

# GENDER EQUALITY PERSPECTIVE IN URBAN PLANNING

## Experience from UMEÅ (Sweden)

Umeå, Sweden, is a city that **actively strives for gender equality**, aiming to create conditions for women and men to have equal power to shape society as well as their own lives. This has been central to their municipal development strategies for decades.

A crucial starting point is that **planning approaches must integrate an understanding of how gendered power structures and norms shape how we plan and interact with our cities**. It is therefore necessary to integrate a refined understanding of gender (in)equality as a central aspect of planning strategies. This approach seeks to replace mainstream planning practices that tend to only add a “gender perspective” at the end of the process.

**“There is no one-size-fits-all, copy-paste-ready solution on gender and planning”**

This factsheet will provide **three examples of best practices based on the experience of Umeå** in integrating a gender perspective into planning practice. It also provides guidelines to integrate a gender perspective into planning initiatives.

**1** Gender-segregated data

**2** Asking critical questions

**3** Examples from Umeå



# 1

## Gender-segregated data

Through the examination of **gender-segregated data, surveys, thorough analysis, and open dialogues, Umeå seeks to gain a comprehensive understanding of the diverse living conditions experienced by individuals.** The gender-segregated data uncovers who receives what resources and under what circumstances, highlighting differences in conditions—ranging from economic disparities, unpaid domestic labour, violence, and other gender-related experiences. **Their analysis uncovers how different conditions impact access and utilization of physical spaces and municipal services** but also emotional connections to them.

In the municipality's annual citizen survey, Umeå has observed that **the proportion of women who report feeling unsafe when venturing outdoors at night is more than twice as high as that amongst men.** This finding holds significant importance in planning processes, **influencing decisions** regarding parks, infrastructure, service and business locations, public lighting, and more. Failure to incorporate these considerations into planning equates to designing urban environments that, in practice, curtail the freedom of movement for a specific segment of citizens.

### WHERE TO OBTAIN DATA FROM



*Not all municipalities possess a dedicated statistical unit capable of conducting extensive and reliable surveys, or collecting, recording, and monitoring citizen data on a large scale. However, there exist alternatives for acquiring valuable data to inform planning processes:*

#### National or Regional statistics.

They can serve as a suitable substitute. These data sources are generally applicable to municipal contexts unless the municipality exhibits highly unique characteristics.

#### Observational Studies.

For smaller-scale cases and specific locales, observational studies can yield valuable insights, by closely examining and documenting conditions and behaviours in these settings.

#### Citizen Dialogue.

Typically an integral component of standard planning procedures. To ensure inclusivity, it is essential to integrate voices from diverse segments of the population. This approach facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of local needs and preferences.

#### Collaboration with universities.

Depending on the project's scope, collaborating with universities can be a highly effective strategy. This might involve joint research projects that employ the municipality as a testing ground or a focus for student thesis investigations, addressing specific locations or issues. This approach leverages academic expertise to enhance the depth and quality of data and analysis.



# 2 Asking critical questions

Data serves as the initial stepping stone, guiding us towards the right course of action. However, it is crucial to **continually inquire about the planners, the beneficiaries, and the nature of the plan itself**, by posing the right critical questions from the inception of a planning process. Remember to always ask:

**What is the problem? / Why does it matter, and who does it matter to? / Whose lives will be improved by the implementation of one solution over another?**

By enquiring about these points, urban spaces and solutions are sensitive to gender considerations. Questions presented bellow can serve as guiding thoughts and starting points for planning, to be adapted to each unique context.

## PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESS



**Does the plan explicitly incorporate a gender equality perspective into its core objectives?**

Does the plan's purpose encompass the specific needs and perspectives of women, men, girls, and boys? Does it effectively address their housing, employment, and other essential requirements?

**Is there equitable representation of both women and men throughout the planning process?**

Participation in decision-making (committees and boards), involvement in reference groups, consultation teams.

## PLANNING AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION



**Does the comprehensive plan address gender equality concerns explicitly?**

What specific provisions or strategies does the general plan outline to promote gender equality?

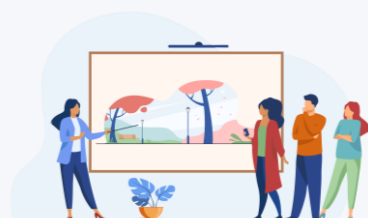
**Does the comprehensive plan take into account the particular requirements for fostering gender equality within the designated area of intervention?**

Does the plan draw upon data and statistics to identify gender equality issues?

**Does the area mapping incorporate considerations of gender equality?**

What insights does the mapping offer into how buildings, communication networks, service facilities, leisure areas, and safety measures are utilized and experienced differently by women, men, girls, and boys?

## DESIGN PROCESS



### Buildings

- Do the constructed structures impact women and men differently (functionality or experience)?
- Is the planned area facilitating shared caregiving responsibilities for parents?

### Communication

- Does the planned area ensure effective & inclusive communication?

### Services

- Are services catering to the needs of women, men, girls, and boys? Do they enjoy equitable access to services?

- Is there room for adaptability in service provision?

### Free time & leisure

- Are there leisure facilities or recreational spaces promoting gender inclusivity?

### Safety

- Are there locations that women and/or men tend to avoid or perceive as unsafe? Does the plan establish areas that are perceived as secure for both?

# 3 Examples of Umeå's urban planning with a gender equality perspective

## Lev! – whose everyday experiences do we cater to when we plan?



The long tunnel beneath the railway exemplifies how **Umeå seamlessly integrates gender equality initiatives into urban planning**. It serves as a harmonious blend of architecture, art, and a secure environment, offering a unique experiential space.

When the design of this passage, connecting the city centre to the Haga neighbourhood, was conceived, the primary goal was to **establish an accessible environment that instilled a sense of safety for all residents, regardless of the time of day**. Consequently, the newly constructed pedestrian and bicycle tunnel boasts ample width and illumination, with abundant light flooding both entrances and the central corridor. The incorporation of rounded corners enhances the tunnel's transparency, assuring that it remains a space where unknown individuals cannot easily hide. The provision of exits at the midpoint further underscores the commitment to bolstering safety in an environment that can often evoke feelings of insecurity. **Throughout this project, a steadfast emphasis on visibility and illumination has been a guiding force.**

## Free zone ("Frizon") – who is represented in dialogues?

**Young girls are frequently underrepresented in recreational and sports facilities**, typically the types of public spaces that municipalities create for young people. They are also **less involved in participatory processes** and dialogues related to urban projects in public areas.

This disparity served as the catalyst for reimagining a portion of the riverside park. The approach taken was to **focus on teenage girls through an "inclusion through exclusion" strategy**. The municipality engaged with diverse groups of girls aged 15-20 who shared their experiences, expectations, perceptions of safety, and thoughts on asserting their presence in this public space. The result of this collaborative effort was the **creation of a space that reflected the desires articulated by these young girls**, where they could socialize with friends or enjoy solitude, feeling both secure and a sense of belonging within the city.



## Listen – Whose experiences count in public space?



In 2019, Umeå Municipality achieved a milestone by installing a unique artwork, potentially the only of its kind in the world. **This artwork was conceived to commemorate the #MeToo movement, serving as a symbol of the ongoing battle for gender equality while taking a stand against oppression and violations.**

The artist Camilla Akraka designed this remarkable monument, strategically positioned at the central square Rådhusorget. Named **"Listen," this monument stands as a powerful tribute to those who collectively shattered the barriers of silence**. The resolute red puma, captured in a perpetual roar, encapsulates both a forward thrust and a **call to action**. It mirrors the **collective testimonies that emerged during the #MeToo movement**, serving as an enduring emblem of those narratives and a reminder that the quest for a gender-equal society must remain unwavering.

***“We are social creatures, and in general the presence of other people makes us feel safe. Not always and not everyone, but generally speaking. That is why our strategy for safety is to get people out into the public space,”*** says Architect Tomas Strömberg.

***“For women, the presence of other women is particularly reassuring, and to have the company of a woman throughout the tunnel, even if she is not there in person, the presence of Sara is tangible, we think it really increases the feeling of safety”***, he continues.

***“Whose body should be the norm in public space? The backrests in the large swings in Frizon are adapted for a person who is 1.65 meters tall - the average height for women in Sweden”,*** says Anna Flatholm, currently the city architect.

***“In our Cultural Committee, we have been working for a long time to create conditions for art to form, grow and develop”,*** says the Chair of the Cultural Committee, Helena Smith (S). ***“At the same time, we try to be very aware of structures present in society in general and culture. Where do funds go? Who is visible in the public space? What stories are we highlighting? Which works will be represent the city to citizens and visitors?”***



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