

# ***Create Gender-Equal City: A Comparison Between Vienna, Barcelona, and Shanghai City***

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**Abstract:** Urban inequality is a pressing issue that can significantly hinder a city's development. It is essential to recognize the importance of establishing gender equality within a city to ensure sustainable urban progress. This comprehensive study thoroughly investigated the urban planning perspective on creating gender-equal cities, specifically emphasizing successful models from Vienna and Barcelona. Furthermore, the study conducted a detailed comparative analysis of these two cities in contrast to Shanghai, delving into the fundamental principles that have made Vienna and Barcelona successful in promoting gender mainstreaming and enhancing gender sensitivity in urban planning. The research also critically examined Shanghai's current approach to urban planning, pinpointing areas that necessitate improvement in promoting gender equality. By drawing from the experiences of Vienna and Barcelona, the study offered practical and actionable recommendations to enhance gender equality within Shanghai's urban planning framework, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and fairer urban environment for all of its residents. The insights gained from Vienna and Barcelona are invaluable and should be shared and applied to various cities, taking into account their distinct and unique circumstances.

**Keywords:** Gender mainstreaming, gender equal city, urban planning

## **1. Introduction**

The issue of gender equality is incredibly significant as it profoundly impacts both individuals and society. A society that embraces gender equality provides equal opportunities to all genders in both professional and personal spheres, fostering social justice and driving economic growth. It is crucial to address this pressing issue urgently. The 2023 Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum revealed that the global gender gap is 68.4% closed across 146 countries, and at the current pace, achieving full parity is projected to take 131 years [1]. Notably, certain cities, such as Vienna, Austria, and Barcelona, Spain, have made substantial progress in this area, and there is much to be learned from their experiences. Vienna's implementation of gender mainstreaming in urban planning and development projects has made the city safer and more accessible for women. At the same time, Barcelona has been proactive in integrating gender perspectives into urban planning since the early 2000s. These cities and many others in developed countries have successfully narrowed the gender gap. However, Shanghai, China's bustling international metropolis, is lagging in this aspect and can significantly benefit from studying the successful practices of Vienna and Barcelona to enhance its efforts in gender equality.

## **2. Urban Design Pioneers: Lessons from Vienna and Barcelona**

### **2.1. The Origin of Gender Mainstreaming**

Gender mainstreaming is an approach to policy-making that considers the interests and concerns of both women and men [2,3]. The concept was first introduced at the 1985 Nairobi World Conference on Women and later established as a strategy in international gender equality policy through the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 [3]. It aims to promote gender equality at all stages and levels of policies, programs, and projects by addressing women's and men's different needs, living conditions, and circumstances. Gender mainstreaming seeks to benefit both genders and address hidden gender inequalities, ultimately working towards a gender-equal society. In urban planning, gender mainstreaming involves integrating a gender-sensitive perspective throughout the planning process to ensure equality and create gender-equal cities. Cities like Vienna and Barcelona have successfully implemented gender mainstreaming in their urban planning efforts.

### **2.2. Framework and Characteristics of Urban Planning in Vienna**

Vienna has committed to integrating gender considerations into all levels and processes of urban planning [4]. This approach ensures that gender factors are considered at every stage, from analysis to implementation and evaluation. Collaboration among various municipal departments and external stakeholders is critical to implementing gender-sensitive practices across different areas of urban planning [4]. Vienna upholds two fundamental principles of gender mainstreaming: equality and equal opportunities and user-centered design. The strategy focuses on providing equal opportunities for all genders by addressing their specific needs and reducing inequalities created by traditional urban planning practices. Urban spaces are designed to accommodate the daily routines and requirements of different user groups, particularly those often underrepresented, such as women, children, older people, and people with special needs. Vienna has set several objectives and quality criteria for creating a gender-equal city. In terms of public space and mobility, the city ensures that public spaces are safe, accessible, and usable for all genders. This includes adequate lighting, clear visibility, and barrier-free design to enhance the subjective feeling of safety and security. Housing and community facilities provide diverse housing options and communal spaces that support various family structures and life phases, facilitating the combination of work and family duties. Vienna has a plan for accessible and high-quality social infrastructure, including schools, kindergartens, healthcare facilities, and leisure areas, to support the needs of all community members. In terms of implementation mechanisms, Vienna launches different pilot projects and model processes to test and refine gender-sensitive planning methods and tools, creating best practices that can be scaled up and integrated into broader urban planning efforts. Test questions, quality criteria, and indicators are used to evaluate the gender sensitivity of planning projects, ensuring that the needs of different gender groups are systematically addressed. Regarding engagement and participation, Vienna has an inclusive decision-making process that engages all gender groups in planning to ensure their perspectives and needs are considered. This includes public consultations, workshops, and structured talks with gender experts, ensuring that underrepresented groups, such as women, have a voice in urban development decisions and promoting equitable participation and involvement.

### **2.3. Framework and Characteristics of Urban Planning in Barcelona**

Barcelona has embraced various strategies in its pursuit of becoming a gender-equal city. The city has prioritized transforming the internal culture and practices of the City Council to ensure gender mainstreaming in all aspects of public management [5]. Additionally, efforts have been focused on improving women's material and economic living conditions, recognizing the importance of care

work, and addressing the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women's employment[5]. Barcelona is committed to guaranteeing women's rights across social, cultural, and symbolic dimensions and is dedicated to developing neighborhoods that prioritize everyday life, making them more egalitarian, safer, and sustainable. Barcelona's approach is guided by several principles, including gender mainstreaming, intersectionality, women's participation and co-production, good governance, budget and resource guarantees, and co-responsibility and proximity. These principles ensure a comprehensive effort to create a gender-equal environment for the city's residents. The city's plan for building a gender-equal city encompasses institutional change, including the establishment of gender mainstreaming units within all areas and districts of the City Council, continuous and comprehensive gender equality training for all municipal staff, and the promotion of inclusive language and imagery in all municipal communications. Barcelona also focuses on creating an economy for life and the organization of time, developing policies that support women's economic independence, fighting against the feminization of poverty, recognizing and distributing care work more equitably, and addressing gender disparities in access to technology and digital resources. Furthermore, Barcelona is committed to establishing a city of rights, ensuring access to comprehensive health services and support for sexual and reproductive rights, implementing measures to prevent and address gender-based violence, and promoting equal representation of women in social and political spheres. Lastly, the city aims to foster close-knit and sustainable neighborhoods by designing public spaces that are safe, accessible, and meet the needs of all genders, promoting gender-sensitive transportation policies, and ensuring that essential services and facilities are accessible within neighborhoods to support the daily needs of residents.

Vienna and Barcelona both prioritize gender equality in their urban planning processes. They include gender perspectives at every planning stage, from big plans to detailed site planning. Both cities have laws requiring gender perspectives in urban planning and other city policies. They also require gender impact assessments for urban development projects to ensure gender equality is vital to planning. In addition, they address different forms of discrimination that affect women, such as race, class, age, and disability. Both cities involve women and diverse community groups in decision-making through public consultations and workshops. They focus on creating safe, accessible public spaces for people of all genders. Vienna and Barcelona also ensure that housing projects consider the specific needs of different gender groups. They promote environmentally friendly and gender-sensitive transportation policies, designing safe and convenient systems for everyone. Both cities emphasize high-quality social infrastructure that is accessible and meets the needs of all community members. They have established dedicated gender mainstreaming units within city departments and provide training for staff on gender equality and inclusive planning practices. Vienna and Barcelona have robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the impact of urban planning policies on gender equality using gender-disaggregated data and indicators. They also allocate resources and budgets to support gender equality initiatives and incorporate gender budgeting to assess and control the impact of financial investments on gender equality. Both cities are committed to gender mainstreaming in their urban planning processes, aiming for fairness and equality for all residents.

### **3. Bridging the Gap: Assessing Shanghai's Gender-Equal Urban Development**

#### **3.1. The Track and Evolution of Urban Planning in Shanghai**

During the early development stage from 1949 to 1978, following the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Shanghai underwent significant reconstruction and development. The focus was primarily on industrialization, allocating large areas for factories and worker housing. The city experienced rapid expansion in the 1950s and 1960s by constructing new residential areas and developing infrastructure to support industrial growth. Subsequently, in the Reform and Opening Up

stage from 1978 to the 1990s, the initiation of economic reforms marked a significant shift in urban planning. Shanghai commenced the modernization of its infrastructure and sought to attract foreign investment. The establishment of special economic zones in the 1980s facilitated rapid industrial and economic growth, leading to increased urbanization and modernization of the city. To become a global city in the 1990s and 2000s, Shanghai embarked on extensive urban renewal projects to modernize the city and improve living standards. Old neighborhoods were redeveloped, and new residential and commercial areas were created. Major infrastructure projects, such as the construction of the Pudong New Area, the expansion of the subway system, and the development of the Shanghai Port, were undertaken to enhance the city's global connectivity. In the sustainable and inclusive growth stage from the 2010s to the present, the Shanghai Master Plan (2016-2040) emphasizes sustainable and inclusive urban development. The plan focuses on improving the quality of life for residents, enhancing environmental sustainability, and promoting economic innovation [6,7]. Recent efforts include implementing innovative city technologies to improve urban management, enhance public services, and foster innovation and entrepreneurship.

### **3.2. Shanghai's Current Urban Planning Stage of Creating Gender Equal City**

The concept of gender mainstreaming has garnered significant attention globally; however, its integration into urban planning in Shanghai is still in its early stages. Shanghai has formulated specific plans to enhance the development of women, such as the "Shanghai Women's Development Outline" and the "14th Five-Year Plan for Women's and Children's Development" [8]. These plans underscore the improvement of women's living conditions, increased participation in social and economic activities, and ensuring their safety. Measures are being taken to improve the safety and accessibility of public spaces for women, including enhancing lighting in public areas, designing more women-friendly public facilities, and ensuring gender-neutral accessibility [8].

The city's housing policies are beginning to account for the distinct needs of women, such as providing housing options that support single mothers and older women. Prioritizing the enhancement of community services catering to women's needs, including childcare facilities, healthcare services, and support for victims of domestic violence, is an ongoing focus. There is a growing emphasis on involving women in urban planning to ensure that their perspectives and needs are adequately represented, including through public consultations and participatory planning processes that encourage women's participation [8].

Shanghai's urban planning has undergone significant evolution over the past decades, transitioning from focusing on industrialization to aspiring to become a global city and moving towards sustainable and inclusive growth. While gender mainstreaming has not been fully integrated into all aspects of Shanghai's urban planning, visible efforts and policy frameworks are in place to address gender-specific needs and promote women's development. Unlike cities like Vienna and Barcelona, Shanghai has not yet introduced a specific plan for creating a gender-equal city, which may hinder its progress toward becoming a more inclusive and vibrant international metropolis. As mentioned, a gender-inclusive environment provides more individuals equal opportunities to transform their lives and contribute to society, activating the city's potential. As the city grows and modernizes, more comprehensive integration of gender mainstreaming into urban planning practices will cultivate a genuinely inclusive and equitable urban environment. Given Shanghai's status as a developed city in China, it needs to consider gender mainstreaming for its long-term development.

## **4. Pathways to Progress: Enhancing Gender-Equal Urban Development in Shanghai**

Shanghai can learn valuable lessons from Vienna and Barcelona, which have successfully integrated gender mainstreaming into their urban planning strategies. Vienna and Barcelona have adopted

gender mainstreaming as their urban planning strategy, resulting in a gender-equal city. Both cities incorporate gender mainstreaming at every stage of urban planning, from high-level master plans to detailed site planning. This ensures that gender considerations are part of all planning tasks. Shanghai should integrate gender mainstreaming into all urban planning stages. This involves conducting gender impact assessments for new projects and policies to ensure they meet the needs of all genders. Vienna and Barcelona established solid regulatory frameworks that mandate gender perspectives in urban planning. For example, Vienna's gender mainstreaming guidelines are legally required for all municipal policies. Shanghai should develop and implement legal frameworks that require gender mainstreaming in urban planning. This includes setting up dedicated gender mainstreaming units within municipal departments to oversee and implement these practices.

There are also some critical principles that Shanghai should follow. Vienna and Barcelona both adopt an intersectional approach, addressing various forms of discrimination that intersect with gender, such as race, class, age, and disability. Shanghai must adopt an intersectional approach to ensure that urban planning policies are inclusive and equitable for all residents, addressing the unique needs of different gender groups. Those two prosperous cities emphasize the importance of participatory planning processes involving women and diverse community groups in decision-making. Shanghai must ensure inclusive decision-making by engaging women and diverse community groups in planning. This includes public consultations, workshops, and structured dialogues with feminist organizations and residents.

Regarding objectives and quality criteria, Shanghai should enhance the safety and accessibility of public spaces by improving lighting, visibility, and barrier-free design and ensuring that public spaces are designed to meet the diverse needs of all gender groups. It should implement housing policies that consider the specific needs of women, such as providing housing options that support single mothers and older women. Enhance community services like childcare, healthcare, and support for victims of domestic violence. Develop gender-sensitive transportation policies that ensure safe and convenient mobility for all genders. This includes creating pedestrian-friendly areas, safe cycling lanes, and reliable public transport systems. Improve social infrastructure to support the needs of all residents. This includes building accessible, high-quality schools, healthcare facilities, and leisure areas.

Shanghai should set up dedicated gender mainstreaming units within municipal departments to ensure gender perspectives are integrated into all urban planning and policy decisions. It should also develop monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of urban planning policies on gender equality. Use gender-disaggregated data and indicators to measure progress and make necessary adjustments. It should also allocate adequate resources and budgets to support gender equality initiatives in urban planning. This includes incorporating gender budgeting to assess and control the impact of financial investments. This implementation mechanism greatly helps create a gender-equal city.

By learning from Vienna and Barcelona, Shanghai can enhance its urban planning practices to create a more gender-equal city. Key steps include integrating gender mainstreaming at all planning levels, adopting an intersectional approach, ensuring inclusive participation, prioritizing safety and accessibility in public spaces, and establishing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Implementing these practices will help Shanghai build an inclusive, equitable, and responsive urban environment for all its residents.

## 5. Conclusion

Shanghai's journey toward becoming a gender-equal city can be significantly enhanced by adopting and adapting the gender mainstreaming strategies exemplified by Vienna and Barcelona. These cities have demonstrated that integrating gender perspectives at every level of urban planning leads to more inclusive, safe, and equitable urban environments.



Vienna's systematic approach to gender mainstreaming, characterized by robust legal frameworks and intersectional planning, ensures that the needs of all gender groups are considered in urban development. Barcelona's focus on inclusive participation and creating safe, accessible public spaces further underscores the importance of involving diverse community groups in planning.

For Shanghai, the critical lessons from Vienna and Barcelona include embedding gender mainstreaming in all stages of urban planning, from policy formulation to project implementation and evaluation. By adopting an intersectional approach, Shanghai can address the unique needs of various gender groups, ensuring that urban spaces are designed to be inclusive and equitable.

By learning from the successes of Vienna and Barcelona, Shanghai can create a city that meets the diverse needs of all its residents and sets a benchmark for gender equality in urban development. These efforts will contribute to a more inclusive, sustainable, and equitable urban future where everyone, regardless of gender, can thrive and participate fully in the city's life.

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