

INVESTIGACIÓN/RESEARCH

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GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN URBAN RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

By 2030 more than 60% of the world population will be urban, thus the problems will increase in urban areas, problems in services, housing, environment, roads, habitability and poverty. The growth of cities, urban poverty and their impact on the space, are therefore one of the major problems that the world faces. In Mexico, many cities are in total imbalance or in crisis, due to several factors such as environmental pollution, urban poverty, disorder in human settlements, traffic problems, loss of quality of life, uncontrolled occupation, and no order for public transport, among others, in addition to the shortage of planning instruments. Clearly, the urgent need for further progress in urban research, incorporating diverse perspectives to deepen the knowledge of the problems of the territory. With regard to the inclusion of a gender perspective in the territorial and urban theme, it has become evident in the hope of minimizing inequality. This article presents an introductory review of the problems and challenges on the territorial issue, from a gender perspective that, without being exhaustive, involves the matters that we consider a priority. The authors, Professors of the Faculty of Engineering of the Autonomous University of Tamaulipas, members of the group of research in Consolidation, *Territorial Planning and Sustainable Development in metropolitan areas*, CA-UAT-89.

KEYWORDS

Territory - urban research - gender perspective.

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PERSPECTIVA DE GÉNERO EN LA INVESTIGACION URBANA

RESUMEN

Para el año 2030 más del 60% de la población mundial será urbana, por lo tanto se incrementaran los problemas en los espacios urbanos, problemas de servicios, de vivienda, de medio ambiente, de vialidad, habitabilidad y pobreza. El crecimiento de las ciudades, la pobreza urbana y su impacto en el espacio, son por tanto uno de los grandes problemas a los que se enfrenta el mundo. En México, muchas ciudades se encuentran en total desequilibrio o en crisis, debido a diversos factores como contaminación ambiental, pobreza urbana, desorden en los asentamientos humanos, problemas de tráfico, pérdida de la calidad de vida, ocupación incontrolada, ausencia de orden para el transporte público, entre otros. Además de la escases de instrumentos de planeación. Es evidente pues, la imperante necesidad de seguir avanzando en la investigación urbana, incorporando diversas perspectivas que profundicen en el conocimiento de la problemática del territorio. Con respecto a la inclusión de la perspectiva de género en el tema territorial y urbano, ésta se ha hecho evidente con la esperanza de minimizar la desigualdad. Este artículo, presenta una revisión introductoria a los problemas y retos actuales en la cuestión territorial, desde una perspectiva de género, que sin ser exhaustiva, involucra los temas que consideramos prioritarios. Los autores, Profesores de la Facultad de Ingeniería de la Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas, integrantes del Cuerpo Académico en Consolidación, *Planificación Territorial y Desarrollo Sustentable en áreas metropolitanas*, CA-UAT-89.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Territorio - investigación urbana - perspectiva de género

1. INTRODUCTION

The current global socioeconomic context, has brought as a consequence new territorial realities, associated with globalization, economic development, unequal distribution of wealth, new processes of urbanization. In Mexico, development and uncontrolled and exaggerated growth of urban areas, has motivated the need to address territorial issues from the perspective of planning and development, not only analyzing and projecting; but also considering the elements that interact in space and their features, including the interpretation from different disciplines which help to understand urban processes. As Rapoport (1978) states: "*...many of them (various disciplines) can help to understand how cities work and how people use and understand them.*" According to UN-HABITAT (2009) in 1950 a third of the world population lived in cities, 50 years later the figure increased to a half and will continue to rise to two-thirds, or about 6,000 million people in 2050. In this sense the gender perspective should be urgently integrated in a timelier manner in the urban environment. To include the gender perspective in the studies of the city implies to redimension those urban concepts, beyond the physical, legal, quantitative, it is to redefine from a social

conception, including the different characteristics and gender inequalities that influence the construction, use and functioning of the territory; in particular the use of the space, the needs of movement, security, access to housing and infrastructure, urban services among others. Furthermore, as Caz *et al* mentioned (2006) there is a need to understand the city as the spatial manifestation of public policies that seek the integral defense of human rights and the principles of social equity. According to Czytajlo (2015), incorporating the gender perspective into the town planning is challenging because of the complex urban reality and the divisions and different interpretations of the urbanization process and its results. In this sense, the purpose of this work is to approach the problems and territorial challenges, investigated from a gender perspective that, without being exhaustive, seeks to reflect on the inclusion of a gender perspective in the research on the city.

2. OBJETIVO Y METODOLOGÍA

We state some background on the inclusion of gender perspective in various fields, specifying in the territory and urban fields and sustainable development.

Starting from what Virginia Guzman states:

... *"The interpretation of the needs and problems that affect a social group gives rise to different discourses, which are not limited to identifying and assessing its urgency but also to deliberate on their causes and more suitable ways to solve them"* ... (Guzman, V. 1994: 143-207)

Upon the recognition of Human Rights of women and girls, is that what the authors refer to as the third wave of the participation of women and social development arises. For reference the 70's, when the United Nations promoted a series of world summits and initiatives that guide the actions of governments to promote human development including the active participation of women in public policy.

In international agendas the incorporation of the need to include the specific characteristics of women in the various socio-territorial and urban habitat problems began, but starting in principle from feminist theories.

As an antecedent² it can be mentioned the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995; in this forum the idea to boost the share of power under female responsibility, the notion of gender *mainstreaming* defending the operational sense of transversal policies that should be gender related. At this conference a Platform for Action that should guide government action in 10 axes was defined. Later I was expanded and renamed 12 major areas, in relation to which it was urgent to act to ensure greater equality and greater opportunities for women and men, girls and boys.

It also defined specific methods for the countries to provoke a change. We enunciated the 11 related to women and the environment, and we indicate the objectives to be achieved:

1. Women and the environment

² It notes that in Europe a framework above the most important forums is generated. For example, the Treaty of Rome, which requires Member States to ensure equal pay for men and women. And the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) and the Treaty of Amsterdam

- K1. To ensure the active participation of women in the adoption of decisions concerning the environment at all levels.
- K.2. To integrate gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programs for sustainable development.
- K.3. To strengthen or establish mechanisms at the regional, national and international levels to assess the impact of development and environment policies in women.

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In 1996 took place in Istanbul, Turkey the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), known as the "City Summit"; The main objectives of Habitat II were "adequate shelter for all" and "sustainable development of human settlements in a world in the process of urbanization". At the Summit the Habitat Agenda was presented, a document in which the Member States undertake inter alia to promote adequate shelter for all, sustainable human settlements, citizen participation and gender equality, the latter particularly related to human settlements.

At the conference, the gender perspective became importantly established, and dealt with undeniable facts about women, such as they have unequal access to housing, credit, training, among others, which reduces their condition to improve their quality of life and that of their children.

The members undertook to promote the full participation of women in planning and decisions on human settlements.

Precisely starting from this summit the link between urban issues and the gender perspective becomes more evident as issues arise about the urban that confirm it, such as the use of space and time, the transport and mobility by gender, accesibility of housing, equipment, infrastructure and urban services, the right to the participation of women in urban planning.

Later in 2010, in Rio de Janeiro took place the V World Urban Forum, under the slogan "Right to the City: Reduction of urban breach".

These forums set the tone to rethink the importance of gender perspective in urban areas.

In a World Bank study (2002) it was concluded that gender equality is critical to the economy of the countries. And as Aguilar (2002) argues, sustainable development is not possible if there is no equity.

3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Gender perspective and spatiality

In principle, the question arises: Why to treat particularly the issue of women in the study of urban territory? Is not it that we are equal? And the answer is very simple, although there are still those who pretend that we are equal, we are not, there exist important differences, beyond the biological question, the differences in roles and activities in space are important in what they do, how they do it and for what they do it.

The gender perspective, recognizes the difference between men and women. The concept of gender is seen as a social construct, above the biological concept of sex.

According to Páramo (2010) the relationship between gender and spatiality are given according to:

- The identification of differential representations of the environment starting from the genre
- The dichotomy between what is public and what is private in the male and female roles
- The ways of planning the urban environment

Gender perspective refers to "*a set of ideas, beliefs and attributions assigned to men and women according to the specific historical and cultural moment that determines relations between the two*" (SERNAM, 2001)

Historically space functional differentiation has arisen because of the roles played by men and women over time, such as public spaces for men and spatial marginalization of women (Folguera, 1982).

Starting from the industrial revolution the dissociation between the workspace and that designated for housing expands, one assigned to productive functions, for men, the other for the functions of reproductive life, upbringing, home.

With the growth of cities, the travel distances between different areas is increased, and not only that, it also increases the critical situations and risks of women in urban environments, e.g. insecurity, difficulty or family-work balance, precarious employment, care of dependent persons, vulnerability to risk, which should be accompanied by socio-spatial strategies, such as provision of urban services, health care and protection equipment, safety plans, improving mobility and accessibility to public services, integrated urban planning, housing policy and environmental quality, associative networks, training, information and participation among others. (Manero, F, 2010).

3.2 Urban research and gender

The urban investigation stems from geographers, sociologists and architects. Over time the topics have evolved that have been investigated. In Latin America in the late fifties, "urban problem" arose, as urban sprawl and the lack of territorial planning generated territorial imbalances, growing of urban poverty, the proliferation of slums, among other problems.

In the 60s and 70s, the great urban theme was the **general demographic dynamics** generated by the accelerated urbanization and rural-urban migration. (Hauser, 1961).

In the seventies, the topic was the **economic dynamics**, and metropolitan growth. Since the eighties urban planning is driven, and became a hot topic of investigation. In addition, emphasis is placed on the issue of housing, housing affordability, self-help construction.

Research in the field of urbanism linking the territory, the city, the built space and women, are favored because of the Habitat II Conference, these investigations provide both qualitative and quantitative knowledge on gender differentiation not only of the occupation of space and its form, but also in their processes and characteristics that determine it.

According to Falu (1995), early studies focused on the activities of women and their

spatial impact, diagnosing various phenomena; later moving to studies seeking to understand the various gender relations in space and the environment.

Urban research including gender perspective identify problems faced by women in urban space where they carry out their activities, their interpersonal relationships and their function.

Some of the urban issues that have been worked from a gender perspective, are those related to:

- Urban space, taking into account the vision, role and appropriation that gives being a woman
- The urban habitat
- Quality of life
- Public policies
- Transport
- Mobility, among others.

Research of urban habitat incorporated gender perspective from the feminist geography, however beyond the search for social, cultural, role and relationship differences; it must be thought to broaden the spectrum in search for equity in all its forms, particularly its spatial expression.

Another area within the urban themes that has incorporated the gender perspective, from different angles, is the quality of life, including different variables such as poverty, vulnerability, gender policy variables, to name a few.

To incorporate gender in urban research has not been easy, because in principle it required the knowledge of the various conditions that occur in urban space, and also links social and economic problems specific to every inhabitant of an urban area, but that increase when speaking of a woman, problems such as lack of a home, access to public services, transport, security, among others.

Challenges and current trends mentioned earlier are object of studies from a gender perspective, however, we only mention the results of a trend: the globalization, being subject matter of international concern; and the results of research on women and environmental issues.

In the words of Rosalva Todaro: In a strict sense the **globalization** is the process resulting from the ability of certain activities to function as a unit in real time on a planetary scale (Castells, 1999). And mainly the globalization has meant profound changes aimed at increasing the competitiveness of enterprises. And it has generated an **economic restructuring which is what has had** different effects for men and women.

3.3 The challenges of urban research

Currently not only large cities, but also the intermediate ones and the metropolitan areas are in crisis due to sprawl, the increased segregation and urban fragmentation, and the lack of territorial planning and urban planning.

Challenges such as those relating to water pollution and poor systems of wastewater treatment are some of the most serious environmental problems that must be faced by Mexican cities. Today it is estimated that 60% of the population in Mexico and Latin America have no access to sewerage services, while 90% of wastewater is

discharged without any treatment to different types of aquifers.

Serious problems such as poverty and marginalization that occur in urban space as have many other such as urban fragmentation and social disintegration, lack of planning, among others.

In this sense, a model of urban development, regional planning and environmental, that lays its foundations on the concepts of quality of life, habitat improvement and urban sustainability from a gender perspective is required; one that identifies the differences and inequalities in this field, and that the proposed solutions integrate social, environmental and urban welfare taking into account these inequalities.

The challenge of the research of territorial and urban problems, is on the one hand, to know the effective functioning of cities as the engine of development in synergy with the region and on the other, facing the deep inequalities in access to housing, equipment and urban services (SEDESOL, 2001)

4. CONCLUSION

The dynamics of the cities have different effect on men and women, so it is necessary to recognize this diversity and its impact on urban planning and in the fields of it, such as housing, infrastructure, transport, urban services, urban safety, and public space among others.

It is necessary that the students of urban go deeper about the relation of quality of life, sustainability and gender perspective, with all the complexity that entails. Trying to innovate methodologies, techniques and tools to help in incorporating a gender perspective into the real work of planning, which can achieve improvements in the levels of quality of life, in urban development, in better planning of public spaces and space-functional organization of cities.

The integration of a gender perspective in the development of strategies and public policies must cease to be a proposal on paper, it must be put into action immediately to define the model of sustainable development that allows us to face the challenges and crises which are forecast in the availability of natural resources, the challenges of biodiversity loss, waste management, the impact on consumption patterns, in the processes of migration to urban areas, the impact of globalization on health and overall quality of life of all humanity, which must consider issues of equality, justice and freedom.

The urban environment and sustainable development seems to be the most efficient option of implementing the new model of sustainable economic development in which the social variable and gender equality should be the main inputs.

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