



Woman in Development and Politics

Lived experiences and women's perception of urban public spaces (Study case; Saqqez city women)

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ABSTRACT

Introduction

While women are always part of the construction of urban space, their presence in urban settlements has often become invisible because the private environment of the home is considered a female space due to the gendered division of labor. In this regard, feminist researchers believe that the city is made by men, because women did not play a significant role in its planning, they interfered less in its construction, and they benefit little from being enclosed in an environment made by men. The built environment reflects men's activities, men's values and men's attitude towards living space. Also in the field of urban theory and planning in the 1970s, scholars began to criticize urban planners for creating an urban space that prioritized the needs of men. Since then, they have been looking for alternative approaches to creating urban spaces that meet the needs of men and women equally.

Considering that cities affect the lives and experiences of those who occupy cities and often different types of people who use city space every day are exposed to different forces that contribute to the creation of this space (those who own and/or or those who govern the space and those behind the design of the space), so when researching urban space, it is important to consider not only the space itself, but also the people who use it and how they actually use it. Considering that in the last two decades, there has been an increasing amount of research on women's use of public spaces, however, most of them have focused on women's experiences in western contexts, mainly in metropolitan cities, and few studies have focused on the context examined in this research. So the current research focuses on the presence of women in the public arenas of Saqqez city in order to clarify the different dimensions of their experiences of being in the public spaces of the city. In addition, the examination of women's subtle experiences while moving in public spaces and how women use these spaces is targeted in gender, class and socio-spatial hierarchies, and examines the meanings and representations that are embodied in spatial actions and are linked to the urban space.

This study tries to answer the main question, "What are women's perceptions, lived experiences, and feelings about urban public spaces?" It also focuses on the following sub-questions:

- 1- What is women's experience and interpretation of urban public spaces and how they access urban spaces?
- 2- How do participants relate to urban public spaces and how do these processes become gendered or classed?
- 3- How do women's experiences of urban public spaces affect their life experiences and their interaction with other spaces?
- 4- What are the tactics and consequences of women's exposure to urban public spaces?

Methodology

phenomenological study that uses Husserli's phenomenology to access the experience of women in the public spaces of Saqqez city. This is because Husserli's phenomenology can be more flexible and the researcher does not need to have deep knowledge of the data under investigation, but can still provide a very clear descriptive description of the lived experience from the perspective of those who experienced the phenomenon. The studied sample does not only include those who are natives of a city, but also includes those who have had past experiences of the researched space. As a result, the population studied in this research included adult women aged 20-40 who lived in Saqqez city and had the experience of being in public spaces.

In this study, a phenomenological interview was used to collect data and the interviews were conducted based on the saturation process, so that no new classifications would occur during data collection and no new material would appear about the phenomenon under investigation from one interview to the next. Although the data reached saturation in the 18th interview, the interviews continued until the 20th participant. The data analysis of this research was done with Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenology method, which provides a brief and complete description of the studied phenomenon, which is confirmed by the participants who experienced it.

Results

The results of the study in the form of 7 themes; "Public-Private Space Interaction", "Spatial Boundaries", "From Necessity to the Pleasure of Presence", "Spatial Inclusion and Exclusion", "From Presence Stereotypes to Spatial Resistance", "Sense of Place" And "perception of the city and the ideal female model" was presented with 19 thematic categories and a comprehensive description of each of these themes was given. These themes intersect and should be considered together to provide a more comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences of urban public spaces.

Conclusion

The data obtained from this study can reflect the role of urban space and influence on daily life experiences and show how important urban space is in our daily life experiences. It includes spatial demarcations, ways of using space, factors of inclusion and exclusion from space, tactics based on gender stereotypes and resistance methods and ideal models presented by women. Therefore, the results of this survey can be of interest to urban designers, architects and those who are responsible for urban policies in creating democratic spaces and laying the foundation for it. In a way that enables women not to experience the feeling of intimidation and otherness, to consider urban spaces as their own and not to feel inequality and exclusion in the use of spaces. Of course, it should be noted that although this data is not necessarily a reflection of the reality, it is still important in the broader considerations of women's experiences in the urban space, and these perceptions are focused on how women access and look at urban spaces and the pressures they feel affected by it.

Future research could focus on the experiences of other older, younger women, as well as other gender minorities, and compare their experiences with these women to effectively understand how space shapes the experiences of others. In addition, the reflection on the existing academic literature, together with the discussion of the primary data, clearly shows that the intersection of public and private spaces should always be considered and the interaction of public and private spaces in women's experiences should be considered. Also, the intersection of gender and class in the use of space is recommended in future studies.

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