

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4 THINK PIECE – BLOG – CREATING PUBLIC SPACES FOR WOMEN AND MEN

Introduction

The Scottish Government is keen to bring together views and ideas from a wide range of sectors and to explore the priorities Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) should address.

In the second in a series of Think Pieces, Emma Ritch, executive director of Engender, sets out her thoughts on Scotland2050 and specifically on creating public spaces for women and men. The opinions expressed are that of the author and we hope that they will stimulate debate and discussion.

The issues and opportunities

In 2018 the Twitter user Emrazz asked women to imagine what they would do if all men vanished harmlessly and painlessly for 24 hours. Of the ten thousand responses her thought-experiment received, the majority were from women who would go for a walk or a run after dark. This revealed a stark and painful truth: most women do not feel safe in public spaces.

Engender imagines a 2050 in Scotland, where women are not an after-thought in the design of our public space and transport systems. A Scotland where women feel safe in their town and city centres after dark, as well as in the local communities in which they live. This feeling of safety means that women can play a fuller part in public life, attend political meetings, socialise differently, and go to further-away events.

At the moment, women are much more likely to work close to home. The spatial pattern of work, childcare services, schools, and housing, coupled with women's likelihood to be doing the majority of care within the household, means it's harder for women to combine paid work with caring roles. We imagine cities and towns that are zoned differently in 2050, to ensure that life, work, and care services are better integrated. We see that this will enable women to accept longer hours at better paid jobs, reducing the gender pay gap, and giving women greater autonomy and equality within their households, as well as making time for leisure. Planning will recognise that our lives do not exist in neat segments, but overlap and intersect.

We also imagine transport systems that aren't built around getting full-time workers from the suburbs to central business district and back again at the start and end of the day. Transport in 2050 should welcome people with pushchairs and wheelchair users, without pre-booking and forcing them to compete for space. It will also meet the needs of part-time workers, people running errands, women dropping children at nursery and school, and popping across town to take prescriptions to older relatives.

Women walk more than men, and are less likely to be car users. In 2050 our cities and towns will have wider, smoother pavements; better lighting; and welcoming public toilets. When resources for managing winter weather are scarce, pavements

will be gritted before roads. This will reduce the amount spent on slips and falls, protect women's health and wellbeing, and mean that older people can socialise more easily and safely.

To achieve all of this, planning processes will need to engage with more women to provide insight into their day-to-day lives. Scotland will also need to learn from the evidence from international initiatives - such as the gender lens used in Vienna's planning frameworks - to design spaces around women's needs. Women are experts at working around poor planning to live their lives. It is high time planning started working for women.

Summary

- In the short term, under the new Planning Act (Scotland) 2019, Ministers must produce a statement alongside the National Planning Framework which sets out how the plans for the development of land contribute to outcomes, including improving equality and eliminating discrimination. To develop this, all of those involved in the planning system need to develop their gender competence: the skills, knowledge, and analytical capacity to think about gender and planning.
- In the medium term, evidence, including from engagement with women, will be applied to planning processes in a gendered way, ensuring more gender-sensitive planning.
- In the long term, our public spaces will meet the distinct needs of women and men, and advance equality between women and men.

Biography

Emma Ritch is executive director of Engender, which advocates for women's political, social and cultural, and economic equality. She sits on the First Minister's Advisory Council on women and girls and is board member of the European Women's Lobby, Close the Gap, and Rape Crisis Scotland.