

World Café Table 4

Building Equity and Fairness into reconstruction activities (with special reference to Gender).

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The world café shall focus on the following theoretical premises, concepts, actual practices, and possible case-studies.

To “build” equity means providing fair access to opportunities, resources and ultimately power. Theoretically, equity aims to address diverse needs by providing differing resources and opportunities to enable full participation at all levels. Implicit is the need to dismantle systemic barriers to access, and to promote social justice and fairness. However, how can we design and implement reconstruction activities acknowledging diversity – with special reference to gender differences - when it comes to (post) conflict situations and cultures? What is at stake when we must face the concrete and urgent rebuilding of public spaces and cities, along with the cultural, social and symbolic dimensions inscribed in every urban planning?

First, we have to keep in mind that women in conflict-affected and recovering countries more often than men lack economic opportunities necessary for survival, remain confronted by daily violence in their homes and communities, struggle to cope with heavy burdens of care and dependency, and continue to endure the emotional and physical scars of conflict, without support or recognition. In the aftermath of conflict, violence against women often increases, underlining the importance of rebuilding rule of law institutions.

Women, also, inhabit spaces that oftentimes exacerbate the asymmetries that characterize their possibilities to gain opportunities and reduce their dependencies, their capacities and to live safely.

Feminist geographers have long argued that gender varies both historically and geographically and is a product of specific practices and activities, places, spaces, and discourses. The idea is that space itself is gendered rather than neutral and both implicate each other in the spatial underpinnings of gender roles, performances, and portrayals. Space tends to be divided as masculine and feminine spaces, and this categorization has led to the gendering of space. It is the stratification at the social level, which gets transformed in the form of social rigid constructions on geographic space.

How can we change this division, and how can we turn the need to reconstruct into an opportunity to change the social and cultural construction of urban and geographical spaces; the very way gender stereotypes, roles and orders are inscribed into space?

This debate is already taking place, for example, in Ukraine, where, before the war, women were more educated than men but less likely to participate in the labour force or hold senior positions in business or politics (World Economic Forum 2021). The war has thereafter exposed women and men to different risks and challenges.

To look at the Ukrainian recovery process as a unique opportunity to address both pre-war and war-related gender inequalities, several committees, women scholars and movements have already advanced some propositions and recommendations, in order to ensure a fair and effective use of reconstruction funds, such as:

Participation: Consultation with population groups with different characteristics (e.g. gender, age, disability, and profession) should inform reconstruction priorities.

Equity and inclusion: The needs of minorities (e.g. people with disabilities) must not be neglected in policies that focus on the needs of the majority.

Addressability: A reconstruction programme aimed at 'everyone' risks significant misallocation of funds, reaching 'no one'.

The collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data should also be prioritised.

The Ukrainian case is but the last example that shows how the built environment, through effects on employment, housing, open spaces, transportation, and environmental quality, might have important consequences for many aspects of gender equality, and how, when rethinking cities, questions such as zoning, connectivity and mobility, as well as more practical details such as the quality of sidewalks and lighting, need to be considered.