

Women differ from each other. Nonetheless, there are some common elements in their use and experience of the city. I wish to venture a set of claims about women's lives in cities, the way women are in cities, to keep in mind when considering aspects of Melbourne and its planning and how these support or hinder women's activities. (Note that I am in no sense considering women to be a victim group – they are people with very considerable strengths and priorities to be respected and valued).

Women are, in my observation, the great integrators of our communities. Within their families and households, their workplaces, the schools and sporting clubs and voluntary organisations with which they are associated, women are frequently the people who knit things together. They make sure the various agendas cohere, tie up the ends, and think laterally across a divergent set of objectives to see how they can be achieved in the time and space available. Women also generally earn less than men or have less superannuation, and are increasingly found in households without men or other adults – they may be old and single, for example or in female headed households with children. So we are always going to be considering questions of affordability when speaking of women's requirements of cities, along with questions of flexibility, and questions of safety. For many adult women, having to manage children and paid work, in a situation in which they don't earn very much, makes them good managers and mediators.

As women negotiate the many frameworks of obligation that surround them, anticipating consequences and needs, one of the physical and social frameworks they must negotiate to perform this integration, this social gluing of the people they know or work with and for, is the city. So in assessing the adequacy of past planning for our metropolitan area, as indicated by the form of the city and the planning processes that are present in it, we can think about the degree to which our city is a framework that allows these endeavours of women to happen.

There are three things women need of the city, if they are to undertake this integrating work, on which, needless to say, our society depends.

Mobility – the capacity to do what they have to do, in the time they have.

Access – the right to have safe and affordable entry to a range of urban places and spaces.

Participatory Power – the opportunity to have an effective say, and to be listened to, to communicate and negotiate, in discussions of the organisation and planning of things urban.

I want to take each of these three requirements that women have of the city – that it allow them mobility, access and participatory power – and consider ways that Melbourne provides these, or does not, and ways that other places may do it better. (Note that these are just examples from here and there – a thoroughgoing evaluation and benchmarking is beyond me here. And most of my brief examples from elsewhere seem to be from Canada! Note also that I am not boxing my comments into policy areas like transport and housing – rather I am thinking about what women do and need in their use of cities, and considering items like transport and housing as aspects of urban infrastructure that may facilitate women's lives and endeavours).

MOBILITY

Mobility is getting around the metropolitan area readily within the times available in order to live one's life – no matter one's income group, age or able-bodiedness. We know from many studies that women make more multi-purpose trips, more suburban trips, more non-work trips, and travel out of peak hours and use public transport more than men (Dowling & Gollnar 1997,i). Does the metropolitan area of Melbourne – the infrastructure it offers women – allow this mobility for all women? Consider the following examples of the sorts of mobility required in a few women's lives, examples that show demands on actual women as the 'juggle time' to use Michael Bittman's phrase).

If you take the list on the dashboard of my car recently, it shows a brief time on a workday for a full-time paid worker (me), who is also an able bodied inner city dweller and negotiator of inner city streets by car on this occasion, a sometime car pooler for other people's children, a mother. The calibration of my time is relatively precise. Without a car this is not possible (and is only barely possible with one).

Take the example of a woman negotiating urban poverty. This is a woman negotiating the times and spaces of poverty in Melbourne, on behalf of herself and her family. The woman is responding to dominant institutions' demands and schedules, but is also showing how without any money to pay for transport, and yet a need to get around to buy the cheapest food, or search it out from neighbours, negotiation of space within time limits is crucial and worrying. Poverty is not lived in one spot – mobility is crucial to surviving it.

So the point is that time is crucial for us all, and for women it is crucial as they integrate different people's schedules and form their own within those of other people. How does Melbourne, the city, stack up when we ask of it how its planning has made it a space for efficient timing - and for whom does it work best in this way? I would make the following points about it.

1. Women negotiating their schedules around those of children, even where they have cars, are disadvantaged by the removal of staff from public transport – from trams, from train stations. Children can far more readily travel alone on public transport that is manned. Without staff on public transport, children have to be picked up more. There are concerns about the safety of women on understaffed and less than frequent public transport too, especially in the dark.
2. To the degree that public transport across the metropolitan area is poorly integrated e.g. where one service fails to connect with another through use of co-ordinated timetables; extra burdens fall on those trying to use the transport services for themselves or their dependants.

I note that this mismatching and the inconvenience it causes are not the case in other places. In Toronto and Montreal, for example, bus and subway train schedules are expertly co-ordinated, even in outer suburban locations. There, public transport schedules and service frequency recognise women as important urban citizens; in Melbourne, this is less the case.

3. Women requiring flexibility for fitting in shopping with other schedules or activities have been greatly assisted by longer hours of opening of shops. They have also benefitted from the more cosmopolitan spaces produced

in certain parts of the city (particularly the inner city) by the co-location of office, housing and retail activities. Intensively used urban spaces are safer for women (and for everyone). On the other hand, one wonders how the occupants of new high rise developments in inner Melbourne (frequently women, in the affordable ones, though the point is not often made) will fare, given that supermarkets and other convenience premises are apparently not included in those vast apartment complexes. The new Docklands developments do not seem to feature them at all. What makes the inner city convenient, and so sought after by women mixing a range of other people's schedules and busy ones of their own, is the juxtaposition of shops, public transport, child care, workplaces, medical services and the like. Why would we build apartment complexes in the inner city without those services in close proximity? I note that in the apartment complexes of metropolitan Canada, supermarkets, kindergartens, and a mix of higher and lower cost premises, are mandated, Not just parking spaces!

4. Urban village ideas of local co-location of housing, transport links and retail premises sometimes surface in planning discussions in Melbourne. For the very local lives of women these allow for integration of their daily activities with the schedules of others with whom they are associated, Beyond the local scale this is less so – and here one wonders if some urban service providers have embraced the internet as a mechanism of efficient access to information and some administrative and registration tasks, allowing access to these matters by individuals outside business hours. Taking a lesson from some North American and European cities, (e.g Amsterdam), has our urban policy taken up the community network-forming possibilities of the internet, which might aid the activities of women greatly, even if those women are relatively isolated?

When thinking about the scale at which cities presently work for women, meshing a range of schedules together as they frequently do, the conclusion seems unavoidable that at the local scale things may work adequately. But at the broader metropolitan scale it is a chance if one can make multi-purpose trips using public transport, to fit in activities across the metropolitan area or visit several offices or other premises efficiently. Now we have freeways, one can get to the airport and the western and eastern suburbs' industrial centres, if one has a good car and the capacity to pay the tolls. Surely freeways are not the only answer we can give to queries about mobility across our metropolitan area.

Finally, there is the question of spatial equity, and the time that needs to be spent accessing things like shops, schools, hospitals and community resources if one lives in different parts of the metropolitan area. If, as research is indicating, lower income households are becoming more numerous further away from the central city, and richer households more numerous closer in, we have a situation where richer households are having increasingly better access to the resources of the inner city (Fincher & Wulff, 198; Burke & Hayward, 2000;76) In the past, those poorer households living close in at least had the benefit of hospitals etc relatively close by and frequent public transport coverage. Is the negotiation of time increasingly harder for lower-income households, and easier for those closer in? I suspect that poorer households, many headed by women, are now more disadvantaged locationally than in the past.

ACCESS

As they cross different parts of the city, entering workplaces, schools, community organisations, parks as well as shops and institutions like hospitals, government offices, and schools, women use the city at different times of the day and night. Safe and affordable passage to and through these private and public spaces of the metropolitan area is what they require (in a timely fashion, as noted already).

I want to think about access to urban spaces at different scales.

1. First – housing. Secure and affordable housing. For women, any provision of more diverse forms of affordable housing is positive, to accommodate the households of single women, single older women, women-headed households with children, that are growing in number and have been for some time. Women earn less than men, as we know, and are more likely to work part-time. They need housing at a range of cost levels, and in a range of tenure types – home ownership of the detached suburban home is not the only option to be considered, and certainly is not likely to be the norm for long (if it is now).

Interestingly, a good proportion of those taking up apartments in the buildings of firms like Central Equity in inner Melbourne, are women, seeking out this housing for its security and convenience. Also, interestingly, some builders and developers of high rise housing in inner Melbourne are considering equipping their buildings for the growth in the group of single households of older women, in interviews for a research project it was recently suggested to me that some high rise buildings in Melbourne will soon include supported accommodation of different kinds and stages – it will be possible to live in a high rise apartment (owned or rented) and order in the levels of service you need as an ageing person, all provided by the company and facilitated for you. (If you can pay, of course).

What this suggests to me is that the private sector in Melbourne may be leading the public sector in the provision of flexible and different forms of housing with women in mind. It suggests to me that the debate of the last decade in our city, about medium density housing, has been dominated by design regulation questions rather than being used to formulate more flexible social models for housing us. The new and funded forms of social housing we might have anticipated from an aware public sector, provided through innovative public-private partnerships, are largely absent. Surely we can co-ordinate ourselves to respond visibly to requests for more creative housing options like those voiced by the women interviewed in the focus groups for this conference.

I have always thought that the non-profit housing co-operative was an interesting tenure type to work to increase though they are not without problems of course. In Canada, in the 1970's and 1980's about 20 women's housing co-operatives were established, and I want to tell you how they worked.

Accessing start up funds from the federal government's non-profit housing program, and using the services of facilitators (planners) also funded by the federal government, the women designed and organised the building of new housing or the renovation of existing buildings. Amongst the co-operatives, there was great variety in the origins of the groups of women, the sponsorship arrangements, the designs, and the social objectives. The idea was that the federal government would make these properties available as secure rental properties to co-operative members, with appropriate subsidies to those of limited means. The women would then manage the co-operative they had a hand in developing (Wakerle, 1988). Of course there were disagreements

with developers about the way things were to be built, and with the federal government about rental and subsidy levels. And the program has been reduced in the 1990's. But this little set of housing arrangements suited some women splendidly – and is one model for governments partnering people and communities in developing different housing options.

A recent report on Melbourne's housing by Burke and Hayward (2000) shows the lack of diversity in Melbourne's housing tenure and dwelling types.

2. Second – community spaces. Here I particularly want to herald the role of neighbourhood houses in Melbourne – accessible community spaces that welcome women in particular (and are run by women, very largely). Women are often newcomers to local areas, or making a lifestyle or household change (say, following a divorce) that means they need to seek out new networks. In these situations, neighbourhood houses, where people can just drop in for casual company, provide an encouraging and open entry point in a local community. They aren't what everyone wants, but they are very helpful to many, providing English language classes, information about educational and other opportunities, and opportunities for informal discussion of matters like domestic violence that can be brought up and shared more comfortably than in most venues. They give many people, especially women, a leg up at a stage in their lives when they need it.

These centres receive limited government funding – and are always scrabbling around for extra support.

There are other community spaces of great import, of course – I think of a multicultural music café running for many years in my neighbourhood, organised for little remuneration by a woman in my street. Some years ago, I joined her in contacting the local council which seemed about to remove her and this wonderful activity from the scout hall they had occupied at a peppercorn rent, apparently the local council wanted to charge out the use of this little hall for much higher rental – for wedding receptions it hoped (as I recall).

The point here is that these community-fostering activities run often by women and certainly used by women, are safe and accessible and welcoming. They are low key and relatively cheap to run. They depend on women's volunteer labour and local networks. They need to be identified, valued and supported, actively, in our planning policies, without undermining them with requirements that they be made efficient and preferably profitable. Can we do that – can we let them flourish rather than being obsessed with controlling them?

3. Third – environmental activism. Where the metropolitan area has become an "environmental sink", women have long been active, all over the world, as amongst the first to identify the presence of harmful toxins in our urban environments. They look out and see deteriorated water, air, electromagnetic radiation possibilities that may be associated with increased cancer in children, lead paint in old school buildings, and so on. In the ongoing fight about the relocation of Coode Island, for example, the persistent community voice in the media comes from women. Women are major participants in fights against toxic waste dumps, against freeways dividing communities, against inner city parks being carved up by development of different kinds, even if they are not the leaders of the movements, always. A concern with protecting the urban environment is part of the broader issue of safety in the spaces of our cities, about which women have long been activists.

Safety in cities more broadly, as we have noted, is a longstanding women's issue. Besides the environmental justice aspect of it, programs of improving personal safety, taking back the night and so on, have been led by women. Sometimes, design improvements in cities have followed (sometimes surveillance cameras!). What has been the fate of the central and suburban safe cities projects begun in Melbourne in the 1990's, not through the planning ministry but through the Dept. of Justice, following the lead of the Victorian Community Council Against Violence? This project had some echoes of the work done by a group of Toronto women in the 1980's, who set up the group, "Woman Plan Toronto", to put women's issues on the agendas of Toronto's city government and planning agencies. They advocated for a set of urban policies they saw as beneficial to women – including intensification (increasing the density of the urban area), legalising and controlling basement apartments, preservation of corner stores. In Melbourne, urban planning agencies do not seem to have participated in such programs.

What does the presence of women in environmental and safety activism suggest, for urban planning strategies about giving women access to the necessary range of urban spaces?

I think it suggests that in women's vigilance about such matters we have an extraordinary resource in our city, and we must design our urban planning policies to take these voices and energies into account. Which leads me on to my next subject – that of participatory power and how women need access to it.

But before I go there, I draw your attention again to the following ways Melbourne's planning has not been good at providing accessible spaces for women over the past decade.

- In providing models of flexible and affordable housing – in both tenure types and physical housing forms – we have been inadequate, and the opportunity possible when medium and high density housing became more prominent in the inner city was lost because little of this housing is affordable.
- In providing more community spaces in neighbourhoods, we have been inadequate, expecting in some cases that longtime community halls might now turn a profit, and failing to resource adequately other community success stories like neighbourhood houses.
- In setting up strategic metropolitan planning strategies about issues of environmental and personal safety in our city's public spaces, of great concern to women and on which their mobility and activities depend, we have been fairly much silent. There are plenty of models to look at for inspiration, if inspiration was what we have lacked. But we have extraordinary women in Melbourne, - inspiration was not what has been lacking but rather lack of considering their views. As I now go on to discuss.

PARTICIPATORY POWER

Planning is not just the spreading of resources on the ground, by efficient and organised bureaucracies of experts, with a view to spatial equity (though it does include this). It is also a matter of process and of taking into account the views of those who live in the city and know it most intimately. If you accept my premise that women are integrators, then another claim follows here that you may also accept. Women are often very good

mediators. They are therefore likely to be a fine resource in any planning forums that require the negotiation of urban outcomes.

Now, the key to any discussion of how this has been occurring and how it might occur is that of scale – this is a point always emphasised by my colleague Leonie Sandercock, an expert in matters of participatory planning process. Some of the issues on which women have expert knowledge are not able to be resolved at a very local level. If we are to take up women’s environmental knowledge about cities for example, and therefore build on their objections to matters like the establishment of toxic waste disposal facilities in particular sites, then clearly this is a matter requiring regionally broad- or metropolitan-wide forums for deliberation and negotiation. The development of planning for the location of such facilities is a matter of a different scale from that of (say) the redesign of a local strip shopping centre and what additional community facilities should be required there, or what parking restrictions etc. The matter of taking up women’s urban and environmental knowledge, the product of their close interaction with the fabric of the city and its localities and points of difficulty, requires a sophisticated framework of forums operating at different scales, in which participation and also a real say for women are guaranteed. On some issue of particularly local import, local people can decide what they want; on matters of metropolitan import they will negotiate with those from other localities.

I seem here to be advocating more work for women – a greater presence in a set of metropolitan decision making structures. This is a strange position for me to advance, since in my own work in the 1990’s I observed with some criticism the extraordinary over-reliance of some outer Melbourne municipalities on women volunteers, in the provision of children’s services. However, I justify my claim for greater participatory power for women (and therefore more work for them) by saying that women are often, anyway, urban activists. Any planning process that could identify the appropriate scale at which any particular matter needed to be resolved, and then give real participatory power to women not just token public meetings and the like, would be an additional and valued channel for them. There have been few consultations with women on planning matters that I have observed over the last decade in Melbourne – very few. Perhaps this very consultation in which we are now involved will identify issues for ongoing resolution at different scales. Perhaps the experts will work alongside the community members – the women of both!

The women in the focus groups would certainly be pleased to be invited. They want:

- “More opportunities for consultations at local government level so women of older ages can continue to have their say” – older woman
- “Provide better local forums for people to have a say in the way communities develop”- woman in new suburb.

What has characterised Melbourne in the last decade, in this regard, has been the following – and it has prevented this participatory power from occurring for women or indeed for other local activists.

- a planning system devoted to development controls and physical design issues, at single sites, not at different scales as relevant according to the issue.
- a limited imagination about what planning actually could be.
- A lack of international best practices comparisons, about the ways a democratic empowering of women in planning occurs elsewhere.

- a boxing up of planning issues into bureaucratic policy sectors, with planning unable to consider them simultaneously. The best example is the existence of transport policy (especially that about freeways) separately from the metropolitan planning agenda. Another I have mentioned already, perhaps of more obvious connection to women's interests, is the separation of discussion of community safety issues from the planning agenda.

For women, the metropolitan area is not just about development controls at a micro scale in our urban neighbourhoods, nor is it just about joining up the freeways of our city so that business commuters can travel vast distances quickly. Rather, the social fabric of people's lives in cities is the focus of many women's interests in metropolitan planning – the way the city's physical and social structures allow people to live the lives they want, equitably and joined together with others in community. The integrating work undertaken by women demands a city of responsiveness and flexibility. Women's integrating work is getting more difficult, as they enter the paid workforce in increasing numbers and as our policies are less forgiving, less inclusive.

CONCLUSION

In my discussion I have raised three issues of relevance when considering women's lives in cities and how the metropolitan area currently supports these lives or does not. I have talked about women requiring mobility, access and participatory power to do what they do successfully. My comments rest on a belief that we could be using women's experience in our city and their expertise in lateral thinking about it, much more effectively in the planning process. For really, we the planners and paid workers of organisations shaping cities have certain knowledge. People living different lives in other parts and places of the city have other knowledge. Combining this knowledge, in the appropriate forums, alongside the regulatory regimes we have at our disposal, would enhance the co-ordination of our city, and make us much more creative in imagining its possibilities.

You have heard me discuss about scale, under each of the headings I've used. That we are even having conversations now about metropolitan planning, after over a decade without any, shows that we are finally recognising that there is a different set of spatial scales out there than just those represented by the site and the freeway. Women fashion their complex lives across numerous spatial scales all the time – they cross boundaries, moving from one part of the city to the other, to one form of space from another, often with difficulty and sometimes with trepidation. Mobility is needed at a range of distances. Access to spaces of a range of characteristics is needed too. Defining the scales at which urban dilemmas need to be considered, for resolution, is very important – for the scale over which the issue prevails determines who should have a part in discussing it. These are not simple matters to resolve. I find the lives of women in our city inspiring, because they negotiate complexity every day, expertly. We need now to make sure the metropolitan planning process recognises this, and takes advantage of the wisdom of Melbourne's women.

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