



CASE STUDY

Vienna | Gender Mainstreaming

# Sharing a Fair City

Twenty five years ago, Vienna's urban planning landscape was dominated by male urban planners and architects. As such, the concerns of women, children and minority groups were not adequately reflected in the city's urban design and architecture. This imbalance began to change when the city adopted gender mainstreaming as a way to create a fair city shared by all.

## The Challenge

In the mid 1980s, "gender mainstreaming" was adopted as a gender equality policy tool for the United Nations and the European Union. This meant considering the situations of both genders, and changing frameworks and structures that led to inequality.

At that time, urban planning in Vienna was still dominated by men. Although female architects were involved in designing and planning housing projects to a modest degree, they had never been invited to participate at the urban planning level.

But as awareness of gender mainstreaming increased, change began to happen. In 1991, Eva Kail, a young urban planner in Vienna, was invited by a women's

organisation to hold an urban planning workshop. She asked participants to describe their housing situation, how they moved in the city, the places they liked as well as the places they feared.

"The importance and significance of public space became evident in the workshop," recalled Kail, in an email interview with *Urban Solutions*. Their sharing led to the exhibition, "Who owns public space?—Women's Everyday Life in the City," by the Viennese planning department. This showcase highlighted women's concerns, such as safety and ease of movement, at the official city planning level for the first time. It generated considerable media coverage and public interest.





The streets of Mariahilf district in the 1980s with their narrow sidewalks.





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## The Solution

Following the seminal exhibition, the city set up a Women's Office in 1992, with Kail as head to look into gender-specific planning issues. Six years later, a Coordination Office, again headed by Kail, was set up to work across 12 planning and traffic departments to ensure fairer urban development.

The Women's Office addressed the issue of gender-sensitive housing first by assembling a team of female architects to draw up requirements for the first women-friendly public housing project in 1993. It then held the first "women-only" design competition to select a female architect for the job. The result was the first

Women-Work-City (*Frauen-Werk-Stadt*) housing estate designed by Franziska Ullmann.

Completed in 1997, the model project, which had 360 units, was designed to be car-free with underground parking lots while kitchens or family rooms faced the courtyards or play streets. These features gave parents peace of mind about their children's safety as they played outdoors. A kindergarten, daycare nursery, clinic and shops in the estate added to the convenience for both working and stay-at-home mothers. A second Women-Work-City project, completed in 2004, focused more on intergenerational living with assisted living units for the elderly.

01 Women-Work-City's courtyards are visible from the surrounding units.

02 Resselpark's fully-illuminated bicycle stands provide greater safety for women after dark.

“This showcase (*Women’s Everyday Life in the City*) highlighted women’s concerns, such as safety and ease of movement, at the official city planning level for the first time.”





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The city then went on to look at how men and women used parks and playgrounds differently. A 1997 study found that by the age of nine, girls used these public spaces a lot less than boys. They were often crowded out by larger groups of boisterous and assertive boys. Many girls who made attempts to share spaces occupied by older boys were turned away, often by sexual insults.

Between 2000 to 2006, the city created six model parks to see how they could get more girls to play outdoors. The changes included well-lit footpaths to make parks safer and more accessible, as well as high perches, smaller play niches, volleyball and badminton courts that girls had indicated a preference for. Today, the city has a set of gender-sensitive planning guidelines for its parks.

When it came to traffic and transport planning, the city looked at the habits of

men and women. It found that Viennese women walked more than men, who typically commuted to and from work in cars. Women, in contrast, used the city's network of sidewalks, trams, buses and subway lines in more varied patterns as they juggled work with family duties such as sending children to school, buying supplies or caring for elderly parents. The city also found that walking was the main mobility option for children and seniors.

The city nominated the Mariahilf district as a pilot district to introduce fair traffic planning. Between 2003 and 2005, 1,000 metres of pavements were widened while 40 street crossings and five barrier-free ramps were created. In addition, 26 lighting projects were installed to make streets safer for women after dark. In 2006, the city used its experience in Mariahilf to create a set of gender mainstreaming instruments for the planning of future public street space.





03 The streets of Mariahilf today.

04 Wider, barrier-free sidewalks in Mariahilf pilot district.



01 Gender mainstreaming efforts used across Vienna such as in everyday signages.

02 Gender-sensitive early childhood education.

## The Outcome

Since the two city-led Women-Work-City projects, three other gender-sensitive co-housing projects in Vienna, which were supported but not initiated by the city, have been built.

Vienna has gone on to introduce many initiatives with the aim of becoming an equitable city. For instance, gender budgeting requires policymakers to consider gender perspectives so that funds are equally distributed among women and men.

Gender mainstreaming has gone beyond the realm of physical infrastructure. “Gender-sensitive” kindergartens now consciously expose children to non-conventional roles. For example, boys are taught how to change diapers, while girls are encouraged to build skyscrapers. The teachers also choose books and songs that do not perpetuate the stereotypical roles of mothers as homemakers and fathers as the serious breadwinner. Kindergartens are actively recruiting more men to be teachers.

As an indication of how tough it is to be truly inclusive, Kail said that taking a gender perspective is still not second nature despite 25 years of gender mainstreaming efforts. “But I think, that most planners have become more sensitive and aware that there are different groups with different needs,” she qualified.

To gain further acceptance, the city uses the slogan of “Fair Shared City” and is now “speaking about the different needs of target groups [such as children, elderly and disabled] without neglecting the men-women perspective,” she said. ○

“The city used its experience in Mariahilf to create a set of gender mainstreaming instruments for the planning of future public street space.”