Panel 1.1 – Public Space: Designing Gender Sensitive Cities

At the outset of the discussion, the moderator Sally Kneeshaw (Urbact) introduced the topic by asking the audience the following question via Slido: are, and how are, cities and public spaces gendered?

Claudia Prinz Brandenburg (city administration of Vienna) briefly elaborated on Vienna’s programme for safe, secure and accessible public spaces: in the early 90s the programme “Who owns public space? Women’s and everybody’s daily life in the city” was launched. The aim was to raise awareness of differences between men and women in lifestyle and the use of public space. The urban open space was then redesigned to include wider pavements (at least two metres), improved and more numerous pedestrian crossings, improved lighting for pedestrians, and more benches. Vienna has low curbs to make it easy to cross the street anywhere. Gender mainstreaming has been made central in tenders to private companies. City officials also work to maintain mixed-use districts with short distances between daily necessities such as parks, green infrastructure, and grocery shops. Vienna, incidentally, has topped the list of “liveable cities” for several years. In response to a question from the audience, Claudia clarified some good practices when it comes to green spaces: the main connections between important points around and within parks should be made open to give visitors a clear view, and it is important to maintain infrastructure, provide access to toilets, and to make public areas multi-purpose.

Jeanne Ponté (parliamentary assistant at the EP) talked about the effects of sexism in advertising. The average person sees between 1000 and 3000 advertisements every day. Sexism in advertising can contribute to the reinforcement of negative gender stereotypes for both men and women, effectively both locking people into set behavioural patterns and justifying discriminatory (or worse) behaviour towards others. Jeanne calls for EU-level legislation against sexist advertising to avoid local authorities claiming it as an issue of culture, rather than sexism. She works with a campaign that advises companies on how to avoid sexism in advertisements, based on the principle that people dislike sexism and are thus less inclined to buy products promoted by sexist advertising.
Serap Altsinik (Plan International) expanded on her organisation’s work in international cooperation and humanitarian aid, with a focus on gender equality. Fear prevents women from unleashing their full potential. She stressed that we need to remain aware of how much power local authorities have to improve this, but also how much they need to do for their public. Plan International has launched the “Safe walks” app, where women can register various trips through cities as safe or unsafe. We need open spaces for girls and young women to participate meaningfully at the local level. For future action her recommendations are:

1) Genders are performed as a role, we need good role models;
2) We need political programmes and policies that help women;
3) We need horizontal decision making, and to emphasize diversity as a common trait.

Malpuri Groth (Swedish Women’s Lobby) talked about public spending as a sign of how gender equal a society is. The SWL runs a programme called Adwatch, through which they urge followers to react to sexist advertising. Cities often have ethical guidelines which are included in contracts with operators of billboards. Although a valuable step, the effectiveness of these guidelines is sometimes hindered by a lack of awareness among citizens. Jelena Drenjanin (Swedish CoR member, EPP) interjected that certain sexist advertisements would work counter to their intention in countries like Sweden.

In response to a question from Slido on public funds being spent unequally, Malpuri stated that more money is spent on roads than public transport and women use public transport more than men, whilst men drive more than women. Furthermore, in healthcare men receive more expensive treatment.

Answering a further Slido question: ‘How is the Committee of the Regions working to further this agenda?’ a CoR functionary in the audience explained that the committee is a sponsor of the European Pillar of Social Rights, in which the second item is gender equality. The CoR makes it clear that the lack of gender balance in national delegations, some of which comprise only men, is not ideal. There have been dialogues with citizens around Europe and gender equality should be part of the agenda.

Concluding the discussion, Serap underlined that besides being underrepresented in politics, young women and girls also often don’t believe that authorities take any interest in their opinions. Thus, public authorities need to actively encourage them to share their perspectives and to take them seriously when they do.
Panel 1.2 – Education and Career:

Supporting Girls in their Rights and Ambitions

The moderator, Claudia de Castro Caldeirinha (Co-author of 'Women leading the way in Brussels') welcomed the panellists and opened the discussion of how the various challenges and discriminations that women and girls face can be overcome.

Gillian Ford (Councillor of London Borough of Havering, EA-Group CoR) introduced some obstacles and challenges to girls during their education, emphasizing the lack of role models and the institutional discrimination they commonly encounter.

“The current situation leaves a lot of work for the EU on gender equality”

According to Brikena Xhomaqi (Director of Lifelong Learning Platform), it is important to break the separate silos of education and gender, and for experts of these two fields to cooperate. She also insisted on the need to modernize education - from early childhood care systems to adult learning - in order to change the way people learn and teach. The language used in education must be altered to successfully fight stereotypes. Non-formal education is a further key element, as it accompanies people throughout their lives and in particular when they become parents and need to provide their children with their first learning environment. Brikena insisted on the necessity of gender-sensitive curricula, and gender-neutral toys and environments from early childhood onwards.

Katja Legisa (Director of the Digital Leadership Institute in Brussels) insisted on the need to change mindsets in order to guarantee greater female participation in high level careers in the digitalised world of the future. Only 10% of workers in European tech start-ups are women, falling to just 3% in Belgium. In order to boost participation, the NGO she leads is defending and promoting the education of girls in ESTEAM subjects: Entrepreneurship, Sciences, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics. Providing technical skills to girls is for her a first step, opening doors for women into a wide range of professional arenas. Increasing funding opportunities for such programmes is paramount in order to keep offering affordable training to girls and women. LRAs together with employment agencies here in Belgium can offer, in addition to free French and Dutch classes, IT classes and training to unemployed people in order to boost their chances of finding a job.

Carmen Vera Garcia (Head of Leadarise Brussels Office) continued the discussion, focusing on the opportunity for women to support each other through networking and community building. Local networks can contribute to bringing about role models and changing mindsets, and can also be spaces in which to share frustrations and find solutions together, particularly in order to fight the confidence gap.
She also insisted on the need for visibility of such networks in order to ensure a multiplying effect. Carmen’s central recommendation: Policy makers at local and regional levels can promote local networks for women in order to help them reduce the confidence gap.

**Claudia** wrapped up the first round of exchanges, inviting the audience to share some best practices and recommendations for local and regional governments.

- The first comment came from the Director of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts Brussels Office, stressing the importance of including non-formal education and, for instance, scouting activities in curricula.

**Brikena** agreed, stating that there is already a recommendation from the Council pushing Member States to work on a system to recognize skills acquired through non-formal education and volunteering. It should be a matter of time and implementation of the recommendation by member states. The role of LRAs in informal learning projects and their role in the promotion of such activities was underlined by **Gillian**.

A second question asked concerned the access to education for women teachers in rural areas. **Katja** responded that technology is central in the provision of distance-learning for people living in remote areas. **Brikena** added that more emphasis must be placed on continuous training for teachers throughout their careers, and expressed her concerns about the decreasing budgets for education in many member states. To make a change it is essential to start learning early, and to never stop.

A third comment from the audience suggested that the mindsets of women are in some cases the main obstacle, particularly regarding women entering politics. In response, **Gillian** mentioned her own experience and the construction of her personal model in contrast to the one she received from her family environment. Politics can be a way to transform weaknesses into strengths and bad examples into good models of practice, and resilience is very important for women. **Brikena** also reflected on a personal experience and concluded that putting women in powerful positions is not enough, they should be seen as equal and as completely responsible and capable.

Two recommendations were proposed by the audience:

- The cultural dimension of education should be taken into consideration.

- Migrant women should be included in non-formal education programmes, as they often have a lot of skills that they could share with others.

A representative from the Mayor of London’s Office presented “Our Time”, a sponsorship programme that pairs highly talented women with champions at senior management level, either female or male, who will help to open up the professional networks, opportunities and contacts often needed to progress to leadership positions within workplaces. The programme comprises both a year-long sponsorship relationship, and a six-month formal development journey, equipping women with the tools to form networks, unlock opportunities, and kick-start the next stage in their careers.

**Claudia** wrapped up the discussion with her own recommendation, stressing the need for local governments to fight stereotypes through education programmes and training.
Panel 2.1 - Local Problems, Local Solutions:

Best Practices to Empower Women's Local Participation

Focusing on the obstacles and preconditions to get women more engaged and elected in politics, this session comprised local perspectives from three elected officials and two academics. The moderator, Sana Afouaiz (Founder of Womenpreneur Initiative), introduced the discussion with facts and figures. According to the European Women's Lobby, the gap between the numbers of elected women across countries and levels of government is still significant. While women currently make up 36% of members of the European Parliament, the number of women elected as mayors is around 15% in a majority of EU member states. "Politics is an arena where serious debate about the future happens, thus, women cannot be excluded" stated Sana. The discussion was twofold, addressing both the roots of women's exclusion from politics and the existing solutions to change the situation.

"Why everyone should want more women in power and where are there not enough?"

According to research, a higher number of women in important political and economic positions is strongly correlated with better governance as well as improved levels of GDP. Empowering women is not a zero-sum game in which jobs are stolen or given to someone else. On the contrary, it is a win-win situation which benefits everybody. Yet, Lewis Dijkstra (Head of Economic Analysis in the DG for Regional and Urban Policy in the European Commission) explained that having more women in politics is not beneficial because a more sensitive feminine identity exists, but rather because influence should be diverse and equally distributed to ensure an efficient balance of power. Despite this, the enclosed map reveals that gender equality in elections has not yet been achieved at the regional level. The blue circle shows the only place in the EU where women represent more than half of elected officials, while the red circles denote regional assemblies where women have 0% representation.

"Power sharing can only become the new normal by criticizing and monitoring the present"

Advocating for equal pay since the Treaty of Rome in 1957, the EU has identified gender equality as one of its core values and rights which counters an historical wrong. This commitment
is still strong today under the "Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality (2016-2019)" which lists measures to promote gender equality within 5 priority areas and monitors progress every year in the European Commission's "Report on Equality between women and men". Against this backdrop, Lewis Dijkstra and Hedvig Norlén (Officer in the DG Joint Research Centre in the European Commission) are developing the first index to measure gender equality at the NUTS2 level. Based on a multi-dimensional definition of gender equality, their index includes two metrics: female achievement and female disadvantage. Gaps exist in different aspects of life such as work, salaries, knowledge, time, power, health, safety, security, life satisfaction and trust, to name a few. Taking into account regional indicators is key to ensuring that progress is shared and comprehensive beyond national averages, which hide a lot of geographical differences (e.g. core vs. periphery, urban vs. rural). Hence, the public debate on gender equality needs to be transversal and address inequality issues in different policy areas simultaneously and in a complementary manner.

"Quotas: a means to an end"

Describing her personal experience as a young woman in local politics, Jasna Gabric (Mayor of the Municipality of Trbovlje and CoR member shortlisted for World Mayor 2018) insisted on the importance of gender quotas to push women to start their political career. In her case, she was first asked to join a political campaign to respect quotas. Yet, her experience as city councillor and deputy mayor convinced her that she could be a suitable mayor, even though she had no financial or political party support. While older male politicians were not confident that she could win, she was elected the first women mayor in her city with 67% of the vote in the second round, following a hard and personal campaign. In a man’s world, young women need to do and prove more to attain similar positions. Yet, during her second mandate, she noticed that this gets easier over time. Compared to the national level, local politics are harder to break into for women, because there are more informal rules and meeting places where decisions and coalitions are made. Thus, gender quotas have a crucial role in changing people's perceptions that governments should be predominantly composed of men. Respecting a quantified threshold, however, is not enough in itself: having more women in politics does not necessarily ensure more gender-equal policies. Qualitative and in-depth studies are much more telling of the real story. Women's access to politics is often dependent upon a man leading, an unstable impact, and a shorter political career. Jasna also added that, once elected, she still needed to assert her position and competence with her colleagues and the media. Quotas are a necessary channel for a faster transition, but they need to be supplemented by other instruments and practices to enhance a cultural revolution.

"Address the obstacles, remove them whatever the cost"

Similarly, Kamzy Gunaratham (Deputy Mayor of Oslo) advocated strongly for the implementation of gender quotas, especially in places where women have never been elected, because while campaigns such as "Half the people, half the power" or "She should run" are inspiring, they alone are not powerful enough to boost women's election to office. Based on an anecdote from Sri Lanka, she also stated that the first enemy of quotas is male politicians justifying the existing inequality by claiming a lack of competent women. Yet, given that their primary function is to represent, a politician cannot be disqualified based on competence. Recalling that "sex is part of nature while gender is socially constructed", Kamzy claimed that the missing tool to enter a man's world is culture. When considering a political career, men ask themselves: "Can I win?", while women are going to express numerous follow-
up questions such as: “How this will affect my family?”. Nonetheless, the construction of gender also indicates room for deconstruction and improvement. In addition to cultural obstacles, she also detailed structural obstacles and the lack of role models. In that sense, 50/50 parental leave is not only essential for a woman’s professional career, but also for children to observe that both of their parents work outside the home. Lastly, Kamzy put good practices in political parties under the spotlight as a central channel to get elected and a mirror of our society. To get more women into politics, it is fundamental that parties recognize gender equality as a basic value, acknowledge the gap, and do not let it be an obstacle to their female politicians.

"Not a women’s issue but a society’s issue"

Monitoring and acknowledging inequality is not enough. Because progress is not linear and certain, our society needs to continuously raise critical questions on gender parity. On this basis, Ibon Uribe (Mayor of Galdakao and CEMR ex-chair for the Standing Committee for Gender Equality) recommended a three-step approach to correctly overcome the barriers to gender equality:

1. **Time** - Given that caring and home tasks are still predominantly done by women, elected politicians at all levels of government can foster the engagement of women in politics by ensuring that public services (e.g. affordable kindergartens, day-care centres for dependents) and social policies (e.g. work-life balance, non-transferable parental leave) are widespread and available. Moreover, time could also be gained by having state funds equally distributed for political campaigns, as raising funds demands time and commitment (e.g. in Britain).

2. **Access** – Because progress and achievements are never immune to reversal, training programmes and services should also be directed to male voters and elected officials to enhance and encourage a critical view of the consistent hegemony of masculinity.

3. **Mobility** – Even once women are "inside" politics, they continue to face obstacles to exercising their power. Yet, regulations can be adopted to modify the rules for non-gender-biased designations and favour upward promotion.

Following the presentations, some conference participants asked questions and made comments related, for instance, to media coverage and social media in which the lack of changing gendered mentalities is flagrant, with women continuously judged on "the way they dress". To conclude, the panellists identified along the discussion numerous obstacles for women to engage in politics ranging from women’s general lack of confidence in a persisting masculine environment to the absence of childcare and funds to enable women in their political campaigns. The goal when overcoming these obstacles is not only to foster better representation of society, but also to convince "old white male" leaders that should also be the ones talking about and fighting for gender equality.
Panel 2.2 – Intergenerational Dialogue: Empowering Europe's Next Generation of Leaders

Moderator Esther Pozo Vera (European Commission) briefly introduced the speakers and outlined the themes of the panel, the fundamental idea being to create a discussion between different generations of women involved in politics. Bringing these experiences together and sharing challenges and achievements permitted the examination of intergenerational solidarity, with the final aim of promoting a life-cycle perspective of gender-equality issues.

Kata Tüttő (Representative of District 12 of Budapest, Hungary, and PES-Group CoR Member) began by describing her own journey towards feminism, influenced by the social pressures she experienced during childhood in Hungary. Told by her own father that biology was not a suitable career, she realized things had to change. Unfortunately, now in Hungary less than 10% of politicians are women, and she is often faced with comments about her appearance rather than her politics. We are all aware of political 'superwomen' who seem capable of mastering every aspect of work and life, but Kata claimed one central necessary change was the presence of more 'normal' women in politics. Kata suggested being transparent and acting without prejudice, and showing good examples of women who are involved in politics and able to manage their lives as the norm, rather than "exceptional". These examples have to be shared with men, in order to overcome prejudice from every source.

Jelena Drenjanin (Member of Huddinge Municipal Council, Sweden, and EPP-Group CoR member) described her experience as leader of a women's party challenging gender stereotypes in Sweden. She has been involved in education since 2000, offering training to young women facing the challenge of balancing family and career, and equipping them to fight stereotypes in the political arena. Her central message was that education is key: changing established mentalities at a young age, before they become entrenched, will engender advances in the wider environment. Jelena emphasized the importance of getting involved in politics, regardless of sex and gender stereotypes. The valuable learning experiences and civil challenges involved are a worthwhile payoff.

Ana Lidia Pereira (President of Young EPP) shared her experience of being frequently asked what it was like to be the first female president, and of her response: "I was never male president, so I don’t know"! Gender equality, she stressed, is a question of time, but it is also a question of valuing the working skills of all people equally, rather than including women simply as a box-ticking exercise. Ana underlined the capability of women to do the same job as men, and their added value of bringing different methods
and approaches to tasks. To achieve a situation of greater gender balance, training, education, and involvement in public affairs is essential.

The underlying approach of Neva Sadikoglu-Novaky (Secretary General, ECR Group CoR) may be described as working hard and fighting to get results. This she attributes not only to her own values, but to a wider environment in which women and men are working together towards a different kind of society. Criticizing them as 'positive discrimination', she does not endorse quotas, and espouses instead an ideal situation in which people are treated equally regardless of their sex. The most important thing according to Neva is to be willing to work hard, to promote oneself, and to remember the role of the family.

In a short presentation, the youngest panellist Laura Hidalgo (President of the Jeunes MR d'Anderlecht, Belgium) described her ascent to leadership. Her key message, for those of any age, was to be open to inspiration, to keep in mind humility, and to never stop learning. Be as positive as possible when starting a political career; follow your instincts and get engaged!

Esther summarized the panel with the following conclusions:

- Women must not underestimate themselves.
- Remember the freedom to choose, and never stop developing as a person.
- In politics, dignity and transparency should be the most important values.
- Women need to help themselves and each other to challenge existing mentalities, using networks and platforms and pushing for better, more accessible education and training.
- It is essential that men are regarded not as enemies to these developments, but as allies for change.
To encourage member states to nominate more female politicians within their national delegations to the CoR, with a target of minimum 40% of each sex; to signal that national delegations without any women can no longer be accepted; and to demonstrate a strong will to go beyond simply meeting quotas.

To increase the number of female rapporteurs of CoR opinions, with a benchmark set at 40% per annum.

To improve gender balance in leadership positions (President/Vice-President; Chair of CoR Commissions etc.)

To go beyond the ban on ‘all-male’ panels by ensuring that all events organised by the CoR have at least 40% of each sex.

To create an award for ‘Best local initiative for gender equality’ at the European Week of Regions and Cities.

To make public spaces and public transportation safe, adequate and accessible for all citizens. To achieve this, it is important that women take part in local planning, design, and governance.

To put in place ethical guidelines for public advertising to prevent sexism in public spaces (billboards, public transport etc.) and provide their citizens with an easy way of reporting inappropriate advertisements to the municipal administration.

To make support and visibility to non-formal education programmes and support educational organisations that encourage women to undertake training in ESTEAM related areas (Entrepreneurship, Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics).

To guarantee that school materials/curricula are free of stereotypes and guarantee up-to-date pedagogical training for teachers.

% of respondents who answered ‘Agree’ or ‘Strongly Agree’ to the recommendation. Source: 118 respondents to the Europe for Her follow-up survey.
WOMEN IN POLITICS: CURRENT FIGURES

Equality between women and men must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay.

- Article 23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

15% of EU mayors are female (CEMR Action Plan June 2018)

22% of CoR members are female

EUROPE FOR HER
EMPOWERING WOMEN IN REGIONS AND CITIES

+200 participants

22% Italian

306 viewers online

13% Spanish

118 survey responses

Top nationalities at the conference

Europe for Her
Empowering women in regions and cities