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# Women's perspective in pedestrian mobility planning: the case of Brasília

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## Abstract

Women's perspective in pedestrian mobility planning, the central theme of this article, not only aggregates infrastructure and transportation planning, but also cultural issues. This emphasizes the need for urban planners and managers to discuss transport, urban planning, amongst other cross-sectional and systemic themes, recognizing the increasing relevance of addressing gender studies in the urban dynamics of cities.

This paper's central aim is to perceive, in the context of a planned city like Brasília, in Brazil, pedestrian women's perspective on the city's infrastructural and cultural issues, in order to start a discussion on the relationship between women as pedestrians and their territory. This research draws from a study that uses part of the database developed by Adriana Souza. This database was compiled from a questionnaire distributed online in Brazil. In the Federal District, case study of this paper, the questionnaire obtained answers from 233 participants from 18 Administrative Regions. The goal here was to develop a qualitative method analysis regarding the quality of the urban environment from the point of view of local women.

The study's findings revealed that what makes a woman change her path, regardless of where she walks, is the exclusive presence of men in public space, which leaves her insecure. Consequently, it becomes even more natural to conclude that, regardless of cultural, ethnic, social, or age issues, society continues to oppress women in public space, since they still do not find conditions for their autonomy.

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## 1. Introduction

Cities are not only about transit and means of transport, they are an expression of cultural, social and national context. This notion has been the foundation that guides an urban policy, whose aim is to provide ample and democratic access to urban spaces, in a safe, socially inclusive, and environmentally friendly way. Traditionally, in

Brazilian cities, access to good transportation has a direct correlation to income: wealthier members of society, most of whom had access to higher education, live in privileged areas that have better urban and public infrastructure.

In city planning and urban design, pedestrian's journeys should be at the forefront of managers and technicians, seeing as every member of society is a pedestrian at some point, even those who own private vehicles. In order to make travelling on foot inviting, it is necessary to have adequate infrastructure and, most importantly, to guarantee people's safety, so they may have autonomy in choosing their paths. As we shall see later in this article, when we consider women's needs as pedestrians, it becomes paramount that the act of "planning a city" is aligned with gender studies and the legibility of urban spaces, that is, how to navigate a city.

It is important to stress that most studies on gender and urban mobility still operate within the binary women/men, not taking into account the plurality of gender identities and expressions present in our society. Nevertheless, within this binary logic, several academic studies have identified differences between women's and men's daily urban journeys, even if, generally speaking, they do not address women's perception, their preferred means of transport and the paths they take.

The importance of planning cities for a diverse and varied population reinforces the need to use the individual as the main subject of analysis. Thus, the inclusion of women's perception of urban mobility, especially on walkability, allows for a broader perception of the difference, and even the discrimination and oppression, suffered by women in their daily lives.

With the goal of bringing the discussion of gender to the field transportation, this article seeks to address women's perception of public space, by enquiring what makes them change their path when walking in Brasília. The aim is to show that, even in a planned city, and regardless of the different realities of the urban areas in the study, women have a pattern in their perceptions of public space and in how they deal with it.

Here, the city is considered as a space of barriers and permeability that condition people's movement and, therefore, this article prioritizes the issue of gender in planning and when considering walkability, identifying particularities of routes in relation to cultural context as well as infrastructure, with the intention of contributing to a dynamic, transversal, systemic planning, emphasizing women's demands and idiosyncrasies in the Regions of Brazil's capital.

## **2. Women's perspective in pedestrian mobility**

Gender differences in planning and pedestrian mobility, the main subject of this article, must address not only transport planning and infrastructure, but also social and cultural issues (patterns of behavior, values and beliefs). Thus, our goal is to highlight the need for urban planners, administrators and politicians to recognize gender issues in the urban dynamic of cities, especially when discussing transportation.

In recent studies on urban mobility regarding origin/destination, women reveal a different pattern in their interaction with space, time and safety. According to Pardo et. al., (2010), women's daily routines are (in many cases) different from men's. For instance, in addition to going to work, it still falls to women to take the children to school, go to the supermarket and perform other domestic duties, usually situated in different parts of the city. This shows that women have different needs when it comes to mobility, since their journeys are, for the most part, connected with domestic duties, childcare and caring for the elderly.

Thus, considering gender when discussing mobility has become essential for understanding the veritable chasm that exists between those who enjoy the city and those who, because they are women, find their circulation and their experience of public spaces to be restricted. This does not mean, however, that women move less in space: in fact, working women make more daily journeys per day than men, a reflection of women's "double shift" hours (Tobío, 1994). It has been shown, furthermore, that women use public transportation more frequently, and travel on foot more often, than men.

When talking about gender and public space, the first issue usually raised is that of safety. It is common sense that safety is the perception of being free from risk, danger or losses, and, since it is about perception, the individual subjectivity of the object of study becomes evident. Thus, this becomes essential when discussing urban politics (of space) that touch upon the broader issue of the right to the city, and when seeking to (re)politicize discourses around safety. Nowadays, we have seen the need for a different theoretical approach, one that moves away from current and

dominant theories and strategies, based on simplistic suppositions, such as the notion that crowded streets make urban spaces more vibrant and safe (Gehl, 2013).

In the 2010 Latin American Women's Habitat Network meeting, women reported being more fearful than men, being taught since very early ages that they are not supposed to go alone to public spaces (Women and habitat network of Latin America, 2010). Women's intensified fear narrows their movements, limiting their use of public space and their trips to other public or private spaces. British geographer Valentine Gill (2016) specifies women's daily coping strategies when choosing their path of travel, stating that women practice a daily negotiation when using public spaces due to cultural and social reasons, mostly the fear of being physically vulnerable to men.

But, it was only in the last decade that urban planners and policy makers from most developing countries have begun to recognize gender differences in the way women and men travel in the city. Gender determines not only the chosen mode of transport, but also the way that transport is perceived and evaluated, as studies around the world have shown. In the case of some countries, religious traditions and cultural traditions are extremely restrictive for women, such as the non-use of bicycles and public transport.

Once the role of culture in determining women's occupation of public spaces is acknowledged, an important step regarding the relation of gender with urban mobility must be taken. Besides the role of scientific research to strive for the reconciliation of women with the joy of moving around the city and occupying public spaces, the practices within transport planning and policy making must recognize gendered differences in the way women and men travel in the city (Harkot, M.K., Andrade, M.H., Giannotti, M., Santoro, P., 2017).

So, it is in this context that the idea of studying women's perspective as pedestrians arose, taking into account their requirements to feel safe and independent in urban spaces and in their daily travels.

### **3. Case study: Brasília**

The planning of Brasília emerged as a new way of life. It's innovative propositions of urban construction were developed as mechanisms of social change, under modernist ideals, as evidenced in the idea of zoning or in the introduction of new and grand buildings, modifying the urban fabric – and exacerbating the city's aesthetic value, impressing the weight that architecture and road infrastructure have had on the city's space since the beginning.

Brasília was conceived and built to be the country's new capital, relocating it further inland. The operation to bring the power further inland was, deliberately, to take possession Brazil's central region, originally made up of undeveloped agricultural areas. At the intersection of the states of Goiás, Bahia and Minas Gerais, the Federal District's territory was defined, being made up of 31 Administrative Regions (AR's), originally known as satellite cities – which emerged due to the very construction of Brasília. As another example of the issue of space vs. money, Brasília has and still is undergoing an acute process of urban sprawling – the Pilot Plan's Superblocks, meant to house employers and employees side by side, bringing about the change in social structure advocated by Modernism, are now the home of the privileged. The rest, those with less purchasing power, have had to move further away from the city, causing the formation of dormitory towns.

The city's urban zoning, conceived under Fordism, resulted in a vast urban occupation which is demanding when it comes to mobility, since it requires intense, long, diverse and random journeys, which cause greater consumption of fuel, increase traffic and (air and noise) pollution.

Brasília's zoning set aside specific areas for different uses of the city: residential, governmental, commercial, industrial, leisure, culture, and so on and so forth. To reduce circulation problems, it eliminated intersections by implementing level crossing. At the end of the longitudinal axis, stands out the Three Powers Plaza (Praça dos Três Poderes). At first, Lúcio Costa designed the Pilot Plan in the form of an orthogonal cross, but the land's topography and circulation needs imposed a change, meaning that the transversal axis had to be curved, simulating the shape of an airplane. Since its inception, therefore, Brasília was built for cars, requiring great undertakings (financial and spatial) of road infrastructure. The existence of these great spaces separating the city's urban centers has generated, since then, fragmentation and discontinuity.

In 1987, Brasília's Pilot Plan was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, being the only 20<sup>th</sup> century urban construction to receive the title. Consequently, Lúcio Costa's four section urban plan (Monumental, Residential, Gregarious, and Bucolic) and their essential values should be preserved; as well as observing the corresponding heritage values for the fundamental areas of the city. The primary degree restricts urban interventions (construction

work) in the Pilot Plan as a whole, for example, the Superblocks, the Monumental Axis, the centre of the city and the area around lake Paranoá. In the secondary degree, and therefore with less restriction, protected areas such as Cruzeiro, Southeast, Northeast, Graphic Industries Sector, Official Parking Sector, amongst others, as registered by the Plano de Preservação do Conjunto Urbanístico (PPCUB).

The urban occupation that spread around Brasília, with the creation of the aforementioned Administrative Regions and their dependence on the Pilot Plan as an economic center, has led to the consolidation of a scenario very distinct from what was usually conceived, creating great pressure on the roads in the central area, which led to continuous adaptations of the Pilot Plan's road system, while no other adjustments were made to provide other means of transport (Lima, 2010). This resulted in the pendular commute of those who live in the surrounding areas and travel every day to the center, crossing the Pilot Plan to reach their destination.

It is remarkable, therefore, to notice that it is in this cultural and morphological scenario that our study takes place. As we shall see, women from different Administrative Regions have replied to the questionnaire and had an active role in shaping the diagnosis here presented.

#### 4. Methods

This article used a question from the online questionnaire applied by Adriana Souza for her PhD thesis. For qualitative method analysis regarding the quality of the urban environment from the point of view of local women, the chosen city was Brasília and the question was *What makes you change paths when walking on foot?* The database was composed of a nation-wide online questionnaire, which received responses from 26 Brazilian states, in addition to Brasília, Federal District, with a total of 773 participants from all over the country. It was composed of 30 closed questions that addressed issues of women's fears when walking on foot, questions of infrastructure (in structure and planning) and public safety.

The cities that received most responses were Brasília, São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Pernambuco and Rio de Janeiro. In Brasília, the present paper's case study, Souza's research focused on one of the 30 questions from the survey and obtained answers from 233 participants from the Administrative Regions. From this, the chosen question asked what led women to change paths when walking in the city and had seven options as answers (the presence of unknown men / the presence of unknown women / lack of signs or information / lack of sidewalks / obstacles or trash in the way / an empty street, without anyone around / a dark street without illumination). Then, it was proposed that the response be graded in a grade from 1 to 7, according to the relevance (1 most relevant, 7 less relevant), and the participant is not allowed to repeat the same value. This allowed us to elaborate a scale of the most relevant answers. After staggering the responses of the participants, we produced a table with the first three items most voted by them.

In the following topic, we shall analyse, of the 7 items presented above, the first three chosen by women as a response to the question of what makes them change paths when walking about in the city, a profile of the participants and their geographical representation in the chosen city.

#### 5. Analysis

Perception of public space is different for each person. To develop any analysis, we must observe our daily micro-actions and their relation to big processes of development. By watching these micro-actions, we can understand how women, for instance, interact with public space and how this space affects their safety, orientation and social relationships.

The inclusion of gender in urban environment studies is relatively recent, having been addressed with greater emphasis from the 1970's by Dumont and Franken (1977). Hayden (1980) and Domínguez (1997), for example, asked why urban plans and diagnosis were unable to understand the different ways in which diverse social groups relate to the city.

The specific needs of women in public space are directly related to the social construction of gender, which has historically confined women to the private space (domestic) and to their reproductive "gifts", as was described by Scott (1986). These patterns are related to the ways in which women enjoy and use the land, resulting in the different ways they circulate and walk in urban spaces (Coutras, 1997; Vidal, 2004; Hanson, 2010).

To answer the question of what makes a woman change her path when walking, we have selected three of the highest rated items and, in light of gender and pedestrian mobility precepts, we have analyzed their answers.

The characteristics of the database, composed of 233 self-declared women, are as follows:

Table 1 - Summary of participants

Participants characteristics	Percentage (%)
white	63,5%
between 22 and 39 years old	71,7%
single	61,4%
do not have children	72,5%
have attended university	78%
earn more than 10 minimum wages	48,5%
own a private vehicle	77,7%
never use public transportation	23,6%

Since its construction, there was great concern that Brasília should be "modernist" and should keep its urban scales and aesthetic-functional values. Throughout the 20th century, the emphasis when interpreting the city was traditionally narratological or descriptive, according to Medeiros (2013). Those approaches focused on economic, political, cultural and social relations, and there seems to be no advancement in the studies about the ways in which the shape-space, in other words, how the conglomerations of empty spaces and filled spaces that make up the city, affect people's relationship with public space, a relevant category to understand urban phenomena, as in the works of Jane Jacobs and Jan Gehl. Even though Brasília presents a large quantity of empty spaces, with numerous places with low infrastructure, and several dark streets for pedestrians, women still considered the presence of unknown men as the main factor that leads them to change their paths. This shows how women's specific needs with regards to mobility have been forgotten in urban planning.

Participants live in 18 of Brasília's 31 Administrative Regions, and more than 40% of them live in the Pilot Plan, as seen below, in comparison of population density distribution:

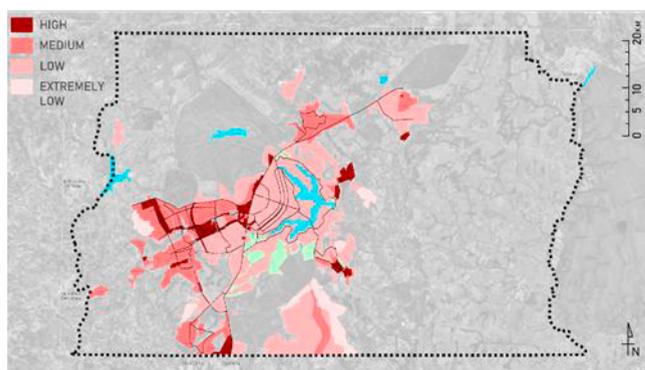


Figure 1- Population Density distribution



Figure 2- Participants Distribution on the territory

In the past few years, in Brazil, gender studies and urban mobility have begun to gain more attention and achieve significant advancements. Discussions have become more aware of the differences between diverse social groups, as Tavares (2015) and Peccini (2016) have shown in Rio de Janeiro, Siqueira (2015) in Recife, and Svab (2016) in São Paulo. However, even with this advance in Brazilian research, which now discusses urban space, not only from a the

point of view of social construction, but from women's perspective in their daily journeys, we still need to understand the consequences of forgetting various social groups in city planning.

It's important to remember that women were not only forgotten in urban planning, but are the greatest victims of sexual violence, in Brazil and in the world. Sexual violence is an universal phenomenon and its consequences are considered a public health problem, as reports this study of Sexual Violence (2013): "*Even though cases of sexual violence are greatly underreported, their prevalence and individual and collective consequences are sufficiently grave to make it a public health problem, but which has been continuously neglected*".

It is no coincidence that of the 7.762 women who were asked whether they have ever decided against doing something (going somewhere, walking past a construction site, walking into the city) due to fear of harassment, 6.292 (81%) replied that they have decided against doing something because they were afraid. Thus, it is not surprising that the highest rated item that leads women to change their course is the presence of unknown men.

In the table below, are listed the first three items chosen by the 233 participants from Brasília.

Table 2 - Most common responses

What makes you change paths when walking on foot?		
1	the presence of unknown men	54,51%
2	a dark street/path without illumination	36,91%
3	an empty street/path, without anyone around	39,06%

Of the 233 participants, 127 chose the first item as the main reason they change their paths when walking in the city, and of these 127, 98% had attended university and 81% didn't have children. When we look at the women who chose as their second item the option a dark street/path without illumination, we find that more than 80% of them chose the presence of unknown men as their highest rated item. It is worth remembering that in 2015, Brazil occupied the 5th place in a list of 83 countries rated according to the number of women murdered, presenting a rate of 4,8 women murdered per 100 thousand inhabitants.

In a study by the *Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada* – (IPEA, 2014), it was estimated that at least 527 thousand people were raped per year in Brazil, and that, of these cases, only 10% were reported to the police. "In Brazil, most women do not press charges due to shame and fear of humiliation, or fear of the reaction of relatives and authorities. It is also common for the perpetrator to threaten women with more violence in case they reveals what they have suffered" stated Jefferson Drezett in the study Sexual Violence (2013). Women of all ages, social conditions, ethnicities and level of education have the same fear.

All of the three highest rated items related to women's fear of, being in a public space, becoming victims of physical or sexual violence, be it in an empty or a poorly-lit street. This happens because there is a mistaken analysis of crime by authorities and society at large, since 35% of them agree with the statement "if women knew how to behave there would be less cases of rape", focusing on the victims behaviors, and not on the perpetrator of the heinous crime, according to research by SIPS (2014).

Of Brazil's 27 capitals, Brasília occupies the 20th place in the Map of Violence (2015). Even as the capital of the country, a pioneer due to the implementation of a law about registration and disclosure of data on violence against vulnerable social groups – children, teenagers, elderly people, people of color, women, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transvestites, transgenders, intersex (LGBTI) and disabled people, when compared to states that have less quality of official statistics and information, Brasília is the capital that killed most women in 2016.

When we talk about gender discrimination and violence against women, we must understand that these are not recent events. Even in older societies, women were considered to be inferior to men (Alambert, 1997). During the feudal system, only men could own land and women were excluded from having a share, being allowed only the social function of reproduction. In the transition from the feudal system to capitalism, the Enlightenment placed women in an extremely fragile position and, after the French Revolution, even as women took an active role in it, they were excluded from the Declaration of the Rights of Men, thus removing them from public life, according to Peccini (2016).

Brasília, with its wide roads and avenues, with speed limits of up to 80km/h only 200 meters from people's homes, not only forgoes the human scale, as defended by architect and urban planner Jan Gehl (2013), but is the result of male-dominated and anthropocentric modernist thinking, resulting in one of the main components that create fear and oppression in an urban environment, originally explained by Siqueira (2015) as "street fear", especially for women.

In a recent study by Harkot, et. al., (2017) women declared that active facades are more important to them, particularly since women take advantage of their daily journeys to perform household-related errands, by their own free will or not, thus frequenting local commerce. That is to say, beyond the life offered by active facades, women feel safer when walking in spaces with greater activity and which are more populated, because in this way, if something were to happen to them, they could seek help with greater ease.

Brasília, built according to modernist ideals, does not only offer physical and structural barriers for women, but its urban spaces, designed according to men's needs and lifestyle, created the false impression of universal projects, but were never based on gender diversity and the varied needs of people's daily routines. Beyond that, the space created by men encodes and perpetuates male superiority, reinforcing women's inferiority and subordination. This is the paradigm that we need to change and take into account that incorporating women's perspective in research is not only a necessity, but a gesture that includes the perception of public space by more than 50% of the population.

## 6. Conclusion and Limitations

Before we outline our conclusions, it is extremely important to acknowledge the limitations faced throughout this research. We must consider, firstly, that the database did not include great diversity. This means there is lack of representation, as the majority of participating women are white, literate and middle-class, and the study does not cover a reasonable population of black women and women of low income. Furthermore, participants represented only 18 of the 31 AR's, and the great majority of them were from the Pilot Plan, which also falls short of representing the city's diversity.

In the course of the present research, it was possible to reach a few conclusions. We noticed that a city, if it is to become democratic and safe, must offer everyone the possibility of coming and going as they choose, without imposing barriers, impediments or any form of violence on them.

Participants' responses reinforced the idea that gender violence is a consequence of the patriarchy, which has for centuries determined men's and women's roles and power relations. As a by-product of the patriarchy, rape culture, implicit or explicitly, places women as objects of desire and the property of men, which results in the legitimizations of various forms of violence, amongst them those least visible to managers and urban planners, such as women's needs as pedestrians.

The gender dispute lies in urban democracy, where social practices should be equal in their rights, responsibilities and opportunities, and public spaces should have more equity. As Lefebvre affirms, "*social spaces are interconnected and superposed, not limited by each other (...) it is necessary to understand what generates diverse movements, rhythms, frequencies, what intertwines them and maintains the precarious hierarchy of big and small...*". The creation of space, therefore, is never impartial, that is, it's constructed by the patriarchy's eyes and hands, actively maintaining various inequalities, gender inequality amongst them. Understanding how gender relations are manifested and happen in public spaces, and also in private spaces, creates that possibility of mapping future interventions and diagnosing existing conflicts.

Redesigning and requalifying cities is not enough if we do not transform power relations and, consequently, gender inequality, in our societies. Women have not had, in fact, the opportunity to plan and influence urban spaces, in spite of being the majority of pedestrians and public transport users in almost every city in the world.

The city is, therefore, product of a power relation, belonging politically, socially and historically to men, though we are not speaking of individual human beings, but of the gender that holds, not only power, but also the tools available to enforce it in the construction and urban planning of cities.

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