



Gender and public spaces in Oran (Algeria): a comparative study of the attendance and participation in the creation of public spaces between women and men

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Abstract. Although women are no longer confined to the domestic sphere and their presence in Algerian public spaces is widely recognized and socially legitimized, gender disparities persist, shaped by enduring socio-cultural factors. Public spaces are not only key sites where urban inequalities are produced and manifested, but also central arenas for exploring, developing, and implementing solutions. Adopting a multidisciplinary approach combining questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and in situ observations, this study examines the gendered dynamics of use and participation in Oran's public spaces (Algeria). It investigates how gender influences attendance patterns, spatial perceptions, and civic engagement within broader urban production processes. The findings reveal differentiated practices and persistent inequalities in access to participation, exposing a discrepancy between institutional discourses that promote inclusivity. This research emphasizes the importance of urban planning sensitive to socio-cultural contexts, offering concrete recommendations to planners and policymakers to promote more equitable and inclusive public spaces.

Keywords: Public spaces, gender, citizen participation, attendances, uses, Oran.

[es] Género y espacios públicos en Oran (Argelia): un estudio comparativo de la asistencia y participación en espacios públicos entre mujeres y hombres

Resumen. Aunque la reclusión de las mujeres en la esfera doméstica ya no constituye una realidad predominante y su presencia en los espacios públicos argelinos es hoy

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ampliamente reconocida y socialmente legitimada, persisten, no obstante, disparidades de género moldeadas por factores socioculturales duraderos. Los espacios públicos no solo son sitios clave donde se producen y manifiestan las desigualdades urbanas, sino también escenarios centrales para explorar, desarrollar e implementar soluciones. A partir de un enfoque multidisciplinar que combina cuestionarios, entrevistas semiestructuradas y observaciones in situ, este estudio analiza las dinámicas de uso y las formas de participación desde una perspectiva de género en los espacios públicos de Orán (Argelia). Examina cómo el género influye en los patrones de asistencia, las percepciones espaciales y el compromiso cívico dentro de los procesos más amplios de producción urbana. Los resultados revelan prácticas diferenciadas y desigualdades persistentes en el acceso y la participación, poniendo de manifiesto una brecha entre los discursos institucionales que promueven la inclusión y la realidad efectiva. Esta investigación subraya la importancia de una planificación urbana sensible a los contextos socioculturales y ofrece recomendaciones concretas para que los urbanistas y responsables políticos fomenten espacios públicos más equitativos e inclusivos.

Palabras clave: Espacios públicos, género, participación ciudadana, asistencias, usos, Orán.

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Introduction

The earliest urban planning theories were rooted in functionalist and technocratic paradigms. These theories produced spaces designed by and for men, overlooking the specific needs and lived experiences of women. For decades, gender was absent from urban planning discourse, but it has recently been integrated as a critical lens through which to design cities that are more responsive to social realities and the diversity of spatial practices. This shift has been accompanied by a growing body of scholarship addressing how urban design can adapt to the different needs of women and marginalized groups.³

³ Reza Askarizad et al., "Gender Disparity in Public Spaces of Iran: Design for More Inclusive Cities," *Cities* 158, no. 105651 (2025), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0264275124008655>; M Moonen, "(Wo)Man-Made Public Space. The Design Changes Needed to Create Gender-Inclusive Cities," *The Journal of Public Space* 9, no. 1 (2024): 25–42, <https://doi.org/doi:10.32891/jps.v9i1.1810>; Pablo Navarrete-Hernandez et al., "Building safer public spaces: Exploring gender difference in the perception of safety in public space through urban design interventions," *Landscape and Urban Planning* 214 (October 2021): 104180, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2021.104180>; Zahraa Imad Hussain Al-Hussaini, "Gender and Urban Studies as an Interactive Approach and Integrated Curriculum," *Articles, Journal of the College of Education for Women* 33, no. 2 (2022): 127–44, <https://doi.org/10.36231/coedw.v33i2.1601>; Rifat Ara Mostofa et al., "GenUrban: Shaping Cities for All Genders'- Right to the City Planning Framework, Hong Kong," *Cities* 150, no. 105081 (2024), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0264275124002956>; Terraza Horacio et al., *Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning and Design*, World Bank (2020),

Beyond its role as a space for transit and circulation, the public space functions as a site for social interaction and collective life, where power relations, including those relating to gender, are manifested and negotiated. In Maghrebi societies, which have been shaped by sociocultural and religious legacies for a long time, women's presence in public spaces has historically been limited, but has changed significantly in recent decades due to broader social transformations.⁴

In Algeria, for example, women's relationship to public space is marked by a complex interplay of mobility, encounters and restrictions. These interactions are influenced by social and cultural norms that vary according to context, becoming more or less restrictive depending on spatial hierarchies and patterns of use.⁵ Algerian public spaces therefore provide a valuable perspective through which to observe the intersection of social, spatial, and gendered dynamics. While several studies have examined women's urban practices, few have addressed their active participation in designing and transforming the spaces they inhabit, particularly in a North African context.

This research offers an original contribution through its dual focus: it analyzes both gendered practices within Oran's public spaces and the role of women in the participatory processes that shape them. It is structured around the following central question: To what extent does gender influence patterns of use, perceptions and forms of participation in the creation of public spaces in Oran? The study aims to shed light on the different logics of appropriation and participation, identify the barriers to women's involvement in urban planning and propose ways to make urban design more inclusive.

The central hypothesis posits that gendered perceptions and practices in Oran's public spaces are conditioned by social norms, cultural structures, and socio-economic factors. This dynamic produces both adaptive behaviors and often-invisible forms of exclusion. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining semi-structured interviews, field observations and a questionnaire survey of 201 residents. The purpose of this is to provide a nuanced understanding of gendered urban dynamics that remain under-explored in the Algerian context, thereby informing planners and policymakers about how to create public spaces that are both inclusive and culturally contextualized.

After reviewing existing literature on women's place in public spaces at international and local levels, the article presents its findings along three main lines of enquiry: the uses and attendance patterns in Oran's public spaces, gendered perceptions of safety, and women's participation in producing these spaces. It concludes by presenting the key insights derived from the study.

<http://hdl.handle.net/10986/33197>; Lidewij Tummers, "Gender Stereotypes in the Practice of Urban Planning," *Travail, Genre et Sociétés* (Paris) No 33, no. 1 (2015): 67–83, Cairn.info.

⁴ Farida Naceur, "Des femmes dans l'espace public. Places et jardins à Batna," *Les Annales de la recherche urbaine* 112, no. 1 (2017): 106–15, <https://doi.org/10.3406/aru.2017.3244>.

⁵ Nassima Dris, "Espaces Publics et Limites. Les Implications Du Genre Dans Les Usages de La Ville à Alger," In s. Denèfle (Dir), *Femmes et Ville, Tours, Msh/Presses Universitaires François-Rabelais (Villes et Territoires)*), Perspectives Villes et Territoires. Presses universitaires François-Rabelais., 2004, 249–64, <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pufr.388>.

1. Literature review

In order to establish the conceptual foundations of our analysis, this literature review first examines the theoretical and empirical contributions concerning the relationship between gender and urban planning.

1.1. Gender and urban planning

In the social sciences, gender is understood as a social construct, shaped by historical and cultural norms that determine the roles, behaviors and responsibilities attributed to men and women.⁶ Within the urban domain, this approach aligns with a systemic vision of cities as complex entities that require inclusive governance and equity.⁷ Gender equality, enshrined at the core of the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), implies integrating gender considerations across all public policies to ensure equitable access to services, participation, and public spaces.⁸ However, gender representations are still heavily influenced by cultural, religious and political differences, meaning urban policies must be adapted to local contexts rather than universal models being reproduced.⁹

Although the integration of gender into urban planning is widely recognized as a key lever for equity and sustainability, it is often fragmented. While gender-sensitive mechanisms exist in employment, health or education policies, these are only weakly connected to urban strategies.¹⁰ This lack of cross-sectoral integration reveals limited coordination between institutional levels and an enduring dependence on Western cultural frameworks. For instance, Michelle Moonen (2024) criticizes the persistence of male-centered urbanism and proposes eight principles of gender-responsive design to address this bias. Similarly, Valera and Casakin (2022) demonstrate that traditional gender roles persist in Barcelona despite advances in feminist urbanism, illustrating the challenges of transferring such models across diverse sociocultural settings.

⁶ James A Inciardi and Robert A. Rothman, *Sociology: Principles and Applications*, New York: HBJ Publishers. (1990); P K Baburajan, "Gendered Spaces in the Arab World," *Journal of Asian Research* 4, no. 3 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.22158/jar.v4n3p19>.

⁷ Clemente J Navarro-Yáñez and María Jesús Rodríguez-García, "Urban Policies as Multi-Level Policy Mixes. The Comparative Urban Portfolio Analysis to Study the Strategies of Integral Urban Development Initiatives," *Cities* 102, no. 102716 (2020).

⁸ UN-Habitat, *The New Urban Agenda* (2017); María Jesús Rodríguez-García and Francesca Donati, "European Integral Urban Policies from a Gender Perspective. Gender-Sensitive Measures, Transversality and Gender Approaches," *Sustainability* 13, no. 9543 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13179543>.

⁹ Ariane Pereira et Emília Malcata Rebelo, "Women in public spaces: Perceptions and initiatives to promote gender equality," *Cities* 154, n° 105346 (2024), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0264275124005602>.

¹⁰ Francesca Donati and María Jesús Rodríguez-García, "Gender Mainstreaming in Urban Projects: A Measurement Proposal Applied to Spanish Urban Regeneration Policies," *Cities* 150, no. 105090 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2024.105090>; Vijaya Kumari Maukonda, "Inclusivity in Urban Development: The Gender Perspective," *Interantional Journal of Scientific Research in Engineering and Management* 07, no. 12 (2023): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.55041/IJSREM27605>.

Several evaluation tools have been developed to overcome these limitations and assess the degree of gender integration in urban projects. While these reveal significant normative progress, they also highlight a persistent weakness in participatory dimensions. Gender blindness remains deeply embedded in planning practices, where women's contributions are often overlooked.¹¹ Therefore, achieving genuine urban equity requires strengthening women's representation in governance, adapting legal frameworks, and recognizing the diversity of spatial needs and experiences.¹² Despite notable progress in raising awareness and developing practical tools, ensuring women's participation and mainstreaming gender remain central priorities for achieving egalitarian urban planning.

1.2. Gendered perceptions, representations, and uses of public spaces

Although the notion of public space is commonly used, it remains multifaceted and subject to diverse interpretations across disciplines and theoretical frameworks. This plurality of meanings stems from the variety of approaches found in social science, urban studies and political philosophy. Public space encompasses a physical dimension, such as streets, parks, squares, gardens and boulevards, as well as a symbolic dimension linked to citizenship, akin to the Habermasian sphere where public opinion is formed.¹³ This study focuses on the spatial and social dimensions of public space.

Research on the gendered dynamics of public spaces reveals persistent inequalities in terms of access, safety and representation. In North African cities, for example, gender segregation is evident through the reduced visibility of women, restricted mobility, and heightened perceptions of insecurity. These issues vary depending on cultural and religious contexts. In Muslim societies, religion plays a significant role in structuring gender relations in relation to space. Religious prescriptions often limit women's access to certain areas, as demonstrated by Askarizad et al. (2025) in Iran and Jalalkamali and Doratli (2022) in Kerman. Social norms reinforce these constraints and further restrict female mobility, particularly in traditional neighborhoods. Women often perceive public spaces as exclusionary or unsafe,¹⁴ leading them to avoid certain places, especially at night, and favor spaces that are perceived as safe. While urban design features such as lighting, visibility, and the presence of people influence these perceptions, true safety also depends on the degree of social legitimacy accorded to women's presence in the city.

In Algeria, women's access to public spaces is still largely determined by social norms that govern visibility and mobility. Their presence is often perceived as transgressive and is more tolerated in urban centers than in residential neighborhoods.¹⁵ However, post-

¹¹ Yasminah Beebeejaun, "Gender, Urban Space, and the Right to Everyday Life," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 39, no. 3 (2016): 323–34.

¹² Kumari Maukonda, "Inclusivity in Urban Development."

¹³ Antoine Fleury, "Espace Public," *Hypergeo*, 2010, 1–3.

¹⁴ Barnali Das, "A Feminist Analysis of Gender in Urban Space," *International Journal of Scientific Research* 4, no. 4 (2015); Pereira and Malcata Rebelo, "Women in Public Spaces: Perceptions and Initiatives to Promote Gender Equality."

¹⁵ Ghaliya Djelloul, "Espace, Genre et Religion : Étude de l'ordre Moral Urbain En Périphérie d'Alger à Partir de l'enjeu de La Mobilité Spatiale Des Femmes," in *L'espace Des Sociologues. Recherches Contemporaines En Compagnie de Jean Remy*, Sociétés Urbaines et Rurales - Poche (Érès, 2018).

independence transformations have encouraged greater female participation in urban life, introducing partial gender mixing in social spaces, though without erasing the distinction between female practices associated with functionality and male practices associated with recreation.¹⁶ Although the urban rehabilitation policies implemented since the 2000s have revitalized public spaces, they have not removed symbolic barriers; the street remains a masculine domain that is rarely designed with women's safety or sense of belonging in mind.¹⁷

Recent studies confirm the persistence of these structural inequalities; both urban morphologies and social representations continue to constrain women's mobility.¹⁸ In a comparative study of Blida and Madrid, Benhamouche et al. (2024) demonstrate that women's legitimacy in public spaces depends more on cultural norms than on the physical qualities of the built environment.¹⁹

Thus, the gendered representations and uses of public spaces in Algeria, as in other places, illustrate the tension between urban change and the persistence of social norms. Although women are increasingly present in urban life, their participation remains socially conditioned and insufficiently legitimized. To make public spaces genuinely inclusive, action is needed not only in terms of urban design, but also in terms of mentalities, through the strengthening of gender equality policies.

1.3. Gender and citizen participation in the production of public spaces

Integrating gender into urban production requires expertise that is sensitive to context and capable of capturing the differentiated experiences of space according to gender and socio-cultural context.²⁰ Citizen participation particularly that of women, is crucial for identifying vulnerabilities that are often overlooked by traditional approaches, and for strengthening the social resilience of territories.²¹ Internationally, several initiatives demonstrate the

¹⁶ Zineb Benzefra Guerroudj, "Les Femmes Algériennes Dans l'espace Public," *Arch. & Comport* 8, no. 2 (1992): 123–36; Abla Rouagh Djenidi, "Espaces de Femmes Dans Les Réinventions Des Féminités », *Les Annales de La Recherche Territoires Urbains*," *Insaniyat*, no. 22 (2003): 83–94, <https://doi.org/10.4000/insaniyat.6964>.

¹⁷ Farida Naceur, "La Problématique de La Dominance Masculine Au Niveau Des Espaces Urbains : Cas Des Villes Algériennes," *In s. Denèfle (Dir), Femmes et Ville, Tours, Msh/Presses Universitaires François-Rabelais (Villes et Territoires)*), 2004, 239–47.

¹⁸ Mehdi Souiah, "De la présence féminine dans la rue : Stratégies d'accession à l'espace public dans un quartier spontané, Ras El Ain – Oran (Algérie)," *African Sociological Review* 23, no. 1 (2019); Naceur, "Des femmes dans l'espace public. Places et jardins à Batna"; Soufiane Fezzai et al., "Gender Dynamics in Urban Space Usage: A Case Study of Tebessa's Historic City Centre, Algeria," *Urban Science* 9, no. 4 (2025): 103, <https://doi.org/10.3390/urbansci9040103>.

¹⁹ Sanaa Benhamouche et al., "Public Space for Women: A Cross-Cultural Study Assessing Spatial Conviviality in Blida, Algeria and Madrid, Spain," *Journal of Urbanism: International Research on Placemaking and Urban Sustainability*, 2024, 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17549175.2024.2337872>.

²⁰ Nataša Čolić Marković and Nataša Danilović Hristić, "Integrating Gender Perspectives in Participation to Guide Changes in Urban Planning in Serbia," *Land* 14, no. 2 (2025): 258, <https://doi.org/10.3390/land14020258>.

²¹ Patricia Huedo et al., "Inclusion of Gender Views for the Evaluation and Mitigation of Urban Vulnerability: A Case Study in Castellón," *Sustainability* 13, no. 10062 (2021),

potential of gender-sensitive urban planning, each contributing to a broader dynamic of inclusion. In Vienna, for example, the establishment of the *Women's Office* in 1992 formalized a gender mainstreaming policy that has since become a global reference point.²² Similarly, the *Via Julia* project in Barcelona showed how women's mobilizations can transform the city by creating safer, more inclusive public spaces.²³ Finally, the co-construction of *Aliar Square* in Mendoza, Argentina, illustrates the importance of local participation in advancing spatial justice.²⁴ Together, these examples confirm that inclusive urban transformation relies on three inseparable pillars: citizen participation, gender sensitivity and sustained institutional commitment.

Recent research emphasizes the necessity of embedding this perspective within planning processes. While Pereira and Malcata Rebelo (2024) highlight the importance of women's perceptions, other studies²⁵ point out that some participatory approaches can unintentionally reproduce the very gender hierarchies they aim to dismantle. For example, creating girls-only spaces can paradoxically reinforce marginalization. Meanwhile, digital tools are opening up new possibilities for equitable urban planning by enabling the collection of inclusive, gender-disaggregated data.²⁶ The *Her City* project exemplifies this potential by demonstrating how integrating gender expertise into digital frameworks can promote greater procedural justice.²⁷

In Algeria, this dynamic is held back by centralized governance and the lack of powerful collective actors.²⁸ Although social norms have long limited women's presence in public spaces, new citizen and feminist movements are demanding greater recognition of their

<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/13/18/10062>; Carole Rakodi, "Cities and People: Towards a Gender-aware Urban Planning Process?," *Public Administration and Development* 11, no. 6 (1991): 541–59, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.4230110603>.

²² Oliwia Jackowska and María Novas Ferradás, "Who Owns Public Spaces? The Trailblazer Exhibition on Women's Everyday Life in the City of Vienna (1991)," *Planning Perspectives* 38, no. 2 (2022): 253–79.

²³ Maria Dolors Garcia-Ramon et al., "Urban Planning, Gender and the Use of Public Space in a Peripheral Neighbourhood of Barcelona," *Cities* 21, no. 3 (2004): 215–23, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2004.03.006>.

²⁴ World Bank Group KDI, *Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning and Design*, 2020, Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/publication/handbook-for-gender-inclusive-urban-planning-and-design>; Pereira and Malcata Rebelo, "Women in Public Spaces: Perceptions and Initiatives to Promote Gender Equality."

²⁵ Ida Sandström et al., "Gendered Sustainability: Are Public Spaces Designed for Girls Good for Everyone? Examining Female Participation as a Strategy for Inclusive Public Space," *Cities* 149 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4510569>; Anna Shaikly, and Beatriz Mella Lira, "Gender-Bias in the Built Environment: How Young Women's Experiences in Public Space Are Understood and Addressed in London," *Journal of Urban Design* 28, no. 4 (2022): 355–74.

²⁶ Flora Fessler et al., "Digitally Supported Participation Processes and Tools to Promote Gender-Responsive Public Spaces," *International Journal of E-Planning Research* 13, no. 1 (2024): 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.4018/IJEPR.340392>; Pascale-Catherine Kirklies et al., "Promoting Digital Equality in Co-Production: The Role of Platform Design," *Government Information Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2024): 101903, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2023.101903>.

²⁷ Vasiliki Geropanta and Elia Margarita Cornelio-Marí, "Inclusiveness and Participation in the Design of Public Spaces: Her City and the Challenge of the Post-Pandemic Scenario," *International Journal of E-Planning Research* 11, no. 1 (2022): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.4018/ijepr.309380>.

²⁸ Madani Safar Zitoun, "Les expériences participatives en Algérie : un révélateur des attentes citoyennes?," *Insaniyat*, no. 90 (December 2020): 29–46, <https://doi.org/10.4000/insaniyat.24227>.

needs.²⁹ Bouadam and Chetbi (2024) advocate co-construction mechanisms based on shared information and active resident engagement. Such approaches emphasize that participation can only be equitable and effective when it is grounded in local realities and fully considers gender relations.³⁰

The scientific literature highlights that women remain underrepresented in public spaces and urban design due to gendered norms, safety concerns and exclusionary governance structures. While these issues have been widely studied elsewhere, they remain under-explored in North Africa. In Algeria, despite some progress, the intersection of gender, participation and urban planning remains limited. This study, conducted in Oran, seeks to address this gap by providing empirical insights into women's differentiated use of public spaces and the obstacles they encounter, thereby contributing to the production of situated knowledge that aligns with the objectives of Agenda 2030.

2. Case study: the city of Oran

Oran, Algeria's second largest city after Algiers, is located in the northwest of the country on the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Shaped by Spanish, Ottoman and French legacies, as well as the transformations of the post-independence period, its urban development reflects a layered historical trajectory in which colonial influences intertwine with contemporary dynamics. Oran's status as a transforming metropolis characterized by contrasting urban dynamics justifies its selection as a case study. The city provides an ideal context in which to analyze inequalities in access, use and participation within public spaces, in a setting characterized by urban and social transformations differentiated by gender.

The evolution of Oran's public spaces is closely tied to the city's historical trajectory. Developed during the colonial period and later reinvested in following independence, these spaces experienced a period of decline before undergoing a recent revival. The organization of the 2022 Mediterranean Games accelerated this process of regeneration through several flagship projects, including the creation of Mediterranean gardens, the redevelopment of the areas surrounding the Olympic stadium, and the restoration of the *Ibn Badis Garden* (formerly the *Létang Promenade*). These changes have encouraged new social practices and increased women's visibility in public spaces, providing a valuable framework for examining differentiated uses, gender relations, and civic engagement in urban development and governance.

²⁹ Khouloud Naili and Krime Dahmani, "Impact of Gendered Female Space on the Sustainability of the Architectural and Urban Heritage: The Case of the M'Zab Valley," *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, ahead of print, Emerald Publishing Limited, January 1, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCHMSD-11-2022-0194>; Susan Slyomovics, "Hassiba Ben Bouali, If You Could See Our Algeria": Women and Public Space in Algeria," *Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World*. *HAWWA* 14, no. 2 (2016): 226–36, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15692086-12341296>.

³⁰ Roukia Bouadam and Wail Chetbi, "The Contribution of Inhabitants to the Development of Public Spaces in Eastern Algeria, Constantine," *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 11, no. 1 (2024): 53, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02557-2>.

3. Methodology

This research takes a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques. This approach is particularly well suited to analyzing gender-based disparities in the use of, and participation in, urban public spaces. At the quantitative level, a survey was administered to 201 residents to measure these differences across various sociodemographic variables (e.g. age, educational attainment, professional status and family situation). This method enables general trends to be identified and statistically significant correlations between social, cultural and spatial variables to be detected. In accordance with the principles of statistical inference, the data were processed using SPSS 26.0 software, which is widely recognized in the social sciences for its analytical robustness.

This survey focuses on users of public spaces in central Oran and the surrounding municipalities of *Bir El Djir* and *Belgaid*. These areas were chosen because of their high urban density, sociocultural diversity and concentration of the city's most iconic and popular public spaces, such as urban parks, public gardens, boulevards and promenades. The number of respondents was rigorously estimated in line with statistical validity standards to ensure the reliability of the results. The selected sample reflects diversity in terms of gender, age, education, employment status, family situation and location. The sample consists of 59% women and 41% men, largely comprising university graduates (78%) and working individuals (66%), compared to 18.9% students, 7% retirees and 8% unemployed individuals. This profile reflects the predominance of active, educated individuals who are exposed to a variety of uses of urban space. Around 50% of respondents are married, including 40% of women with children, which is an important factor for understanding gender-based constraints in spatial practices. Overall, although the sample is primarily composed of young, educated and active individuals, it provides a relevant framework for analyzing gender differences in the production and appropriation of public spaces in Oran.

This sociodemographic composition corresponds to the current structure of urban populations in Algeria, which is characterized by a high proportion of young people, increased access to higher education and significant participation in professional life. Therefore, the sample can be considered broadly representative of the current urban reality in Algeria. However, the data collection process encountered some resistance, particularly with regard to questions about citizen participation, which were sometimes perceived as sensitive. Despite assurances of anonymity, some residents were reluctant to respond or refused, occasionally associating the topic with politics.

A qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews and a field observation phase complemented the quantitative analysis, aiming to contextualize and deepen the results. Twenty interviews were conducted with users and professionals involved in urban planning, management and design in Oran. These professionals represented institutions such as the Urban Planning Study and Implementation Centre (URBOR), the Directorate of Urbanism, Architecture and Construction (DUAC), the *Oran-Vert* Urban Planning and Development Agency (EPIC *Oran-Vert*), which is responsible for green and recreational spaces, and the Directorate of Environment. Cross-referencing actor logics with local perceptions helped identify institutional barriers and potential levers for fostering a more inclusive production of public spaces.

4. Public space in Oran through the lens of gender: practices, uses and forms of participation

Before examining patterns of use, it is important to consider how women in Oran perceive public spaces. Their perceptions reveal an understanding of public space as a domain of regulated sociability, oriented more towards conviviality than individual autonomy or mobility. They predominantly associate public spaces with communal areas such as green spaces (33%), leisure areas (26%) and shared spaces (25%), while notions of openness and movement are rarely mentioned. Public space thus appears as an extension of the domestic sphere, providing a place where women can socialize while adhering to the gender norms that structure Algerian society.

4.1. Usage and attendance of public spaces in Oran

In terms of usage, parks and gardens stand out for their high level of gender diversity. This is in contrast to other urban spaces, such as small squares, cafés and neighborhood stadiums, which remain predominantly male. Survey data indicate that these spaces are among the most frequently visited in Oran (Fig. 1), with men and women using them almost equally (67% and 60%, respectively). For many salaried women on average incomes, these areas provide a free and accessible setting for relaxation. However, self-employed women, despite having more flexible schedules, tend to visit them less often. This underscores the influence of work rhythms and socioeconomic conditions on the use of urban spaces. As one 37-year-old respondent explained: 'When you talk about public spaces, I immediately think of parks and gardens. They're the only places where I can go out with my children without spending too much.' Playgrounds also represent a central component of family logistics, the burden of which remains highly gendered. Half of the observed users (51%) are married parents with children, confirming the instrumental role of these spaces. Among this group, women are overrepresented by 65%, revealing the persistence of a gendered division of care within the urban environment.

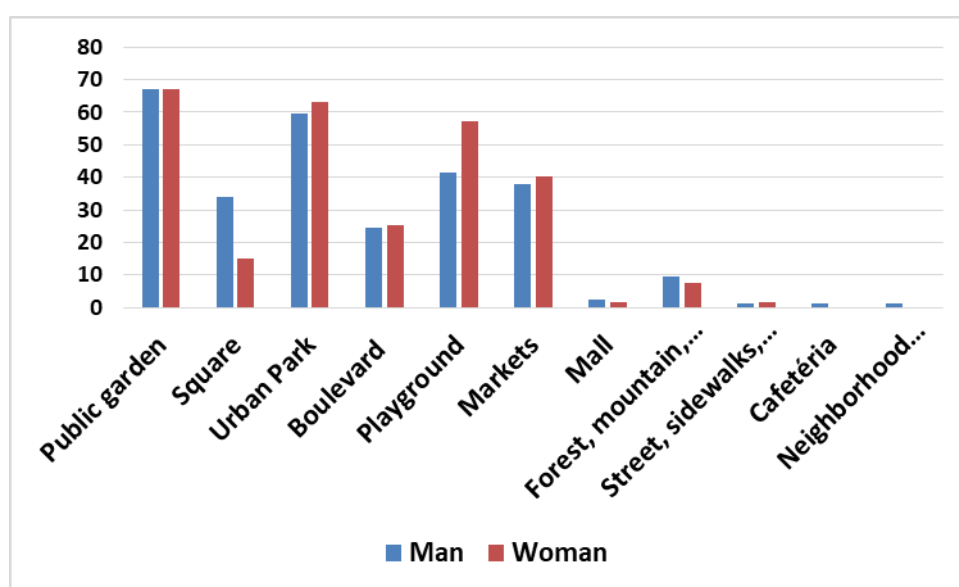


Figure 1. Types of Public Spaces Frequented in Oran.

Compiled by the authors based on questionnaire results, 2024

In Oran, the main use of public spaces is for relaxation and gentle exercise such as walking and strolling. Sports activities, however, are predominantly male-oriented (9% of women compared to 28% of men, see Fig. 2), due to social scrutiny and gender norms. As one 35-year-old participant confided: 'Exercising outdoors is difficult for a woman. You never really feel comfortable because there are too many stares.'

Attendance patterns reveal the central role of public spaces in Oran's daily life, as well as the persistence of gender disparities, with a predominance of men (68% versus 56% of women going out at least once a week). This difference translates into gendered daily rhythms: women tend to favor the afternoon (83%), often due to family responsibilities and a greater sense of safety, whereas men are more present in the evening (46% compared to 25%), a time of masculine sociability that coincides with women's withdrawal from public spaces.

Fear and insecurity therefore shape women's urban experience, limiting their mobility, although this restriction eases when lighting and climatic conditions are favorable. Spring, with its mild weather and longer days, emerges as the most favorable season for outdoor activity (83% of men and 86% of women), confirming the decisive influence of environmental and social factors on the gendered accessibility of public spaces (see Fig. 3).

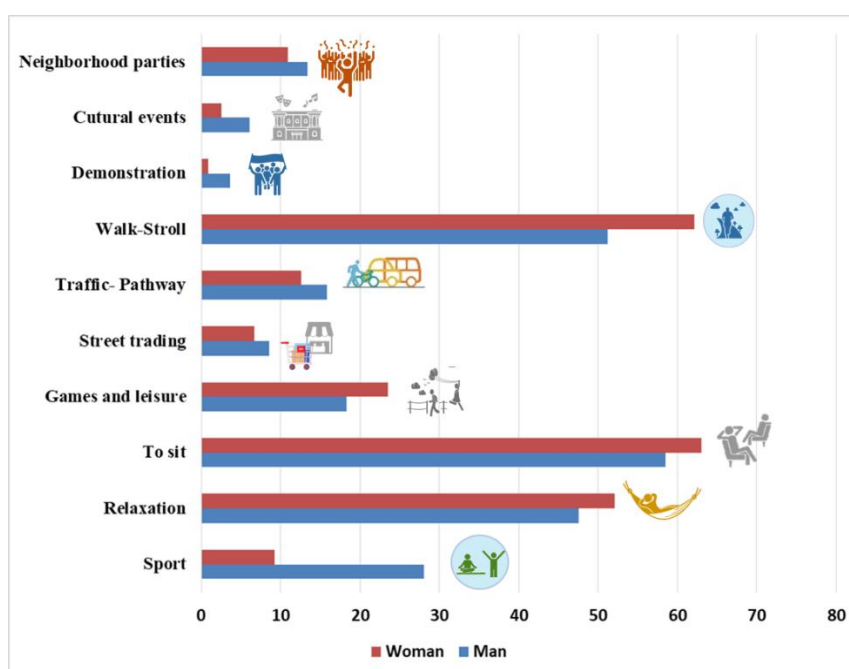


Figure 2. Activities Undertaken in Public Spaces in Oran.
Compiled by the authors based on questionnaire results, 2024

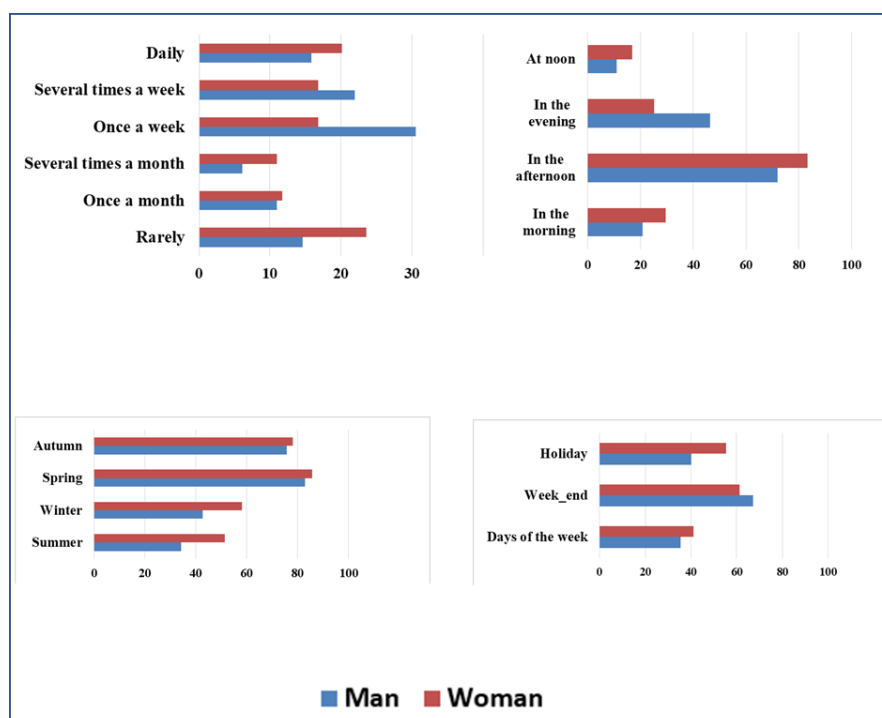


Figure 3. The frequency of use of public spaces in Oran.
Compiled by the authors based on questionnaire results, 2024

4.2. Gendered perception of safety

Issues related to urban design and management present everyday obstacles to the use of public spaces, with a sense of insecurity emerging as a constraint, which varies according to gender, age and social status. Insecurity is cited alongside poor sanitation and a lack of street furniture as one of the main problems encountered. While both genders share these perceptions, women express them more acutely: 54% of women consider public spaces unsafe, compared to 46% of men. This feeling is significantly stronger among users under 40 and those who are more highly educated. Thus, the intersection of gender, age, and education shows that insecurity is a constraint that disproportionately affects women, and is amplified by generational and socio-educational factors. “As a rule, I don’t go out alone after 8 p.m. There isn’t enough lighting and there’s always the fear of comments or insistent stares,” explained a 24-year-old university student. ‘It’s not that the city is dangerous everywhere, but we all know that a woman alone at night is not viewed positively,’ she added. These accounts illustrate that perceptions of risk extend beyond physical safety to encompass social norms that restrict women’s presence in public spaces.

This differentiated perception of safety is reflected in the criteria that guide the choice of public spaces, which are primarily based on accessibility, cleanliness and security. Women prioritize “appropriate frequentation”, where informal social control plays a decisive role, whereas men prioritize more functional aspects, such as the availability of services or parking. This reflects a concern for efficiency and autonomy (Fig. 4). These differences are evident in patterns of public space use: for women, these are particularly shaped by sociability and family context. 85% of women visit public spaces with their families, compared to 69% of men, and only 20% visit alone. Thus, collective use appears to

be a female strategy for adapting to an environment perceived as unsafe, in contrast to men's more individual practices.

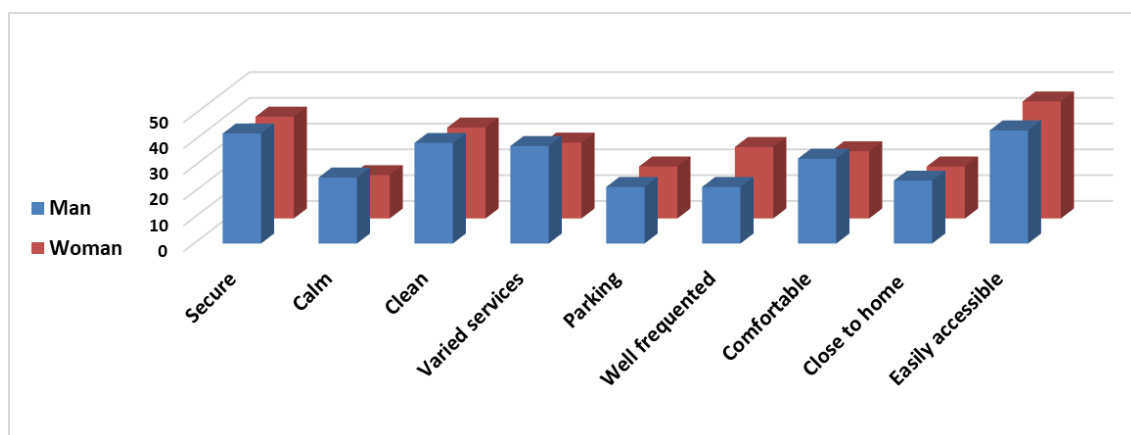


Figure 4. Criteria for Choosing Public Spaces in Oran.
Compiled by the authors based on questionnaire results, 2024.

Analysis of design processes, planning layouts and official planning documents reveals a clear prioritization of technical considerations that is often misaligned with the actual concerns of women as users. The reviewed planning documents make no mention of any gender impact assessment or explicit consideration of differentiated needs. As one architect affiliated with an architectural design office explained: 'In our projects, we primarily focus on functionality. The gender dimension is usually considered only in certain technical aspects, such as the design of restrooms with separate access... As for safety, this is mostly approached from a technical standpoint: ramps, guardrails and lighting.' This emphasis on technical solutions stands in direct contrast to the needs expressed by women, for whom safety is not merely defined by technical devices, but also by the overall atmosphere and the presence of social life in public spaces.

4.3 Towards an inclusive urban citizenship? Women's role in shaping public spaces in Oran

Understanding citizen participation as the direct involvement of residents in urban development and planning processes³¹ provides a relevant framework for analyzing the position of women, who are a particularly vulnerable group in Algeria, through the lens of spatial justice and the right to the city.³²

Despite the generally positive perception of their role, the current supply of public spaces is widely considered to be insufficient, highlighting the ongoing discrepancy

³¹ Safar Zitoun, "Les expériences participatives en Algérie."

³² Moonen, "(Wo)Man-Made Public Space. The Design Changes Needed to Create Gender-Inclusive Cities"; Sergi Valera and Hernan Casakin, "Integrating Observation and Network Analysis to Identify Patterns of Use in the Public Space: A Gender Perspective," *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.898809>.

between the ideal and the reality. More than half of respondents believe that public spaces improve quality of life, with this view being particularly prevalent among those under 40 and those with higher education qualifications. However, a significant majority consider the current provision to be inadequate (75% of women and 67% of men), a shortfall that is particularly keenly felt by young single individuals and mothers. This perception of inadequacy reflects unmet needs for independent socialization among young people and childcare logistics among mothers.

The strong aspiration for participatory democracy is hindered by two major obstacles: a lack of accessible information and low levels of effective participation. This exclusion, which is strongly gendered, often leads women to engage in informal forms of civic involvement. While a large majority of female respondents (78%) consider citizen participation to be essential to urban development, only 19% believe that citizens are genuinely involved in decision-making (see Fig. 5). This reveals a clear discrepancy between the desire to participate and the reality of engagement. Furthermore, a similarly large proportion agree that residents should be involved in the creation of public spaces (74% of women and 78% of men; see Fig. 6). This conviction is particularly pronounced among university-educated women, confirming the link between educational capital and the aspiration towards urban engagement. However, this interest rarely translates into formal participation: only 5% of women, compared to 21% of men, report having ever taken part in an urban planning project.

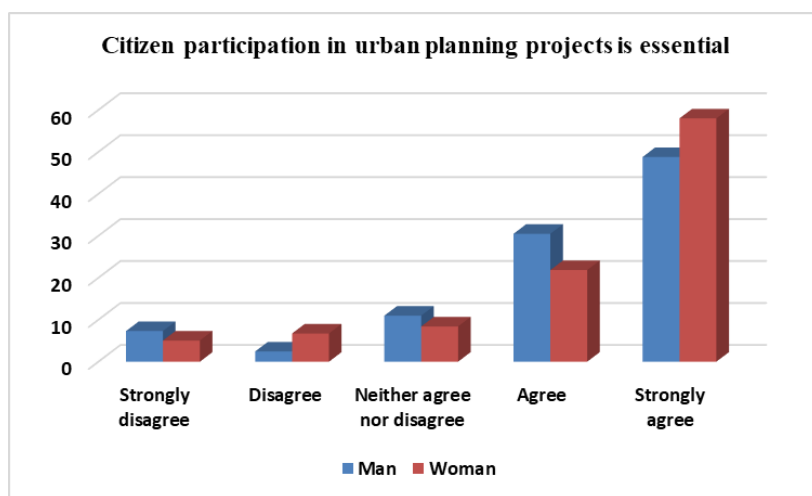


Figure 5. The Perception of Citizen Participation in Urban Planning Projects.
Compiled by the authors based on questionnaire results, 2024

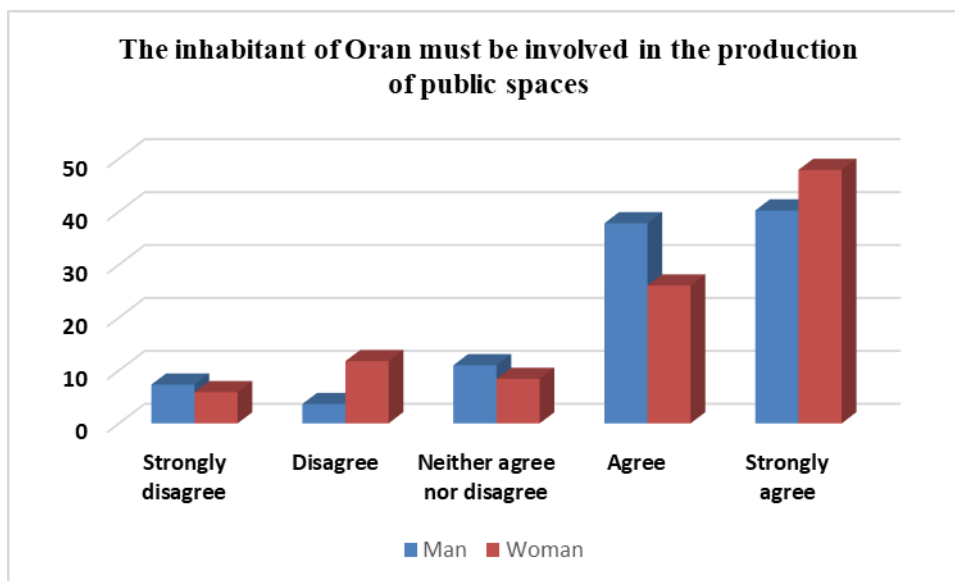


Figure 6. The perception of citizen participation in public space projects. Compiled by the authors based on questionnaire results, 2024.

This low level of engagement can largely be explained by the lack of accessible information regarding public deliberations, a shortcoming reported by 86% of women compared to 76% of men, as well as by the fact that participation is still very limited and male-dominated (8% of active participants are men, compared to only 3% women). As an architect affiliated with an architectural design office noted: 'Public meetings are mostly attended by technicians and elected officials, while citizen participation, especially that of women, remains limited. These meetings often take place within very tight deadlines, which can restrict genuine consultation.'

Thus, even within a context of overall low participation, men remain more visible and better integrated into decision-making bodies. However, some women bypass institutional channels by taking concrete action within their neighborhoods. As one interviewee explained: "Sometimes, we gather with our neighbors to clean up the neighborhood or plant trees, rather than waiting for the municipality. It's our way of participating." These practices reveal a subtle yet significant form of civic engagement.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm the initial hypothesis that the way public spaces are perceived and used in Oran results from a complex interplay between social norms, cultural structures, and socio-economic factors. These dynamics generate subtle forms of adaptation and exclusion among women, in line with the observations of Pereira et al. (2024), Askarizad et al. (2025) and Fezzai et al. (2025), who emphasize that women's access to public spaces is still limited by social norms and urban policies that are not sufficiently inclusive. While women develop strategies for being present in a discreet way, their practices are still strongly influenced by social roles. This confirms the influence of gender on freedom of movement and the ways in which the city is inhabited, as discussed by Valera et al. (2022). This configuration reveals a symbolic segmentation of the city, with masculine spaces representing free appropriation and feminine spaces representing justified presence. This maintains public spaces as sites of unequal interaction.

Nevertheless, the majority of respondents recognize the importance of public spaces for urban quality of life, even though their use is still marked by gender and class disparities. Parks and gardens emerge as relatively equitable spaces, particularly frequented by middle-class wage earners. The variation in use according to occupational status demonstrates the role of work in differentiating spatial practices.³³ This logic is also evident in other everyday places: for example, playgrounds are strongly associated with married women accompanied by children, illustrating the persistence of gendered divisions of family responsibilities that assign women the roles of care and accompaniment. As feminist analyses of urban planning have highlighted,³⁴ women's use of urban space tends to be domestic-oriented, whereas men's practices are more professional or recreational. These areas would benefit from being designed not only as play spaces for children, but also as environments that support mothers in their daily lives, with more suitable furniture and amenities.

Inequalities in usage are also evident in attitudes towards time and the criteria used to select locations. 'Access time' and 'use time' are more decisive factors in segregation than location. Women adapt their spatial practices to safety, lighting and climate constraints, favoring spaces that are perceived as secure and compatible with family logistics. They also pay particular attention to the quality of social interactions and ambience. In contrast, men, especially younger ones, occupy public spaces more freely for sociability and value mobility autonomy to a greater extent.³⁵ These differences reveal a temporal and social segmentation of the city, in which gender relations continue to influence how the city is used.

Such disparities highlight the limitations of urban planning, which remains dominated by a functionalist and technical logic that is insufficiently attentive to the differentiated needs of different genders and generations. This approach particularly affects young, educated women who are more autonomous and aware of their rights. By reducing safety to a matter of infrastructure, current planning overlooks its social dimension. Equitable access to the city is paramount for women. However, urban planning often relies on a universalist conception that prioritizes autonomous, masculine mobility, thereby perpetuating a subtle yet persistent form of female exclusion.

These findings form part of a broader regional dynamic. In Tunisia, for example, social norms and pressures continue to restrict women's mobility despite advances following the revolution.³⁶ In Morocco, Mekrini (2024) describes a fragmented female urbanity in Béni Mellal, shaped by social inequalities and gender norms, where women are caught between their attachment to familiar central spaces and their search for anonymity in peripheral

³³ Yvonne Guichard-Claudic and Danièle Kergoat, "Le corps aux prises avec l'avancée en mixité: Introduction," *Cahiers du Genre* n° 42, no. 1 (2007): 5–18, <https://doi.org/10.3917/cdge.042.0005>.

³⁴ Yves Raibaud, "Durable mais inégalitaire : la ville," *Travail, genre et sociétés* n° 33, no. 1 (2015): 29–47, <https://doi.org/10.3917/tgs.033.0029>.

³⁵ Salma Begum et al., "Gender and Public Space: Mapping Palimpsests of Art, Design, and Agency in Shahbag, Dhaka," *Social Inclusion* 9, no. 4 (2021): 143–57, <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v9i4.4368>.

³⁶ Meryem Sellami, "Représentations des violences faites aux femmes dans l'espace public en Tunisie postrévolutionnaire: un enjeu politique de genre," *Cahiers du Genre* n° 72, no. 1 (2022): 175–206, <https://doi.org/10.3917/cdge.072.0175>; Abir Kréfa, "Genre, espace et dynamique de la révolution tunisienne : le cas des mobilisations de rue du centre-ville de la capitale," *Genre, sexualité et société* 32 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.4000/12xuj>; Chiara Sebastiani and Sami Yassine Turki, "Espace (s) public(s) en Tunisie. De l'évolution des politiques aux mutations des pratiques," *Les Cahiers d'EMAM*, no. 28 (June 2016), <https://doi.org/10.4000/emam.1247>.

areas.³⁷ This polarization, whereby the city is experienced 'together yet apart', is similar to the situation in Oran, where women's practices are still limited by familial and security-related considerations. At a national level, the degree of gender mixing varies according to the urban context: university and tourist cities tend to be more open, while more conservative regions tend to maintain a stronger separation of the sexes.³⁸ Conversely, certain local configurations and initiatives, such as those in Batna, have fostered greater social mixing,³⁹ contrasting with the persistent segregation observed in Tebessa.⁴⁰

A growing awareness, particularly among educated young adults, highlights the importance of public spaces for urban well-being. However, this recognition is accompanied by dissatisfaction with what is perceived as an insufficient and inadequate offering, particularly for women and parents. This reflects the emergence of an urban consciousness informed by international ideas of spatial justice. The discrepancy between citizens' expectations and the current urban provision emphasizes the limitations of an approach to planning that is still insufficiently inclusive.

In this context, the gradual embrace of citizen participation reflects the emergence of urban citizenship. However, the low level of women's effective involvement underscores the persistent barriers to their engagement. Despite their clear willingness to participate, institutional frameworks remain ill-suited to their needs and are dominated by men. In response to this exclusion, some women undertake informal activities such as cleaning, planting and maintaining their neighborhoods, which embody a form of 'practical citizenship', compensating for their marginalization in decision-making processes. These initiatives illustrate the ongoing discrepancy between institutional participation and everyday engagement. The underrepresentation of women in Oran's urban planning processes confirms Safar Zitoun's (2020) findings regarding the lack of support for citizen participation.

However, this study, which focused on Oran and a specific social category, had certain methodological limitations. A lack of institutional documentation and local cooperation restricted the scope of the analysis, which relied mainly on ad hoc survey data. Difficulties in reaching marginalized groups or individuals reluctant to discuss gender-related issues and participation also limited the diversity of perspectives collected. These constraints highlight the need for further research through comparative studies to shed light on the diversity of local configurations.

Despite these limitations, the findings have practical and theoretical implications. In practice, they advocate for the promotion of inclusive urbanism that considers gender as a core aspect of planning, through measures such as improved lighting, diverse amenities, and participatory governance involving women's associations and safety audits. Theoretically,

³⁷ Soukaina Mekrini, "Femmes dans la ville : Mixité, territorialités et entre soi: Le cas de Béni Mellal au Maroc," *Rives méditerranéennes* 65 (2024): 185–212, <https://doi.org/10.4000/12iwn>.

³⁸ Lyes Rahmani and Maha Messaoudene, "Gendered and Gender-Neutral Character of Public Places in Algeria," *Quaestiones Geographicae* 40, no. 2 (2021): 119–37, <https://doi.org/10.2478/quageo-2021-0017>.

³⁹ Naceur, "Des femmes dans l'espace public. Places et jardins à Batna."

⁴⁰ Fezzai et al., "Gender Dynamics in Urban Space Usage."

this research renews approaches to gender and the city by emphasizing the influence of Algerian sociocultural norms on urban experience. It encourages us to view public spaces as arenas of negotiation between institutional planning and everyday practices, in which women devise strategies to adapt to spatial segregation. Finally, it paves the way for analyzing institutional resistance and strengthening the connection between scientific knowledge and public action.

6. Gender equality in public spaces in Algeria: what lessons can be learned?

Our research sits within the wider body of work on sustainable urbanism in culturally grounded contexts. It highlights the importance of integrated approaches that combine citizen participation with gender sensitivity in order to design truly inclusive public spaces. As levers of equity and empowerment for women, such spaces must ensure accessibility, safety, and adaptability to diverse uses. Integrating women's lived experiences at every stage, from planning to management, is essential for their full participation in collective life.⁴¹ Our study's findings have identified strategic directions that can be adapted beyond the Oranese context to support urban planners in creating open and welcoming environments for women and marginalized groups. To achieve genuine gender equality in these spaces, coordinated policies must be structured around five key areas: participation, inclusive design, safety, activation and governance.

- **Promoting participatory planning**

It is essential to meaningfully involve women and communities in the design, management and evaluation of public spaces. This requires training professionals in gender-sensitive urbanism and implementing participatory mechanisms suited to local contexts, such as exploratory walks, workshops, public forums, and surveys. Digital tools such as collaborative mapping and online consultations can be useful, but their deployment must consider existing digital divides. Strong political commitment is necessary to ensure the long-term institutionalization of such participation, through action plans, funding and systematic evaluations.

- **Designing inclusive and accessible spaces**

Equal access depends on spatial arrangements that cater for diversity, such as appropriate urban furniture and free services like public restrooms, playgrounds and cultural and recreational facilities. It also depends on a safe, accessible and well-connected public transport network. These provisions encourage the presence of women, children, the elderly, and vulnerable groups, while fostering social diversity and cohesion.

- **Integrating a gendered reading of the city**

Urban planning must incorporate gender-differentiated assessments, such as gender audits, impact analyses and inclusive consultations, by engaging with a variety of users,

⁴¹ Pereira and Malcata Rebelo, "Women in Public Spaces: Perceptions and Initiatives to Promote Gender Equality."

particularly women. This approach helps to better identify needs relating to safety, comfort, mobility and symbolic recognition within the urban fabric.

- **Making safety a fundamental urban right**

Both actual and perceived safety are prerequisites for urban equality. Appropriate lighting, clear signage, a visible human presence, regular maintenance and the regeneration of neglected areas all contribute to strengthening the sense of security. Tools such as gender-sensitive risk mapping and regular public space activation can be utilized, provided they are firmly anchored in institutions to ensure the continuity and sustainability of action.

- **Establishing a lasting institutional framework**

Dedicated structures that address gender issues are needed to embed equality within long-term urban governance. This must be based on a cross-cutting approach that incorporates participation, inclusion, safety, economic equity and social justice. The presence of women in decision-making spheres, whether as elected officials, civil servants, or activists, is also crucial for the development of more equitable urban priorities. To achieve this, institutions must promote genuine gender democracy and guarantee women's agency in contexts that are still marked by structural inequalities.

Strategic axis	Main objectives	Key actions and measures	Expected benefits
1. Inclusive Participation and Governance	Promote equitable active involvement of women in urban planning processes.	the Training urban professionals on and gender issues. Organizing exploratory walks, co-design workshops and citizen forums Implementing participatory budgeting, digital platforms and field surveys.	Aligning public spaces with actual needs, strengthening local democracy, and promoting spatial justice.
2. Inclusive and multifunctional design	Create accessible, welcoming, user-friendly public spaces.	The provision of: - comfortable street furniture. - shaded areas. - free restrooms. - playgrounds. - sports areas. Local services such as: - childcare facilities. Free or low-cost cultural and recreational activities. Safe and well-connected public transport.	Improved accessibility and quality of life, and reduced inequalities in the use of space.
3. Gender-sensitive urban design	Ensure that gender perspectives are integrated into the design of public spaces.	Conducting gender-based assessments Performing gender-sensitive safety audits Engaging a diverse range of participants, particularly women, in consultation processes	impact The development of inclusive, safe and equitable public environments.
4. Safety and continuous activation of public space	Ensure the safety of all public spaces, open, of both perceived and actual.	Quality lighting, clear signage and visible pedestrian routes. Visible emergency services and human and technological	Enhanced feelings of safety and increased use of public spaces by

Strategic axis	Main objectives	Key actions and measures	Expected benefits
		surveillance and regular women and maintenance. Redesigning vulnerable groups. perceived unsafe areas. Daytime and night-time programming to keep spaces lively.	
Institutional mainstreaming	Ensure the long-term sustainability of gender-sensitive urban policies.	Establishment of dedicated gender equality institutions and cross-sectoral integration of gender perspectives into all urban strategies.	Coherent and sustainable governance and the structural transformation of urban policy.

Table 1: Strategic Axes for Advancing Gender Equality in Public Spaces.
Compiled by the authors, 2025

Conclusion

This research examined the intersection between gender, citizen participation and the creation of public spaces in Oran. It demonstrated that these spaces, far from being neutral, reproduce social norms that influence urban experiences differently for men and women. Women navigate the city within a constrained framework, as they continue to face limitations in their access to urban spaces due to insufficiently inclusive policies and unequal socio-economic and cultural structures. This unequal appropriation is evident in the differentiated patterns of public space use. Urban design, which is often indifferent to gender-specific needs, perpetuates a symbolic division whereby masculinity dominates central spaces of free appropriation, while women are confined to transit areas or socially 'justified' uses. This segmentation is further reinforced by professional status, domestic responsibilities and environmental conditions, restricting women’s spatial and temporal availability.

Nevertheless, the study reveals a growing awareness of the role of public spaces in urban well-being, as well as an increasing desire for collective reappropriation. However, this recognition is accompanied by widespread dissatisfaction with the quantity and quality of available spaces, highlighting a persistent gap between civic expectations and urban provision. Participation remains limited, particularly among women, due to a lack of information and communication. The discrepancy between adherence to the participatory ideal and actual involvement underscores the need to strengthen awareness, transparency and inclusion within local governance. In the absence of institutional recognition, many women engage in informal action, reflecting an active yet largely invisible form of everyday urban citizenship.

In conclusion, this research highlights the need to progress from merely acknowledging inequalities to establishing a gender-sensitive and genuinely inclusive approach to urban planning. Such an approach must adopt an intersectional perspective that considers the social, generational and territorial inequalities that shape urban experiences. It requires us to move beyond technocratic conceptions of planning in order to address the different needs of citizens and recognize their active role in co-constructing fairer, more equitable and sustainable urban areas. Thus, this study invites us to rethink the design, management and use of public spaces in Oran, in order to foster the full and visible citizenship of women.

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