

## **WUL Conference TEHRAN: Gender Justice in Cities.**

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Today I will explain how Barcelona City Council is working on the relationship between urban policies and gender equality. I will address the importance for the city government and the Metropolis Network of the idea of the right to the city from the empowerment of women and mention some of the actions we have begun.

The policies aimed at women which we are promoting in Barcelona are implemented under the “Plan for Gender Justice”. For us, gender justice entails working with values such as respect, recognition, and freedom for women. The idea of gender justice is a human right; every woman and girl is entitled to live in dignity and in freedom, without any fear.

The Plan for Gender Justice covers four major areas of intervention:

- 1) Changing the institutional culture to drive equality within city council (by training municipal staff in the gender perspective; ensuring that public contracting includes mandatory gender clauses for companies such as having business equality plans, to ensure the balance of conditions for women and men; guaranteeing that city prizes and distinctions recognize the legacy of women, etc.).
- 2) Developing an economic model for life and in harmonization with the balance between work time, education, family, and personal time. In other words, we

are promoting a labor policy that enables women to access the market, that gets women working in better conditions, and that eliminates vertical segregation.

- 3) Building a city where women's basic rights are guaranteed, such as the right to health and culture, the right to housing, the right to a life free of violence, and the right to participation and empowerment.
- 4) And fostering inclusive and liveable neighborhoods, thinking in the public space for the women and men who live in them.

For councilor office for women in Barcelona, the goal of a fair city requires intervention in all four fields at the same time. To put just one example: if we want to make a town-planning change in the city that is equal for women and men, we will have to work simultaneously on the following fronts:

- **Changing the habits of public servants** in the administrations: we need the technical teams in the areas of town planning, housing, and mobility to be trained in the gender perspective, and we also need gender criteria in the contracting of all public and mobility works so that women can actively engage in constructing this urban change.
- **Placing a true value on a diverse economic model** that focuses not only on what is "productive" but on all the production/reproduction work in life and the distribution of men's and women's use of time.
- **And guaranteeing women's participation in the design and construction of the urban planning.** Active participation as a basis for their empowerment.

The Plan for Gender Justice starts from the concept of use value in reference to the city. David Harvey's work, *Rebel Cities*, is a benchmark in understanding the urban world and its dynamics today. In it, Harvey went deeper into the concept of right to the city, to assert its use value in the face of the exchange value associated with urban policies that are part of the commodification processes of living environments. Understood from a women perspective, the use value of the city means asserting life from the quotidian sphere.

However, it is important to consider that women's and men's needs are sometimes the same, but not always. We aren't in the same position, nor do we dedicate the same time to the care of dependents, or have the same access to the job or housing markets, or to the same economic resources. We do not move around the city in the same way.

Therefore, to build a city that is liveable for all, that is inclusive, aimed at the common good, that guarantees sustainable spaces, and that promotes balanced uses among all the people who inhabit it **we have to guarantee the sovereignty of women and their ability to impact the definition of what we want from the public space**, infrastructures, forms of mobility, housing, availability of equipment, business hours, access to the job market, and so on.

We need the empowerment of women, as a collective and individual, and the promotion of policies that enable their active involvement in public life and that boost relations between City Council and community action by women groups and social movements.

## **The Situation in Barcelona:**

Barcelona is a city which in terms of town planning has a number of positive aspects regarding the gender perspective. **Three important things have been done in the past three decades:**

1. **The creation of public space**, bought or expropriated from private ownership, with the new creation of parks, squares, and so on. One standout example was the maritime hub of the city described by the writer Manuel Vázquez Montalbán as the most democratic space in town. The initial idea was to build a large upscale seafront but fierce public protests put paid to that plan in the 1960s and it was subsequently developed as a promenade with free access to the sea, with housing relegated to a block back from the waterfront. The public space conditions were also improved, for example by redeveloping the downtown area to make it almost fully pedestrianized and by delineating boulevards and squares across town.
2. The strong development of the **public transport network** in the city, which is mainly used by women.
3. And the **rollout of urban services** (schools, civic centers, primary health centers, parks, libraries “the Barcelona library network is exemplary”, sports centers, and more) throughout the neighborhoods, including outlying ones which are predominantly used by women.

But we also have problems:

1. One is the gentrification of some areas of the city, meaning that lower-income people (especially older women, people from different nationalities, single-parent families and the

lower classes) who lived there all their lives have had to move out due to the rise in house prices as an upshot of the urban regeneration of the space. Before undertaking improvement works, City Council must be able to pinpoint the vulnerability map and define positive impact strategies for all of these people. To that end we need an analysis with a gender perspective and which addresses inequalities in the areas we want to redevelop. Another problem is that we don't have indicators to monitor policies that involve changing the urban space, so that when a change occurs we then don't have evaluated indicators that enable us to grasp the possible negative effects of the redevelopment in terms of social inequality.

2. Another problem is the perception of safety in public spaces. Barcelona is a safe city, particularly compared to other large cities around the world, but for women we have to keep working on safety so they can better harness what the space has to offer.

## **Areas of Urban Intervention for Gender Justice:**

I would like to highlight a couple of areas of urban intervention for gender justice we are promoting in Barcelona and also working on with the Metropolis Women antennae.

**In terms of mobility and transport**, the ways women and men move around the city in different ways. For example, women use public transport more, because they have different roles to cover as I say before.

For this reason we need to improve the public transport. This coincides with the promotion of a more **sustainable, and better-balanced** mobility network.

We are **Prioritizing walking, cycling, and the use of public transport** to cover the needs of movements inside the neighborhoods, taking into account the location of the different services and facilities, where the elderly and women in particular are the main users.

**Reduce private transport.** This not only relieves traffic problems in the city and makes it less polluting, it also responds better to the needs of women and other sectors of the population that don't use private vehicles.

We are also exploring other actions that can impact not just mobility but also changes in the public space and urban environment. One example of this is called the “**super-block**” where we create a traffic free space in an area of nine city blocks. The idea is to cut traffic in the inside streets, and boosting the space of social, relational, and promoting the local shops and services. The problem with these experiences is that the quality of life can rise dramatically in the space, with the result that the better-off move into the area, forcing people of limited means out due to property price hikes. Even though this is a pilot experience we are already considering how to address this issue, for example by buying up public housing for council flats and purchasing ground floor establishments to retain local businesses, another key aspect in meeting the needs of the people who live in a city. Here it involves preventing the space from ending up as a transit point and consumer hub and ensuring it is designed and defined in line with the presence of the local

people and their uses, and to this end we are reaching out to the inhabitants for their insights. In short, we are seeking to establish a balance between the social, relational, and consumer use of the space; to reduce pollution, and to offer alternatives to the use of private vehicles.

**And finally, in terms of safety,** the actions we are focusing on, apart from the police-based or coercive public control of safety policies:

- ❖ Awareness building about sexual violence, to eradicate the social tolerance
- ❖ Review the regulatory frameworks of public space management
- ❖ Map with women their perceptions of lack of safety caused by urban planning and make changes in public space to improve them. We should do it together with women.
- ❖ Foster women's networks in the city to overcome the perception of being alone and,
- ❖ Build information points and action protocols against sexual violence in: popular events, music venues and markets...etc

All in all, we still have a lot work to do to achieve greater equity between women and men. But we have major opportunities through the urban management.

Also, by sharing best practices in events like this. Thank you!