

# Disability Issues in the Context of Urban and Feminist Paradigms

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**Abstract.** The article discusses the issues of comfort and friendliness of the urban space for women with disabilities. The authors use the focus of urban feminism as a new interdisciplinary research field that has emerged to encourage the integration of a gender perspective in urban development policies. We proceed from the fact that the stigma of a woman with a disability is not equal to the stigma of a woman and the stigma of a disabled person. This is a border zone, a parallel citizenship, which, implemented in a large city, acquires special features of uniqueness.

## 1. Introduction

The research focus of this work is defined by three scientific categories - gender, urbanism, disability. Each of them today has turned from exclusively scientific objects of analysis into the category of political and actionist practices. This study is about the gender context of disability in a big city. This is a topic that cannot be studied statistically, it is unique. A socially oriented approach to the planning of spaces or specific places of a city is based on taking into account the specifics of different groups of citizens (gender, age, cultural, social, local etc.), creating opportunities for the development of human potential instead of some abstract "equality". The purpose of this approach is to ensure sustainable development of the city and its territories: meeting the needs and rights to space for various groups of people, creating such a friendly and open environment that quickly responds to these requirements and, if necessary, easily changes, re-profiles or adapts to new conditions and functions. However, the spatial reality of our cities is far from both formulation and implementation of such tasks, which today are considered to be the basic principles of inclusive design. This applies to both the municipal authorities responsible for the development of planning strategies and architectural schools.

Scientists who have studied the interaction of behavior and the environment, Michel Foucault [5] and Henri Lefebvre confirmed that architecture reflected and strengthened social norms and patterns of behavior. Lefebvre [3] came to the conclusion that physical spaces and their design played a role in the construction of the identity and ideas of self-identity of an individual. Feminist studies of the city were presented in particular by the work of Dolores Hayden [2], who studied the influence of sex on urban space and argued that, when studying architecture and urbanism, it was necessary to take

into account the concepts of women's everyday life. American researcher Elizabeth Wilson [4] proposed creating a basis for social policy that would take into account the feminine aspects of urban life and the positive role of the urban experience of women. If gender-sensitive studies of the city are presented by Western feminists, and the study of disability in the gender plane is successfully developed not only by Western, but also by Russian scientists (Yarskaya-Smirnova E.R.) [6], then the urban-feminist focus of the analysis of disability issues has been set for the first time. The growing focus on intersectionality is a positive trend that potentially reflects the complex intersections between gender and other social differences in the contexts studied. The intersectoral approach has recently led to a significant breakthrough in studies of the city, disability, genderology, which has led to a series of theoretical discussions on how, for example, to understand disability in combination with other categories.

One way to capture and understand the complex relationship between gender and other social differences in societies such as Russia is to apply the theoretical framework of urban feminism.

Urban feminism is a relatively new interdisciplinary research field that has emerged to encourage gender mainstreaming in sustainable urban policies, projects and programs. Women with disabilities have specific requirements for the characteristics of the city and urban lifestyle; some aspects of urban realities are perceived by this category of citizens more sensitively and require detailed consideration. We can say that this is the citizenship of women with disabilities, which, being realized in a big city, acquires special features of uniqueness.

Living in an urban environment provides many benefits to women with disabilities, but it also involves a whole range of problems that a big city poses.

Cognitive skills developed among residents depend on the kind of world created in the urban system.

The daily experience of women with disabilities opens up a parallel city.

## **2. Purpose and questions of research**

To reveal the indicated hypotheses, the empirical framework of our study is outlined by a qualitative methodology that is necessary to achieve an understanding of individual experience, life trajectories, discrimination and any consequences of inequality of women with disabilities in urban settings. These provisions are disclosed and based on empirical results obtained using the methodology of interviewing and cognitive mapping. In March-April 2019, 20 interviews were collected with young women with visible signs of disability. Of the twenty girls, eighteen have a disease of the musculoskeletal system (nine of them use a wheelchair), two girls have congenital anatomical anomalies in their arms and legs. The survey was conducted among students of a Moscow inclusive university, the age of informants is from 20 to 25 years old, everyone lives in Moscow, more than half of them came to the capital from small and medium-sized Russian cities. The interview guide covered the worldview of the status of women with disabilities, topics of orientation in the city space, experience of discrimination and intolerance, issues of trust in urban spaces and services, perception of urban risks and dangers for women with disabilities, experience of certain negative situations associated with experiencing their femininity and disability, and was also aimed at collecting information of a different nature if the informant was interested in a frank story. The authors analyzed the position of gender, the nature of disability, linking them to specific places and situations typical of urban life. A number of questions related to the help and support from the townspeople, as well as experiences of discrimination or anxiety (about visiting certain places in the city and about a clash with certain types of urban residents). At our disposal was first-hand experience. In this study, voices were heard that had not been previously heard due to the fact that the situation of female disability was either automatically included in the general problem of disability, or these problems were not noticed and were considered individual rather than social.

Do women in their everyday city life forget their disabilities or do they have to remember this all the time? It turned out that the feeling of the characteristics of the place can greatly affect this. Many said that they acutely felt their disability mainly in places not adapted, not accessible, crowded or, on

the contrary, poorly populated, where there was a feeling of danger or discomfort associated with the close attention of passers-by.

The main factors that exacerbate the feeling of being atypical are fears caused by the inaccessibility of the place and the fullness of the place by people who will either knock them down (children, the crowd) or will closely examine and make any insulting statements.

Forming the social space of the metropolitan city based on the daily experience of women with disabilities, the authors saw the types of perceptions of women with disabilities by men in the context of romantic patterns. In the context of urban acquaintances, girls with disabilities typologize men oriented to: carefree friendly communication; serious relationships in connection with the feeling of the heaviness of one's own life and the desire to find a frivolous woman who understands the cost of partnership; denying any opportunity to interact with women with disabilities due to internal fears, stereotypes, self-awareness of their status (both high and low).

There were no significant differences in the perception of the degree of friendliness of the urban environment and citizens by women and men with disabilities, however, the differences are fixed in the fact that a woman, encoded in the sociocultural field as a weaker sex, is more disposed of citizens to assist her (physically and materially). However, women with disabilities face gross violations of their personal space more often than men due to unwillingness to engage in interactions, which are often presented under the guise of assistance.

The capital city is always endowed with the characteristics of heterogeneity, in particular associated with foreign ethnicity. In the field of female disability, two dichotomous images of foreign ethnic men are recorded in the city, one of them is labeled as a source of danger, the other one encodes foreign ethnic men as more responsive and generous to women with disabilities. In the first case, a cluster of men of non-Russian nationality is perceived as a signal of danger and the threat of being drawn into unwanted conversations and contacts. The second discourse of foreign ethnicity in the big city contains the emotional component of greater tolerance, willingness to help and generosity. The indicated problems and psychological frustrations of informants are not strictly personal, since they are rooted both in the sphere of stereotypes and stigma, and in models of the gender order of society. Supporters of the radical wing of the feminist movement sought to reformat the cultural codes of the patriarchy, however, surviving attitudes about objectivity (and not subjectivity) of women make young women with disabilities more vulnerable in the city.

The study showed that women in wheelchairs who move around the city in their own car often do not feel safe in parking lots. If a woman with a disability drives a car, then the likelihood of uncomfortable situations in the parking lot increases for her, since she can make movements that are unclear to the outside observer and might cause conviction. While studies of female drivers without a disability record problems due to deserted parking (especially when it comes to underground or multi-tiered parking), then women with disabilities, especially when traveling without an accompanying person, should look for a parking lot where they are likely to ask someone for help getting a wheelchair chair from the trunk. In most cases, such requests are perceived positively and adequately, however, sometimes the men who have helped begin to show excessive obsession, which causes a sense of anxiety in women with disabilities. There are cases of verbal or physical aggression.

In the urban-feminist context, the production of a space of disability is seen in a new way, men and women with and without disabilities bring meaning to this or that space in connection with a particular situation. In this case, we are dealing not with urban territories, but with embodied space, when space is produced through corporeality and the emotional component. So the figure of a woman with a disability evokes behavior and emotions associated with sociocultural codes of sexual relations, but more often the urban space is produced in the discourse and emotions of empathy and the provision of feasible assistance. In addition, help is constructed differently in higher and lower social strata. Our informants often recalled situations of manifestation of the so-called "tactless kindness".

Analyzing the emotional component of the reasoning of women with disabilities about the city, we came to the conclusion that all fears about one's physicality in the city were associated with three

characteristics of spaces - supervision, accessibility and space filling with diverse groups. Accessibility allows you to feel independent and safe.

In supervised spaces where there are video cameras, police officers and other employees, and where it is quite (but not excessively) crowded, women feel safe. On the contrary, the “bedroom suburbs” and the backwoods of the city do not attract women with disabilities, although they attract teenagers and young people, especially in single-industry towns. The accumulation of large groups of certain people can cause fears and concerns among girls with disabilities, and these fears are associated not only with marginalized groups, but also, for example, with children. We resorted to the metaphor of the description of the city, based on the fact that the metaphor “anthropomorphizes” the social and sometimes even the physical reality of space. Analyzing the cognitive component of the perception of urban space in the plane of urban metaphors and in the framework of the question of the preferred city for life, we identified the associations of our informants and compared the images of Moscow with statements about those cities from where they came to the capital to study. In general, the capital was described in metaphors of high urbanism (growth point, place for one’s own development, achievements and increase of human potential), provincial urbanism was described mainly by metaphors of vulnerable points (dullness, wilderness, periphery), but often the descriptions of these cities or towns were emotionally colored, the informants were showing love for their native place, sincerity and their own non-falsity as inhabitants of these places.

### **3. Conclusion**

To sum up, the practices of invisible groups have become the subject of our study. As a result, not only new sociological knowledge has been obtained, but also material for various social groups involved in solving gender and disability problems, which will expand the range of possibilities for solving existing urban problems. The trends revealed are not easy to change, but their discovery in itself triggers a process of change. The study has shown that the main factors aggravating the feeling of being atypical are fears caused by the inaccessibility of a place, the lack of supervision of this place or its being crowded with people having negative identities. In the context of city acquaintances, girls with disabilities face different types of gender communications, either carefree friendly communication or attempts to establish serious relationships in connection with the similarity of the situation of men and women with disabilities, or are completely refused to make contact and interact with women who have visible signs of disability. Gender communications in the metropolis are colored by sociocultural ethnic contexts; for example, a significant difference between Muslims and those professing other religions and atheists is gender attitudes. Belonging to Islamic culture and religion is a stable predictor of patriarchy.

In a comparative context of reasoning about a city that allows one to live a prosperous, comfortable life [7, 8], Moscow has been characterized by metaphors of high modernism, but inferior to the top fast-growing Asian cities (Singapore, Shanghai) or the old European cities of Italy, Austria and France. Sometimes it happens that the results of sociological studies become interesting for journalists, politicians, activists or people who make decisions and set strategies, including those regarding the development of urban areas. If scientific and research material on accessibility of the urban environment for people with disabilities has been accumulated, it may well serve the purpose of providing an information basis for the development of sound and realistic development plans for Russian cities that are comfortable for living. The general conclusion boils down to the assertion that the current approach to the development of a modern metropolis is to ensure sustainable development of the city and its territories, meet the needs and rights to space for various groups of people, create such a friendly and open environment that quickly responds to these requirements and, if necessary, it is easy to change, reprofile or adapt to new conditions and functions. However, the spatial reality of many cities is far from both formulation and implementation of such tasks, which today are considered to be the basic principles of inclusive design. This applies to both the municipal authorities responsible for the development of planning strategies and architectural schools.

#### 4. Acknowledgments

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