<span style="background-color:teal">**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**</span>

# Mapping the 'Presency' of Women in Cities

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*Abstract* – This paper explores how innovative ways of mapping both the presence and the agency of contemporary women in cities may support the emergence of emancipatory placemaking perspectives and previously unrecorded narratives. It starts by proposing 'presency' as a new concept, merging the meaning of presence, as a mindful way of paying attention to life; and agency, as critical awareness of the context and capacity to act. It examines the pace of urbanisation of the world and the revisited role of women in their mediation of space and making of place including efforts to forge a new framework of regenerative urban development. It proposes different mapping approaches to capture a mosaic of regenerative practices led by women addressing how cities of present and future can be green and inclusive. It concludes by suggesting that the act of mapping spatially and 'from within' the way women experience and act in the city may unleash women's emancipatory place-making skills, moving cities systems up to higher orders of integrated expression.

*Keywords* – women; mapping; placemaking; regenerative development; agency

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*'The moving about that the city multiplies and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place - an experience that is, to be sure, broken up into countless tiny deportations (displacements and walks), compensated for by the relationships and intersections of these exoduses that intertwine and create an urban fabric, and placed under the sign of what ought to be, ultimately.'*
- De Certeau, 1984

Maps are often considered accurate visual representations of the world untainted by social factors (Harley, 1989) and providing a mirror effect to particular sections of the earth (Rorty, 1979). However, many see *'the process of selection, omission, isolation, distance and codification* of mapping' (Corner, 1999 p.215) repeatedly reinforcing the legal statutes and representing specific political territorial imperatives (Harley, 1989). In contrast to the 'scientific' cartography approach, maps can be used as a liberating instrument (Corner, 1999), generating new thinking and holding the power of changing urban reality (Petrescu, 2018). Despite what cartographers may claim (Erskine, 2018), maps have a strategic, constitutive and inventive role (Corner, 1990) as they articulate diverse intentional arguments about the world (Harley, 1989).

This paper explores how innovative ways of mapping both the presence and the agency of contemporary women in cities may support the emergence of emancipatory placemaking perspectives and previously unrecorded narratives (University of Reading, 2019). It examines both the prospects and the impediments to mapping women's presence and agency in cities from policy to community development (Colau, 2017 cited in Johnston-Zimmerman), from social capital (Campbell, 2018) to impact investment, from participatory budgeting to civic ecology (Krasny and Tidball, 2015). It also highlights the catalyst role of mapping as a tool to explore both the rhizomatic (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972) and the sociological (Simmel, 1903) nature of cities from a women's perspective.

This paper is the first attempt to describe 'presency' as a new concept. It blends the words presence and agency to create a new concept which combines both meanings. It adopts the Heideggerian perspective of presence experienced in the now and or in the timeless aspect of the eternal now (1927). It also considers the Buddhist view of presence as a mindful way of paying attention to life, moment by moment (Levman, 2017). It describes agency as critical awareness of the context and capacity to act. For Freire (1970), a word contains both

reflection and action. The sacrifice of action and emphasis on reflection leads to rhetorical verbalism, while poor reflection in detriment to action generates shallow activism. Therefore, the term 'presency' proposes a balance between inner and outer, thought and praxis, critical attention and action emerging from an experienced context.

## The Context

In 2007, for the first time in history, the global urban population exceeded the global rural population (UN DESA, 2014). The world population has remained predominantly urban ever since. Cities occupy just 3% of the planet surface (Columbia University Earth Institute, 2005) but account for 60 - 80% of global energy consumption, 75% of carbon emissions (UNEP, 2012) and more than 75% of the world's natural resources (Girardet, 2008). Continuing population growth and urbanisation is projected to add 2.5 billion people to the world's urban population by 2050, with nearly 90 per cent of the increase concentrated in Asia and Africa (UNDESA, 2014).

The accelerated pace of what Davis called 'the urbanization of the human population' (1965) provided the backdrop for the emergence of global cities (Sassem, 2005). Reflecting on the pace of urbanisation, Fuller (1978) thought that 'unsettlement' would be a more accurate description of the mobile character of modern life. While Jacobs (1968) argues for a piecemeal growth as a process of creating a vibrant built environment, Campbell (2018) proposes 'making massive small change' as a conceptual antidote to the 'bigness' approach which has informed recent urban evolution.

Urbanisation is often associated with greater independence and opportunity for women- but also with hostility and constraints on employment, mobility and leadership that reflect deep gender-based inequalities (Tacoli, 2013). According to the Agenda 2030 (UN, 2015) and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by UN members states in 2015, new trends in urbanisation are likely to unfold over the coming years. The revisited role of women in their 'mediation of space and making of place' is crucial to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda including efforts to forge a new framework of regenerative urban development.

The case for cities supporting the sustainability agenda is incredibly compelling. Cities generate their own wealth, shape local and often national policies and are spearheading a thrilling new vision of governance for the implementation of the SDGs. Pragmatic in approach, close to real people and their problems (Barber, 2014), cities also contain the seeds of their own regeneration (Jacobs, 1961). Barber argues that in this century, it will be the city, not the state, which becomes the nexus of economic and political power (2014). However, cities have been planned, developed and built primarily by men for men (Greed, 1994) embedding inequality as a recurrent socio-economic pattern within the urban space.

Jacobs (1961) makes the case that 'big city plans never stirred women's blood'. De Beauvoir (1949) reinforces the argument by claiming men cannot represent women's interest adequately. In this context, emerging women's collectives reflect on how to ensure that gender equality is at the heart of the planning and governance of sustainable cities and human settlements. How are sidewalks built, public transport networked, alleyways illuminated, neighbourhood funds distributed, should be informed by the 'presency' of women. This investigation aims to map a mosaic of regenerative practices led by women as agents of the re-enchantment of cities addressing how cities of present and future can be green, inclusive, liveable and poetic (UNSW, 2015).

## Prospects and Restraints

All movement occurs while it is being inhibited (Maturana and Bunnell, 1999). The Agenda 2030 positions women and girls as diverse and innovative agents of change and gender equality is central to the achievement of all SDGs. However, investigating SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities at the target level (Targets 11.2 and 11.7), the language is revealing. Women are characterised as amongst the vulnerable members of society requiring protection alongside children, older persons and persons with disabilities. Almost 40 years after the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the international community continues to associate women with those in need of protection, instead of proposing a framework that inspires and propels women to help to shape the regeneration of contemporary cities.

Given that women live in so many diverse urban settings, there can be no single approach or strategy to address the apparent disconnect between SDG 11- Sustainable Cities and SDG 5- Gender Equality. However, in innovative ways, women are already meeting the challenge, working to co-create a society that uses energy and resources with greater efficiency (SDG 12), distributes wealth equitably (SDG 10), and makes quality of life, rather than open-ended economic growth (SDG 8), the focus of future thinking.

For instance, like the material feminists of 1930's who argued that women rather than men must control the infrastructure, water pipes, communication lines and fuel lines and use them as their base for economic power (Hayden, 1981) today active participation of women as consumers and workforce in the renewables industry is considered essential for the global energy transformation (IRENA, 2018). Recent research from IRENA (2019) revealed that women represent 32% of the full- time employees of the renewable energy industry substantially higher than the 22% average in the global oil and gas industry. This reinforces the fact that women are in the best position to define how new social accords and spatial infrastructures can shape the quality of their experience as residents and protagonists of urban environments.

## Presence in the City

A core insight of regenerative development is the idea that we can shift from dominance to intimacy with the entity of place (Reed, 2007). This depends on knowing the 'place' on the

level of relationship and experience. Referring to the way men experience the city, Baudelaire wrote 'the crowd is his domain, just as the air is the bird's, and water that of the fish. His passion and his profession are to merge with the crowd' (1893). More than a century later, women continue to navigate cities in a profoundly different way from men, often seeking protection from risks of violence and striving to be respected and safe (Elkin, 2016).

For Awan (2016) at an intimate level, there is a disconnect between digital technology infrastructures of the so-called smart cities and women from low-income neighbourhoods. For instance, continuous and widespread Violence Against Women (VAW) in urban India highlights the challenge of delivering SDGs 11 and SDG 5 together. Officials from UN Women agency argue no city can be smart and sustainable if half of its population is not safe and lives in fear of violence.

This is about to change. With the rise of technology, smart phones and apps, women may today swiftly gather, produce and navigate city data. A myriad of apps such as Safe and the City, BSafe, Shake2Safety, Safitipin Nite, have been used by women from Delhi to Sydney, Kampala to Madrid, helping women to navigate back home safely. Similar GPS apps can serve as emancipatory tools for women to map 'from within' the socio-political cultural space (Petrescu), and spatially their essential contribution to place-making.

A research can be emancipatory or supportive of dysfunctional power relations (Silva et al., 2015). The word emancipation is derived from the Latin e- 'out', manus- 'hand' and capere- 'to take', meaning freeing of an individual from the strong hand or the legal authority to make her or his own way in the world (Etymological Dictionary, 2019). This paper suggests that the act of mapping spatially and 'from within' the way women experience and interact with the city may unleash women's emancipatory place-making skills, moving cities systems up to higher orders of integrated expression.

This hypothesis invites further investigation in four key domains as illustrated in the table below.

| Mapping Women's Presency in the City | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **From Within** Experience of the City | **Spatially** Socio-urban Practices |
| **Presence** Mediation of Space | Safe/Unsafe Reinforcing/undermining Sense of Self | Belonging/Outsider Reinforcing/undermining Sense of Identity |
| **Agency** Making of Place | Gazing/Avoiding Gaze Walking/Strolling How political or invisible is the personal? | Empowered/Disempowered Beneficiary/Protagonist Who rules? Who designs, plans? |

Table 1- Mapping Women's 'Presency' in the City by Author

Parameters for mapping the presence of women at the level of experience may include the level of safety she experiences from within, reinforcing or undermining her sense of

relational self. Spatially, how urban development supports or challenges 'the fluid complexities of women's identities' (McCann and Kim, 2016, pp 20) and belonging to cities, towns and neighbourhoods could be considered.

Questions to be researched at the level of agency includes the emancipatory decision of women to stand-up or blend in with the crowd (Elkin, 2016) while taking goal-oriented walks or slow strolls exploring city life (Gehl, 2010). Other parameters at the heart of their urban experience include how political or invisible is the personal (De Beauvoir, 1949) or how much they want to attract, initiate or escape gaze.

At the spatial domain mapping parameters could take in consideration ways in which women use the built environment as beneficiary or protagonist and what are their expectations in respect to planning process (Sassen, 2016) and place-making.

## Agency in Mapping

Sassen (2016) claims that urban planning is not gender neutral. While there has been some research on how urban systems fail to respond to women's needs, only recently cities have been addressing the 'urban-planning gender gap'. This paper investigates the concept of the gendered nature of regenerative planning embedded in the proliferation of movements by and for women. It also describes agency as critical awareness of the context and capacity to act.

In Darjeeling at the foothills of the Himalayas, for instance, a group of women are advancing the SDGs, prioritising #SDG6 Clean Water and Sanitation by harvesting rooftop rainwater and promoting responsible consumption (#SDG12) amongst its growing population (East, 2018). Taking into consideration the influx of tourism, and the lack of integrated planning policies and conservation measures, the group also prioritised #SDG11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities - as a potential catalyst for the changes that need to occur in the context of rapid unplanned urbanisation and its impact on infrastructure, mobility, waste management, noise and air pollution.

In the Brazilian city of Santana de Parnaiba, it is women, many of them urban planners, administrators and housing officials, who are leading the process of Voluntary Local Review on the SDGs implementation (East, 2018, Nichols, 2019). Discussing how urban systems fail to respond to women's needs, the female Secretary of Housing recently argued that while male planners see dislocation as natural and a way to concentrate commercial activities, women in the same role would plan services to be offered at walking distance of neighbourhoods. For men, the issue is mobility while for women, the issue is proximity.

Given that women live in so many different social, cultural economic and political circumstances, there can be no best global strategy for changes (McCann and Kim, 2016). However, it is expected that the mapping of women's

'presency' would bear impact on the way women experience and act in cities.

## Discussions and Conclusions

For UN-Habitat, urban centres are where the battle for sustainable development will be won or lost. The potential triumph could only be achieved with a new integrated vision placing women as protagonists of an urban environment that reflects their needs and aspirations. Working class women, women of colour, mothers, academicians, professionals, the revolutionary and the conservative, the mature and the young, wearing burkas, saris, black jeans or business attire. Mapping how they walk, experience and act in the city may accelerate what the first female Mayor of Barcelona Colau (2016) stated:

*'For every woman, regardless of the privilege there is an opportunity for those individuals who have traditionally been let down as 'second-class citizens' to become the main characters. This is about achieving what we have never had the opportunity to impact before: the design and management of our cities, by and for our fellow women'.*

Taking in consideration that the value and meaning of women's lives must be defined from their own point of view (McCann and Kim, 2016), this paper suggests mapping exercises as a way to investigate how women experience the city from within and spatially. Future investigations may consider ethnographic walks utilising apps combined with conversations carefully conducted so that they are not usurped by the presence of technology (Campbell, 2018). Beyond illustration and tracing, the visual aspect of mapping may function as a form of research, a platform for agency, a practice of presence.

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