

A feminist perspective on urban politics and social space in the neo-liberal city. Theoretical outlooks and social practices in the Italian context.

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Gender dimension, from a feminist perspective, in urban policies is a subject that urban planners, urban sociologists, politicians, and activists have often grappled with over time. However, the need to achieve an overall feminist take (Mol) or a gender urban advocacy approach (Kern, 2020) has frequently clashed, in urban activism or in the analysis of policy areas and segments open to gender issues, with a cultural climate resistant to gender inequalities, especially in the context of the neoliberal city. The latter is focused on maximizing its ability to extract value from cities and citizens, and naturally tends not to pay the necessary attention to the spatialization of inequalities (both gender and intersectional) that occur in the urban context. On the other hand, the increasingly widespread adoption of the gender mainstreaming paradigm seems to permeate various institutional levels, descending from the supranational level of the EU, where it was formulated, down to a more formal than substantive incorporation in urban contexts. This paper aims to analyse, first and foremost, from a theoretical perspective with the necessary reference to the gender claim of urban space and the introduction of the gender mainstreaming paradigm in public policies, and secondly with an empirical approach dedicated to Italian metropolitan cities, the ways in which the right to the city (Lefebvre) is interpreted in terms of gender. The goal of the work is to highlight a formalistic and non-substantive adherence to the gender mainstreaming paradigm in the context of Italian cities, where, in the light of references to gender equality in the right to the city, predominantly symbolic and commemorative references to the role of women are made, proceeding only in limited cases towards planning urban spaces and services tailored to women, supporting women's participation in city life, and fully integrating gender issues into the programming of social, educational, and city-sized welfare services.

Keywords: Gender Mainstreaming; Social Space; Gender; Italian Metropolitan Cities; Urban policies; Feminism; Citizenship; Communication.

Introduction

This paper focuses on the emerging recognition of the gender perspective in Italian urban planning and policies. It seeks to bridge the gap in envisioning social spaces through the lens of gender, with particular attention to Italy. This new perspective, often referred to as "urbanistica di genere," provides a framework to analyse gender mainstreaming in major Italian metropolitan cities. The paper also questions whether this perspective, with its genuine efforts to promote gender-inclusive urban policies, can counter the neoliberal urban model (Hackworth, 1990), which tends to prioritize extracting value from urban spaces without considering community needs.

The study delves into the impact of urban policies related to gender in fourteen Italian metropolitan cities, exploring positive experiences in promoting gender equality within urban environments from a feminist standpoint. It emphasizes the restructuring of provinces and metropolitan cities brought about by Law No. 56 of April 7, 2014, which redefined the roles of urban areas.

From a feminist perspective and guided by Sustainable Development Goal 11, "Sustainable Cities and Communities," the paper examines city-level initiatives and actions aimed at fostering women-friendly cities and promoting an inclusive vision of urban spaces. The first part of the paper reviews existing literature on spatiality, citizenship, and gender. The second part introduces the concept of gender mainstreaming and its adoption in Italian national policies, with specific reference to the National Resilience and Recovery Plan and the Italian Strategy for Gender Equality in 2021-2.

In the third section, the paper conducts a landscape analysis of urban policies and experiences in the 14 metropolitan areas, emphasizing the inclusivity and safety of women within the urban fabric. It explores the relationship between citizenship, urban spaces, and gender in urban-level public policies, including the communicative dimension of this unexplored dynamic.

The final section discusses the communicative and political impact of the analysed policy measures, comparing them with the theoretical premises described earlier. This analysis draws on critical urban studies and the literature on citizenship and space to understand the co-production of space and social relations within the context of gender.

Theoretical background: gender, city, and citizens

The feminist perspective has intersected over time with the city, in its forms of development. From a localized context in which the early feminists were called upon to demand equal civil and political rights with men to a preferred focus on the reproduction of economic differences between men and women (Fraser, Arruzza & Bhattacharya, 2019; Fraser, 2021), from urban spaces designed to accommodate

predominantly male needs to a context in which equal roles in political participation are demanded, the city has often been at the center of feminist thought, although not always with systematic modes of analysis and research. In recent times, Leslie Kern's book, "Feminist City" (2020), has proposed a radical perspective in claiming access to the city and its physical, symbolic, and social spaces for women.

Recognizing urban space as planned for functions, services, and needs centered on the male citizen, ideally endowed with a socio-economic status suitable for capital production, is a mechanism for unveiling the development of contemporary cities advocated by Kern (2020) and by previous feminist analyses of the city. This unveiling, which highlights a characteristic urban development model, especially in the neoliberal development of Western cities, tends to present gender inequalities as one of the constitutive traits of cities. It points out how urban space, its transportation, services located on it, lifestyles, and consumption patterns developed, as well as formats of participation in the public sphere, are poorly suited to meet the needs of women, to support their functions (as workers, mothers, caregivers), which are significant according to the model of "social reproduction" as outlined by Fraser (2021). This model highlights the gendered aspects, and it also presents the need for modes of exercising the right to the city, as conceived by Lefebvre (1968), and the necessary universality of participation in the city, as advocated by Jacobs (1961).

The issue of planning urban spaces and services accessible to women, the demand for the exercise of economic rights in an increasingly gentrified and capital-dominated urban context, and equal access to participation in the urban public sphere are all feminist claims that intersect with the urban dimension. They view the urban context not only as a setting but as an arena where gender inequalities and injustices find their own specific system. Some more recent policy tools, such as gender mainstreaming, especially prevalent in the EU, and the suggestion of the need to achieve gender equity goals within the global objectives landscape, have been introduced into international and national political systems. However, and this is the analytical perspective adopted in the present paper, they represent a more

proclaimed than effective guardianship of gender equity, exposing to intervene in a less meaningful way, especially in those urban contexts where inequalities also widen along gender lines, making them more urgently needed.

The theme of the gender perspective in the complex life of cities has been explored in scientific literature from various angles. In a seminal work, McDowell (1983) addressed the issue of the gendered division of urban space, encompassing work, business, caregiving, and family life. She introduced the concept of distinct roles, male and female, in economic production within the urban fabric, with men primarily seen as breadwinners and women engaged in social reproduction through caregiving and relational work.

In the same period, the idea of a non-sexist city, a place where gender equity policies could be advanced to ensure the right to the city for all, men, and women, was presented by Hayden (1980). The necessity, rather than the possibility, of feminist urban planning was introduced in a 1992 work by Sandercock and Forsyth. Over the following years, the pursuit of gender equality in urban planning took various analytical trajectories.

A spatial planning that respects women's needs in the city, including work, caregiving, assistance, and social reproduction, was presented as a feminist utopia by Hudson and Rönnblom (2008), who explored its physical and social feasibility. In the same vein, Nelson and Seager (2008) examined the potential for developing functions and services in a more inclusive city that catered to the needs of female city dwellers.

McLean (2014) noted a gender disparity in the evaluation of policies related to the creative city, where initiatives seem to be primarily crafted for creative men. Beebeejaun (2016) offered a feminine reinterpretation of Lefebvre's right to the city, highlighting how everyday life in urban spaces serves as a negotiation arena when it comes to women's rights in the city. In a similar vein, Gauvin et al. (2020) interpreted urban mobility as predominantly designed for men, Perri and O'Campo (2021) examined gender biases in social housing policies designed with a male-breadwinner bias, and Listerbon (2020) identified gender disparities in providing women's rights to the city, rooted in the prevailing neoliberal conception of the city,

where services and functions are designed to serve economic production more than social reproduction.

More recently, adopting an intersectional perspective, Bella (2023) explored the possibilities of intersectionality between feminist cities and political ecology, a line of analysis and research previously explored, including as an alternative to the neoliberal city, by Clark in his voice of 2012 ecofeminism.

Gender-inclusive urban planning and policymaking aim to plan cities with a more comprehensive outlook, considering the diverse needs and roles of different genders. The objective is to enhance the quality of life for individuals who have historically been marginalized in urban planning. When we analyse urban spaces and policies through this lens, it becomes evident that cities often inadvertently reflect the gender inequalities present in our society. Through this perspective, it becomes apparent that women face more intricate daily challenges compared to men, primarily due to traditional gender roles and the urban functions and services designed in line with them. These roles typically assign women responsibilities such as caregiving, child-rearing, and household chores, impacting how they utilize and experience urban environments. The gender-conscious approach strives to address these imbalances in urban planning and in urban-level policies (such housing, mobility, safety), creating a concrete alternative to the neo-liberal urban model, based on the structural acceptance of inequalities. In this perspective, The adoption of gender-sensitive urban planning in Italy, though somewhat delayed (Ciocoletto, 2021; Andreola Muzzonigro, 2021), appears to offer an alternative path to the neoliberal mainstream and urban regimes followed by Italian cities. This approach becomes increasingly necessary in a context where planning cities from a more comprehensive perspective, capable of addressing the diverse needs and requirements of different genders, is vital for improving the daily lives of those historically overlooked by urban planning, particularly women.

To better understand how Italian cities practically engage with this rich theoretical dimension in terms of actions, measures, and institutional communication, it's crucial to introduce the concept that has been embraced as a

significant paradigm in public policies over the last decade: gender mainstreaming. In the Italian context, it has gained new prominence through its inclusion in planning documents such as the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) and the National Strategy for Gender Equality.

From polity to policy: gender mainstreaming as a new paradigm in public policies

Feminist theory emphasizes diversity as a socio-cultural construction of sex (Harding, 2004); indeed, gender is conceived as a social construction and institution, and this reflects the complexity of social urban life (Butler, 1990). The sociological constructivist paradigm raises critical perspectives in academia: Moss (2008), Lavena and Riccucci (2012) argue that the very idea of gender mainstreaming is surrounded by ambiguities and paradoxes. Indeed, following Butler (1990) and West and Zimmerman (1987) the human production of space depends upon everyone's "doing gender" and they argue that the social construction of gender affects everyday life and hence urban governance.

During the last decades, adopting a critical point of view, urban geographers have revisited cities through gender lenses. They argue that the field of geography and the practice of urban governance are too masculine and gender blind and that, women's presence in space is highly constrained by gender roles. However, in the EU, even if at snail's pace, a shift in the perspective has been promoted and, from governmental responsibilities to governance-oriented structures, bottom-up initiatives increased. (Zebracki, 2014). In line with the EU Gender Mainstreaming approach (GMA), gender mainstreaming strives to include the gender dimension into the perspective of urban planning policies, promoting equal rights for men and women to access and control accessible resources, as well as to foster empowerment and self-promotion. However, it is important to underline that a multistranded approach is necessary, considering not only equal opportunities for women and men through equal-opportunity-earmarked policies, but also that gender awareness should be a given and equality (of sexes) a constant goal (Woodward, 2003).

Taking care of other people implies a higher number of activities in comparison with a person who needs to care only about her/himself; in this perspective a reflection on gendered use of city space and city services would be useful in order to pursue the inclusiveness and safety of cities. The mobility of a person taking care of others implies chained movements (from school to the pharmacy, to the grocery store ...), on the contrary, the mobility of a person taking care only of themselves is more linear (from home to work and/or gym,). The former model reflects the traditional female gender role, while the latter reflects the traditional male gender role and use of city space (Ciocoleto, 2016).

Gender mainstreaming governance, as articulated by feminist theorists, still lacks an unambiguous articulation when it is related to societal needs (Lavena and Riccucci, 2012). That is why it is important to fully articulate the connection between gender mainstreaming and societal needs. This implies the idea of a plurality of actors involved in every step of the political policies (from the idea to the implementation of the measures) in order to fully understand how gender could be articulated into urban practices (European Commission, 2009).

However, the most challenging actions for urban planners to consider is to avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes and be more inclusive. The translation of gender mainstreaming into urban governance needs to focus on important topics such as a shift in focus from women as a unique homogeneous group (heterosexual, white, middle-class) to a diverse complex group; to consider women not only as carers but carers and waged workers, as well to consider several variables intersecting with gender (age, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and variables) that may determine different uses and different needs in private and public space.

Gender mainstreaming into the Italian public policies: between National Recovery and Resilience Plan and the National Strategy for Gender Equality

In recent years, gender mainstreaming has become a key strategy for promoting gender equality in Italian public policies, as proposed by the European Commission

and through a spillover mechanism (Morais Maceira, 2017). In a broad sense, as it is correct to do when analyzing public policies concerning citizenship, space, and gender, we define this area as any outcome of public decision-makers' collective action in specific areas of intervention: welfare, healthcare, work, economy (Pierre, Peters, 2006). In particular, when we envisage the systems of public policies that concern the dimensions of space, gender and citizenship, we can move on two levels of policies: those referring to the general incorporation of gender equality in the policies reserved for the entire state system and all citizens from on the one hand, and those referring to the choices of proximity, in the local context, in which the rights of gendered citizenship attest their effectiveness in the access to services and activities of a local level.

Referring to the introduction of gender mainstreaming in the system of public policies in Italy, we consider it a legal requirement for public institutions, as enshrined in the country's National Plan for Equal Opportunities (Piano Nazionale delle Politiche di Genere)¹. Italy has seen its first success in implementing gender mainstreaming in the area of employment, where policies promoting equal opportunities for women have been implemented since 2010. These policies include affirmative action measures such as quotas for women in leadership positions on boards and statutory auditors of companies in the stock exchange market, as well as provisions for funding specifically addressed to female entrepreneurs.

While detailed tools for gender mainstreaming had been established in specific fields and sectors since the mid-2010s, only in recent times have specific measures and actions been taken to support gender mainstreaming in broad areas of public policies. The 2022 National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) affirms gender mainstreaming across its six areas of intervention, each containing measures and actions, aimed at promoting women's participation in the labor market and mitigating asymmetries that hinder gender equality².

¹ Ministero della Salute, “Piano di uguaglianza di genere”, accessed on 17.09.2023, https://www.salute.gov.it/imgs/C_17_minpag_1383_12_file.pdf

²Governo italiano, “Piano nazionale di ripresa e resilienza”; accessed on 17.09.2023, <https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/PNRR.pdf>

Furthermore, the 2022 National Strategy for gender equality sets a systemic context analysis of gender equality, promoting a five-year vision based on the systematic introduction of gender mainstreaming in Italian public policies. The National Strategy thus identifies five areas of public policies for gender mainstreaming (work, income, skills, time, power) to conduct transversal measures, verifying implementation, and identifying paths for monitoring and evaluating the undertaken procedures. From this perspective, even if the effort to include this relevant dimension in deciding and implementing public policies in a dimension of gender equality appears commendable, much remains to be done to transfer this approach to the level of maximum proximity (and more significant impact) for women's lives: into urban policies, especially, an area in which only in recent times has a model of active inclusion of women in the public sphere of the city been tested, often with incomplete methods and with a lack of coordination between different experiences and practices (i.e. among regions or among bigger and smaller cities of the same Region). The absence of a national strategy for the organic and systematic development of cities - after a decade dedicated to the urban agenda, supported by the EU - together with the reality of differentiated models of active citizenship, has shown a significant impact in making the development and implementation of urban gender policies uneven according to a common model of inclusion of gender mainstreaming in city-level.

Urban-level gender policies in 14 metropolitan cities in Italy: one step forward and two steps back

In Italy, urban policies often neglect gender-related issues due to a combination of institutional and cultural factors. Cities in Italy face constraints in terms of authority and resources for implementing inclusive urban design and tailored services for a diverse population. A lack of normative tools and city autonomy often results in dependence on the state. Gender mainstreaming, the integration of gender perspectives into public choices and decisions, has yet to make significant inroads

in Italian urban policy. Consequently, urban decisions frequently lag in considering gender-specific implications.

Our field research seeks to identify gender-sensitive urban policies in Italy's 14 metropolitan cities, which possess a higher institutional status and more integrated functions compared to other Italian cities. The selection of these cities also contemplates their specific cultural attitudes towards citizenship and gender policies.

These 14 metropolitan cities in Italy operate under a unique governance system, allowing them to manage functions such as territorial planning, mobility, and strategic planning. They encompass major cities and their surrounding areas and are dedicated to service integration. Operating since 2015, these metropolitan cities span different regions of Italy, significantly expanding urban spaces and reinforcing their city status. Given their importance in the Italian legal system, our field research focuses on these cities to determine if they have developed gender-sensitive urban policies across physical, social, and symbolic spaces.

Methodology

Our research focuses on exploring the applicability of gender mainstreaming approach to the urban level planning and policy planning in the context of urban cities. To do this, we analyse the institutional communication of 14 selected Italian cities (metropolitan cities) on urban-level gender actions, measures, and initiatives. We aim to determine if public policy activities, as reflected in their communication, not only include gender-sensitive measures and actions but also convey the explicit intent of policymakers to address gender-related concerns to the citizens.

We consider online communication as a tool to assess the level of interaction and engagement between institutions and citizens, in accordance with Law 150/2000. In this regard, online institutional communication serves as a proxy for evaluating gender-related actions and policies in urban contexts. Communication through institutional websites stands as a proxy of shareability (Freyd, 2003) of the policy actions and measures to the citizenship. In this perspective, the more an

action or measure is communicated by urban governance to its target audience, the greater the intention to involve the public in the planned policy intervention. Furthermore, in our analytical perspective, the format used for communicating these types of actions and initiatives also reflects the mindset and the system of intentions with which urban policy measures for women have been designed and implemented.

Our analysis of the 14 institutional websites of metropolitan cities includes:

1. Identifying mentions of gender-sensitive city-level initiatives.
2. Identifying the types of public policies involved.
3. Evaluating the presence of budget allocations for these policies.
4. Analysing the continuity and frequency of these policies.

To transition from communication assessment to policy identification, we employ the internal search engine functions of the cities' websites to locate gender mainstreaming initiatives conducted by Italian metropolitan cities over the past 5-6 years. Initiatives related to national-level anti-violence centres against women are excluded from our analysis, focusing on those initiatives that remain. These remaining initiatives are classified into six categories based on their characteristics and proposed measures:

1. **Commemorative:** Including public events, conferences, and social art exhibitions on occasions like International Women's Day or International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

2. **Symbolic:** Encompassing measures with predominantly symbolic value, such as dedicating streets or street furniture to women or adopting gender-inclusive language in administrative acts.

3. **Informational:** Encompassing actions and measures aimed at informing women about their rights, services, and opportunities in their city to raise awareness of gender-specific services at the city level.

4. **Cultural:** Involving festivals and events celebrating the contributions of women in the arts within the city.

5. Economic: Focusing on economic resources and services provided at the city level for women in specific vulnerable conditions, such as victims of gendered violence.

6. Participatory: Encompassing measures and activities like gender budgeting and gender-sensitive urban service planning, aimed at involving, including, and providing specific resources to women in designing and implementing activities and services within the urban space.

Our research findings on urban-level policy actions and initiatives in the 14 metropolitan cities are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

14 Metropolitan cities	Policy initiatives and actions	Beginning	Policy initiative and action type	Website reference
Milan	Milan's services for women	2022	Informative	I servizi di Milano per le donne - Comune di Milano
Milan	The talents of women (with Bracco Foundation)	2020	Informative	"I talenti delle donne". All'acquario la mostra fotografica "Una vita da scienziata" - Comune di Milano
Milan	Women's City. Program of initiatives for March 8	2023	Symbolic	8 marzo. Venerdì a Palazzo Marino la presentazione di "Milano Città delle donne" - Comune di Milano
Milan	Donne Teatro Diritti 23, theatre with agreement with the municipality of Milan	2023	Informative	https://www.pacta.org/donneteatrodiritti/
Turin	Guidelines for non-discriminatory language in municipal administrative acts	2017	Symbolic	http://www.comune.torino.it/ediliziaprivata/normativa/pdf/al11-DelGC201703517.pdf
Turin	Initiative of listening from below, collection of proposals for the elaboration of a plan for Turin, City of women	2021	Participatory	http://www.comune.torino.it/cittagora/primo-piano/torino-citta-per-le-donne.html
Venice	cultural project dedicated to "Venezia Città delle Donne"	2016	Informative	https://www.visitmuve.it/it/venezia-citta-delle-donne/progetto/

Venice	Cultural Initiative Women against.	2019	Informative	https://www.comune.venezia.it/it/content/donne-contro-contro-le-donne
Venice	Venice Cultural and social initiatives Marzo Donna	2022	Informative	MODULO MARZO DONNA (comune.venezia.it)
Genoa	Superb cultural initiative, the women of the city of Genoa	2022	Informative	Centro storico: domenica “Superbe, storie di donne di Genova” Comune di Genova Sito Istituzionale
Genoa	Use of women in administrative language	2022	Symbolic	https://smart.comune.genova.it/sites/default/files/archivio/documenti/3AA2_Allegato_n_001-2022_DL_0000153_P.I.A.O..pdf
Bonomia	Gender balance and quality of life 2021-26	2021	Participative	https://www.comune.bologna.it/servizi-informazioni/bilancio-genero
Bonomia	Presentation of the Law of popular initiative for the elimination of voluntary resignation before the City Council and other initiatives in support of women’s work	2023	Economic	8 marzo, Giornata internazionale della donna Comune di Bologna
Bonomia	cultural events in Bologna on the theme of women	2023	Informative	8 marzo, Giornata internazionale della donna Comune di Bologna
Florence	Free museums for women 8 March	2023	Informative	Musei gratuiti per le donne l'8 marzo Cultura (comune.fi.it)
Florence	Festival The legacy of women	2019	Informative	MET - Firenze. La città delle donne, piani per una progettazione urbana inclusiva (cittametropolitana.fi.it)
Florence	Florence. The city of women, plans for an inclusive urban design	2021	Participatory	https://www.architettifirenze.it/evento/la-citta-delle-donne-piani-per-una-progettazione-urbana-inclusiva/
Rome	Planting of 5 Mimosas for 5 Constituent Mothers	2023	Symbolic	Roma Capitale Sito Istituzionale 8 Marzo, Roma dedica 5 mimose alle Madri Costituenti (comune.roma.it)

Rome	International Women's Rights Day, cultural events in Civic Museums	2021	Informative	Roma Capitale Sito Istituzionale Giornata internazionale dei diritti della donna, gli appuntamenti nei Musei Civici (comune.roma.it)
Rome	8 March, two initiatives on safety and women's rights	2023	Informative	https://www.comune.roma.it/web/it/notizia.page?contentId=NWS1021639
Rome	street name for Rita Levi Montalcini	2023	Symbolic	https://www.comune.roma.it/web/it/notizia.page?contentId=NWS897419
Naples	Initiatives of the Consulta delle elette per il Gender Mainstreaming at the Municipality of Naples	2022	Symbolic	Comune di Napoli - Lotta alla disparità di genere: le proposte della Consulta delle Elette nell'incontro al Maschio Angioino
Naples	"Marzodonna, Specchiarsi and Ri-specchiarsi... Know and re-know the image of himself"	2020	Informative	Comune di Napoli - "Marzo Donna 2023 - Specchiarsi e Ri-specchiarsi... Conoscere e Ri-conoscere l'immagine di sé"
Bari	"Women squared" initiative - spreading economic knowledge to defend against financial violence of gender	2018	Economic	https://www.comune.bari.it/donne-al-quadrato
Bari	Development of female place names in the city	2022	Symbolic	https://www.comune.bari.it/-/toponomastica-femminile-presentati-questa-mattina-otto-nuovi-toponimi-dedicati-ad-altrettante-donne-negli-spazi-pubblici-della-citta
Bari	Call for art "Vite plurali. Visioni di genere" public art for the fight against discrimination and gender violence	2022	Informative	https://www.comune.bari.it/-/vite-plurali-visioni-di-genera-al-via-la-call-for-art-sul-contrasto-alle-discriminazioni-e-alla-violenza-di-genera-nell-ambito-del-programma-generare
Bari	Festival Generare Culture Non Violente on the occasion of November 25, anti-violence day	2022	Informative	https://www.comune.bari.it/-/presentato-il-festival-generare-culture-nonviolente-dal-25-al-27-novembre-al-

				<u>teatro-kismet-la-manifestazione-dell-assessorato-al-welfare-contro-la-vio</u>
Reggio Calabria	Cultural events for the International Women's Day organized by Comune and UDI	2022	Symbolic	<u>Comune di Reggio Calabria - Notizie - 8 Marzo 2022 - Giornata Internazionale delle Donne: Eventi culturali al Castello Aragonese</u>
Reggio Calabria	Economic support measure Income of freedom for women victims of gender-based violence in vulnerable conditions	2021	Economic	<u>Comune di Reggio Calabria - Notizie - Welfare - Reddito di Libertà a favore donne vittime di violenza di genere</u>
Reggio Calabria	International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women	2020	Symbolic	<u>https://www.reggiocal.it/Notizie/Details/1437</u>
Messina	Naming a square after women victims of femicide	2017	Symbolic	<u>https://comune.messina.it/ufficio-stampa/intitolazione-di-una-piazza-alle-donne-vittime-di-femminicidio-la-consultra-comunale-delle-organizzazioni-sociali-scrive-alla-commissione-toponomastica/</u>
Messina	March 8 - Messina is woman": the program of initiatives promoted by the City Administration	2023	Symbolic	<u>Città di Messina "8 Marzo - Messina è donna": il programma delle iniziative promosse dall'Amministrazione comunale » Comune di Messina</u>
Messina	Legal - economic literacy of women	2022	Participatory	<u>Città di Messina Domani incontro pubblico a Palazzo Zanca dal tema "Conoscere per proteggersi: a Messina un incontro per promuovere l'alfabetizzazione giuridico-</u>

				economica delle donne" » <u>Comune di Messina</u>
Messina	City Hall lit orange against violence against women	2022	Symbolic	<u>Città di Messina Palazzo Zanca illuminato di arancione contro la violenza sulle donne</u> » <u>Comune di Messina</u>
Catania	Thematic awareness initiatives for 8 March International Women's Day.	2019	Symbolic	https://www.comune.catania.it/informazioni/cstampa/default.aspx?cs=69065
Catania	Joint initiative to raise youth awareness against violence against women	2023	Symbolic	https://www.comune.catania.it/informazioni/cstampa/default.aspx?cs=81904
Palermo	Platform of free counters for women looking for an occupation in the territory of Palermo	2021	Informative	https://www.comune.palermo.it/palermo-informadettagli.php?tp=1&id=33409
Palermo	Directive of the municipal secretary so that the administrative acts, as well as the indications contained in the online site of the municipality, are conformed to the correct gender language.	2022	Symbolic	https://www.comune.palermo.it/palermo-informadettagli.php?id=35580&tipo=1
Palermo	Inauguration of the red bench for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women	2022	Symbolic	<u>Inaugurazione della panchina rossa per la Giornata internazionale per l'eliminazione della violenza contro le donne - Comune di Palermo</u>
Cagliari	Calendar "Feminas 2022" the shared calendar of events that has as subtitle "Cagliari against violence. Woman, life, freedom - for Iranian women".	2022	Symbolic	https://www.comune.cagliari.it/portale/resources/cms/documents/Il calendario degli appuntamenti di Ferminas 2022.pdf

Results and comments of the analysis on the 14 cities online institutional communication

In our analysis, we found that gender policies are present in all Italian metropolitan cities, but they vary in their approaches and perspectives. There's a growing tendency to incorporate gender mainstream perspectives into urban policies, but differences arise due to variations in civic culture, political sensibilities, and citizen interests. While all cities have policies with celebratory and symbolic elements, there's a need to translate these symbolic actions into concrete and practical policy measures.

In alignment with the Lefebvre perspective on the right to the city and all the mentioned papers on the necessity of gendering the urban context, these celebratory and symbolic urban policies tend to adopt a "reproduction of spaces" approach, imposing institutional top-down gender codes upon urban culture. Features like toponymic attributions, urban designs with gendered connotations (such as red benches), and gendered public events tied to specific dates contribute to a symbolic dimension of socially defined spaces without a genuine impact on the city's inhabitants, who may lack authentic shared symbols and imaginaries.

Additionally, another notable area of urban gender policies involves the introduction of information resources dedicated to services and activities designed for women. Milan, for example, offers an informative section on its institutional website that assists women living in or frequently visiting the city. This approach contributes to the dimension of spatial practice and reproduction, helping women integrate into the urban and social space designed for them.

Cultural policies at the city level aim to connect women with prominent female cultural and artistic figures from the past or engage in cultural activities that consider the gender dimension. Many institutional websites include sections dedicated to women artists and writers or activities targeting women in the present. These policies align with the representation of Lefebvre's space, which is often conceived in a top-down manner by city authorities, lacking genuine gender-specific autonomy in determining social uses of city spaces.

Furthermore, in the realm of economic policies, some cities allocate resources within the social sector for women, particularly those facing conditions such as poverty, family violence, or housing needs. This approach corresponds to a social reproduction of public policies, integrating women into the urban community through economic provisions. However, it often maintains a top-down approach, neglecting gendered civic subjectivity and participation, which are crucial components of citizenship.

Florence and Bnomia are the exceptions, as they have genuinely participatory policies empowering women. These cities actively involve women in designing urban spaces and services using gender mainstreaming tools like Gender Budget and GEP. Their experiences are a step toward real urban policies that promote women's active participation in a subjectivity dimension, aligning with Lefebvre's concept of urban space of representation and a gendered perspective on the right to the city, which is still evolving.

In our analysis, we find that policy tools incorporating a gender perspective in urban planning, such as gender budgets and gendered design and planning, promote a new conception of women as urban citizens. These participatory actions aim to address gender equality in determining the allocation of social space. This perspective aligns with Lefebvre's notion of the "space of representation" as a grassroots standpoint, experienced through practices, images, and symbols and acted upon by citizens in a participatory manner.

Combining this grassroots perspective with the urban public space as perceived by the city system and as a structured format for production and reproduction presents a significant challenge for the gender politics of the urban system from a Lefebvre perspective.

In conclusion, the incorporation of gender mainstreaming into Italian public policies at the national level and, to a varying extent, within metropolitan city-level urban policies necessitates thorough reflection. Urban policies have been predominantly designed and implemented from a male perspective, which must change to ensure equal access and rights for all citizens, regardless of gender.

Urban space is the closest junction between citizens and public institutions, offering the opportunity for everyone to exercise their rights and fulfil their civic potential. It's crucial that these urban spaces are accessible without gender differentiation.

Furthermore, we need to fully integrate the gender mainstreaming approach into urban-level public policies, ensuring that the services and tools available are designed with inclusivity in mind. Women should not have to adapt to an urban management system primarily tailored to men's needs. It's essential to promote this perspective beyond feminist circles and architectural and urban planning research to foster gender equality and women's rights in urban contexts.

Despite some progress in a few Italian cities, the assimilation of gender-specific rights into urban policies remains a challenging process, often marred by tokenism and lack of true participation. Collaborative decision-making involving local institutions can empower women in urban areas and lead to more democratic and inclusive policies. Connecting social space and gender should be a priority for civil society and local institutions at both the national and local levels of urban policies.

A gendered Lefebvre's perspective on urban space as the space of democracy and the importance of lived, experienced space in critiquing abstract, capitalist space underscores the significance of urban practices that mobilize gender. These practices contribute to creating the urban citizen as a subject of the concrete universal, transcending gender dualisms and promoting an emancipatory dimension of social space.

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