PERCEIVING DESIGN: SHAPING SAFER PUBLIC SPACES FOR WOMEN

Adriana Elizabeth Vivanco Sarmiento[1], Sikama Sekenwa[2]

[1]adrianavivancoes@gmail.com
[2]sikamawazir@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper investigates the influence of urban design on women's perceptions of safety and the strategies needed to build safe spaces in cities. Urban design has the potential to play a dominant role in transforming public spaces in cities. This research explores this role and its meaning using case studies from Sweden, South Africa, and Mexico to better understand varying contexts, identify approaches, parameters, and design principles in public spaces, and identify strategies employed that contribute to women's perceptions of safety in cities. This research recognizes the importance of cultural differences, which can affect how women's safety is defined and what is being done to guarantee it. The research focuses mainly on the public urban realm. The findings are translated into guidelines and offer recommendations to create secure and inclusive public spaces for all, particularly women.

This research aims to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks on gender, public space design, and applied strategies for inclusive urban design, with a particular focus on women aligned with the concept of "Right to the City," prioritizing the need for inclusive urban spaces accessible to all.

Keywords: Women's safety, Urban Design, Public Spaces, Right to the City,

1. INTRODUCTION

The right to the city refers to the collective right of all city inhabitants to use and access a city with ease and freedom, it is characterized by the right of citizens to participate in building, deciding, and designing the city and its spaces. Henry Lefebvre coined this concept in the 1960s, which evokes the collective right to shape urban spaces based on the concept of inclusive and equitable cities. However, its implementation faces significant challenges considering that no homogenous prototype serves all cities ("Examining the Right to the City From a Gender Perspective," 2010, 59).

In reality, expectations must be articulated by different identity groups, with gender being one of the most relevant identities. Historically, women have faced systemic barriers and discrimination when accessing and using urban spaces. Those violations of women's collective rights have significantly hindered women's ability to navigate and inhabit public spaces with safety and security. Consequently, this gap also perpetuates gender inequalities in urban environments, reinforcing social and spatial divisions.

This reality stems from social constructs rooted in patriarchy, and gender roles. Social and power relations in society shape space and its use; space does not simply exist ("Examining the Right to the City From a Gender Perspective," 2010, 58). One of the factors influencing the fact that the right to the city has been limited to only one type of user is that the decisions that govern the urban sphere are political and political positions are generally held by men (Muxí et al., 2011).

Lefebvre argues that space "is a dynamic product of social, political, economic, and ideological forces" (Meagher et al., 2019). The city itself is a complex puzzle where essential amenities and functions must be continuously organized to adequately serve—this is what Lefebvre refers to as "conceived space".

The fear of violence in public spaces is a major theme that attracts wide-ranging discussions about women's safety. In the urban context, the freedom to use the city can be both a luxury and a source of fear for women. Women experience sexual violence at a higher rate than men, leading women to avoid certain areas despite having the right to access them freely.

The question of how urban design influences women's perception of safety in public spaces is particularly critical today, as urban development is geared more toward capital accumulation and less toward the inhabitants. Understanding how design elements affect how women use the public sphere is crucial to attaining a more gendered understanding of the right to the city. This paper explores how urban design influences women's perceptions of safety in public spaces, drawing from case studies in South Africa and Sweden to illustrate the critical role of gender-inclusive urban planning in realizing the right to the city.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review provides an overview of research on women's safety in public spaces and their perceptions, focusing on the impact of harassment, violence, fear, social norms, cultural contexts, and the relationship between urban design and safety. The existing body of research highlights the intricacy of gender dynamics, urban design, and women's safety in public spaces.

Numerous studies have documented the widespread impact of harassment, violence, and fear on women's mobility and freedom in public spaces. Research by Davies and Francis (2019) highlights how experiences of sexual harassment and assault contribute to women's avoidance of certain areas, routes, or modes of transport, limiting their ability to navigate the urban landscape freely. Similarly, studies by Jewkes et al. (2017) emphasize the profound psychological impact of fear and anxiety induced by the threat of violence, leading to self-imposed restrictions on women's movements and activities in public spaces.

U.N. Habitat (2019) underscores those urban dynamics such as segregation, economic inequality, the loss of positive social cohesion, and gender inequality play a role in determining whether a city experiences high levels of violence and crime. The most effective approaches to addressing gender-based violence and crime take into account the multi-faceted causes and implement both social and technological responses. In this context, inclusion is a guiding principle in the UN system-wide Guidelines on Safer Cities and Human Settlements, which call for targeted actions and investments that consider the specific interests of women and girls.

Research focused on gender design and policy perspectives emphasizes the influence of patriarchal norms and gendered power dynamics on women's spatial behaviors. Social expectations often dictate where and when women can venture out alone, further contributing to restrictions on their public presence and reinforcing gender-based spatial inequality.

Urban design plays a pivotal role in shaping both the safety and the perceived safety of public spaces. Lighting, visibility, and sightlines are identified as key factors in the design and creation of safe environments. Loukaitou-Sideris and Eck (2018) show how well-lit environments and clear sightlines enhance feelings of safety and deter criminal activity. Additionally, designing public spaces to support diverse uses can encourage vibrant, active environments. This promotes informal surveillance, where the collective presence of people in public spaces increases safety.

One of the most influential concepts in this regard is Jane Jacobs's "eyes on the street" theory, which posits that the more people in public spaces, the more natural surveillance exists, discouraging crime. Navarrete-Hernandez & Vetro (2021) discuss how this theory, along with other strategies such as removing graffiti to align with the "broken glass" theory and eliminating solid walls can help mitigate disorderliness and improve safety. They also advocate for providing public toilets, which is informed by feminist theory, recognizing these interventions as both practical and symbolic in reducing gendered barriers to public space.

Urban planning from a gender perspective demands attention across all spatial scales. As Sánchez de Madariaga (2016) argues, urbanism must give equal importance to macro-scale infrastructure including public spaces, facilities, and transport networks—and the micro-scale elements that constitute everyday life, beginning with housing. Del Caz Enjuto (2011) adds that urban policy must address broader social issues like inequality, cohesion, access to basic services, and security while integrating socioeconomic and environmental considerations.

This vision aligns with the reflections introduced by Jane Jacobs in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), which challenged prevailing planning norms—such as the separation of uses, car-centric

development, and rigid road hierarchies. Jacobs's work prompted a reevaluation of how cities function and sparked movements advocating for inclusive cities that accommodate diverse needs without discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, age, ability, or socioeconomic status.

3. METHODOLOGY

All over the world, women and girls face sexual harassment and other forms of violence in public spaces, ranging from remarks and unwanted touching to rape and femicide. This violence occurs in streets, markets, squares, public transportation, etc., in developed and developing countries and urban and rural areas. In addition to having an impact on their health and well-being, violence limits women's right to freedom of movement and their ability to access opportunities for work, education, and essential services, and enjoy the culture and leisures of cities.

To address these challenges, a comparative case study methodology was adopted, to analyze how specific urban design strategies impact women's perceived safety in public spaces.

3.1. *Research Approach*

This research employs a comparative case study approach to investigate the influence of urban design on women's perceptions of safety in public spaces. The selected case studies provide insight into the experiences of women in public spaces.

The literature review provided a comprehensive understanding of the current issues surrounding women's safety perceptions in public spaces, urban challenges, and the importance of inclusive design. The information gathered in the case studies, combined with the methodology outlined here, will be analyzed and the findings will help formulate recommendations and guidelines for designing safer and inclusive urban spaces for women.

3.2. *Case Study Selection*

A purposeful collection of case studies is chosen from a geographically diverse range of contexts (Africa, the Americas, and Europe). They represent a range of economic development levels, cultural and societal norms, and varying uses of public spaces. Regardless of these subjective differences, there will be similar objectives. Within each city, the research will focus on public spaces frequented by women, aiming to capture design elements and their impact on safety perceptions.

Figure 1. Illustration of the case studies selected that contributed to the research Map from
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:World-map.svg

4. CASE STUDIES

4.1. *Warwick Junction Durban, South Africa*

General Background

The Warwick Junction is a dominant transportation hub within the eThekwini Municipality. It is the connection node for eThekwini rail, buses, and taxis, making it the heart of the metropolitan area. It connects the commercial center of Durban with the rest of the KwaZulu-Natal region and South Africa (Urban Land Institute, 2015). Beyond this physical connection, it connects people, culture, services, and institutions, with an estimated 450,000 daily commuters passing through the area. By its location, construction, and orientation, this urban space is classified as an urban gateway. The Warwick junction is a critical location that affects the perception of visitors to the central business district it connects to. Moreover, it is essential to the overall economy of eThekwini.

During apartheid, Black and Indian buses prohibited from inhabiting the city center had to stop at this junction. It served as the entry point for black Africans into an exclusively all-white African metropolis (Rampaul & Hangwelani, 2022). The junction became a site for informal trading, with 500 traders making a living daily (DOBSON, 2007). By 1996, the area was in urban decay, with high crime rates and problems maintaining order.

Figure 2. The Music Bridge in the Warwick Junction marketplace (World Resources Institute, n.d.).

Actions And Results

"The public spaces of the Warwick Junction area form part of a wider inner city public open space structure" (Rampaul & Hangwelani, 2022). The Warwick Precinct mostly serves the general public and is viewed and administered as a public space. The Warwick Urban Junction Renewal project is a multi-agency renewal project that began in 1997 to turn this area into a more vibrant business center and tourist attraction. Rather than eliminate the informal businesses in this area, the project worked with the owners as key stakeholders to create a more inclusive redesign of Warwick (DOBSON, 2007). Three main policies are used to improve this public space. These are inclusive policy, an inclusive urban planning approach, and the organization and involvement of informal communities. Some key developments that stem from this approach:

1. The project office was strategically stationed at Warwick Junction itself, to facilitate closer engagement with stakeholders and ensure accessibility.

2. A derelict warehouse was repurposed into a community hall, serving as a meeting place for project teams, community members, and city representatives. It provided a space for discussions, consultations, and collaboration.

3. An umbrella traders' street committee was formed to enable informal traders to voice their needs and space requirements. This committee played a crucial role in negotiating arrangements and ensuring representation.

4. The project identified an unused section and transformed it into a purpose-built Herb Traders Market. This involved constructing a bridge and pedestrian access to the area.

Figure 3. Market scene at the Warwick Junction (World Resources Institute, n.d.).

Rampaul & Hangwelani (2022) recognize the involvement of women in the Warwick project. This involvement was achieved through communication, collaboration, and a bottom-up approach involving women. Their study examined how gender mainstreaming was implemented in the Warwick project through investigations of persons involved in the Warwick project. Women experience urban spaces differently from men, which makes their insight invaluable when designing those spaces. In the Warwick Renewal project, the majority of the informal merchants are women. The conception of renewed spaces was informed by the experiences, concerns, and needs of the women who engage in business.

Specific urban features in the Warwick Renewal project that improved women's safety in the area include:

1. Improved lighting: To increase safety, the design team ensured an increase in street lighting to deter crime and improve visibility at night. This measure has reduced the rate of car theft at night (DOBSON, 2007).

2. Provision of storage and restroom facilities: Upon the women's request for restrooms and storage facilities being provided, both were constructed to be more gender conscious. Having storage facilities would safeguard the properties of the women from theft. Restrooms are fundamental for women to feel safe and secure at work, especially at night.

3. Accessibility: The team designed interconnected trading spaces to ensure safe movement for traders between spaces. According to the project manager, the designed spaces are solely for the traders (Rampaul & Hangwelani, 2022). To ensure safety, accessibility, and mobility, ramps and elevators were installed close to the elderly and women traders with children.

4. Additional measures: The project team targeted measures such as lowering congestion in the area, enhancing police presence and activities and community policing, and reducing concealed spaces.

The evidence of women's involvement in the Renewal exercise is the implementation of the aforementioned measures aimed at resolving their concerns. The interviewed town planners in
Rampaul & Hangwelani's research stated "Our main planning tool was gender-sensitive planning, which aided in creating positive experiences for female traders… We knew that women's capacity to fully utilize public places was reliant on their access to transportation and their perceptions of safety".

Women's perception of safety is achieved through visual proof rather than statistics or ideas. This makes their active participation as seen in the Warwick Junction Renewal crucial in their use of the public space.

4.2. #UrbanGirlsMovement Fittja, Botkyrka Municipality, Sweden

General Background

Fittja is located south of Stockholm and connected to the Stockholm city metro. The neighborhood was previously listed as a vulnerable area with young girls being one of the most vulnerable groups due to their age, gender, and social conditions (Wrangsten, 2019). As many as 78% of young girls raised the issue of security being a major problem. Fittja was considered a dangerous area by the Swedish police, struggling with territorial stigmatization, and criminal and drug activities (ESPOSITO, 2020). The exercise was funded by Vinnova, Global Utmaning, Botkyrka Kommun, UN-Habitat, Iteam, and Mistra Urban Futures from 2017 to 2019 (ESPOSITO, 2020).

The young girls of the Botkyrka municipality teamed up with the local municipality to transform the area. Six innovation labs were created by the participants, stakeholders, and local authorities to co-design the neighborhood from a young girl's perspective (Urban Girls and Women Redesign Their Cities Using Digital Tools, 2021). The labs were a platform where different sectors interacted to create realistic outcomes for commonly identified problems. The outcome of the workshops was the proposals for the redesign of areas in Fittja. To assist individuals with limited knowledge of spatial planning, the Minecraft video game was used.

Four spaces were identified as the most problematic: the subway station, the Fittja square, inside the mall, and behind the mall. These became the focal points of the study. The young girls analyzed them to help define the problems they perceived.

Figure 4. The four focal points of study (Fabre, Anneroth, & Wrangsten, 2019, p. 119).

The Subway Station:
The young girls identified the positive and negative points of the subway station. Popular opinion was the subway's connection to Stockholm's city center through various means of transportation. People are always using

the subway, making it safe for the users. However, there are many damaged light fixtures, and the loud traffic makes it harder for young girls to use the subway at night. The girls also highlighted a lack of sufficient security personnel in the area.

The Fittja Square:

According to the girls' perception, the square is unsafe and unwelcoming, due to its unpleasant and poorly functioning design. The square is a mere point of transit instead of a meeting space because of its dirty and grey nature. It is difficult to ask for help because most people keep moving. Results from the survey indicated that the girls would like a better-designed square with brighter colors. This would encourage more people to use the space, making it safer for vulnerable groups such as young girls (FABRE et al., 2019).

Inside the Mall:

Fittja Centrum is a mall that includes a supermarket, a library, a dental practice, food places, and shops. The main entrance is toward the Fittja square. The girls stated they felt very unsafe making their way into the mall because a large group of young men always stood within that area, some of them dealing drugs and some almost fully covering their faces. Because of this, the participants agreed they chose a different entrance (FABRE et al., 2019). Additionally, poor lighting in this area intensified their feeling of fear. The inside felt more like a transaction zone or transit area with no seats; uncommon for commercial places. The road leading to the health clinic and library was described as narrow. Toilets close to the library were shut down due to vandalism, which hinders women and girls from staying longer than necessary (FABRE et al., 2019).

Behind the Mall:

There were mixed perceptions about the backside of the mall. Some described it as dark and abandoned and unsuitable for use at night, while others stated it was more spacious and better lit when compared to the entrance. One reason the backside felt safer was due to the absence of the young men who loiter at the front entrance (FABRE et al., 2019).

Actions Taken

The first workshop targeted the apprehension of the current urban situation by the participants through a 'Girls Urban Walk' strategy. The result of this exercise was the articulation and analysis of the problems. What were identified included: Good footpaths and public mobility; Places for women, children, and elderly to loiter; Good lighting and visibility; Safety and the presence of authority; Open access; Human scale design; Flexibility, multi-purpose, and multi-functions; Well working infrastructure, water, and sanitation; and Mixed-use and population (Anneroth, 2019).

Before the workshops, a team of experts from UN-Habitat designed Fittja in Minecraft. This was used in the redesign of the spaces by the participants. Each group made proposals for one of the four spaces identified. Architects later reviewed the proposals to portray the ideas realistically (FABRE et al., 2019).

To realize the proposed developments, the girls and experts worked on policy recommendations that could affect the actors involved: the local government (Fittja Square), regional government (the subway), and private owners (the mall) (FABRE et al., 2019).

Figure 5. Satellite image of Fittja Centrum (Fabre, Anneroth, & Wrangsten, 2019, p. 139).

Figure 6. Fittja Centrum in Minecraft (Fabre, Anneroth, & Wrangsten, 2019, p. 139).

Fittja Square:

Fittja Square should be a light space with many bright colors to encourage commercial activities. It should cater to the needs of the youth, who may otherwise loiter. The design should have a greenhouse, green spaces, sports, footpaths, and public mobility.

The Mall:

To promote commercial activities, Fittja Square should be well-lit and colorful. It should serve as a proper meeting place; a functioning food court. It should be more accessible so people stay longer.

The Subway:

The station could be better equipped with good seating and protection from the weather for commuters. Improved footpaths and public mobility, redesigning entrances and exits.

Well-arranged seating and relaxation areas; lighting; and green spaces should be added.

Results

Although the workshop did not instantly translate to built changes being made, it highlighted their perspective which was previously ignored. The proposals were translated into more implementable approaches, even though they may not be implemented at all (Anneroth, 2019). Some of the lessons learned from this project include:

1. Feeling safe is important, but it's not the only factor in creating a livable public space. Imposed security measures might not necessarily make girls feel comfortable using those spaces. The girls prioritized the addition of more social functions for the areas highlighted.
2. The young girls have their perception of the social fabric they are part of, their insight is valuable when designing public spaces.

3. Failure to consider the diverse needs of users, such as young girls, leads to limited use of public spaces.
4. Liveability goes beyond just feeling safe. It also includes features that promote well-being, amusement, and social interaction.

4.3. *San Luis de Potosí, México*

General Background

Mexico joined the Global Initiative titled 'Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces in 2015. The Government of Mexico City collaborated with the Women's Institute of Mexico City and the UN Women representation in Mexico to develop programs aimed at preventing and addressing sexual violence against women and girls in public spaces and on public transport (Coordinación de Investigación y Estadística Inmujeres CDMX, 2017). Mexico presented a program called "CDMX Safe and Friendly City for Women and Girls" as a proposal for inclusive tactical urbanism. It is part of a public policy incorporating five components in favor of the safety of women and girls. It consisted of four phases: the Safe Travels Project, the Safe Walks Project, and the Community Participation Project focused on creating and sustaining safety for women and girls in public spaces, and the Institutional Strengthening of Actions Project.

The Safe and Friendly Cities for Women and Girls program aims to provide practical short- and long-term solutions to gender issues within the country. It promotes cultural change in the CDMX population in favor of women's and girls' rights to violence-free mobility in public spaces and transportation. It creates a climate of "zero tolerance" toward violence against women and girls, and inclusive urban environments where women and girls can move with greater confidence in their journeys through the CDMX. All measures taken, and projects developed and implemented protect and assist women and girls in case of aggression.

Mexico has been characterized by high levels of urban inequality. Infrastructure and equipment resources are unequally distributed, and the daily lives of city dwellers are negatively impacted, particularly those related to gender, health, and economic development. There has been an increase in women's perception of insecurity within cities, neighborhoods, and colonies. It can be said that men and women undoubtedly experience urban life differently (Xinqiao Su, 2023). However, the presence of a greater number of symbolic and structural barriers for women, and other disadvantaged population groups impedes their access to public services and spaces. These inequalities widen as the urban population grows unsustainably through the proliferation of irregular settlements, resource depletion, and environmental degradation. (Flores Dávila, 2020)

Actions Taken

Daily, women are subjected to harassment on Mexico City's urban transportation system, which has an influx of four million people. A study conducted by Mexico's National Council for Prevention of Discrimination concluded that 90% of female users in Mexico City have been victims of sexual harassment on their commute, including touching, leering, and explicit comments about their bodies. Many of Mexico City's women do not trust police officers, which exacerbates the problem and reduces the reporting of sexual harassment and violence on public transportation.

In response, through the Global Initiative plan "Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces for CDMX", Mexico City allocates two wagons for each subway train exclusively for women. In 2008 the local government's Passenger Transport Network created the Atenea line, which has women-only buses. This provides safe, comfortable, and economical transportation for women. It has 67 units that travel 24 of the 91 routes of the Passenger Transport Network, mostly in the areas of greatest demand, which is where most harassment occurs (Dunckel-Graglia Amy, 2013).

This project empowered women to participate in decision-making and the design of public spaces. Alongside the Pink Car Project and the Atenea Transport Programme, it introduced the 'Let's Travel Safely' program, which allows women to report sexual harassment on public transport and address abuse. The program also conducted awareness campaigns using modules and posters to highlight that sexual violence is a form of discrimination (Dunckel-Graglia Amy, 2013). Another innovation was the introduction of Pink Taxis, enabling women to drive

and manage their transport. Additionally, the 'App Viaja Segura CDMX' was developed as a digital tool to help women evaluate their perception of safety during city journeys.

Results

The combined efforts of the Mexican government, public and private sectors, and the community under the Safe and Friendly City for Girls and Women program enabled the transformation of public spaces into violence-free and safe zones for women and girls. Among the strategies used to transform public transportation, the pink train car campaign stands out in efforts to combat the insecurity of women and girls in public spaces.

"This program has positioned women as key urban figures in advancing Mexico's well-being. The Pink Transit Movement marks a pivotal moment in urban history, symbolizing women reclaiming urban spaces and shaping cities to reflect their needs.

Figure 7. Implementation of the Pink wagons exclusive for women. (El Norte Newspaper, 2021, https://www.elnorte.com/mediran-hundimientos-en-linea-a-del-metro/ar2180320)

Figure 8 & 9 . Women-exclusive pink buses (left) and their women drivers (right) (Castillo Juarez, 2017 , El Servicio Atenea: usos y experiencias, https://semujeres.cdmx.gob.mx/).

5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

5.1. *Similarities and Differences*

The examination of Warwick Junction, Fittja, and San Luis Potosí case studies reveal some similarities and differences, highlighting how women's safety is approached in urban design.

In terms of similarities, all three projects ultimately aimed to improve the safety and overall usability of public spaces for women. The projects integrated a gender perspective. All three projects involved a participatory approach involving women in the planning and design process.

However, there are differences between all three projects. These differences stem from context, focus groups, the initiated project, the existing problems, the actions taken, and the results of these actions. These variations showcase the adaptability of various solutions to different contexts. These differences are identified in Table 1.

Case Study	Warwick Junction (Durban, South Africa)	Fittja (Sweden)	San Luis Potosí (México)
Focus Group	Informal traders, mostly women	Young girls	Women and girls in general
Project	Renewal of an existing transportation hub	Redesign of public spaces	Public transportation safety program & "Life Safe" application
Problems	Urban decay, crime, and lack of safety	Lack of safety for young girls	Sexual harassment on public transportation
Key Actions	Improved lighting, gender-sensitive restrooms, and storage facilities in proximity	Minecraft workshops to identify problems, co-design solutions	Exclusive women's transportation (train, taxis), implementation of the "Let's travel safely" program
Results	Increased safety, increased economic activities	Awareness of safety issues, proposals for redesign	Creation of safe spaces for women, challenged perception of gender roles

Table 1. Differences in the case studies analyzed.

Furthermore, three emerging themes were identified across all three case studies; community participation, gender focus, and general safety and security. These themes are detailed in *Table 2*.

Theme	Description	Example from Projects
Community Participation	Projects involved community members in the planning and design process.	● **Warwick Junction:** Informal traders (mostly women) were involved through committee members and professional stakeholders to make sure their voices were heard. ● **Fittja:** Hands-on workshops were conducted with young girls to co-design solutions using Minecraft. ● **San Luis Potosí:** The "Let's travel safely" program gave women the opportunity to report harassment and participate

Theme	Description	Case Studies
		in awareness campaigns.
Gender Focus	Projects prioritized the safety and well-being of women and girls.	● **Warwick Junction:** Improved lighting, restrooms, and accessibility issues addressed the safety concerns of women traders. ● **Fittja:** Creating safe spaces for young girls was the main focus of the workshops. ● **San Luis Potosí:** Implemented exclusive women's transportation options and anti-harassment campaigns.
General Safety and Security	Projects aimed at enhancing safety and security in the public space.	● **Warwick Junction:** Crime and urban decay were addressed through improved lighting and better security measures. ● **Fittja:** Workshops identified generally unsafe areas for young girls and proposed solutions. ● **San Luis Potosí:** Tackled sexual harassment on public transportation; a long-time safety concern for women.

Table 2. Themes of case studies identified

5.2. *Public Space Design Strategic Guidelines*

Based on the analysis of the data and the identified themes, a compilation of design guidelines aimed at creating safer environments for women has been consolidated in *Table 3* by the findings.

Theme	Guideline	Description
Community Participation	Engage the target users	The members of the target community should be involved in the project.
	Account for the diverse needs of target users.	It is important to recognize the various needs and perspectives of a target community.
	Facilitate communication	Create a network of open communication to eliminate ambiguity and miscommunication.

Gender Focus	Prioritize women's safety	Design with safety concerns of women and girls in mind (lighting, visibility, accessibility).
	Incorporate gendered needs	Consider restrooms, storage, and amenities important to women.
	Empower women's participation	Create opportunities for women to be active participants in the projects from conception to execution.
Safety and Security	Improve visibility	Ensure good lighting throughout the public space and in spaces connected to it.
	Design for accessibility	Consider the needs of individuals with disabilities, parents with young children, and senior citizens (ramps, elevators, pathways).
	Address specific safety concerns	Identify areas prone to crime and harassment and develop effective solutions that address these issues. Proactive measures help address the underlying problems that pose a threat.
	Promote social interaction	When designing safer spaces, ensure the spaces are interactive and serve a mixed-use purpose.
	Integrate technology	Consider technology for security (safety apps, online platforms to report crimes without intimidation or fear, cameras).

Table 3. Guidelines of designs and strategies that can be implemented in public spaces.

6. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the case studies: Warwick Junction, Fittja, and San Luis Potosí, confirms that urban gender-focused research, particularly on women's safety in public spaces, is increasingly becoming part of municipal and governmental agendas. This highlights the current relevance of the issue and underscores the need for active participation and sustained engagement.

As demonstrated, the case studies provide valuable insights into the design and perception of safer public environments for women. Each of the three projects incorporates a gender-sensitive approach to engage and collaborate with local target groups. This model of participatory engagement enhances the design and implementation of interventions and ensures their relevance and long-term impact on improving women's safety in public spaces. These initiatives served as guidelines for this study, offering practical strategies to address the safety concerns of girls and women across varied social contexts.

While confronting distinct local challenges the projects collectively underscored key thematic priorities. These included the enhancement of women's safety through interventions such as improved lighting, accessible amenities, and targeted initiatives like exclusive transport options.

This study, based on secondary sources including academic literature and institutional reports, offers a broad view of gender-sensitive design in diverse global contexts. While it does not incorporate primary fieldwork, the peer-reviewed sources ensure a solid analytical foundation. Future research could build on incorporating direct user feedback to deepen the understanding of lived experiences.

In summary, this research underscores the importance of integrating gender perspectives in urban design. It emphasizes the role of inclusive urban strategies in mitigating safety risks for women and promoting public spaces that meet the needs of diverse populations.

REFERENCES

[1] **Anneroth, E.** (2019). – a case study analysis of the feminist urban development project #UrbanGirlsMovement discussing gender-transformative urban planning techniques as a means for more equal cities. Stockholm University.

[2] **Camargo, F. M.** (n.d.). El derecho a la ciudad: de Henri Lefebvre a los análisis sobre la ciudad capitalista contemporánea. FOLIOS, 44, 1-19.

[3] **Castillo J,** (2017) , El SERVICIO ATENEA: USOS Y EXPERIENCIAS https://semujeres.cdmx.gob.mx/

[4] Coordinación de Investigación y Estadística Inmujeres CDMX. (2017). Safe and Friendly City for Women and Girls. (Ficha 1, Año 2.), 1-103. www.inmujeres.cdmx.gob.mx@Inmujerescdmx

[5] **Davies, S., & Francis, P.** (n.d.). Fear and harassment in public places: A comparative study of women's and men's perceptions of safety in two British cities. Urban Studies, 56(4), 731-750.

[6] **DOBSON, R.** (2007). Urban Regeneration As A Crime Prevention Strategy: The Experience Of Warwick Junction, Ethekwini (Durban), South Africa. Strategies and Best Practices in Crime Prevention in particular in relation to Urban Areas and Youth at Risk.

[7] **ESPOSITO, V.** (2020). Impact of the Botkyrka Project on Gender Equality and Youth Participation. KTH ROYAL INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY.

[8] **Especial (2021, 16 March) El Norte Newspaper**, Medirán hundimientos en Línea A del Metro https://www.elnorte.com/mediran-hundimientos-en-linea-a-del-metro/ar2180320

[9] Examining the Right to the City from a Gender Perspective. (2010). In A. Sugranyes & C. Mathivet (Eds.), Cities for All Proposals and Experiences towards the Right to the City. Habitat International Coalition. Retrieved April 7, 2024, from https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=7692f8a64a9a13098eb4790d1a5bb546a6f088b9#page=59

[10] **Fabre, E. A., Anneroth, E., & Wrangsten, C.** (2019). Urban Girls Catalogue: How Cities Planned For And By Girls Work For Everyone. Printrun Ab, Stockholm.

[11] **Flores Dávila,, J. I.** (2020). Women and the Use of Public Spaces in Mexico. Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales | Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México Nueva Época, 65, 34. https://www.scielo.org.mx/pdf/rmcps/v65n240/0185-1918-rmcps-65-240-293.pdf

[12] **Jewkes, R., Wood, K., & Morrell, R. (**2017). Dangerous places: Rape and male social environments. Journal of South African Studies, 43(1), 19-31.

[13] **Loukaitou-Sideris, A., & Eck, J. E.** (2018). Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED): Megaprojects and urban transportation. portation. In R. Santos & N. Gokulsing (Eds.),, 273-288. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54115-6_13

[14] **Meagher, S. M., Biehl, J. S., & Noll, S.** (Eds.). (2019). The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of the City. Taylor & Francis Group.

[15] **Navarrete-Hernandez, P., & Vetro, A.** (2021). Building safer public spaces: Exploring gender difference in the perception of safety in public space through urban design interventions. Landscape and Urban Planning, 214., (214).

[16] **Rampaul, K., & Hangwelani, M.-C.** (2022). Gender mainstreaming in the urban space to promote inclusive cities. Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa, 18.1.

[17] U.N. Habitat. (2019). The strategic plan 2020-2023.

[18] UN Women 2019. (2019). Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces for Women and Girls Global Flagship Initiative: International Compendium of Practices.

[19] Urban Girls and women redesign their cities using digital tools. (2021, February 22). UN-Habitat. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from https://unhabitat.org/news/22-feb-2021/urban-girls-and-women-redesign-their-cities-using-digital-tools

[20] Urban Land Institute. (2015, February 22-27). Warwick Junction Durban, South Africa. A ULI Advisory Services Panel Report.

[21] **Vacchelli, E., & Kofman, E.** (2017). Towards an inclusive and gendered right to the city. Cities, (76), 1-3.

[22] **Valentine, G.** (1990). Women's Fear and the Design of Public Space. Built Environment (1978-), 16(4).

[23] **Wrangsten, C.** (2019). Back to the Future: Public Space Design by Girls. Stockholm University.

[24] **Xinqiao, S.** (2023). Gender-Inclusive Urban Design: Insights from Eye-Tracking Research. cademic Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences, Vol. 6. https://francis-press.com/uploads/papers/zN0cuVcZXMXUwn9MVKdJVwxckJCbeL63nNoZyiI7.pdf

[25] World Resources Institute. (n.d.). Urban transformations in Durban: Informal workers design marketplaces instead of getting marginalized. Retrieved April 7, 2025, from https://www.wri.org/insights/urban-transformations-durban-informal-workers-design-marketplaces-instead-getting