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Reclaiming the Night: The gap between feminist activism and urban change

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Abstract

Studies show that women feel unsafe when walking home be it at day or night as they feel the built/urban environment is not accessible to them. One thing women have tried to do to solve this is to protest and march to 'Reclaim the Night' and 'Take Back the Night'. These night-time, predominantly women-only protests, protest against male violence against women in public space and for safer environments for women. These marches begun in the 1970s and still go on to this day, therefore the protestors demands have clearly not been met as there is still a need for them to protest for the same reasons today. There is also little information available in the media which suggests these protests have brought about any long term change, for example changes in the design and feminist architectural theories suggest that this is the only way to make our built/urban environments safer and more accessible for women. However, it could be argued that if the protesters were in contact with the right people, ie people in the design professions, who have the power and authority to bring about change, then they could tell them their needs and they could be incorporated into the design of our built/urban environments. Hence, if there is a collaboration between women and architects, urban planners etc., then our built/urban environments may be able to become safer and more accessible for women.



Figure 1 - A photo of a park at night, to show how bright light can create shadows and darker areas which may make the space feel unsafe (Balfelt).

Introduction

A significant amount of women and girls feel unsafe walking alone on the streets whether it be at day or night, and the amount of women who feel this way is increasing. According to the office for National Statistics (2022), 32% of women had stopped walking in quiet places such as 'parks or open spaces' after dark because of feeling unsafe and this increased to 37% in 2022 (Office for National Statistics, 2022). The Girl Guide attitude survey in 2020 found that as girls increase in age, they feel more unsafe when they go outside; "over a quarter (26%) of girls aged 7 to 10 feel unsafe when they go outside, increasing to two fifths (41%) for those aged 11 to 15, and almost half (49%) aged 16 to 21" (Girlguiding, 2020, p. 12). The survey also found that 34% of girls aged 7 to 21 feel worried to do things outside if they are on their own (Girlguiding, 2020, p. 12). These worrying statistics, which seem to be worsening as time goes on, leads us to question, what makes our built environment so fearful for women? And what is being done about it?



Figure 2- A photo of a woman struggling to carry her pushchair up some stairs (Matrix).

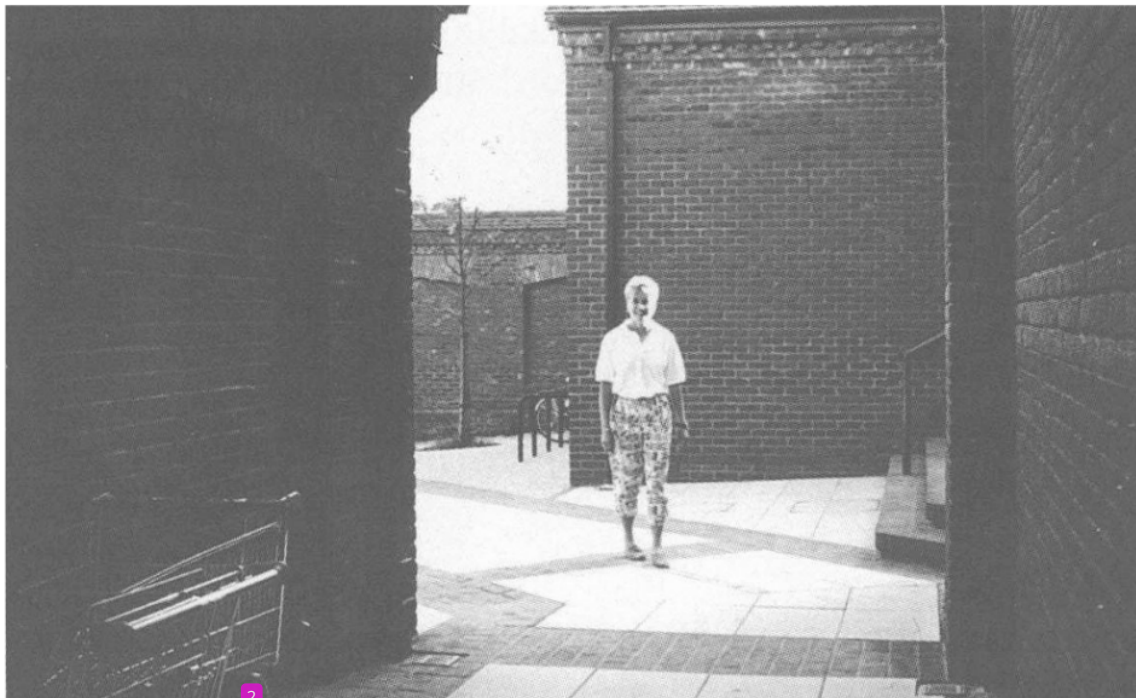


Figure 3- A photo of a badly designed building layout which creates confined space and restricted views where women may anticipate themselves to be at risk (Meller).

From open spaces in parks that are barely lit at night, to enclosed spaces such as subways and alleyways that offer no way to easily escape, the journal article 'Gender-bias in the built environment: how young women's experiences in public space are understood and addressed in London' by Shaikly and Lira outlines that "gender insensitive design has led to widespread spatial inequality and fear in public spaces" (Shaikly and Lira, 2023, p. 355). Which Sandercock and Forsyth explain as "male dominance in the theories, standards and ideologies used to guide planners work, results in gender-biased design and outcomes, and the subsequent underrepresentation of young women in the public space" (Sandercock and Forsyth 1992). This can be seen in figure 2, which is a photograph of a woman struggling to carry her pushchair up some stairs and in figure 3, which is a photograph of a badly designed building layout that creates confined spaces and restricted views. These environments were clearly not designed with women in mind. This has been an issue for women throughout history and a problem that still remains to this day.

One thing that women have tried to do to create a safer environment for themselves, is protest and march to 'Reclaim the Night' (Europe) and 'Take Back the Night' (America). The initial protests began during the second wave of feminism in the 1970s, with the first records of protest dating back to 1972 in Southern Florida, and 1977 in the UK. The protests would bring women together, to march to try to put a stop to male violence against women in public spaces and to demand safer environments for women. These initial protests inspired marches across the world and have left a legacy as the 'Reclaim the Night' and 'Take Back the Night' marches still go on in the UK and other parts of the world to this day. This dissertation will explore why women choose certain public spaces to 'Reclaim the Night' by investigating the link between the reasons for the protests and the locations they take place in.

People protest to demand change, so it is important to consider the design changes that the 'Reclaim the Night' protests have advocated for and whether they have been achieved (or if not, then why). When researching the impacts of the protests, there are no sources that suggest they have caused a direct change in design, so some may argue that the demands have not been met, hence why the protests still go on to this day. Although, there may have been some indirect change because of the protests, as they have raised awareness which could have influenced government policies and conversations in government authority. This dissertation will analyse the media and governments response to the protests, alongside feminist architectural theories, to examine what has been done to make our built/urban environment safer and more accessible for women.

Whilst the media suggests that the 'Reclaim the Night' and 'Take Back the Night' protests haven't led to real changes in making our cities safer for women, it's important to explore why that is. It can be argued that if the women in the 'Reclaim the Night' and 'Take Back the Night' protests were in contact with the correct people in the design profession, then through collaboration they could make safer and more accessible built/urban environments. Barcelona and Vienna are two cities that demonstrate through collaboration between women and architects, urban planners, etc., safer public spaces are possible. This dissertation will investigate the strategies used in Barcelona and Vienna to discover how collaboration with women and people in the design profession is successful. It will also look into the emergence of independent feminist groups in the UK to analyse whether they could be key in helping the UK's built/urban environment to be designed with women in mind.

To fully understand women's struggles with access and fear to the built/urban environment and the 'Reclaim the Night' and 'Take Back the Night' protests, it is important to analyse research that has been published on these subjects. The academic article 'Taking back the Swedish night: making and reclaiming space' by Coe and Sandburg (2020) and the book chapter 'From Brussels to Leeds, San Francisco, Delhi: The global march of Reclaim the Night' in the book *Radical Feminism: Feminist Activism in Movement* by Mackay (2015) both analyse the 'Reclaim the Night' and 'Take Back the Night' protests. They examine the history of the protests and how women use them strategically, to create temporary safe spaces for themselves where they can feel in power.

Valentine's article 'Women's Fear and the Design of Public Space' (1990) helps us to understand what women fear the built/urban environment. He interviewed women in Reading from working and middle class backgrounds to discover what women's fears are and how the design of public spaces can be changed to stop this. Also, feminist literature such as 'What Would a Non-Sexist City Be Like? Speculations on Housing, Urban Design, and Human Work' by Hayden (1980) provides detailed theories on how our built/urban environment was designed around a basis that women's place is in the home as a housewife, and men's place is in the city as the family breadwinner (Hayden, 1980). As women started to go into paid work, Hayden believed that it caused issues for women as everything in the city was design for men, so she suggested a complete change of design in our cities was necessary. Similarly the book 'Making space: women and the man-made environment' by the group Matrix in 1984 aims to describe and outline women's struggles with the built environment to educate women as well as people in the design profession who have the power to cause change.

To fully examine the 'Reclaim the Night' and 'Take Back the Night' protests, as well as how the design of our built and urban environments can be unsafe for women, it's also essential to explore how these topics are covered in the media. This could offer insights into the reactions to the protests and whether any changes in design have occurred as a result. By looking into newspaper articles, photos from the protests, posters, magazines and government policies, using the guidance of the academic references above, a full analysis can be made.



Figure 4- A screenshot from a video of the 1977 Reclaim the Night protest in Leeds (unknown).



Figure 5- A photo of the Reclaim the Night protest in London 2021 (Nathan).

Chapter 1- Reclaiming the Night: gendered violence in public spaces and the power of protest locations.

Since the 1970s, women across the world have tried to create a safer environment for themselves by protesting and marching to 'Reclaim the Night' (RTN) and 'Take Back the Night' (TBTN). These powerful women-only, nighttime, urban demonstrations protest against 'all forms of male violence against women' in public space (Mackay, 2014). Early protests begun in America in 1972, then spread to Europe in 1976 and then eventually to the rest of the world. These early protests inspired women worldwide, and their legacy continues today with annual marches in cities across the world, where women come together to reclaim the streets where they still feel unsafe. In this chapter we will explore the two case studies of the 1977 RTN protest in Leeds seen in figure 4 and the 2021 RTN protest in London seen in figure 5. These two protests have been chosen because they have one thing in common; they were both motivated by a crime against a woman in a public space, and the location of the protest was the same space that the crime took place. This key link between the two protests which is also common in other RTN and TBTN protests, could provide insight into the spaces women fear and why they are chosen for protest. This could help us understand the underlying reasons for their fears in terms of the design flaws of these spaces.

Chapter 1- Reclaiming the Night: gendered ¹violence in public spaces and the power of protest locations.

Mapping the initial ¹'Take Back the Night' and 'Reclaim the Night' protests.

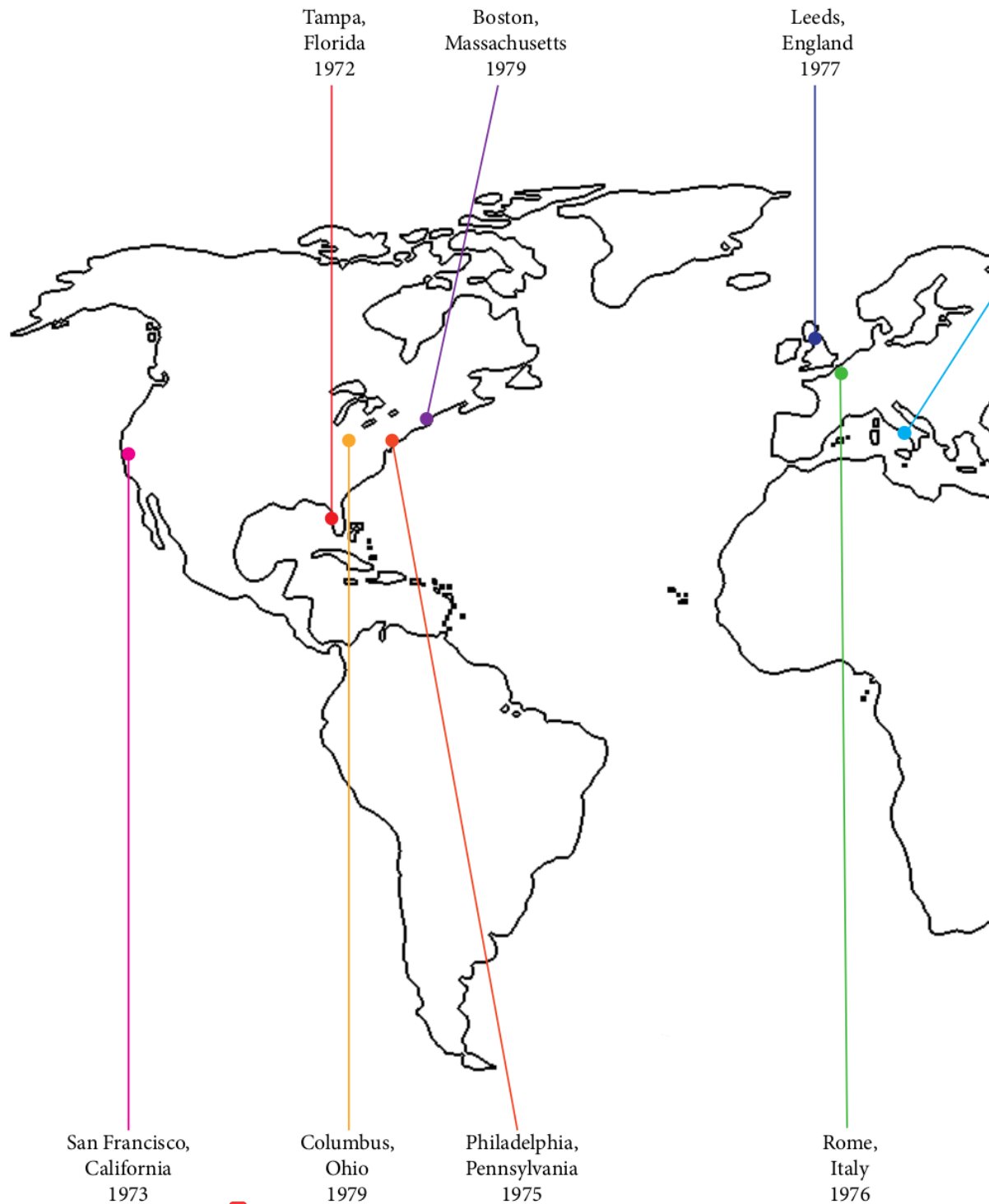
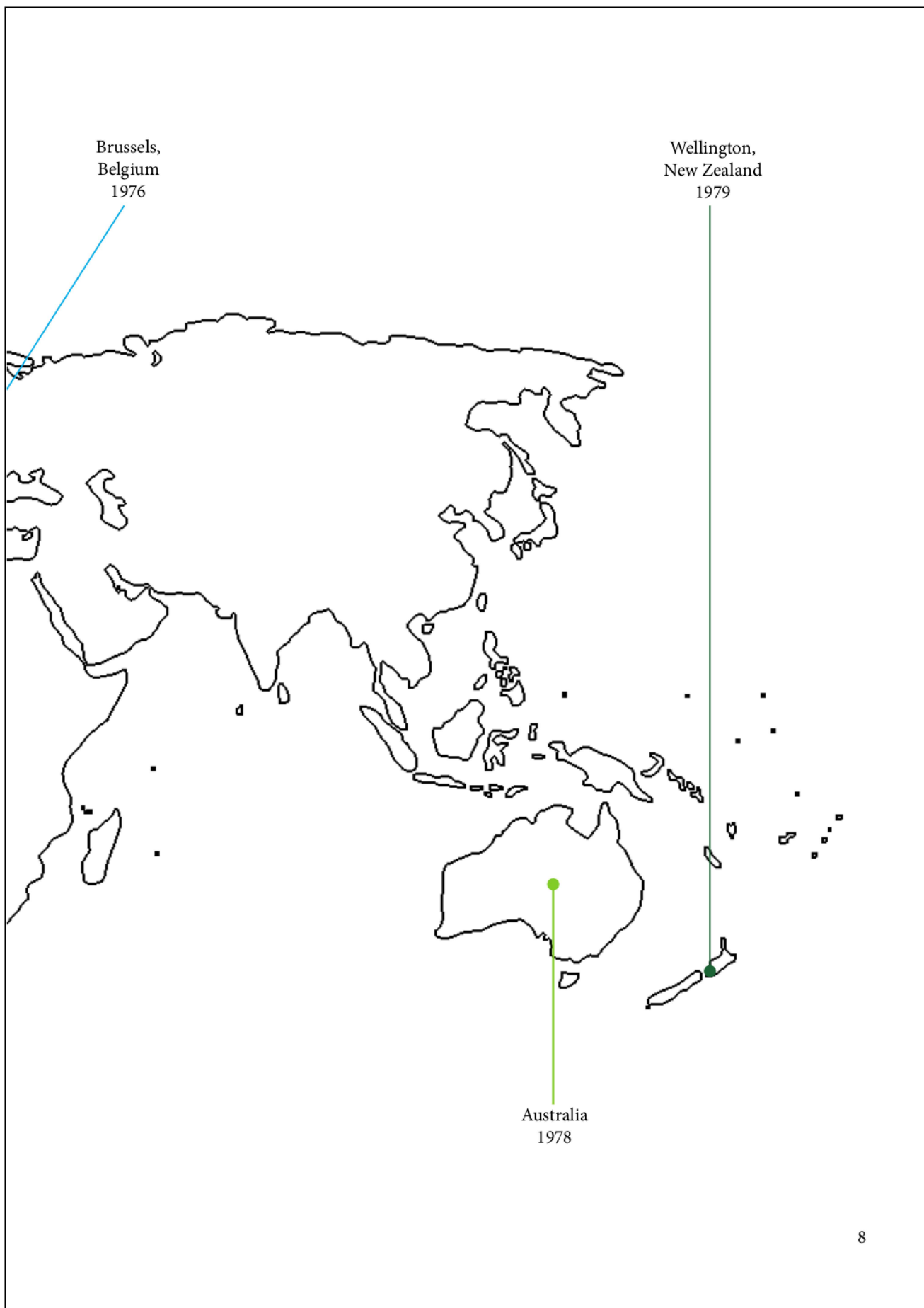


Figure 6- The emergence of the ¹'Take Back the Night' and 'Reclaim the Night' protests across the world from 1972-1979 (Scandrett).



Chapter 1- Reclaiming the Night: ⁴⁰gendered violence in public spaces and the power of protest locations.

The first ⁵⁵recorded TBTN protest was in Tampa, Florida in 1972 as women marched through the University of Southern Florida campus with witches' brooms and black capes demanding resources and safety for women (Take Back the Night foundation, 2024). Shortly after this in 1975, Philadelphia, a TBTN ⁶⁰march made the papers (figure 7) as women protested against male violence against women because 'microbiologist Susan Alexander Speeth was stabbed to death on a sidewalk after work' (Take Back the Night, 2024).



Figure 7- A piece from the Philadelphia Inquirer showing the 1975 'Take Back the Night' protest.

These initial outbreaks of protest in America sparked RTN ⁹protests in Europe, with the first march being traced back to Brussels, Belgium in 1976. It started at an 'international conference on male violence against women', that then led to a march by the female attendees on the last night of the conference ⁹(Mackay, 2014). After the conference the women who ⁹were present took the news of the RTN march back to their own countries. This then led to a march in Rome, a few months later, as there was also a rise in rape cases. As the news of RTN marches spread, so did the protests. In 1977, a 'synchronized' march held in several cities across Germany made headlines, which then caught ³⁹the attention of the UK feminist magazine 'Spare Rib' (Erickson, 2010). This article inspired women in Leeds, England, who were angered by the ongoing Yorkshire Ripper murders as they were told ²⁰by the police to stay at home at night to be safe. So in November 1977, women took to the streets of Leeds and marched to 'Reclaim the Night'. This march can be seen in figure 8 with a women holding up sign that says 'curfew on men'. This inspired other women in cities across the UK to also come together to protest to 'Reclaim the Night'. The magazine 'Spare Rib' published a report on this in 1978 to further raise awareness as seen in figure 9. These early marches have created a legacy, as there are annual RTN and TBTN protests in cities across the world.



Figure 8- A screenshot a video of ¹⁵the 1977 'Reclaim the Night' protest in Leeds showing a women hold up a sign saying 'curfew on men' (unknown).



Figure 9- A photo of the January 1978 edition of the 'Spare Rib' magazine which shows a double spread of the 'Reclaim the Night' protests in the UK (Philips).

Photos of previous 'Reclaim ⁷¹the Night' and 'Take Back the Night' marches from 1970s-2024

Photos found from the 1970s



Figure 10- Reclaim the Night, Leeds, England, 1977 (unknown).



Figure 11- ⁷¹Take Back the Night, San Francisco, 1978 (Lacy).



Figure 12- Take Back the Night, Boston, MA, 1979 (Gant)

Photos found from the 1980s



Figure 13- Take Back the Night, Harvard University, 1980 (unknown).



Figure 14- Reclaim the Night, North London, 1981(unknown).

No photos found from 1990s

Photos found from 2000s



Figure 15- Reclaim the Night, London, 2004. Revival of the RTN protests- first protest in London since 1980s(unknown).



Figure 16- Reclaim the Night, London, 2006 (unknown).



Figure 17- Reclaim the Night, London, 2009 (unknown).

Photos found from 2010s



Figure 18- Reclaim the Night, Birmingham, 2013 (unknown).



Figure 19- Reclaim the Night, London, 2015 (unknown).



Figure 20- Reclaim the Night, London, 2019 (unknown).

Photos found from 2020s



Figure 21- Reclaim the Night, Renfrewshire, 2023 (Renfrewshire Council).



Figure 22- Reclaim the Night, Manchester, 2024 (Lindley).



Figure 23- Reclaim the Night, Manchester, 2024 (Unknown).

Although the RTN or TBTN ⁶⁴protests did inspire one another, usually a protest is sparked as a reaction to a crime where there is male violence against a women in a public space. For example, the Yorkshire Ripper murders (the murder of thirteen women by Peter Sutcliffe between 1975-1980) inspired the 1977 protest in Leeds. This was held in the same park, the Prince Philip playing fields, Chapeltown (seen in figure 24) that ⁹¹the murder of Wilma Mccan took place (one of his victims). Lord mayor of Leeds Al Garthwaite ⁹¹played a key role in the organisation of this protest and told iN-ews in 2021 about the two locations of this protest,

¹⁵“one group set out from the corner of Woodhouse Moor, which was known as a place where women would get harassed or worse – there were assaults that took place there. The other group was near where I lived in Chapeltown at the time” (Garthwaite, 2021)



Figure 24- The Prince Philip Playing Fields, Chapeltown, 2020. The place Wilma Mccan was murdered and location of the 1977 RTN protest (Greenbell).



Figure 25- Woodhouse Moor, Leeds the location of the 1977 RTN protest (Discover Leeds).



Figure 26- Clapham Common, London. The place where Sarah Everard was last seen and the location of the 2021 RTN protest (unknown).

This description from Garthwaite provides insight on how the space chosen to protest in links to crime against women in public space. More recently, there was a RTN protest in London 2021, following the death of ⁶²Sarah Everard who was murdered by a police officer on her way home from her friend's house. The protest took the form of a vigil, and was also held in the park Clapham Common (seen in figure 26), where she was last seen.

When investigating why these spaces are chosen for protest it is important to examine the reasons women fear these spaces in the first place and how the design of the space facilitates gendered violence. The Prince Philip Playing fields in Chapeltown where the murder of Wilma Mccan took place, may have been more accessible to murder as it was (and still remains) a badly lit park with lots of open space (figure 24). Similarly, Clapham Common where Sarah Everard was last seen remains an open spaced park with trees that line the edges (figure 26).

Geographer Jill Valentine conducted interviews in 1988-89 with women from working and middle class backgrounds in Reading, England, questioning them on the public spaces they fear the most. Valentine found that women tend to avoid parks and woods especially at night because of how their



Figure 27- Clapham Common, London at night, showing bad lighting that creates dark, shadowed areas (unknown).

design makes them feel unsafe. For example, a young woman from Lower Earley said “I don’t like parks and woods because you just don’t know who will be there, and I think people tend to lurk round woods” and “I don’t like it when there’s a lot of trees and bushes because anyone could be hiding behind them and no one would know about it” (unknown, 1988-89). Another woman from Whitley explained how the position of some hills at the park near her leisure centre made her feel unsafe because “you don’t know who can be hiding there” and “generally light and the maintenance of light is bad” (unknown, 1988-89). This can also be seen in Clapham Common in figure 27, as the bright light just causes dark, shadowed areas. All these firsthand accounts share a common theme: the design of parks facilitate good hiding places for potential predators. Valentine concluded that “the design and layout of the physical environment provide the opportunity for men to conceal themselves, and then trap and attack women out of the visual range of others” (Valentine, 1990). What if changes in design removed these spaces? Would this make them less conducive for those considering assault? The women in the interviews came to the following conclusion;

“...trees and shrubs should not be planted near pathways. Similarly, fences and walls should be maximized so that public areas are not screened from houses. Mounds and clumps of trees in recreational areas should be set well back from the edge because they obscure vision of the playing area from surrounding roads. And bright white rather than yellow lights should be used to maximize visibility” (Valentine, 1990).

These ideas for changes in design given by women could provide clues into how our built/ urban environment could be more accessible to women. And if these women were able to relay their ideas to architects or urban planners, this could lead to the design of safer spaces.

When examining the RTN protests, it's important to understand why women choose to protest at night in the areas where they feel most vulnerable because of previous attacks occurred there. It could be argued that they choose the same spaces to try to empower women, and to convey the same message that was coined by Al Garthwaite during the march of 150 women through Chapeldown; 'we did not feel frightened' (Garthwaite, 2021). This shows how returning to a space they fear in a group provides safety in numbers. It could also be an attempt to change the reputation of a space, giving it a new, more positive, and safer meaning. Academic Professor Daphne Spain argues that;

³³ "...social movements almost always alter the use of space, inevitably producing conflict in the process. Changes may be deliberate or unintentional, and they include both the destruction of existing places and the creation of new ones" (Spain, 2016).

Therefore when women come together at the RTN and TBTN marches, they are not only protesting for safer public spaces and an end to violence against women, but they are also reclaiming the spaces they fear by coming together and forming a crowd that provides safety in numbers.

Similarly, sociologists Sandburg and Coe, who studied the RTN and TBTN protests, found that protestors use TBTN marches to temporarily challenge spatial power relations as they believe 'space is therefore always under negotiation' (Coe & Sandburg, 2020). They went to a TBTN protest in Gotgatan, Stockholm in 2001 and interviewed some of the women there. One woman at the protest said;

¹ "I was there, on Gotgatan in Stockholm on March 8 and together with hundreds of women we chanted that we will take back the night. During the demonstration, in the protection of the group, I felt strong and for once courageous. But just half an hour later, fear had overtaken me again. On the subway train home, I sat just as tensely as always" (Andersson, Voasterbottens Kuriren September 18, 2001, News report).

This extract from the interview explains how the woman felt "strong and courageous" during the march as she was in a group, but scared and tense on the way home as she was alone. This shows how much of a difference the marches can have on women's confidence in public space. By marching as a united group, they redefine these spaces on their own terms, empowering themselves and taking back a sense of ownership of the space, even if it's just for one night. This gives women a sense of what could be and how they should be able to feel when using these built/urban environments.

To conclude, it is clear why women choose to protest in the public spaces where there has been a crime against a woman, as they fear these places the most. By going to these spaces to march in a united group, they achieve a feeling of safety even if it is only for one night. Therefore the RTN and TBTN protests have been successful in helping women come together to temporarily change the meaning of a public space, and to empower themselves to feel safe in a united group, in a space that they would usually fear. They have also been successful in creating a legacy as the protest and marches still go on in cities across the world today. Although, some may argue that as the protests still happen today it is clear that ⁸⁶women's fear of certain public spaces and gendered violence against women is still a relevant issue that hasn't been solved. The protests can also be seen as unsuccessful as these feelings of safety are only temporary whilst the protests are carried out. Therefore, in order for the built/urban environment to become more accessible and safer for women in the long term, a change in design needs to happen so that these spaces are less likely to facilitate gendered crime.



Figure 28- Reclaim the Night protest in London 2021, the women in the photo are gleaming with confidence (Christofilou).



Figure 29- Reclaim the Night protest in London 2021 (Christofilou).

Chapter 2- The impact of the 'Reclaim the Night' protests in the UK: examining the gap between feminist activism and urban change

After investigating the RTN and TBTN protests from the 1970s to the current day, there has been little information available on whether the protests have directly caused any changes in design that make built/urban environments safer and more accessible for women. When the women from the protests propose how they need design of public space to change, it is not clear whether they are being listened to. It could be argued the protests have not been directly successful in their plight. However, it might be that the protests have indirectly caused some changes which may in the longer term contribute to a safer urban environment for women? Some examples include raising awareness in news coverage, 'temporary fixes' such as more CCTV, new government policies and the introduction of feminist design groups. However, feminist architectural theories would argue that unless there is a change in the design of our built/urban environment, public space will not be safe and accessible for women, thus declaring that these attempts are not worth the effort. This chapter will discuss the impact of the protests, with a focus on the UK to explore what has been achieved.

Media coverage

One thing the RTN and TBTN protests have been successful in doing is raising awareness in the public eye. Their coverage in the media enabled them to spread to cities across the world. As seen in the figures on page 20, the RTN protests in the UK have been seen in magazines (figure 30), posters (figure 31,32,33), newspapers (figure 34,35,36), photographs (pages 11-12), and websites (figure 35,36). This is proof that women's demands for safer built/urban environments and a stop to sexual violence against women in public space, are prevalent messages within media coverage. Even though there is so much coverage of the protests in the media which convey women's needs, it can be argued that the demands of the women have not been met. The protests 'are still as relevant today as they articulate the problem of unequal access to public space and are part of a struggle over the access to the city' (Coe & Sandburg, 2019).

Going back to the RTN protests in Leeds (as mentioned previously in chapter one), there has been news reports on the marches that took place there. The Guardian released an article on the 2010 RTN protest (as seen in figure 35) where they discussed the changes needed to make the built/urban environment safer. Laura Mackenzie said "more than 200 women have taken to the streets of Leeds in protest at sexual violence and gender inequality, and to assert their right to feel safe in every part of the city whatever the time of the day or night" (Mackenzie, 2010). Fourteen years later, a recent BBC news report on the 2024 RTN march in Leeds (as seen in figure 26) contains very similar information. Al Garthwaite (founder of the 1977 RTN protest in Leeds) was interviewed and said "she would like to foresee a day when women feel safe to walk out in a public place at night" (Garthwaite, 2024). These news reports are fourteen years apart and show how women continue to protest for the same demands, yet nothing is being done to bring about change. These articles tell a similar story each time and women are still protesting for the same reasons. This leads us to question why the women in the RTN protests are not being listened to even though their demands to make public space safer for women are so clearly portrayed in the media.

'Temporary fixes'

In some cases, after there is a crime against a woman in public space and a RTN protest follows, which gains coverage in the media, the government respond with fast strategies and temporary fixes that are easy to put in place, in order to meet the protestors demand and quickly 'solve' the problem. For example, in the case of the Yorkshire Ripper murders in 1977, women were told to stay at home at night as a short term fix to their safety. Similarly, when Sarah Everard was murdered in London 2021, there was immediate action taken by the government to try to convey a greater level of safety. This was discussed in the woman's hour podcast on 16th March 2021 in which Emma Barnett interviewed Home Office Minister, Victoria Atkins. They spoke about the strategies that were going to be put in place to make the built/urban environment safer for women, which included more CCTV, the recruitment of 2000 police officers and undercover officers in bars/pubs. Although these appear sensible plans, Barnett cleverly pointed out how it does not make sense to put more CCTV in London as it is already has the third highest level of surveillance in the world and Sarah Everard was still murdered there. Barnett also questioned whether more cameras would help, without a corresponding increase in the number of people to monitor the footage? As Sarah Everard was murdered by a police officer, Barnett then suggested that recruiting more police may not be at the best idea, given that women's faith in the police was at an all-time low. This highlights that solutions that are put forward as quick fixes, may not reach their desired outcome, especially if they are not properly thought through.



Figure 30- Spare Rib magazine cover starring Reclaim the Night protests 1978 (Spare Rib).

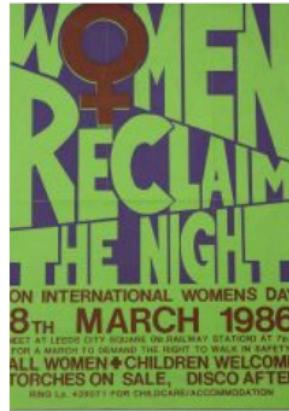


Figure 31- A poster advertising a RTN protest in 1986 (unknown).



Figure 32- A poster advertising a RTN protest in 1989 (unknown).

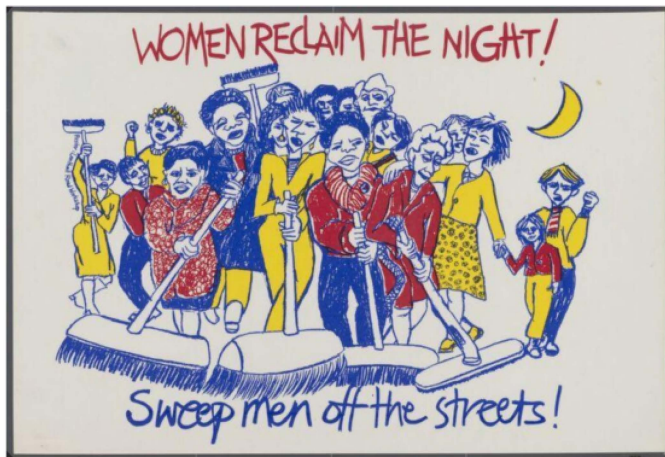


Figure 33- A poster advertising RTN in 1980 (Stiles).



Figure 34- Newspaper clippings from the 1977 RTN protest (Unknown).

Leeds women march through streets to 'Reclaim the Night'

More than 200 women have taken to the streets of Leeds to 'Reclaim the Night' and raise awareness of sexual harassment and violence towards women. Guest blogger **Laura Mackenzie** joined them on their march and rally



Figure 35- A screenshot of a 2010 news article on RTN (Mackenzie).

Women reclaim the night 47 years after first march



Grace Wood
28 October 2024

A Reclaim the Night march has been held to empower women and girls to stand up for safer spaces as the evenings get darker.

Mayor of West Yorkshire Tracy Brabin was joined by Al Greenhalgh, last year's Lord Mayor of Leeds, who played a key role in the first march in 1977.

They were joined in Middleton Park by dozens more for getting and crime. More than 100 women and girls took part in the march.

Ms Greenhalgh said she would like to see a day when "women feel safe to walk out in a public place at night" but there was still a need for marches almost 47 years later.

She said: "There's absolutely nothing men's not need for it. They're empowered. They're not scared. They're not scared."

Figure 36- A screenshot of a 2024 news article on RTN (Wood).

Government policies

Government policies have been put in place as an attempt to create safer built/urban environments for women. A policy that has been introduced in the UK and other parts of the world is Gender Mainstreaming, which the Royal Town Planning Institute outlines as follows;

'to recognise the different needs of men and women having regard to other differences (such as age, ethnicity, race, religion etc.) at every stage of the planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes, and projects to ensure that gender equality is enhanced and that both men and women benefit equally' (RTPI, 2021).

This policy was therefore put in place so that the needs of women are thought about in all stages of the design process and is therefore necessary when ensuring that the built/urban environment is not only more accessible but also safe for women. It was introduced in 1985 and then implemented 'in the UN's 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action' in 1995 and has been the EU's central policy approach to gender equality attainment since The Treaty of Amsterdam 1997' (RTPI, 2021). However, some argue that this policy has not been as successful as intended because a study in 2021 by the Royal Town Planning Institute found that 'gender mainstreaming has not been effectively implemented as a means of integrating the needs of women and men equally into spatial planning' (RTPI, 2021). Similarly, research conducted by Shakily and Lira found that 'both international and national obligations to tackle gender inequality in public space have not been met' (Lira and Shakily, 2022). This shows that even though a gender mainstreaming policy was introduced to help the design of the built/urban environment become safer for women, it is not necessarily being adhered to.

In 1987 in the UK, the Woman's Design Service (WDS) was established to ensure the Gender Mainstreaming policy was implemented into design and to make the correct resources available to local authorities (Devine and Biquelet-Lock, 2021). The WDS had a vision of 'a future where all our buildings, transport systems, streets, parks and open spaces were designed to incorporate the needs of women' (Woman's Design Service, unknown). They planned to do this through community development, research, policy development, education, training and by giving advice to other organisations. Although the WDS visions sounded hopeful, the organisation unfortunately closed down in 2020 due to lack of funding, leaving the UK without a formal body that empowers gender mainstreaming. This could explain why the gender mainstreaming policy is not being implemented into design.

Similarly, research from Make Space for Girls, a charitable organization who campaigns for parks and public spaces to be designed with girls in mind, found that current designs within parks, do not comply with the government policy. The Equality Act 2010 'prohibits direct and indirect discrimination on grounds of sex in many fields, including in the provision of services and facilities by public authorities' (Clark and Walker, 2020). They argue that there are areas of public space that do not adhere to these policies (e.g. certain parks). Consequently, the "current state of affairs is not compliant with the law" as there is not equal access for genders in parks (Clark and Walker, 2020). This evidence shows that even though policies are being put in place to promote women's needs in the design process, it is not necessarily being implemented. Although charitable organisations such as Make Space for Girls are trying to raise awareness of this, they do not necessarily have the power to cause any widespread change.

Feminist architectural theories

Feminist architectural theories argue that a change in design needs to take place in order for the built/urban environment to become safer and more accessible for women. An example of this is Professor Dolores Hayden's work, who has written many pieces on feminist architecture. Her article released in 1980, 'What Would a Non-Sexist City Be Like? Speculations on Housing, Urban Design, and Human Work' is a good example of her feminist theory on architecture. Hayden wrote;

"dwellings, neighbourhoods, and cities designed for homebound women constrain women physically, socially and economically. The only solution is to develop a new paradigm of the home, the neighbourhood, and the city, to begin to describe the physical, social and economic design of a human settlement that would support, rather than restrict, the activities of employed women and their families" (Hayden, 1980, 171).

Here Hayden is describing the problem and giving her feminist theory on a solution as to how the built environment should be reconstructed, so that it is accessible for women and does not hinder their everyday lives. Hayden suggests that a complete rebuild of our built environment is necessary for women not to be restricted by their environment and for them not to experience fear of public spaces.

Similarly, the feminist group 'Matrix', consisting of ten women, formally known as the 'Feminist Design Collective' came together and wrote 'Making Space. Women and the Man-Made Environment' in 1984. When asked the reasoning behind 'Making Space' the group 'Matrix' responded;

"...we are not prescribing the solution: we are describing a problem, so as to help women understand their own relationship to the built environment and to help architects understand how the environment is a problem for women" (Matrix, 2022, ix)

The book, which is a collection of essays, explores the ways in which the built environment has its effects on women as an attempt to educate women but also the people who could do something about it i.e. architects and planners. However, the book was not received well by male architects who might be able to help. As 'Matrix' claims "the still predominantly male architecture profession preferred to shun the book" (Matrix, 2022, ix). This reaction illustrates the barrier that exists for feminist theories in their plight to be acknowledged and implemented, due to how they are received by men in the 'predominantly male architectural field'. If these men prefer to 'shun the book' then why would they use the Matrix groups ideas in their designs?

In conclusion it is clear that the RTN and TBTN protests have struggled to directly bring about any changes in terms of design that make the built/urban environment safer and more accessible for women. This may be because their demands in the media are not fully being listened to. Instead, the strategies that are being put in place, for example more CCTV and police officers, are quick solutions that are not completely thought through. Similarly, when the government has tried to implement policies that put women's needs in the design process, for example gender mainstreaming, it is not resulting in change in the design of our built/urban environment, again suggesting the policies are not being listened to. Finally, the feminist architectural theories that have been discussed throughout history are mostly ignored by the 'predominantly male architecture profession' according to Matrix. Consequently the needs of women in the design of our built/urban environment remain largely unaddressed. What needs to happen is a proper collaboration between women and the influential people in the design profession.



Figure 37- 'Mamifera' the group breastfeeding point (Equal Saree).

Chapter 3- Can collaboration create safer, more accessible urban spaces for women?

The women across the world who are part of the RTN and TBTN protests have demanded an end to violence against women and safer public spaces, by doing annual marches that raise awareness not only in the media but in real life too. However as hard as they have tried, their efforts have not yet resulted in significant change. But what if they could directly collaborate with influential professionals in the design industry, e.g. architects and urban planners? Might they be able to fully explain their needs to the people who have the power to do something? Some countries have implemented this approach already, for example Barcelona and Vienna, where they have many projects in their cities that are based on collaboration with women so that their needs are included in the designs. In the UK there has been some emergence of charity organisations that have put women's needs and safety at the forefront of their aims. For example, 'Make Space for Girls' who collaborate with younger girls to discover their needs in terms of parks/playgrounds. This chapter will explore the power of collaboration between women and designers and whether it is successful in creating a built/urban environment that is safer and more accessible for women.

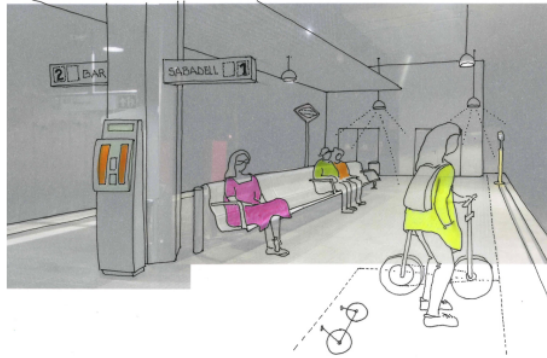


Figure 38- Col·lectiu Punt 6's recommendations for Central Sabadell Station (Col·lectiu Punt 6).

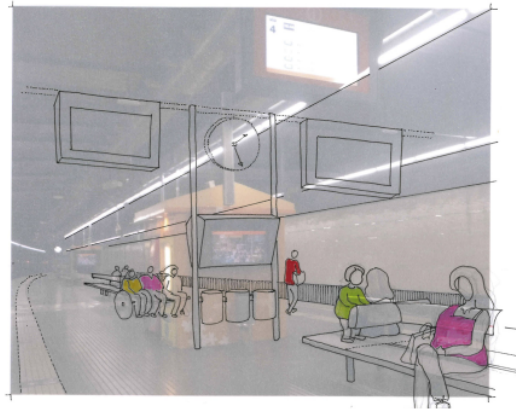


Figure 39- Col·lectiu Punt 6's recommendations for Plaça Espanya Station (Col·lectiu Punt 6).



Figure 41- Col·lectiu Punt 6's recommendations for Central Sabadell Station (Col·lectiu Punt 6).

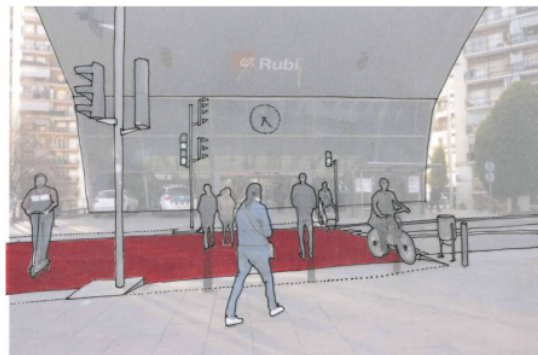


Figure 42- Col·lectiu Punt 6's recommendations for Rubí Station (Col·lectiu Punt 6).

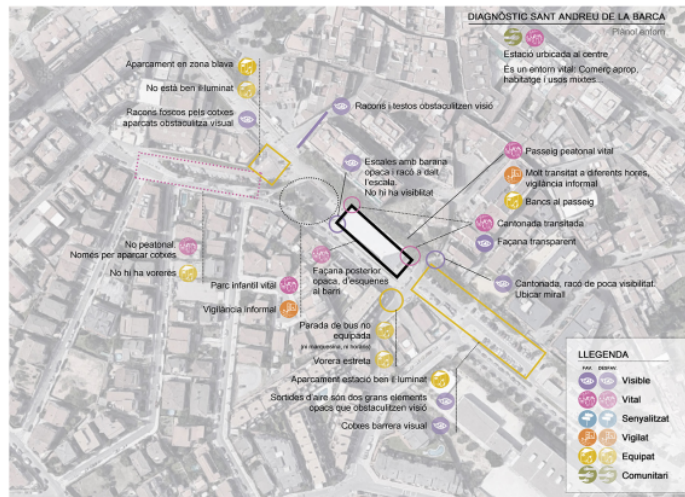


Figure 40- Col·lectiu Punt 6's assessment map of the surrounding neighborhood of Sant Andreu de la Barca Station (Col·lectiu Punt 6).

Barcelona

Barcelona has become a pioneer for other cities as they have been considering women's needs and safety in all stages of design in the built environment since 1991 when its first Municipal Plan for Women was approved. They have been working towards a more egalitarian city that emphasizes 'women's health, culture, sports and employment' (CHANGE, unknown). An organisation that has channelled these objectives is Col·lectiu Punt 6, which was founded in 2005 by a group of female architects, urban planners, and sociologists. Their work aims to 'rethink domestic, community and public spaces from an intersectional feminist perspective through community participation'. One of their main objects is to 'place people's needs at the centre of urban decisions', giving women the opportunity to tell architects/ urban planners what they need or want in order to feel safe in public space (Col·lectiu Punt 6, unknown). By putting women's needs first and collaborating with women in the public, Col·lectiu Punt 6 have become a trusted organisation which has developed many different ideas around how to design for women's safety. These include six key areas; better designed public toilets with more space, fairly designed playgrounds, more public pathways, no car zones, more seating areas and pop up buildings with support against sexual violence towards women.

An example of Col·lectiu Punt 6's work is a safety audit from a gender perspective on the use of train stations As seen in figures 38-42. They went to stations in Barcelona and surveyed them to work out how women's needs could be incorporated. They also have been involved in making playground equipment, which included 'reviewing the current user', to collaborate and then choose user friendly materials that promote 'inter-gender and inter-generational relationships' (Col·lectiu Punt 6, unknown). Some of the equipment they built included 'a wild structure for movement and tranquillity, a wild hut, a balance circuit with platforms, corners for exploring symbolic games, experimentation tables, rest and quiet areas and some gardening elements' (Col·lectiu Punt 6, unknown). Col·lectiu Punt 6 shows that through collaboration with women and girls in the general public, positive and well thought through decisions can be made in the design process, to create a built/urban environment that address women's needs.

Another organisation in Barcelona that has put women's needs first is Equal Saree. They aim to 'unmask the social, political, economic and legal inequalities that women and people with non-normative identities suffer', in terms of public space and use urban planning and feminist architecture, through the design of spaces, 'to think, build or regenerate' (Equal Saree, unknown). They are passionate about user needs and so they seek to collaborate through active participation in every process, to really understand women's needs. This is evident in their project 'Mamifera' the group breastfeeding point seen in figures 43-45. 'Mamifera' offers a safe space for women who breastfeed, bottle feed and for whoever else may need it, as they found that 52% of women who participated in a 2022 study admitted to trying to hide breastfeeding, 63.5% have felt judged and 15% have had attention drawn to them while breastfeeding (LOLA MullenLowe and LinQ Market Research España SA, 2022). They took this information from women in the public and designed a safe space for them to breastfeed which has been a success. Therefore Equal Saree show how through collaboration, positive and thoughtful design choices can be made to make public space safe for women.



Figure 43- 'Mamifera' the group breastfeeding point (Equal Saree).

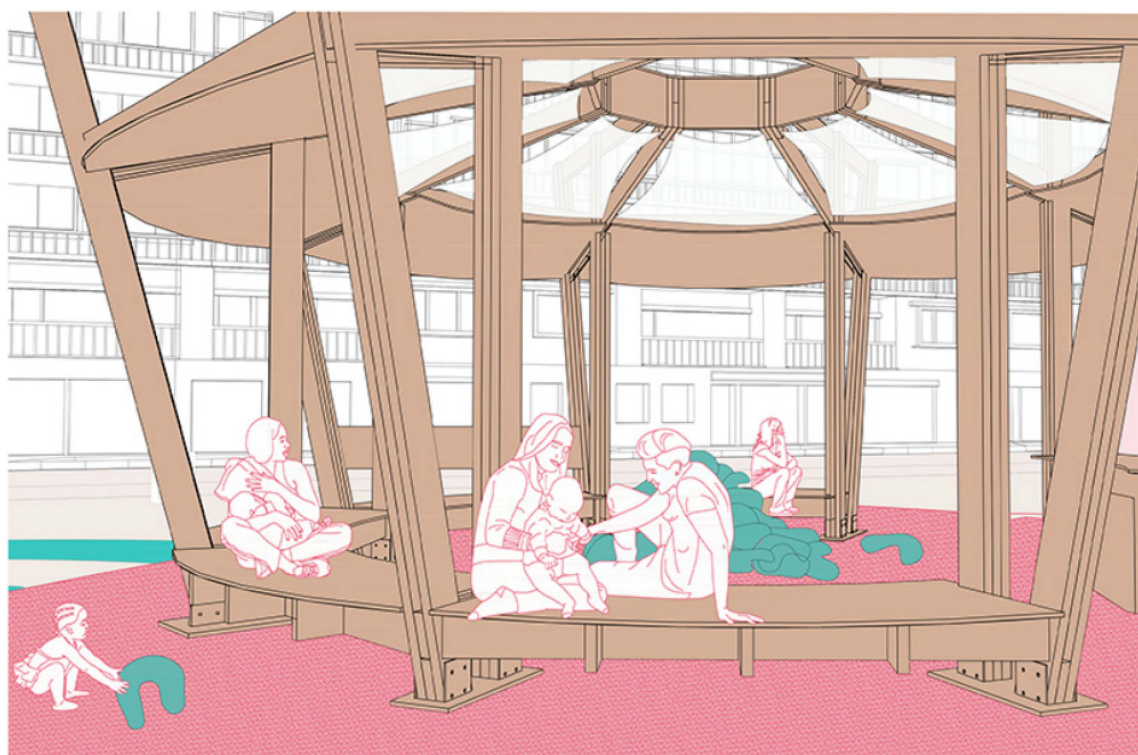


Figure 44- 'Mamifera' the group breastfeeding point (Equal Saree).

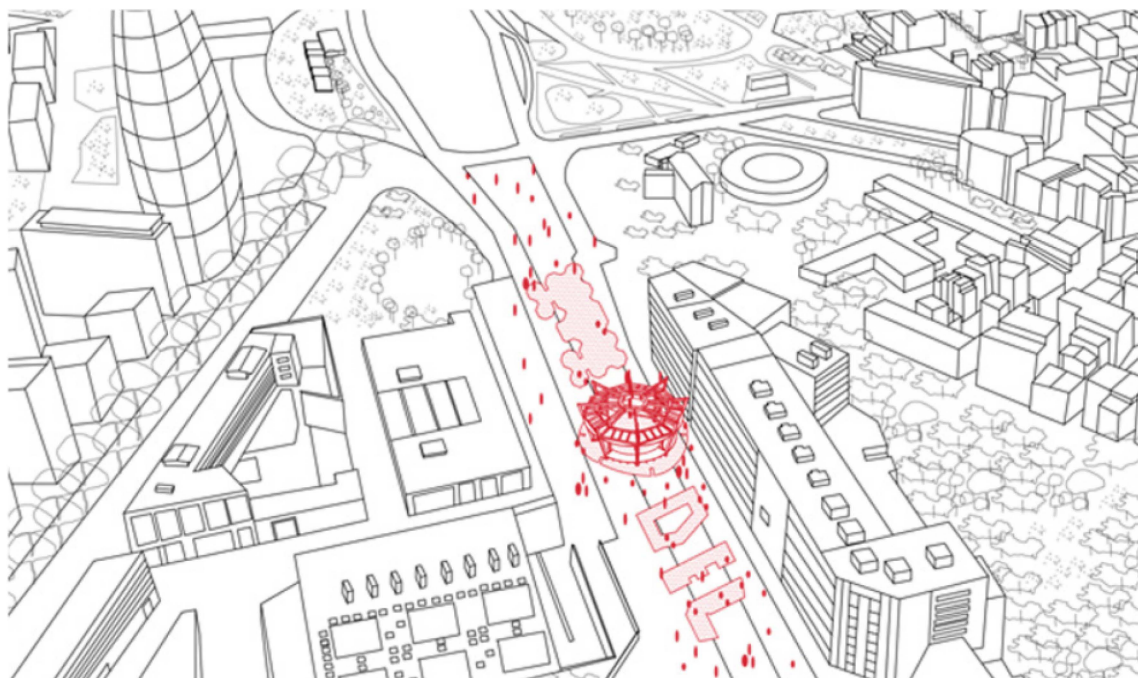


Figure 45- 'Mamifera' the group breastfeeding point (Equal Saree).

Vienna

Gender mainstreaming has been implemented in Vienna since the 1990s as their government have carried out over 60 pilot projects where they have put women's needs central to the design of their city. This started in 1991, with research into how women use public transport compared to men. They created an exhibition on 'Who Owns Public Space – Women's Everyday Life in the City' which led to the formation of a City Women's Office. In 1999, City Women's Office conducted a large survey on transport in and around the city and found women's routines were the most varied. This led the city to 'reevaluate its long-term approach to urban planning' (Chalaby, 2017). The town Mariahilf became a pilot district where they experimented with gender mainstreaming by improving street lighting to make it safer at night, widened more than one km of pavement, designed an overpass with ramps and introduced pedestrian friendly traffic lights (Chalaby, 2017). These initial experiments were successful so there has been 26 street lighting projects and an additional seating in nine locations in the pilot district Mariahilf. Eva Kail, a gender expert in the city's Urban Planning Group was interviewed to explain the importance of collaboration when gender mainstreaming;

"You need to know who is using the space, how many people, and what are their aims. Once you've analysed the patterns of use of public space, you start to define the needs and interests of the people using it," (Kail, 2013).

One project that embodied this in Vienna was the Frauen-Werk-Stadt or Women-Work-City built in 1993/94 as seen in figures 46 and 47. It is a housing complex that aims to make women's lives easier by putting pedestrian needs at the heart of the development. This has involved having green areas between apartments for children to play, thoughtful pathways, childcare facilities, a doctors surgery and a pharmacy all on the premises of the complex. The city's Women's office commissioned female architects to design the complex, which made sure that collaboration with women was implemented throughout.

Another issue Vienna has tried to tackle is girl's use of public parks. A study by local officials found that from the age of 10, young women's use of parks significantly decreased, as girls lacked the confidence to join in male dominated areas (Perez, 2019). Through collaboration with the girls they found the solution was to subdivide the park to create smaller green spaces, remove fencing to create multiple entrances and adapted sports courts so they could be used as informal spaces (Shakily and Lira, 2023). With these changes, girls started to use the parks more and Vienna was nominated for the United Nations Public Service Award. In 2008, Vienna's city planning strategy was included in the registry of best practices in the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (Foran, 2013). Therefore the way Vienna implements gender mainstreaming by carrying out research and conducting surveys before the design process starts, proves to be successful as they are collaborating with women to discover what their needs are and how they can be incorporated into the design.



Figure 46- A photograph of ⁷⁰Frauen-Werk-Stadt or Women-Work-City (unknown).

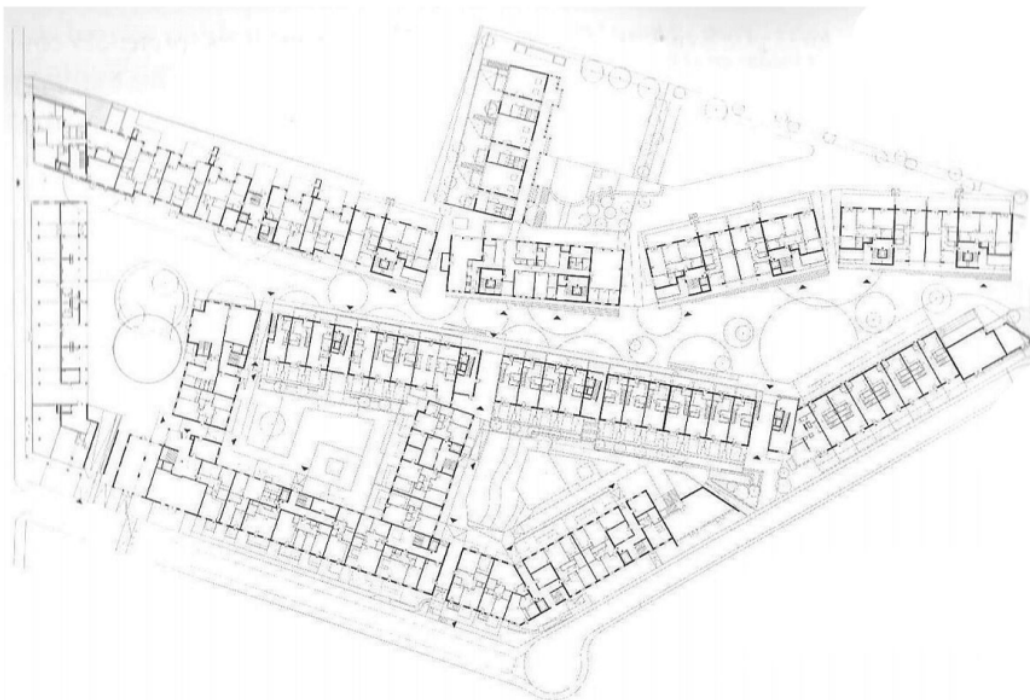


Figure 47- A master plan of ⁷⁰Frauen-Werk-Stadt or Women-Work-City (unknown).

Make space for girls

Although the UK hasn't implemented the gender mainstreaming policy in many aspects of our built/urban environment, the charity organisation 'Make Space for Girls' are currently campaigning for 'parks and public spaces to be designed with teenage girls in mind' (Make Space for Girls, unknown). They argue that currently there is no space in parks for girls as it is occupied by activities typically associated with boys, for example as skate parks, multi-use games areas (aka fenced football pitches) and BMX tracks, leaving girls feeling 'unsafe' (Make Space for Girls, unknown). They have been working closely with girls and collaborating to design parks that are suited precisely to their needs so that young girls feel encouraged to use park facilities. They work with developers, design professionals and councils to educate/ train them to ensure the needs of teenage girls are incorporated into plans from the start. They have created a series of images which explain 'what better looks like' in order to 'get people talking about what might be found in spaces design with girls in mind' (Make Space for Girls, unknown). These images can be seen and explained in figures 48-53. Even though the charity Make Space for Girls may not have any real life built projects yet, their campaign is definitely a step in the right direction for the UK, as they are educating people on the importance of collaborating with girls, to incorporate their needs in the design process.

To conclude, it is positive to see how collaboration between women and people in the design professions has enabled women's needs to be implemented into the designs of Barcelona and Vienna. The projects such as 'Mamifera' and 'Frauen-Werk-Stadt or Women-Work-City' are examples that put women's needs first and prove that design can make women feel safer. Projects such as these could be used to inspire other countries to collaborating with women in designing urban spaces. The emergence of Make Space for Girls, shows how the UK may begin to incorporate feedback into the design process, which is a positive step forward and may result in observable change in years to come.



Figure 48- Climbing up high- a drawing of 'what better looks like' in parks according to Make Space for Girls (Make Space for Girls).



Figure 49- Dividing up a MUGA or any space- a drawing of 'what better looks like' in parks according to Make Space for Girls (Make Space for Girls).



Figure 50- Social exercise spaces- a drawing of 'what better looks like' in parks according to Make Space for Girls (Make Space for Girls).

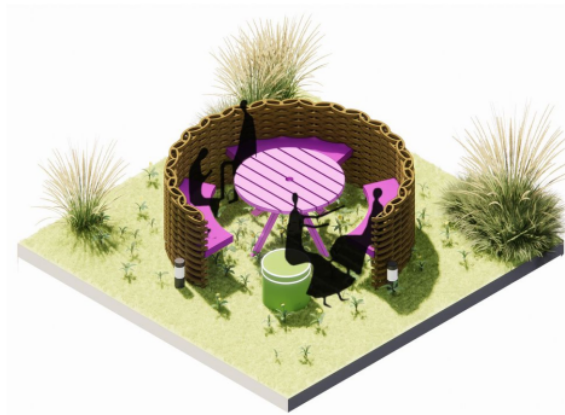


Figure 51- Social seating- a drawing of 'what better looks like' in parks according to Make Space for Girls (Make Space for Girls).



Figure 52- A stage for fun- a drawing of 'what better looks like' in parks according to Make Space for Girls (Make Space for Girls).

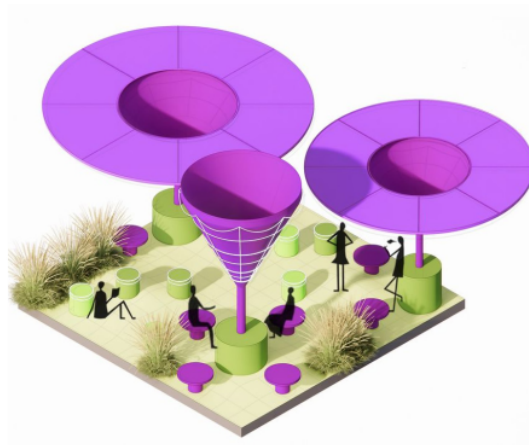


Figure 53- Weather proof- a drawing of 'what better looks like' in parks according to Make Space for Girls (Make Space for Girls).



Figure 54- Make Space for Girls visit a school in Chelmsford, Essex to collaborate with and educate the girls there about safer park design (Make Space for Girls).

Conclusion

Overall, it can be argued that the design of our built/urban environment still poses an issue for women due to lack of accessibility and safety concerns. Since the 1970s, women have attempted to change this, by protesting and marching to 'Reclaim the Night' and 'Take Back the Night' in public spaces where they feel unsafe. By going to the actual spaces where crimes against women have occurred, the marches have been successful in helping women to feel empowered. By gathering in united groups in the places they fear the most, they change the meaning of the space and temporarily no longer feel afraid. The protests have also been successful in gaining media coverage, which has helped to spread news to other countries, leading to people protesting to RTN and TBTN across the world.

Unfortunately, the marches have not been successful in causing a direct change in ⁸⁵ the design of the built/urban environment, because the demands of the protestors are largely being ignored. This may be because they are not in contact with influential people such as architects and urban planners, who have the power to bring about lasting change. The government's responses have been criticised as being temporary fixes that are ⁷³ not properly thought through. Similarly, policies such as gender mainstreaming which encourage the inclusion of women's needs in the design process, do not seem to have the desired outcome. Much of the built/urban environment remains inaccessible and unsafe to women.

However, it can be argued that through collaboration between women and design professionals women's needs can be implemented into the design of public spaces. This has been proven in Vienna and Barcelona and shows promising signs in the UK with the work of the Make Space for Girls charity (figure 54). It is important to note that no matter how much the design of our built/urban environment changes, sadly there will always be some crimes against women in public spaces. As Merry points out, although 'poor design facilitates crime, good design will not necessarily prevent it' (Merry, 1981, p.398) and Valentine explains how 'design can only create preconditions for effective control' (Valentine, 1990, p.292). But with the inclusion of women's needs in the design of the urban environment, crimes against women could become a less frequent occurrence, because spaces would no longer be amenable to the perpetrators of these crimes.

To conclude, women's fear of the built/urban environment remains an issue in current society and without the help of architects, urban planners, developers, engineers, etc. it will likely remain a problem for years to come. Therefore, it is important that collaboration between women and design professionals is strongly encouraged, so that women can convey their exact needs to the people who have the power to do something about it. Women have been protesting to 'Reclaim the Night' and 'Take Back the Night' for 53 years; surely the time has now come for action.

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