

URBAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: GENDER APPROACHES

Zaida Muxí Martínez & Tania Magro Huertas***

* UPC - DUOT-ETSAB- Professor, PhD in Architecture.av Diagonal 649 4^o floor, 08028 Barcelona;
zaida@coac.net

** UPC DCA. ETSAB PhD Candidate ETSAB Architect, Masters Laboratory for 21st Century Housing,
ETSAB-FPC; tamaghue@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT: At the end of the 60's the so called Urban Social Movements were groups that coming from different locally rooted entities or associations, asked for new approaches to planning that meant taking care of people's needs and memories.

As a result of the experience that came from the gendered division of work, duties and spaces women had a deep and broad knowledge of the urban circumstances. At the very beginning of the Urban Social Movements in Barcelona we could find women's meetings where they asked for better condition of living, claiming for better and safer public spaces, more public facilities for daily life and better public transport, all of these with the aim to allow everyone, but specially women, to conciliated public, personal and family life.

KEY WORDS: Social movements. Gender. Urban renewal. Participation. Feminism.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the late 1960s new agents began appearing on the Western urban scene who would play different roles from those of the powers that be, giving new meaning to the processes of urban renewal and development.

These new agents came to be known as Urban Social Movements, and arose in an effort to solve urban problems caused by advanced capitalism's contradictions (Martínez, 1998) in cities and the negative results of application of urban proposals of the Modern Movement's avantgardes. The unyielding zonification they proposed ended up destroying essential values of cities as a place for meeting and for communication, disconnecting and destroying basic activities that traditionally had maintained the spirit of the city as a place for exchange and encounters, interrupting its historical continuity.

Urban Social Movements demanded new approaches to city planning that meant taking people and their needs and imaginaries into account. Thus, rather than planning that was implemented taking everything as a *tabula rasa*, Urban Social Movements, in contact with people's reality, proposed improving their lives and their relationships with the neighborhood. They fought for urbanism to propose a series of spaces, facilities and services that would not only satisfy citizens' needs, but also enhance their living experience and communication. Although USMs are different in each country, what they share is that they are the expression of the citizenry's will to be involved in the creation and construction of their own urban space (Domingo-Bonet, 1996).

One of the most significant thinkers of urbanism, both from the technical standpoint and in Urban Social Movement struggles, is Jane Jacobs. In her book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), she argues for new urban planning principles different from those taught in architecture schools, based on her experience as a woman in the city and its immediate surroundings. She advocates a new method of urban research based on constantly thinking about structures in movement, in processes underway; on working inductively, reasoning from particular to general; and on looking for unique indications or signs, different from the generality.

Jane Jacobs talks about the importance of security on city streets, about the components characterizing successful public spaces, about urban regeneration, everyday life and day-to-day activities in the neighborhood. She defends urban diversity vis-à-vis global, uniform planning, valuing high-density, mixed-use urban fabrics, from the danger implied by single-function interventions focusing on infrastructure. To

achieve these objectives she proposed community participation, thereby trusting individual capacities as a tool against the devastating impact of urban developers and their corporate clients.

In her view, cities are complex emerging systems that are the result of the unplanned actions of individuals and small groups, where local knowledge is key.

Urban Social Movements arose in Barcelona in the late 1960s in response to the needs of certain neighborhoods. These movements were primarily vehicularized through neighborhood associations. In Spain under the Franco dictatorship neighborhood associations played a political role when political party activity was still prohibited.

Women's participation in these associations was very important, not only because it implied support and cohesiveness for men's work, but also because they organized independently to demand certain neighborhood conditions that would resolve their specific needs as those responsible for reproduction and as women. As a consequence of a gender-based division of labor, women for the most part dealt with reproductive tasks¹, which provided them with a different, profound and broad knowledge of urban wants (fig.1).



Figure 1: Everyday life of women in the neighborhoods. (photos from the magazine *Vindicación feminista* nº 22 and from the magazine *La veu del carrer* nº 21: “*La ciutat i les dones*”).

2 URBAN CONFLICTS AS EXPERIENCED BY WOMEN.

In the 1970s working-class women endured dual discrimination: as belonging to a marginated and exploited social class, and as women, there were excluded and marginated in the groups they belonged to themselves. Gender inequality was articulated in the public-private dichotomy, also supported by capitalism and patriarchy, which mutually reinforced one another. These women were relegated to the private space, as persons exclusively responsible for reproductive tasks, although many of them also worked in the productive sphere. Women's reproductive work was invisibilized, since as it was not remunerated it did not fall within the system of values of capitalist production and, moreover, they were barred from the political sphere. The exclusion suffered by women during the dictatorship implied a setback in their situation as a collective, and they lost space in terms of power and decision-making. During those years, the oppression of women was manifest in the family, in society, in education, in work, and in sexuality.

Dolores Hayden (Hayden, 1981)² explained the relationship between the situation of women relegated to domestic chores and urban planning. The author criticizes the idea that “woman's place is in the home” as a principle of architectural design and urban planning. Dwellings, neighborhoods and cities were designed for women confined to their homes, and this limited them physically, socially and economically. When in

¹ Tasks making possible the natural, physical and social development of persons, as the basis for productive tasks.

² Based on the conference “Planning and Designing a Non-Sexist Society,” held at the University of California, Los Angeles, April 21, 1979.

addition to reproductive tasks women have to deal with productive work the frustrations are accentuated. In the author's view a solution must be found for the limitations and difficulties women encounter both in the private and the public spheres, given that conventional households were not appropriate for women who cared for their families and were also employed. One of the problems implied by living in an outlying neighborhood was the scarcity of shared public spaces, stores, daycare, and laundry services. As remedy Hayden proposes attacking the traditional division between public and private space, in addition to linking housing and workplaces in proximity, so as to avoid long commutes.

Manuel Castells (Castells, 1975) refers to the urban problem as a series of everyday acts and situations whose performance and features closely depend on general social organization. Those urban problems include the case of women as a specific social group. They are the women who want to leave the private sphere but who do not make it, or who find it very difficult because of the impediments they encounter in the city, which include the lack of services as well as hours not suited to their needs. The author refers specifically to the phalocratic cultural model, which keeps women at home, submitted, and isolated.

The theoretical debates were endorsed by women involved in USMs, since in fulfilling the assigned role of dealing with reproductive shores, it was women who suffered the inconveniences and deficiencies of the physical support in which those chores had to be performed, i.e., dwellings and neighborhoods. A 1970 study in Barcelona's Besòs neighborhood³ to determine the number of daycare centers that were needed (Matas Pericé, 1971) found that 22% of women worked outside the home, and 50% worked in exchange for a salary within their own homes. In general there were no collective or social services allowing women to rid themselves of some of their reproductive obligations in order to be able to take on remunerated work.

The specific problems of women in the neighborhood started coming to light, making it clear that they needed to have their own organization to denounce the problems they face and demand solutions that would take them into account. Otherwise women would continue to bear the brunt of the situation. (fig.2)



Figure 2: Women protesting in Barcelona City Hall against rubbish in Collserola hill (photo Nash, 2007). Woman demanding better public spaces (Photo magazine *La veu del carrer* nº 21) and women group demonstrating for better houses.

3 ORGANIZATION AND PARTICIPATION.⁴

Yet women have always participated in USMs and have often led them, although their roles as promoters of social change have received little attention. There has been acceptance of the hegemonic discourse that says that women are politically passive and submissive, even when this contradicts reality, and their work has often been presented as complementary to and functional for the work of men within the movement.

It is not that women do not do important things, but instead that what women do is not considered important.

³ El Besòs is a traditional worker and industrial neighborhood of Barcelona. In the 1970s it was on the outskirts of the city.

⁴ The concept of empowerment with a dual dimension appeared as of the 1995 Beijing Declaration, at the Fourth World Conference on Women. On the one hand, it involved awareness of the individual and collective power held by women. And on the other, a political dimension, insofar as women seek to be present in decision-making places, i.e., exercising power.

To rewrite the history of USMs from a gender perspective we would have to invert the scale of values where significance has been related to the male world, to now give importance to the female world, that proper to women, with other systems of value, relationships and internal articulation.

The organization of women within neighborhood associations is different from that of men, since women, in addition to fighting for cohesion and improvement of the neighborhood, have to fight for personal emancipation, bringing other factors into the mix.

The characteristic of women's struggles are (Trayner i Vilanova, 1997):

1- The ways in which women act in mobilizations follow behavior patterns in line with values assigned to the female gender.

2- They bring entertainment and festive elements to their protests.

3- Organization of women in more informal structures and without strict rules as to membership and operation.

4- In women's groups the public-private and individual-collective dichotomies are less patent than in traditional social and political organizations.

5- Communication and participation are more direct.

6- Women's participation in specific urban demands leads to a change in the social relationships of the demanding group, since gender awareness is added to class consciousness.

Feminist theories would accompany development of neighborhood and urban demands of women. It was as of 1975, declared by the UN as International Women's Year, that feminist women in Spain began to meet and establish contacts that led to proposing alternatives to official events. Feminist groups organized the First Workshop for Women's Liberation in Madrid from December 6 to 8. In March 1976 the First Catalan Women's Workshop was held in Barcelona.



Figure 3: First Catalan Women's Workshop held in Barcelona University main hall. (from Pilar Aymerich, Exhibition Catalogue *Memoria d'un temps.*)

One of the presentations focused on women and neighborhoods, underscoring two important issues:

1) Poor neighborhood living conditions most affect women, since they are the ones who spend most time and do most chores there;

2) The problem of citizen participation is more serious in women because they are in a position of inferiority, due to the oppression to which they are subjected and their exclusion from public space, with respect to men.

Proposals to deal with this situation included:

a- The women's economic emancipation.

To achieve it, it was important to collectivize domestic services (laundries, dining halls, etc.), create free social services (daycare centers, schools, adult education centers), and ensure good mobility within the neighborhood and between the neighborhood and the rest of the city.

b- The incorporation of women in political life.

c- The creation of women's subgroups.

Although the debate does not reflect a unified perspective, it is evident that the urban question is not neutral and affects women differently. For that reasons, the magazine *Vindicación feminista*⁵ began publishing a new section as of its October 4, 1976 edition, called “Woman in neighborhoods” (fig. 4) attempting to present “as faithfully as possible the conditions in which hundreds of thousands of women live in neighborhoods, the kinds of oppression they face there, and their brutally or subtly discriminatory reality” (Pineda, 1976).



Figure 4: Cover from magazine *Vindicación feminista* n° 1 and n° 4. Opening article of the new section in the magazine “The Woman in the Neighborhoods” signed by Amparo Pineda.

4 GENERATING THE CITY⁶

Gender grievances imply speaking from the experience of the city and neighborhoods beyond oneself, and having made it possible to reconcile reproduction and production times (not to mention own time) despite the difficulties posed by the physical surroundings. The female experience, even today, can unfortunately not be de-linked from imposed roles. The decisions made about the city are informed by an exclusive experience, which is by no means universal.

The right to the city, which can be understood abstractly and philosophically, has a first level that is evidently material, affording women the same opportunities of choice as men. Hence the charter of rights can be materialized in a series of services and facilities for which neighborhood women have struggled, and continue to struggle.

Among the most important claims made over these years have been those for collective services, particularly childcare centers, for all neighborhoods and with sufficient space for all children. They should also be free and have flexible hours. It was a matter of creating services that would make women’s remunerated and reproductive work compatible, since creation of care centers for children was essential for women’s emancipation.

So, the most important women’s claims in the 70’s were (fig. 5):

Children care centers.

Adult education institute.

Public kindergardens and schools.

Neighborhood health centers.

All these easily reachable on foot or by public transport in all neighborhood.

⁵ *Vindicación feminista* was a magazine published between 1976 and 1979 that was a platform for dissemination of claims by the Feminist Movement in Spain.

⁶ In the view of Deleuze (LARRAURI, 2000) the logic of life is not the logic of being but of becoming. What is important is that which passes, which is gone through, which changes. This gives rise to the concept of “generating,” the power to generate the city. It is also a play on words with “género,” i.e., “gender” in the Spanish language.

And last but not least, housing claims extended to the quality of the quality neighborhood public space.



Figure 5: Children and women demonstrating for public and free childcare centers. (magazine *Triunfo* nº 698)

5 CONCLUSIONS

The relationship between women's activism and Urban Social Movements has been conflictive from the outset. Urban Social Movements often assume a bourgeois position of segregating women from spheres of power (Fig.6).

There have always been women who have tried to bring feminist claims into movements, such as Federica Montseny in the Catalan anarchist movement, Flora Tristán in the French socialist movement, or Clara Zetkin in the communist movement.⁷ Yet they were never priority grievances for movement leaders. They seemed to feel that giving them too much attention would weaken the priority objectives, and that once the priorities had been met, the others, those of women, would fall into place.



Figure 6: Cartoon criticizing men that belongs to the left movement because they were indifferent to women's rights

Feminist claims as of the 1970s focused on the fact that being a male citizen is not the same as being a female citizen, insofar as it does not provide access to spheres of power on equal terms. Hence they focused on questioning the separation between public and private, and on strengthening other ways of viewing the world, different from the patriarchal ideology (Alfama and Miró, 2005).

For urban planning it is important to take away the lesson that a good neighborhood, a good city, cannot be planned if we fail to take into account the knowledge afforded by women's experience. And although over thirty years have gone by from the time of the experiences related here, the burden of responsibility linked to gender roles continues to be totally unequal, and according to Spain 2007 statistics, it is we women who perform nearly 70% of reproductive work. Urban forms condition opportunities for equality, and the segregated and disperse growth of urban developments in the closing decades of the 20th century reinforce the division deriving from gender roles and the patriarchal hierarchy structure.

⁷ Eva Alfama i Neus Miró, 2005. Pg.19.

A first, evident, conclusion is that the improvements in cities and in Barcelona in particular during the last quarter of the 20th century derive from claims and urban projects conceived and defended from the bottom up.

As a second conclusion, it has been demonstrated that urban experience is not neutral. Hence the experience of women, both as differently-sexed beings and because of assigned gender roles, reveals other dysfunctions and needs from those seen from men's perspective. Consequently, enhancing the visibility of women's contributions to the city constitutes a debt to our predecessors, as well as a necessary revision in order to build equitable societies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Paper produced by research group on "Documentary archive for a critical review of the Barcelona model," reference HAR2008-05486/ARTE, Ministry of Science and Innovation and Catalunya AGAUR 2009/GRE435.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alfama, Eva & Miró, Neus. (2005) *Dones en moviment. Un anàlisi de gènere de la lluita en defensa de l'Ebre*. Barcelona: Institut de Govern i polítiques públiques. Cossetània Edicions.
- Castells, Manuel. (1975) *Movimientos Sociales Urbanos*, Madrid: Siglo veintiuno de España editores.
- Domingo i Clota, Miquel & Bonet i Casas, Maria Rosa. (1998) *Barcelona i els moviments socials urbans*, Barcelona: Fundació Jaume Bofill, Editorial Mediterrània.
- FAVB (1979) *I Assemblea de les associacions de veïns de Catalunya. Desenvolupament, conclusions i cens*, Manresa: Federació d'Associacions de Veïns de Barcelona.
- Goicoechea, Maite. (1977) *Barcelona: Sublevación popular en el Besós, Vindicación feminista nº 13*, pp. 51-53.
- Hayden, Dolores. (1981) *What would a Non-Sexist City be Like? Speculation on Housing, Urban design and Human Work*. in Stimpson, Catharine R., Dixler, Elsa; Nelson, Martha J.; Yakratis, Kathryn B.(eds) *Women and the American City*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Jacobs, Jane. (1961) *Muerte y vida de las grandes ciudades americanas*, Madrid: Península.
- Jornades Catalanes de la dona. (1996) *20 anys de feminisme a Catalunya*, Barcelona: Associació de Dones per a la Celebració dels 20 Anys de les Primeres Jornades de la Dona.
- Jornades Catalanes de la Dona. (1977) *Jornades Catalanes de la Dona*, Barcelona: Comissió Catalana d'Organitzacions no Governamentals, Secretariat de les Jornades. Alternatives.
- Larrauri, Maite. (2000) *El deseo según Gilles Deleuze*, Valencia: Tàndem Edicions.
- Luzán, Julia. (1976) *Guarderías gratuitas, públicas y democráticas*, Triunfo nº 698, pp. 18-19.
- Martínez Barceló, Pep. (1998) *Del Moviment ciutadà i de la democràcia local: moviments socials i democràcia local*, Revista Catalana de sociologia nº 7, pp. 29-72.
- Matas Pericé, Alfred. (1970) *Al Sud-Oest del Besòs*, Barcelona: Editorial Portic.
- Nash, Mary. (2007) *Dones en transició*, Barcelona: Regidoria de Dona, Ajuntament de Barcelona.
- Pineda, Amparo. (1976) *La mujer en los barrios*, Vindicación feminista nº 4, pp. 50.
- Roig, Montserrat & Luzán, Julia. *Las mujeres de "Motor Ibérica"*, Triunfo nº 711, pp. 28-31.
- Segura Soriano, Isabel. (2001) *Dones de Sants-Montjuïc: itineraris històrics*, Barcelona: Arxiu Municipal i Districte de Sants-Montjuïc. Ajuntament de Barcelona.
- Segura Soriano, Isabel (2001) *Dones de Sant Andreu: itineraris històrics*, Barcelona: Arxiu Municipal i Districte de Sant Andreu. Ajuntament de Barcelona.
- Segura Soriano, Isabel (2002) *Dones de Sant Martí*, Barcelona: Arxiu Municipal i Districte de Sant Martí. Ajuntament de Barcelona.
- Segura Soriano, Isabel (2007) *Dones d'Horta-Guinardó: itineraris històrics*, Barcelona: Arxiu Municipal i Districte d'Horta-Guinardó. Ajuntament de Barcelona.
- Soria i Badia, Assumpta. (1978) *Las mujeres de Sant Andreu han creado el Casal de la Dona*, Vindicación feminista nº 22, pp.51.
- Trayner i Vilanova, Mari Pau. (1997) *Les organitzacions populars de dones i el Canvi social*, in: Proa (Eds) *L'articulació social de la Barcelona contemporània*, Barcelona: Institut de Cultura de Barcelona.
