feminist City

Katrina Johnston Zimmerman, *THINK-urban*

Katrina is describing the development of cities through history. When cities became bigger and more urban, the construction of femininity shifted, cities became more hierarchical and masculinity was connected with power struggles. Since men has had the power to shape our cities, stratification has also been shown through the way our cities are built. Katrina is concluding that cities are sexist. However, she is also emphasizing that this shows that cities are a product, which means that it is possible to change the way we build and shape our cities.

The corona crisis might be a factor that can contribute to change. Katrina is suggesting that the crisis has shown the need of compassion and care for vulnerable people, while also bringing light to inequity. In that way, the crisis might be a stepping stone for a development towards a woman-led city.

Q: What strategies can help us to implement feminist perspectives in the urban planning process? Everyone is not enthusiastic about the concept, to say the least.

Katrina: I know a lot of people will probably also suggest this, but gender balanced budgeting is one good tool. But also, in relation especially with what is happening here in the US, mandatory representation in leadership is another way to go about creating a more equitable, feminist city from top-down leadership. If we can put systems in place that require gender equality in leadership, rather than only relying on the ability of women to rise up in positions or be promoted, then we can ensure that they are able to put better policies in place for everyone. We can also start by listening to the citizens of a city – by giving them a right to the city so that we don't have to rely on protests, and if we must, then those voices will be heard and responded to in a productive way. The city is a community – we must treat it like an ecosystem and habitat for humans in a holistic and compassionate way so that everyone's needs are met.

Katrina's five C:s of a woman-led city

Co-created

Collaborative

Communal

Compassionate

Car-free

EMPOWERMENT

Defending Frivolous Fun

*Dr. Shilpa Phadke, Tata Institute of
Social Sciences (Mumbai)*

Shilpa is problematizing how society almost only fights for women's right to use the public space when they are on their way to work, school, etc., the kind of protests that are often sparked by a crime committed. She's suggesting that very few politicians defend or fight for women's right to be in the public space to have fun, with no other purpose at all. According to Shilpa, the focus needs a shift. Implementing measures that increase women's opportunity to have fun in public space will make their presence in public space unconditional, and a higher likelihood for women to have a natural space in public.

When co-writing the book [Why Loiter? Women and risk on Mumbai streets](#), she and co-authors Shilpa Ranade and Sameera Khan argued that loitering may be a way for women and vulnerable groups to claim the public space. After writing the book, there have been initiatives where women go out in public space to loiter. Shilpa's also describing the organization [Blank Noise](#), that works to stop victim blaming. For example by organizing the exhibition *I never ask for it*, where clothes that women have worn while sexually harassed were shown, which challenge the ridiculous notion that women's clothes have anything to do with sexual harassment.

Quote

"When women claim fun in public space they produce in others, not happiness, but anxiety. When women choose to wander in public spaces their actions are perceived to signal not well-behaved women, but trouble-makers in need of control."

Making Space for Girls in Swedish Towns: Asllani Court

Kristina Cedrins, ICA Real Estate

ICA Real Estate is a private company and developer. Besides supermarkets their most important aim is to create positive, safe and secure places. ICA wants people to come out, meet and do activities together. Meaning that not only boys but everyone should feel welcome. This is not achieved by just design but one also needs to work with social contexts.

Asllani court is a soccer court for girls in the town of Vimmerby, Sweden. The court is named after soccer star Asllani who has grown up in the area. Inspiration comes from the Zlatan court in Malmö. The project was a collaboration between the local shop owner, ICA Real Estate and an artist who created large portraits of Asllani.

At many courts' boys have the best time slots. At Asllani court boys are welcome but girls get the best times to play soccer. ICA is proud of working with the project and try to change perspectives in planning and use of public places.

Asllani court has had a large positive impact on local society as a whole. The place is activated by people all the time, not just boys, and has become livelier. Girls have grown as persons, especially in their life outside the court since many of them come from cultures or backgrounds where they are not allowed to do any sports.

Q: What are the results of the project and do girls really use the time slots provided?

Kristina: A result from the project is that the sport in itself has gotten a higher status, girls even have the football star Asllani to look up to. Moreover, has the place become safer, as it is used more hours and by both boys and girls. Girls use the court all the time. And maybe most importantly girls have grown as persons.

Quote

"The planning of cities has mainly focused on places for boys, like football fields, graffiti walls. Girls may want to do such activities too but are being pushed away by boys."

Applying an Intersectional Perspective on Public Life in Catalonia

Sara Ortiz Escalante, COL·LECTIU PUNT6

Sara starts out by introducing some starting point for feminist urban planning and explains that most cities' design is a response to capitalist and patriarchal thinking, with a focus on work and growth. Feminist urban planning challenges the cities' adaption of segregated spaces, zoning, suburbia and prioritization of a male mode of mobility. The concept prioritizes people's everyday life, by transforming urban settings to accommodate daily life, domestic care and community activities.

The cooperative COL·LECTIU PUNT6 has been working in Spain and abroad to break gender hierarchies and promote gender participation in all phases of urban planning. It's important to always take on an intersectional perspective which means they have worked with different groups in the neighbourhood at the same time in the same project, including for instance youth, neighbourhood organizations, elderly, people with disabilities, children, etc.

Sara is concluding her presentation with a few practical cases as a project with focus on elderly in which a network of benches was created to cater for local needs with concerns to placement and design of benches. Another project involved working with night-shift workers specifically as a special needs group in the city (Nocturnas), which resulted in the implementation of a "Request a Stop Night Bus Service".

Q: From your experience and projects, what are the main key elements a public space should have for women to be available and support the local everyday life patterns?

Sara: There is not a magical formula to know how the spaces have to be from this perspective, because spaces cannot be copied; we have to adapt to every context and city. But we can talk of five urban qualities: 1) Proximity, 2) Diversity, 3) Autonomy, 4) Vitality, 5) Representativeness. [Watch a movie about the five urban qualities here.](#)

Everyday life =

Activities
+
Space
+
Time

SAFETY

Stimulating Conscience: Preventing Sexual Offences on London Trains (SOLT)

Dr. Shola Apena Rogers, University in Birmingham

Shola is describing how women subjected to sexual harassment in public transport is a global problem, a behaviour which includes obscene gestures, staring, touching, clinching and rubbing off against a woman. While researching why people commit an SOLT, Shola found that offenders use four strategies while committing a crime, namely rationalization, cognitive distortions, referring to existing social norms (violence towards women) and moral disengagement.

When it comes to crime prevention, the main aim is to remove the neutralization techniques used by the offender increasing the feelings of guilt for the offender when contemplating to commit a crime. Shola is suggesting that nudging can be an appropriate approach to this. She is also suggesting that symbols and campaigns can be used as a tool to remind offenders that their behaviour is morally wrong, since one of the neutralization techniques used by offenders are to look at the behaviour as normal.

Q: Shola is suggesting that nudging might be a way to prevent SOLT:s. Can she give any examples of that in practice?

Shola: There are currently no examples of using the nudge approach in practice on transport networks, although the Canadian Transit Police and the British Transport Police are considering this approach. The key point, however, is to correct what are perceived as 'errors' in people's choices by altering their choice environment and without restricting their freedom to choose, thus influencing the situational calculus made by individuals. For example, if the underlying assumption of individual behaviours is that it is normal to objectify women, this could be counteracted by presenting an anti-neutralization message. Using a media campaign in which individuals who commit SOLT are portrayed as morally wrong, while respecting others is portrayed as a moral obligation, uses established social psychological influence mechanisms to induce behavioural modifications. This type of communication strategy has been considered in relation to preventing shoplifting, however, there is a lack of research evidence.

Quote

"Exposure was justified because the victim was looking away, therefore the perpetrator was not responsible of this person seeing their behaviour "

A Feminist Public Restroom

Erika Sjöqvist, The Safer Sweden Foundation

Erika is describing how safe public restrooms have to do with the right to freedom from violence, the right to safety and to good health. Throughout history however, there have been fewer, if any, accessible public restrooms for women compared to men. That there are fewer public restrooms available for women than men is problematic in many ways. Among other problems, this can lead to an increased risk of developing gastrointestinal problems, incontinence and urinary tract infections. Women can also have the need to use a restroom more frequent than men, due to menstruation and caregiving. The need of public restrooms available for women is something that women have fought for since, at least, the early 20th century.

When studying public restrooms in central Stockholm, Erika noted that no restroom contains facilities specific to women's needs. Also, the majority of users were men and women are also discriminated against financially. However, today there are more available public restrooms for women in Stockholm than there has ever been throughout history.

Q: In my country restrooms are used for drug dealing and prostitution. Available public restrooms are limited due to that. What's your thought on that?

Erika: This is an issue in Sweden as well. It's a dilemma to make sure that public restrooms are available for all by making them free of charge and open 24 hours, and at the same time avoid that they are used for drug dealing or other criminal behavior. One way to avoid that public restrooms are misused is to make sure that there is a formal social control available near the restroom, for example cleaning staff or a reception. It might also be necessary to keep the restroom closed during night hours. I think that this problem shows that the needs of different social groups sometimes aren't compatible, and that social control might be necessary for public places to be available and safe.

10%

Only 1 out of 10 users of public restrooms in the Norrmalm area in Stockholm is a woman.

50%

About half of the restrooms that women can use in Stockholm are pay restrooms. Men, on the other hand, always have the option to use a urinal, which is free of charge.

Quote

"The state of the public restrooms in a city can tell us a lot about the state of justice and equality in that city"

Gender Segregation and Honour Culture

Omar Makram, Never forget Pela and Fadime

Omar was born in Egypt but due to the country's blasphemy-law, he sought asylum and moved to Sweden after leaving Islam. He is talking about the connection between gender segregation and honor culture. According to Omar, gender segregation is one of the main aspects of honor culture, since it helps the community in controlling women and the sexes access to one another, which in turn maintain this idea of chastity and sexual purity. In this way, women's freedom and agency is taken away. In the end, every action between the sexes are sexualized which establish the dichotomy of women as sex objects and men as sex offenders.

There are some arguments that promotes gender segregation, for example cultural relativism. But for Omar, gender segregation equates with an abandonment of gender equality. Promoting gender segregation is accepting that women in some areas are seen as controllable or sex objects, which might create a parallel society. He also thinks it's a betrayal towards the women and men fighting against oppression derived from honour culture. By being liberal regarding honour culture there's a risk that societal norms are cemented for future generations. By fighting honour culture there is, on the other hand, the possibility that oppressed women and men are liberated. If women's safety is jeopardized, other preventive measures should be taken rather than separating men from women.

Q: I wonder how Omar looks at the possibility of allowing gender segregation and "non separation"/"general use" in the same function/place, so that they exist together as a solution?

Omar: The existence of segregation even as an alternative would consequently lead to cementing and replicating that aspect of honor culture since that option will be resorted to by those living under the honor culture structure and hence will make it difficult to dismantle it. In addition to gender segregation this can lead into a form of ethnic segregation and furthers the creation of parallel society with parallel value system and in turn would damage integration rather than facilitate it.

Quote

"Honour culture is defined as a collectivist value system which can be both religious and cultural. It leads to the family and community controlling the sexuality of some individuals, restricting their freedom. Mostly of young people and especially for girls, due to a belief in chastity or sexual purity. When violated, the honour of the family is lost and violent measures have to be taken."

**240
000**

The estimated number of Swedish youth living under honour culture is 240 000, according to Omar.

The Safety and Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups

Roni Al Jalkh, Placemaking MENA

Roni is highlighting that groups such as refugees often are excluded and discriminated in public space, even though in theory the place is open and inclusive. Many municipalities impose curfews only for refugees, divide the use of space (refugees vs host community) or ask entry fees. Moreover, they suffer from tensions between themselves and the local host community.

Roni is posing the question: Why do women or other vulnerable groups not use public space? First of all it can be because of physical aspects such as darkness, dirtiness, not inviting, while secondly it is about social aspects: in many cultures users of public space are mainly men. Or different groups/communities don't like to mix because of tensions.

According to Roni the best way to create welcoming spaces is to include vulnerable groups in design process and have a place centered approach as placemaking. This can be difficult as vulnerable groups may not always feel welcome in a participatory approach: they do not have time (work, family), their culture/husband is not supportive, do not feel safe in the specific place where activities take place, they have no experience or bad experience with participation or feel intimidated by other groups.

Q: Have you seen any concrete long-term changes in the use of public spaces by women/refugees after your projects have been implemented? Can you give a specific example?

Roni: We cannot talk about long-term changes since the project implementation was in 2018-2019. However, many behavior changes were noticed at the community level. As witnessed by one of the municipal police during a street animation and outdoor movie night activities conducted within a placemaking project in one of the deprived neighborhoods in Northern Lebanon. He said that it was for the first time, that he sees women in the street at night since previously they were afraid to go out at that time. In addition, he assured that usually youth are trouble makers in such event and they use to harass girls and kids, but this time we can see that they are really involved in the activity and they are eager to contribute to the success of the event.

10+ practical ways to ensure participation

- 1** Enforce participation
- 2** Use youth in process as catalysts
- 3** Involve local volunteers from target groups
- 4** Work in collaboration with local associations
- 5** Take time with husbands or group leaders
- 6** Provide baby-sitting services
- 7** Provide activities for kids
- 8** Highlight their suggestions, take time to understand
- 9** Take time
- 10** Create inviting and safe place
- 11** Create sense of belonging and appropriation

UN REFLECTS

Lizzette Soria

UN-Women

"UN-Women's mandate is to advance gender equality, which we are doing by eliminating discrimination towards women and girls. A lot of the topics discussed here are exactly that. Violence against women and girls in public spaces is a human rights violation of gender-based discrimination. In turn, fear and experience of violence reduces women and girl's ability to study and work and participate in public life. Eliminating these discriminations, in the context of cities, are one of the key aspects of women's rights to the city.

The evidence and presentations today confirms this as a universal challenge. We are a network of 50 cities and we see that this happens everywhere, unfortunately. But at the same time, we know that it can be prevented. Two things were clearly highlighted in the presentations, the first one is women's freedom of movement, which is one of the key indicators in the safe cities global program, for each city that joins it. We measure and track how the interventions are improving women's freedom of movement. And secondly, how can we reduce different forms of sexual violence against women and girls in public spaces and increase women's perception of safety? In this way, cities can accelerate change for SDG 5 and SDG 11

Another great way that I think these initiatives align with UN-Women's work, is that we are a human rights organization and always follow feminist principles. Today we have heard great examples of how to do that through the speakers. For example, collaboration and co-creation with different groups of people is key, the need to create a safe space for diverse women to voice their needs in the city. Women leadership and representation in decision-making. The key role of women's rights organizations. They are the ones advocating for this work and we encourage local governments to engage them during planning and implementation.

So now, when we are talking about how to rebuild our cities due to the pandemic, it's important to take that into account these principles. We need to listen and include needs and voices in the new plans, we need strong political will, cohesive partnerships, and interventions at community, policy and institutional levels with potential for scale.

No one can do it alone. The UN alone cannot do it. The local government cannot do it alone. We all have to work together. Due to the increasing challenges we now have to be more creative in finding solutions. We must build on this momentum to continue growing our efforts and create safe and empowering cities for women and girls."

Juma Assiago

UN-Habitat

"This has been a very interesting topic and right at the heart of what the Sustainable Urban Development Agenda speaks to. We say that the agenda will be won or lost in the context of participation of citizens, the way we look at the governance of our cities and towns, and the way we enhance partnership approaches to the build of cities. The impact of the corona-virus has gone to show that cities will need to re-frame their narrative. And I think that the presentations here today have underscored the need for us to deliver the point of participation in the way we appropriate public spaces for all inhabitants. And again, from a gender lens, to look at a city and it's differentiation.

Our approach at UN-Habitat over the past 25 years, with the work of the Safer Cities Programme, has been to look at safety and security less from a policing dimension, and more from the co-production of safety and security for all. With local governments at the centre of the coordination of such strategies, we say that safety as a public good must manifest itself in the public space in terms of their availability, their use and their access. When we look at how this plays out, the space is actually defined by how we look at safety for all. So my take on this webinar is that the context in which we have looked at women's safety, speaks much to the way we define the rights of citizens to the city and to access the benefits of city life.

I believe that if we look at this as a fundamental way to define the post covid-19 cities, this may be an opportunity to further catalyse the gains they have made in terms of advancing safe public spaces for women and girls as the way to actually develop the city for all.

I would like to conclude this by saying that our cities are facing an unprecedented challenge with the Covid-19 pandemic, we need to think about innovative ways of how to re-imagine and visualize the new normal of cities and public safety. Not from a perspective of more segregation and distancing. But more from how to reorder what cities have not themselves undertaken. I was happy to hear many presenters saying that Covid-19 has given cities opportunities to accelerate policies that they hitherto had not actually implemented. We can think of riding along those kind of drivers to make 'the city', the safer city that we want, the safer public spaces for women and all, from a perspective of new urban legislation, urban planning, urban management and governance with the city and its institutions at the centre of that co-production agenda."



**Network for
Feminist Urban Planning**

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