

The potential of community-led Placemaking to create gender inclusive public spaces in Montreal*

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Summary This research explores the potential the participatory approach of placemaking to develop urban public spaces that are gender inclusive in their process and design. Overcoming gender gaps through the active involvement of a diversity of women in urban development and governance is a priority for sustainable urbanism, reflected in recent global normative frameworks (ex. Agenda 2030; New Urban Agenda) and in the thematic priorities of the Gender Summit 11 (ex. gender equality and diversity as drivers of innovation, intersectionality, gender equality as a marker of success).

1. Relevance

Placemaking and other participatory approaches to urban development are increasingly prevalent in cities around the world. Women and girls have traditionally been excluded from urban planning processes, resulting in gender gaps in cities, thus it is essential that we strive to understand how emerging participatory approaches to planning can be harnessed as gender inclusive strategies to city planning processes that result in inclusive public spaces for all women and girls.

2. Aims & Objectives

The research seeks to understand whether placemaking, a flexible, participatory bottom-up approach to planning, can overcome the well-documented gender gaps in urban planning to create gender inclusive public spaces. Literature on placemaking lacks mention of the diversity of people it purports to represent, thus the research will explore how inclusive placemaking actually is, critically assessing the process by considering diverse women's roles at various stages, especially related to decision making and designing the public space. The research will begin to fill a current gap in existing literature around gender and placemaking in the fields of urban studies, geography and urban planning.

3. Methods

The study relied on a variety of methods to achieve its goal. To begin to fill a knowledge gap around gender inclusive placemaking processes, international key informant interviews were held with experts. To better understand how processes result in places to understand the potential for gender inclusion in practice, an in-depth case study of a placemaking site in Montreal was undertaken. The study consisted on a series of observations, photography, semi-directive interviews with those leading the placemaking, semi-directive interviews with community organisations reaching a diversity of local residents and micro-surveys with users of the space *in situ* were completed.

4. Results

Data analysis is currently underway, but early results from the key informant interviews suggest that placemaking can be an empowering process for women, many of whom assume leadership roles as a result. Similarly, while site observations reveal a relative gender balance in usage of the space, other homogenous factors were revealed, notably age, suggesting that placemaking can result in places of exclusion for some.

5. Conclusions

It appears that placemaking can be an innovative tool used to promote gender inclusion in developing urban public spaces if specific attention and efforts are made to this end. Further, it suggests that an intersectional approach is needed to achieve for inclusion of a diversity of women and girls.

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