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Cultural norms, placemaking, and social justice: Creating inclusive public spaces for women

A. Hadid^{1,2,*}, B. Marir^{1,3}, A. Mebarki^{1,4}

¹Institute of Architecture and Urbanism, University of Batna 1, Batna, Algeria.

²Laboratory of Architecture, Urban Planning and Transport: Housing, Landscape and Urban Mobility (LAUTr), University of Batna 1, Batna, Algeria.

³Laboratory of Natural Risk Land Use Planning (LARNAT), University of Batna 1, Batna, Algeria.

⁴Laboratory of Bioclimatic Architecture and the Environment (ABE), Constantine 3 University, Constantine, Algeria.

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES: In Algerian cities, access to and use of public spaces remain strongly conditioned by cultural norms, gender stereotypes, and spatial inequalities. Women are often perceived as less legitimate users of public space, resulting in unequal access, limited visibility, and a heightened sense of vulnerability. This research explores how collective representations, particularly gendered social expectations, cultural constraints, and socio-spatial dynamics, shape women's behaviors and restrict their appropriation of public space. Grounded in gender-sensitive placemaking, the study seeks to identify key obstacles and planning-related challenges while proposing inclusive urban strategies.

METHODS: The study adopts an anthropological and reflexive methodology, combining a literature review with mixed methods. It integrates qualitative interviews, field observations, and a structured survey of 100 women in the Ben-Boulaid alleys of Batna, Algeria. The empirical strategy was designed to investigate how cultural expectations, spatial arrangements (lighting, accessibility, urban design), and socio-economic characteristics (age, occupation, mobility) intersect to shape gendered uses of public space. This methodological framework allows for testing the assumption that these factors play a decisive role in producing spatial inequalities and limiting women's access and autonomy in urban environments.

FINDINGS: The results show strong associations between women's use of public space and multiple interrelated factors. A significant correlation was found between the frequency of visits and age/occupation. Cultural barriers were identified as the most influential factor limiting access, followed by inadequate infrastructure and perceived insecurity. Negative correlations were observed for perceptions of equal access ($r = -0.167$, $p = 0.098$) and women's access to the Ben-Boulaid alleys ($r = -0.189$, $p = 0.060$), indicating exclusion from certain spatial practices. Lighting was positively correlated with reduced fear of aggression ($r = 0.165$). Furthermore, 72% of respondents judged current gender equality measures as insufficient. These results confirm the hypothesis and emphasize the urgent need to integrate gender indicators into urban planning practices.

CONCLUSION: This research highlights the importance of rethinking urban policies through a gender lens, incorporating women's lived experiences and spatial needs into the design process. It calls for participatory placemaking strategies that promote safety, inclusivity, and cultural sensitivity, aiming to foster public spaces that are accessible, welcoming, and equitable for all.

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*Corresponding Author:

Email: amani.hadid@univ-batna.dz

Phone: +213553948187

ORCID: [0009-0004-8408-6151](https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8408-6151)

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INTRODUCTION

The history of women, particularly within the Algerian context, is marked by their struggle to assert their identity and role within broader social movements for change (Beaud and Masclat, 2006). This dynamic includes a questioning of the traditional boundaries between public and private spheres, as well as of imposed social roles. During the colonial period, Algerian women played a central role in the struggle for freedom, shaping their narratives and resisting both colonial and patriarchal domination (Amrane-Minne, 2015). Anthropological studies conducted in the 1930s by researchers such as Jacqueline Rivière and Germaine Tillion explored Kabyle, Chaoui, and Mozabite societies, often through the lens of colonization (Boulhaïs, 1998). In her writings, Assia Djebar (Cheref, 2019) echoes this process of resistance, highlighting how these women were at the heart of histories marked by social violence and symbolic struggle. Despite significant progress, women continue to face numerous challenges in contemporary urban spaces. Safety concerns remain critical, with current security measures often proving insufficient and contributing to a persistent sense of vulnerability (Vera-Gray & Kelly, 2020; Bourel, 2012). The gendered impact of mobility and accessibility barriers stems from transportation infrastructures that inadequately reflect women's specific travel needs and patterns (Priya Uteng, 2021). The design of public spaces frequently overlooks the spatio-temporal dynamics particular to women, especially those balancing domestic and professional responsibilities (Libertun de Duren, 2022). Social norms and gender stereotypes shape expectations and behaviors in public space, limiting women's participation and freedom of use (Borgerson, 2005). This situation is further exacerbated by unequal access to resources and opportunities, which reinforces disparities between men's and women's spatial practices (Benny et al., 2024). Research on gendered public spaces has grown substantially in recent years (Beebeejaun, 2017; Kern, 2020). However, significant blind spots persist, particularly concerning the Maghreb and Algeria in particular. Urban studies remain predominantly focused on Western contexts (Gudekli et al., 2023; Spain, 2014), creating a geographical imbalance that limits our understanding of the specific dynamics at play in Arab-Muslim societies. This gap is all the more problematic as

recent Algerian research demonstrates pronounced gendered differences in spatial practices (Rahmani & Messaoudene, 2021; Benneghrouzi & Zitouni, 2018), rooted in enduring cultural conventions. Academic research on Algerian cities has largely concentrated on the historical and political dimensions of women's participation (Tlemçani, 2009), often overlooking contemporary analyses of women's everyday use of public space. More recent studies, however, have highlighted the need to consider the diversity of women's spatial practices about cultural, religious, and territorial factors, particularly through the lens of "spatial dignity," shaped by prevailing social norms (Rahmani & Messaoudene, 2021). At the same time, the application of the placemaking concept in North African contexts remains extremely limited, despite its methodological potential for fostering inclusive and gender-sensitive public spaces (Friedmann, 2010; Mehta, 2014). This situation is further compounded by a lack of in-depth empirical data on the barriers women face in public spaces in North African societies, as well as on the strategies of avoidance, adaptation, or resistance they employ to cope with these constraints (Naamane Guessous, 2016). Recent methodological approaches emphasize the need for the active participation of women in urban planning processes, integrating their needs and experiences at every stage of project development (UNDP et al., 2022). As (Cooper Marcus and Francis, 1997) have shown, public spaces are too often designed without considering the specific needs of certain groups, particularly women, thereby exacerbating inequalities in access, comfort, and safety. Given these considerations, the need for gender-sensitive urbanism emerges as an urgent priority. Traditional urban design models have historically failed to integrate gender perspectives in sustainable urban planning (Gauvin et al., 2020), marginalizing those of women and gender minorities. This omission not only compromises equal access to public space but also undermines the sustainability and quality of life in urban environments (Parnigoni, 2020). An inclusive and equitable reconfiguration of these spaces, therefore, requires the explicit integration of women's perspectives into planning practices. The concept of placemaking aligns closely with this imperative. It is a collaborative approach aimed at strengthening the connection between people and the places they inhabit (Schneekloth &

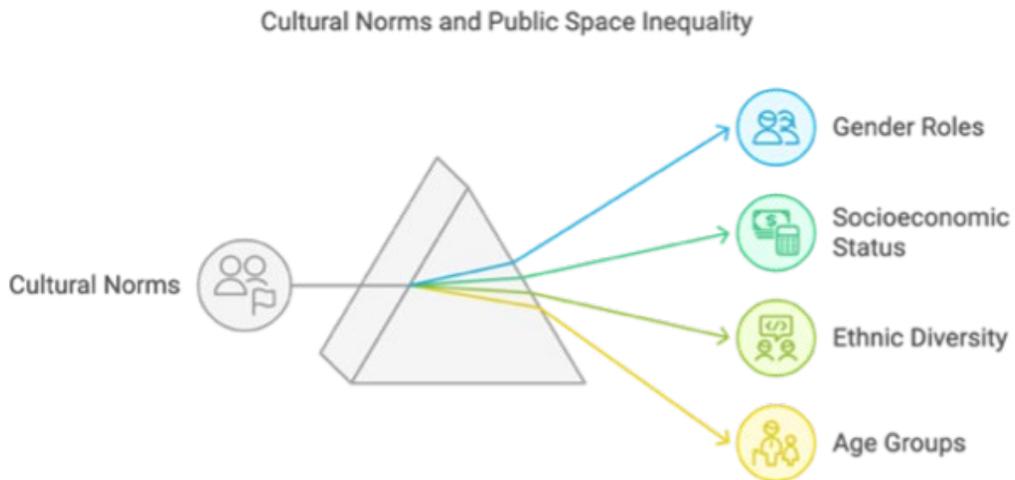


Fig. 1: Cultural norms and public space inequality

Shibley, 1993; Myers, 2002), while accounting for the cultural, social, and identity-specific needs of different groups, particularly women. Beyond its technical dimension, placemaking stands as a lever for social transformation that fosters more inclusive and equitable urban environments (Mehan, 2024). Several recent studies have highlighted the relevance of anchoring this approach in the fine-grained analysis of spatial behaviors to design interventions that are better adapted to local contexts (Sadeghi et al., 2022). This study focuses on gendered use of public space in Algerian cities. It aims to identify the main cultural, social, and urban planning factors that influence women's access, presence, and modes of appropriation of public spaces. Based on this analysis, recommendations will be developed to guide urban design practices in line with gender-sensitive placemaking principles. The central hypothesis of this study is that cultural norms and gendered spatial configurations significantly shape women's presence, practices, and the inequalities they face in public space, as illustrated in Fig. 1. To achieve these objectives, the research survey was conducted in the Ben-Boulaid alleys of Batna city, Algeria, in 2024. This research, therefore, aims not only to identify the cultural and spatial barriers that women face in Algerian public spaces but also to examine how urban planning practices can be rethought through the lens of gender-sensitive placemaking to respond to these challenges and create more inclusive environments.

Literature review

Research on cultural norms, placemaking, and social inequalities in public spaces highlights an urgent need to rethink the design of these spaces to make them more inclusive, equitable, and responsive to women's needs. A gender-sensitive approach to placemaking can not only improve the safety and accessibility of public spaces but also help to deconstruct traditional gender roles and promote social equality in cities. Over the centuries, cultures have placed varying degrees of importance on public space, with contemporary research emphasizing their role in community building and cultural engagement (Ramos-Vidal, 2024). The evolution of cultural norms regarding women's access to public spaces has been marked by profound transformations, influenced by feminist struggles, social changes, and political contexts (Laplanche, 2016). Historically confined to the private sphere, women have gradually claimed their place in public places, particularly in the 20th century, with the feminist movements that fought for equal rights and active participation in social and political life (Gubin, 2004). While in many societies today, women occupy these spaces more equally, challenges remain, such as street harassment, safety on public transport, and differences in access linked to social class. Thus, although progress has been made, the complete and secure appropriation of public spaces by women remains a major challenge in the fight for equality (Bandaiko et al., 2024).

The development of public spaces must be gender inclusive, especially for women, as actions taken in the public spaces could affect their presence or full participation in public life in public places. Placemaking is an approach to urban planning that developed in the 1960s as a reaction to a conception of the city centered on motor vehicles and commercial activities (Akbar *et al.*, and Edelenbos, 2021). Urban planners such as Jane Jacobs and William H. Whyte promoted a vision that focused on pedestrians and community life rather than on road infrastructure and buildings. According to architect Jan Gehl, this philosophy places “everyday life [first], followed by spaces, then buildings”, emphasizing that the reverse “never works” (Cappelli et chardonnet-darmaillaq, 2019). Placemaking, therefore, favors an approach centered on the uses and needs of residents to create public spaces conducive to social interaction and the development of the local community (Kutay Karacor, 2014). To assess the quality of perception of public spaces by their users, Jan Gehl has developed an analysis tool composed of twelve criteria. These criteria, divided into three distinct categories (protection, comfort, and pleasure), make it possible to assess whether a public space offers a safe, pleasant, and stimulating environment for its users (Cappelli et chardonnet-darmaillaq, 2019). However, despite these theoretical frameworks, a critical analysis of international urban planning studies reveals significant gaps in the practical application of gender-sensitive placemaking principles. While Gehl’s criteria provide a foundation for space evaluation, most urban planning projects lack specific methodologies for measuring gender-differentiated impacts of spatial interventions.

International studies of urban planning solutions for gender inclusion

Gender-sensitive urban planning has been most extensively developed in Vienna, which, since the early 2000s, has systematically applied a gender mainstreaming approach across all its urban policies (Jacquot, 2013). Studies conducted in public parks revealed a male-dominated spatial occupation, prompting targeted planning interventions. These included pilot projects involving teenage girls in the design process, reconfiguring park layouts to create multifunctional environments, and including gender criteria in urban planning regulations. This

approach effectively operationalizes Gehl’s principle of prioritizing “everyday life” by tailoring it to gender-specific needs in public space design (Cappelli et Chardonnet-Darmaillacq, 2019). Empirical research further emphasizes the central role of safety in shaping women’s use of urban environments (Ntakana *et al.*, 2022). A quantitative study involving 256 women in developing countries identified key planning interventions for improving perceived safety, such as technically standardized public lighting, redesigned public transport access points, the replacement of male-dominated spaces with mixed-use commercial areas, and the integration of playgrounds within public areas (Sadeghi *et al.*, 2023; Mowri *et al.*, 2024). Complementing this, the World Bank’s *Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning and Design* offers practical tools to incorporate gender perspectives into urban design through the placemaking framework (Terraza *et al.*, 2020). Recent research also highlights the need to critically question how public spaces are conceptualized and built, emphasizing that male-dominated design paradigms in fact shape many so-called “neutral” spaces; a gender-sensitive approach must therefore address these structural biases to truly foster inclusivity (Moonen, 2024).

The social construction of gender in public spaces

Judith Butler, an American philosopher and gender theorist, argues that male and female roles are not determined by biology but rather shaped by social constructions. According to her, gender is not a stable identity but rather a performance that is constructed through repeated acts in each social context. Butler thus challenges the idea of a natural and essential gender identity and highlights the fluid and performative nature of gender (Dichman, 2024). While Butler’s theoretical framework provides important insights into gender construction, urban planning research requires moving beyond performativity theory to examine concrete spatial interventions. The challenge for urban planners is translating these social understandings into measurable design solutions.

Judith Butler’s Key ideas on gender (Baril, 2008):

1. *Gender is not a stable identity, but rather a performance that is constructed through repeated acts in each social context.*
2. *Male and female roles are not determined by biology but are shaped by social constructs.*

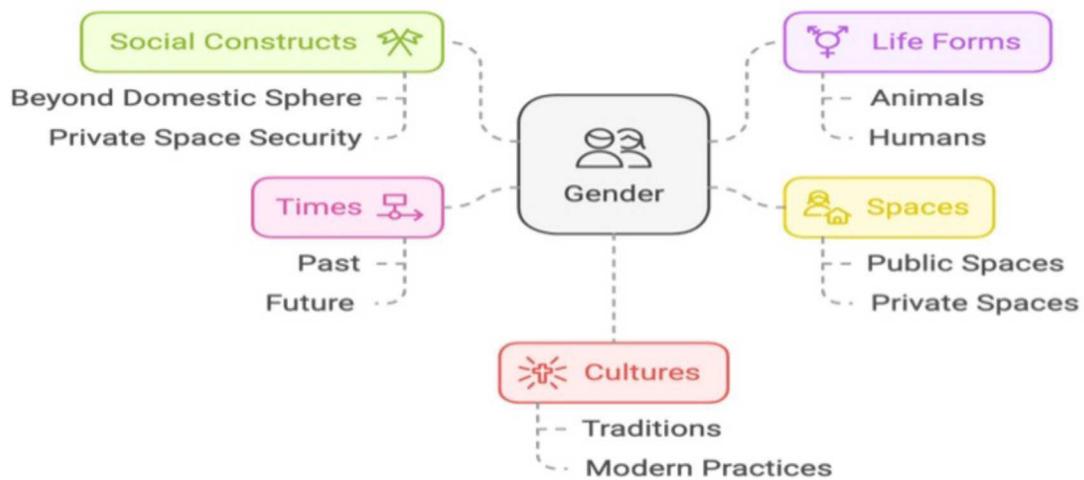


Fig. 2: The social construction of gender in public spaces

3. Gender identity is not natural and essential, but rather fluid and performative.
4. Gender is the result of a stylized repetition of acts, gestures, and desires that create the illusion of a stable and coherent gender identity.

Contributions of Judith Butler's gender theory

Judith Butler's work has had a significant impact on gender studies and feminist movements. Her ideas have notably helped to:

1. To challenge gender essentialism and show its socially constructed nature.
2. Paving the way for a more fluid and inclusive understanding of gender identities.
3. Encourage critical reflection on gender norms and their effects on individuals.
4. Contribute to better recognition of the diversity of gender expressions.

Public spaces mirror the gender dynamics of society (Bassand, 2001). Gender stereotypes and social norms strongly influence how individuals behave and navigate these spaces. Gender identity often dictates what is perceived as appropriate or acceptable behavior in public settings. These gender dynamics shape interactions and uses of public space, reflecting the inequalities and power relations present in society (Rusek et Banasiewicz, 2017). Cultural norms, both implicit and explicit, do indeed have a significant influence on how men and women occupy and behave in public space (Jalalkamali et

Doratli, 2022). The critical gap in current research lies in the lack of empirical studies that measure how specific urban design interventions can modify these gender dynamics in practice. While social construction theory explains why gendered behaviors exist in space, urban planning requires evidence-based solutions for creating more inclusive environments. It is necessary to study traditional social and scientific order, since gender inequalities become visible only when individuals become aware of social, gender, and racial disparities and their persistence (Verry, 2022). This calls for an analysis of the gendered nature of specific spaces and the recognition of these spaces as expressions of cultural identity rather than mere geographical boundaries; see Fig. 2. Gender is not limited to the social roles attributed to men and women. It is part of broader realities, such as the organization of living spaces, the perception of time, or even cultural practices (Ucciani, 2012).

Relationship between woman/culture/space

The relationship between women and public spaces is complex, influenced by historical, social, and design factors that shape their experience and accessibility. As cities transform, understanding these dynamics becomes essential to promoting inclusion (Bassand and Joye, 2001). The main elements of this relationship are:

The historical context: Public space is not a neutral container but a historically and culturally produced setting, continuously reshaped by social

practices and power dynamics (Low, 2022). Each period has brought its challenges and ideals, shaping how these places are perceived and used today. Understanding this history is essential to designing public spaces that meet contemporary needs while honoring their rich cultural heritage. The influence of design and accessibility on public spaces is crucial to creating inclusive urban environments where everyone can move freely and safely (Evans, 2009). With a collaborative approach that integrates diverse needs and perspectives, it is possible to improve not only physical accessibility but also the sense of belonging and community engagement within public spaces, as shown in Fig. 3. Space and culture are seen as a two-way exchange: space, as a social product, is imprinted by the culture that produced it; culture, on the other hand, also has certain spatial dimensions. (Houssay-Holzschuch, 2005) how women orient themselves, name and divide space (profane/sacred, private/public), or how their relationship to the environment is mediated by culture (technical mediation, food mediation, etc.).

The relationships between space and culture are dialectical in the sense that the landscape is imbued with culture; it is also a matrix because it preserves the very culture that is found there, as explored in contemporary ethnographic approaches to space and place (Low, 2016). Space is the fruit of this culture. Thus, each geography must be considered as a cultural geography; it is no longer simply a question of understanding geographical limits but of grasping society as a whole, where culture occupies a central place (Bonnemaison, 2000). In this context, space is seen as a relevant and effective tool for understanding society, as illustrated in Fig. 4. Within and around geography, or the importance of gender analyses, because Gender geography is part of cultural geography to the extent that the place and role of women are cultural constructs. (Louargant, 2002). The analysis of the relationships between societies and space always begins with society, because space is reconfigured through communicative and practical processes reflecting evolving social (Christmann et al., 2022) (Fig. 5).

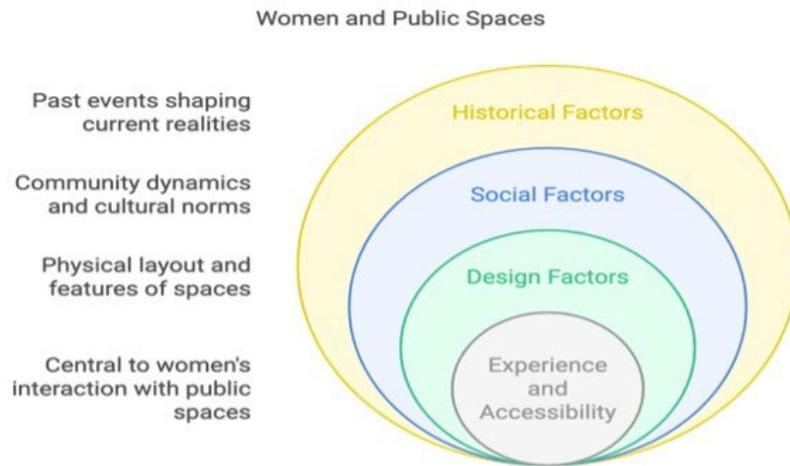


Fig. 3: Women and public space

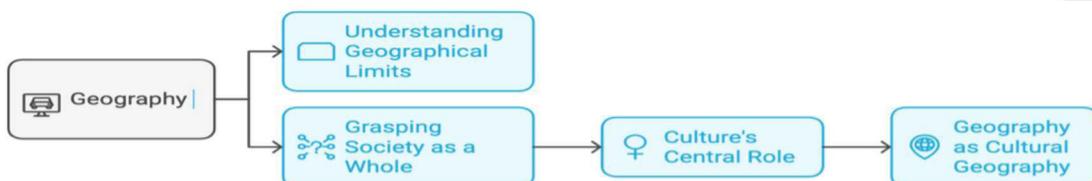


Fig. 4: Relationship between space and geography

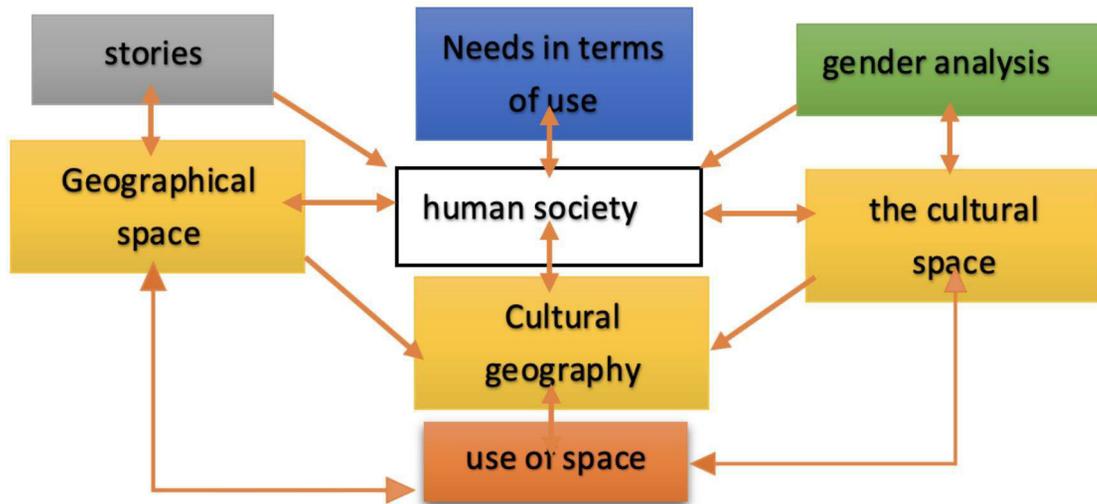


Fig. 5: Relationship between space and culture

The needs of women in public spaces

Research on women's needs in public spaces reveals a multidimensional complexity that transcends simple architectural considerations. Contemporary studies on urban safety and gender demonstrate that women's experiences of public spaces are fundamentally shaped by perceptions of security and accessibility (Dubey *et al.*, 2025). While contemporary studies like those of Tovi Fenster (Fenster, 2005) and researchers like Sanchez de Madariaga deepen the understanding of gender dynamics in urban space (Dutton *et al.*, 2022). Analysis of factors influencing the feeling of security highlights the emergence of security as a central concern (Ntakana *et al.*, 2022). Women's experience in public spaces reflects a multidimensional reading of the space. Their approach favors dynamic criteria—visibility, lighting, and mobility—which are closely intertwined with deep social, cultural, and psychological constructions, revealing a lived geography that is much more than a simple spatial journey (Malhotra *et al.*, 2023). Reports from international organizations such as UN-Habitat and the World Bank confirm that women's needs include not only physical security but also accessibility, comfort, respect, and the opportunity for active participation in the design of urban spaces (Falú, A. 2014). However, public spaces remain largely unadopted to these needs. Urban design has traditionally been dominated by

men, resulting in a spatial organization that does not meet the specific needs of women. This approach often privileges infrastructures and facilities focused on masculine activities, such as rectangular sports fields, neglecting the creation of more inclusive and multipurpose spaces (Kaakour and Cartier, 2023). The feeling of invisibility and exclusion that women often experience in public spaces is a complex issue (Bourdieu, 2002). Indeed, urban planning does not always consider the specific needs of women, which can accentuate this feeling. For example, women use public spaces more for utilitarian travel than for strolling, which may reflect disparities in access to and use of these spaces. This raises important questions about equity and inclusion in the design of public spaces to better meet the needs and expectations of the entire population (Bigot, 2021). Safety is indeed a major issue, especially for women who frequently experience harassing behavior in public spaces. This situation creates a feeling of insecurity that significantly influences their movements. Faced with these experiences, many women adopt avoidance strategies, such as choosing routes that they consider safer or avoiding certain places at certain times of the day (Blidon, 2010). Cultural norms often dictate the expected behavior of women in public spaces. These expectations can restrict their freedom of action and reinforce the idea that they should not occupy these spaces equally to men. Studies show that

women are regularly subjected to “calls to order” in public spaces, constantly reminding them of their vulnerability. These norms limit women’s access to public spaces and contribute to perpetuating gender inequality (What place for women in public space?, 2023). Urban planning policies have long neglected the specific needs of women in terms of mobility, their more complex journeys linked to domestic and care tasks. This invisibility of female mobility creates inequalities in access to services and public space.

Critical analysis of research gaps in urban planning literature

Despite the substantial theoretical foundation established by social and cultural analyses of gender dynamics in public spaces, the urban planning and territorial development literature reveals significant methodological limitations that impede the advancement of evidence-based practice. First, the majority of gender-sensitive urban planning initiatives suffer from inadequate quantitative impact assessment, whereby current studies predominantly adopt descriptive approaches that document implemented solutions without establishing rigorous empirical measurements of their effectiveness on women’s spatial usage patterns (Fenster, 2005). Second, the field demonstrates a notable absence of standardized intervention methodologies, creating a substantial disconnect between theoretical recommendations and practical implementation, where planning solutions exhibit considerable

variation across different contexts without a unified methodological framework that would enable systematic comparison and reproducibility of results (Greed, 2003; UN-Habitat, 2021). Third, the research corpus exhibits insufficient longitudinal analysis, as studies predominantly focus on immediate post-intervention effects while neglecting long-term monitoring of women’s spatial appropriation processes, thereby preventing comprehensive evaluation of intervention sustainability and durability (Terraza et al., 2020).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This article adopts a reflexive and anthropological approach, inspired by the work of (Bourdieu, 2002), to analyze the social and cultural systems that underpin masculine and feminine identities (Hammoudi, 2007). It explores global cultural invariants and local specificities by highlighting the role of multiculturalism in perpetuating gender inequalities (Jodelet, 2015). By examining these dynamics, the mechanisms that naturalize local history and culture, often perceived as self-evident, are sought to be deconstructed (Edensor et al., 2002). The main objective is to highlight the paradoxes and inequalities that shape the design of public spaces in Algeria, an aspect often neglected by planners who focus mainly on the technical aspects of planning (Djouad, 2019). To better understand the different barriers related to gender inequality in public spaces, the methodology shown in Fig. 6 combines an in-

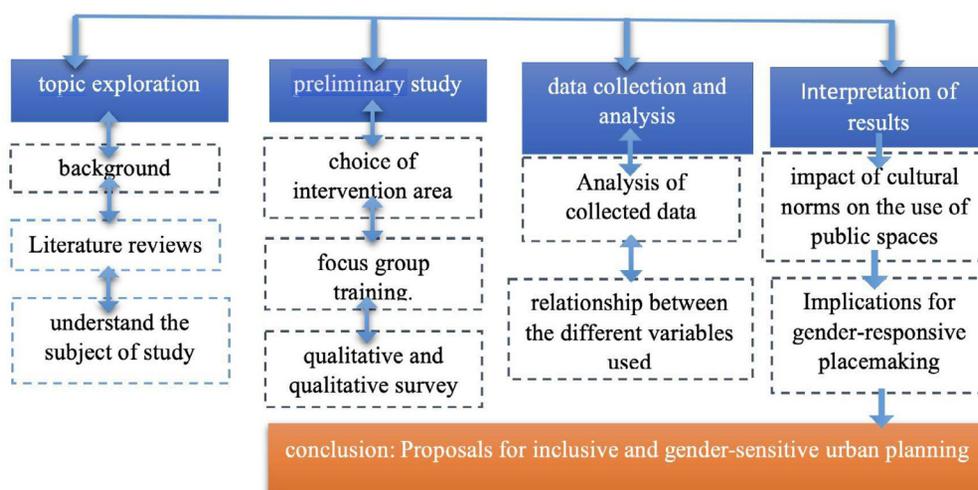


Fig. 6: Diagram of the methods used in this study

depth literature review, exploring how cultural norms shape women’s use of public spaces, considering social, cultural, and environmental dimensions. Research then focused on a case study of the Ben-Boulaid alleys, a public urban space in the city of Batna. The alleys, frequented by a diversity of users, reflect like a mirror the complexity and richness of the local society, thus constituting a particularly fertile ground for observation. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select 100 women aged 18-65 years, with specific selection criteria including regular use of the study area (at least twice weekly), residence within a 2 km radius of the site, and willingness to participate in follow-up interviews. This approach ensured representation of diverse socio-economic backgrounds while maintaining focus on research objectives. The study combined mixed methods: a structured questionnaire survey conducted with a sample of 100 women to collect data on barriers related to accessibility, gender, and multiculturalism, complemented by in-depth semi-

structured interviews with a subset of participants and systematic observations using structured grids during different periods. To ensure reliability and validity, a pilot study was conducted to validate instruments and refine data collection procedures, with internal consistency of scales assessed using Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha > 0.70$ for all constructs). Validation strategies include triangulation of multiple data sources, member checking with participants, and systematic documentation of all methodological decisions. The study aims to establish correlations between the variables studied to rethink placemaking practices to make public spaces safer and more welcoming for women, as illustrated in [Table 1](#).

Presentation of the case study

Batna is the “capital” of the Aurès (the Aurès mountain range, located south of Khenchela, Lambèse, and Timgad, stretches between the Chotts of Constantine and the Saharan depression of Ziban). These mountainous highlands, which reach their

Table 1. From theoretical constructs to measurable indicators: operationalization of concepts and variables

Concept	Variable	Indicator	Measurement Method	Justification
Gender and Perceptions of Cultural Norms	Gender roles, honor codes, and cultural beliefs	Agreement with statements on women's presence in public spaces	5-point Likert scale questionnaire + interviews	Captures internalized cultural beliefs affecting spatial behavior
Security Level and Feeling of Security	Fear of harassment, risk perception, and safety assessment	Safety ratings, reported incidents, avoidance behaviors	Likert scale + behavioral mapping	Subjective and objective security measures are crucial for spatial practices
Number and Time of Visit	Frequency patterns, temporal usage	Visiting frequency, duration of stay, preferred time slots	Self-reporting + observation logs	Reveals actual usage patterns and temporal preferences
Distribution of Activities	Activity types, spatial appropriation	Type of activities, location preferences, and space occupation	Behavioral mapping + structured observation	Shows how different activities are distributed across space
Frequency of Users	User density, demographic diversity	Number of users by time/location, user characteristics	Systematic counting + demographic surveys	Objective measurement of space utilization
Causes of Inequalities in Public Space	Structural barriers, design limitations	Physical obstacles, cultural restrictions, and policy gaps	Spatial analysis + policy review + interviews	Identifies root causes of gender-based spatial exclusion
Impact of Urban Policies on Gender Equality	Policy effectiveness, implementation gaps	Policy compliance, resource allocation, and enforcement	Document analysis + stakeholder interviews	Evaluates how policies translate into spatial practice
Influence of Placemaking Practices	Design interventions, spatial modifications	Before/after usage patterns, user satisfaction, and accessibility improvements	Comparative analysis + user feedback	Measures the effectiveness of spatial interventions
Equal Access	Accessibility barriers, inclusion levels	Physical accessibility, cultural acceptance, and usage equality	Accessibility audit + usage statistics by gender	Assesses actual vs. intended accessibility

highest point at 2,328 meters, constitute a veritable geographical barrier. The region is home to the Chaouia, a Berber-speaking ethnic group that has preserved its unique cultural identity through the intergenerational transmission of rich traditional knowledge, covering domains such as astronomy, meteorology, agriculture, and traditional medicine (Iles d’Imesli & Guedjiba Abdennacer, 2019). Located at approximately 1,048 meters above sea level and surrounded by the Aurès Mountains, Batna is the fifth-largest city in Algeria, with a population of around 290,645, according to the 2008 census. Despite its position in a basin, it is considered the

tallest major urban center in the country (Zeraib et al.,2022). The city experiences a cold, semi-arid mountain climate, characterized by cold winters with occasional snowfall and hot, dry summers (Fig. 7). Batna’s urban planning exhibits significant diversity. Established in 1844, the city consists of a dense historic center, a residential periphery, and newer, modern housing developments. Each area features distinct characteristics tailored to specific needs. The Ben-Boulaid alleys, Batna, Algeria. Located opposite the Ben Boulaid boulevards, there is a space measuring 4313.60 m². The space is delimited on all sides by lanes intended for mechanical traffic. It

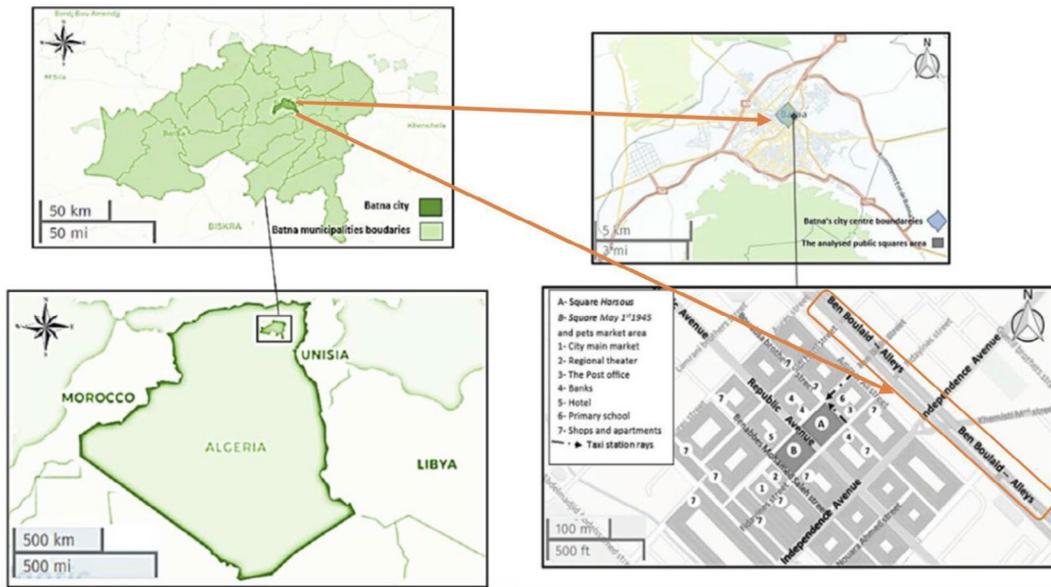


Fig. 7: Location of the study area (source: https://www.viamichelin.pl/web/Mapy-plan/Mapa_plan-Batna_-Batna-Algeria)



Fig. 8: (a) and (b) photos taken on the Ben-Boulaid alleys

has a tiled floor and a barren land that serves as a courtyard (plot) for a garden. These boulevards, to be very busy and attractive, constitute a place of relaxation and socialization accessible to all social classes. It is appreciated by a very large number of families; it is also a space for summer festivals where outdoor concerts are frequently organized and various exhibitions take place. The Ben-Boulaid alleys, formerly known as the Bocca alleys, have undergone a profound metamorphosis since independence. This urban route, once a simple means of communication, has been transformed into a place full of history and symbols. Today, paved with marble and decorated with green spaces, it constitutes the beating heart of the city, where memories of the past and aspirations for the future mingle. The presence of the statue of Mustafa Ben-Boulaid, an emblematic figure of the Algerian revolution, further reinforces the memorial

character of this space. Having become a privileged place for walking and relaxation, it regularly hosts cultural and sporting events, thus reinforcing its role as the living heart of the city (Naceur, 2017) (Fig. 8).

Investigation on women's urban practices

Combining mixed methods, focus group, and questionnaire survey, as shown in Fig. 9.

The formation of focus groups

Allowed for an in-depth exploration of the female category. The topics discussed revolved around women's urban practices, particularly about their family commitments, professional obligations, and consumer lifestyles. Emphasis was also placed on their conditions of access to public spaces and their perception of the level of security and the impact of gender among different users (Fig. 10).



Fig. 9: Methodological approach

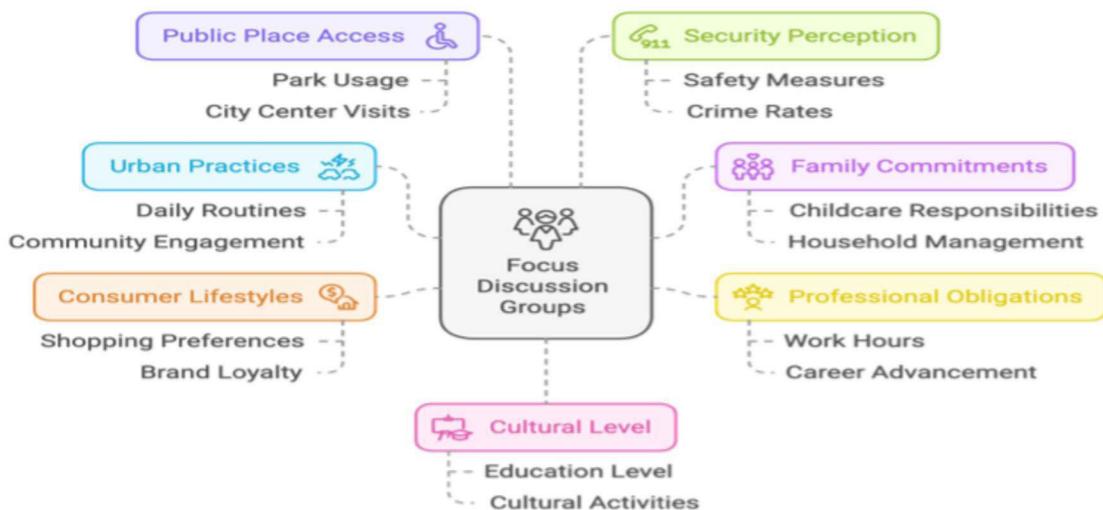


Fig. 10: The formation of focus discussion groups

Participants' profile

The ideal common profile for this study was that of women belonging to the economic middle class, whether they worked or not. These women had to be regular users of public spaces and frequent the city center. The main criterion for distinguishing these three groups was age, the hypothesis being that differences in urban emancipation were linked to generational effects. Thus, women were classified as follows: those aged over 45, retired, single or married (Group 1); single, or divorced mothers with dependent children (Group 2); and young working women (Group 3) (Fig. 11).

The objective is to collect varied perspectives on the cultural norms and social order that influence the female presence in this space.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Group 1 people aged over 45, retired, single, or married, as represented in Fig. 12

With age, these women wish to move closer to the city center for practical reasons and due to fear of their usual fragilities. The Ben-Boulaid alleys constitute one of the most appreciated spaces by

elderly women. Afternoons see retired women gathering at specific times for their social meetings. Mainly from the northern districts, these women leave their cramped and noisy homes to occupy this public space. Our analysis reveals a conscious avoidance strategy of certain urban sectors deemed hostile. They bypass the Bouakal neighborhood, stigmatized for its insecurity and strong masculine influence, as well as the 84-unit neighborhood. These results confirm the existence of a gendered urban geography that guides their daily movements. Despite inadequacies in street furniture and public lighting, they express satisfaction with the place.

Group 2 single or divorced mothers with dependent children, as represented in Fig. 13

Women have often faced gender discrimination, but despite this, they have managed to develop a strong identity linked to their place of residence. Although some may have initially hesitated to settle in a particular place, they have eventually managed to anchor themselves there and build part of their identity there. Batna City Center presents undeniable advantages: accessible public transportation and

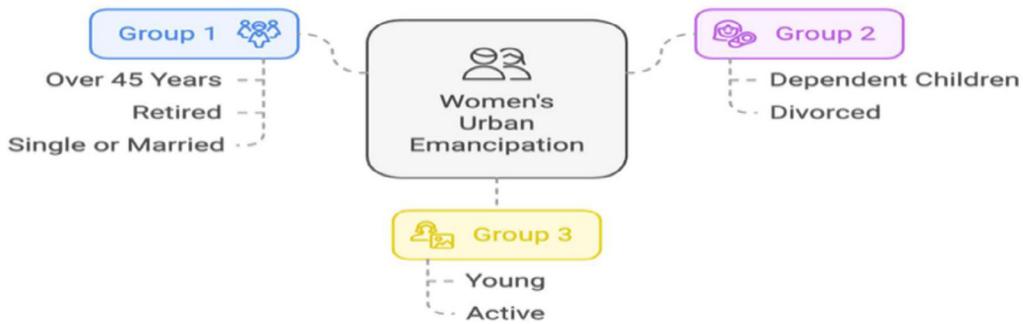


Fig. 11: Classification by age



Fig. 12: Photos (i) and (j) women aged over 45 years



Fig. 13: photos (K) and (L) women 2nd group

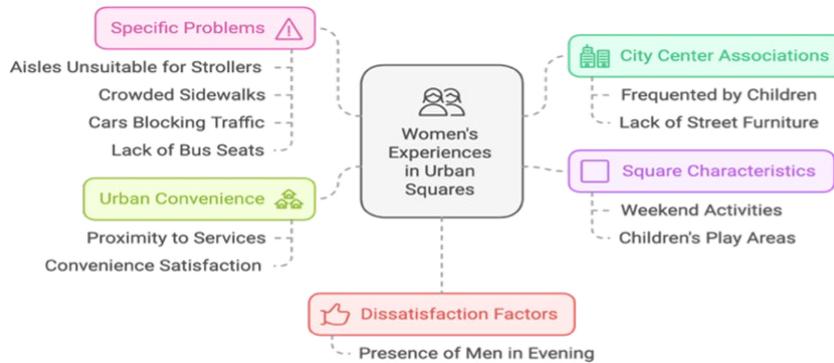


Fig. 14: Women's experiences in urban space

proximity to shops and services. For these women, the proximity of Ben-Boulaid alleys to the city center serves mainly practical purposes. They go there for specific errands or official business, never strolling without a precise goal. This utilitarian use reveals how parental constraints restructure female spatial practices. Mothers highlight specific problems: inadequacy of strollers (described as “a nightmare

scenario”), crowded sidewalks, traffic blocked by cars, and lack of stroller seats on buses. These obstacles reveal the inadequacy of urban space to parental mobility needs. They also express dissatisfaction with male presence in the evening, confirming a gendered temporality of public space use (see Fig. 14).

Group 3 young active women, as represented in Fig. 15.



Fig. 15: photos (M) and (N) women 3rd group

Young women emphasize the narrow-mindedness of Batna residents and obstacles to newcomer integration: “When you come from another city, integration becomes difficult. There are social circles, and you must be well-connected to belong “. A native participant confirms, “I’m bored. I feel like I’m always in the same routine, always meeting the same faces.” This spatial monotony reveals a generational gap in public space appropriation (Fig. 15). These discussions have allowed us to reconsider preconceived ideas about the freedom of movement of women, particularly young women. Nighttime anxiety seems to limit urban entertainment activities by drawing boundaries around certain places and specific times. However, the qualitative data

highlighted other barriers, such as the gender issue. This is why a second analysis was carried out to understand the multiple facets.

Questionnaire survey

A questionnaire was designed to collect data on the frequency of use of public spaces by women (N = 100), their feelings of safety, and their perceptions of cultural norms. This will allow us to obtain statistical data on the subject using an analysis of the different variables. This method is illustrated in Fig. 16.

Number and time of visits

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for visiting hours (M = 2.93, SD = 1.26, N = 100).

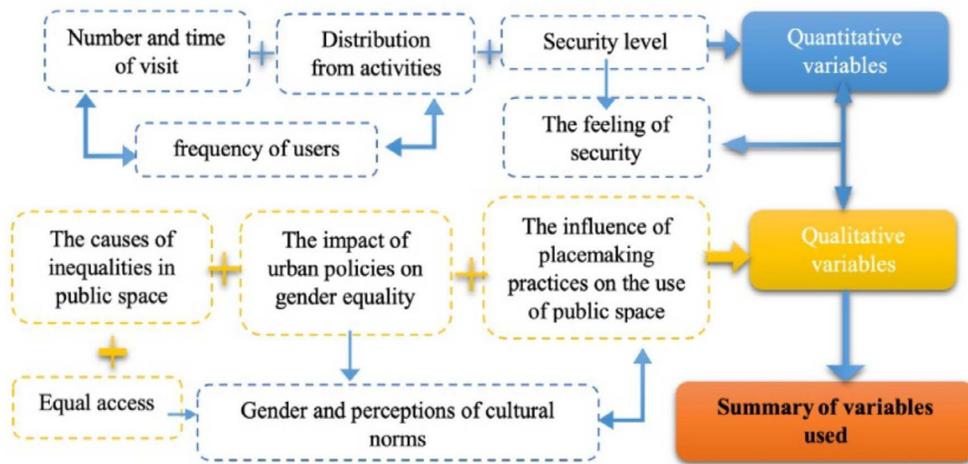


Fig. 16: The variables used in the survey

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics			
variables	average	standard	N
Visiting hours	2.9300	1.25734	100

Table 3. Correlation

Correlations		Visiting time in public spaces	Number of visits to public spaces
Visiting Hours of the Mustapha Ben-Boulaid alleys for Women	Pearson correlation	1	-.0576
	Sig. (bilateral)	-	.576
	N	100	100
Number of visits	Pearson correlation	-.0576	1
	Sig. (bilateral)	.567	-

Pearson's correlation is a statistical measure that assesses the degree of linear relationship between two quantitative variables. The significance (bilateral) is an important indicator for determining whether a statistical result is significant or not. Table 3 demonstrates this correlation analysis, revealing no significant relationship between visiting hours and number of visits to the Mustapha Ben-Boulaid alleys for women ($r = -.0576$, $p = .576$).

Figs. 17 and 18 show a perfect correlation between the number of visits and the time of visit of the space studied, which means that these two variables are closely related. In other words, the variations in the number of visits are directly and perfectly explained by the variations in the time of visit. This very strong relationship indicates that there is probably a cause-

and-effect link between these two variables, where the number of visits depends on the time of visit or vice versa. Factors such as age and occupation influenced the number and timing of visits.

Distribution of activities between men and women is shown in Table 4

The correlation coefficient $r = -0.167$ indicates negative correlations between activity types and visit numbers, suggesting that men and women participate in different activities. This differential participation reflects gendered spatial practices where women's access is systematically constrained. For women's access (alone or accompanied), $r = -0.189$ with significance approaching threshold ($p = 0.060$) indicates women have reduced access or feel less comfortable frequenting the alleys

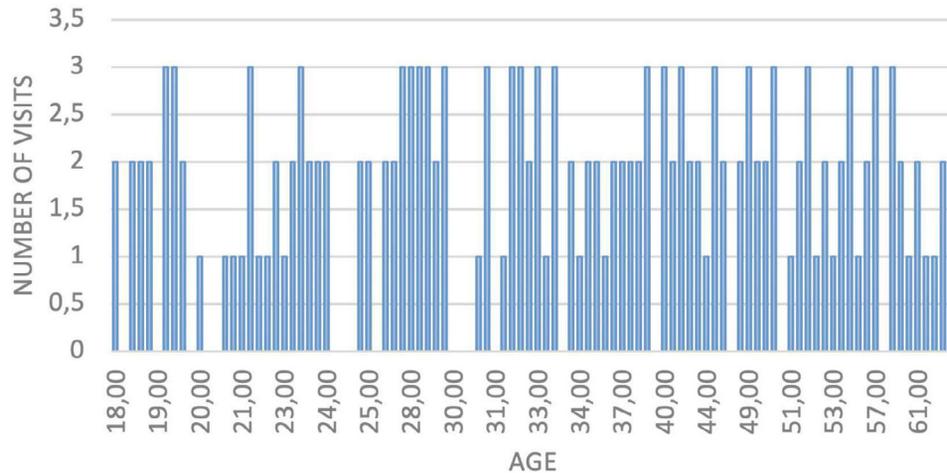


Fig. 17: Bar chart/number of visits by age

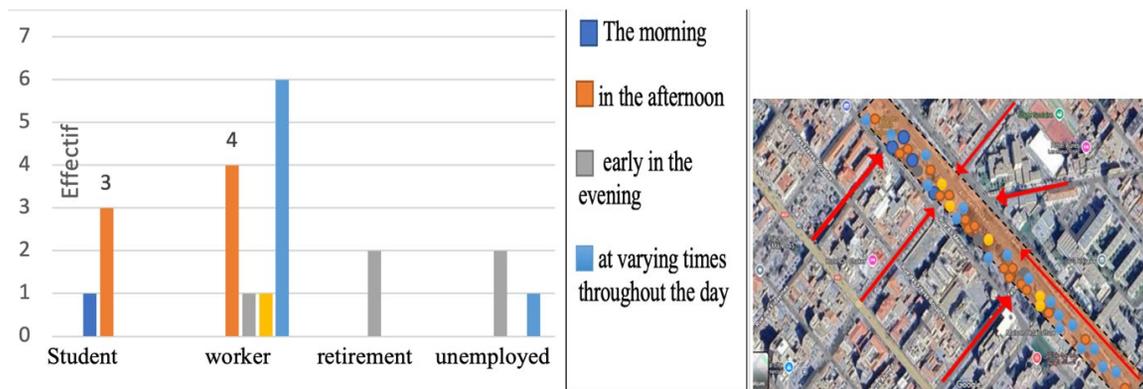


Fig. 18: bar chart + map showing time of visit by profession

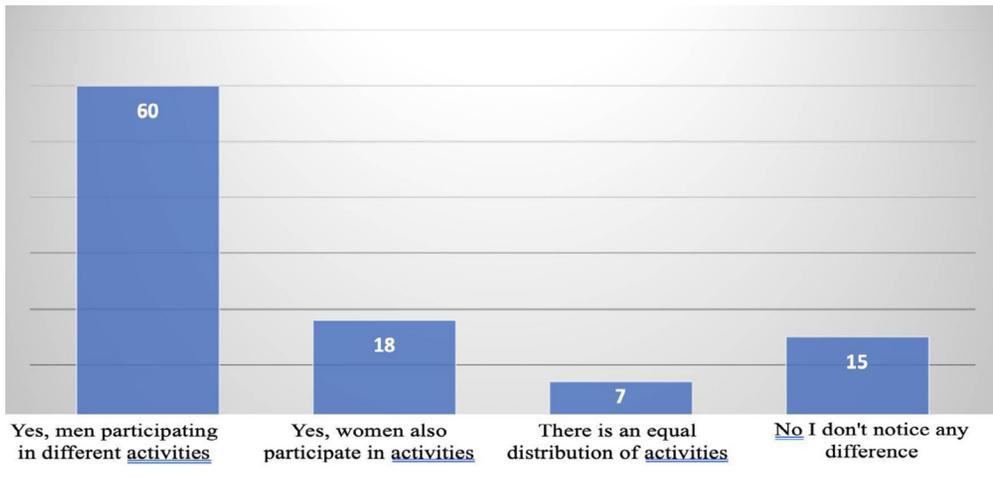


Fig. 19: Relating to the types of activities in which men and women participate

Table 4. Relating to the type of activities

Model		Differences in the types of activities in which men and women participate	Access between men and women	access for single or accompanied women
Differences in the types of activities in which men and women participate in the Ben-Boulaid alleys	Pearson correlation	1	-.167	-.189
	Sig. (bilateral)	-	.098	.060
Access between men and women	N	100	100	100
	Pearson correlation	-.167	1	.150
access for women in public spaces alone or accompanied	N	100	100	100
	Sig. (bilateral)	.060	.137	-

due to cultural and social factors. Results show marked perception differences in male-female participation. Most respondents recognize that men are more active in various activities, while female participation remains limited. These findings confirm the existence

of structural barriers to female engagement in public space, which can be seen in Fig. 19.

According to the level of security in the space: Figs. 20, 21, and 22

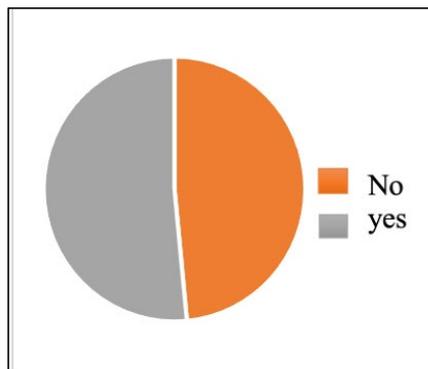


Fig. 20: Relative to the lighting level

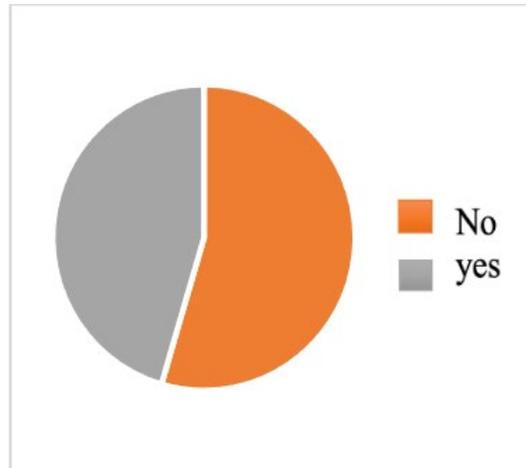


Fig. 21: Presence of aggression

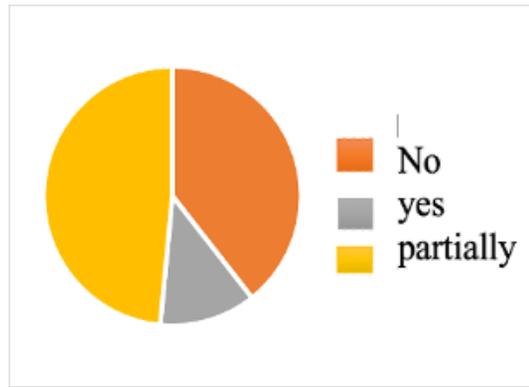


Fig. 22: Equipment on the plot

Lighting level and presence of aggressions

Table 5 shows that the lighting level is positively correlated with the presence of aggression ($r = 0.165$), suggesting that improved lighting may be associated with a reduction in aggressive incidents. The analysis indicates that variables related to physical infrastructure significantly influence perceptions of security, with lighting emerging as a key factor in shaping women's spatial comfort.

The causes of cultural inequalities in the use of the Ben-Boulaid alleys

Figs. 23 and 24 show that respondents identified cultural barriers as the primary source of inequality (40%), followed by socioeconomic disparities (25%), while cultural discrimination was less frequently cited

(15%). This hierarchy underscores the role of cultural norms as dominant mechanisms of spatial exclusion, surpassing economic factors in shaping women's access to public space. These results are further detailed in Table 6.

The impact of urban policies, urban planning, and public services on gender equality

Results presented in Table 7 indicate limited policy effectiveness: 50% of respondents believe that urban policies have no significant impact on gender equality, while 43% acknowledge partial improvements, albeit with persistent gaps. These findings underscore the inadequacy of current urban planning approaches in addressing gendered spatial inequalities. However, Table 8 shows that 72% of respondents believe that

Table 5. Relating to the different variables on the perception of security level

Model		Equipment in the Ben-Boulaid alleys meet user needs or not	Lighting level in the Mustapha Ben Boulaid alleys sufficient or not	Presence of attacks or not in this public place
Does the equipment in the Mustapha Ben Boulaid alleys meet the needs of users or not	Pearson correlation	1	.016	.032
	Sig. (bilateral)	-	.871	.752
	N	100	100	100
Lighting level in the Mustapha Ben Boulaid alleys sufficient or not	Pearson correlation	.016	1	.165
	Sig. (bilateral)	.871	-	.102
	N	100	100	100
Presence of attacks or not in this public space	Pearson correlation	.032	.165	1
	Sig. (bilateral)	.752	.102	-
	N	100	100	100

Table 6. Relating to the causes of cultural inequalities in the public space studied

	The answers	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Discrimination or cultural prejudice	15	14.7	15.0	15.0
	barriers of cultural origin	40	39.2	40.0	55.0
	socio-economic differences	25	24.5	25.0	80.0
	others	20	19.6	20.0	100.0
	Total	100	98.0	100.0	100

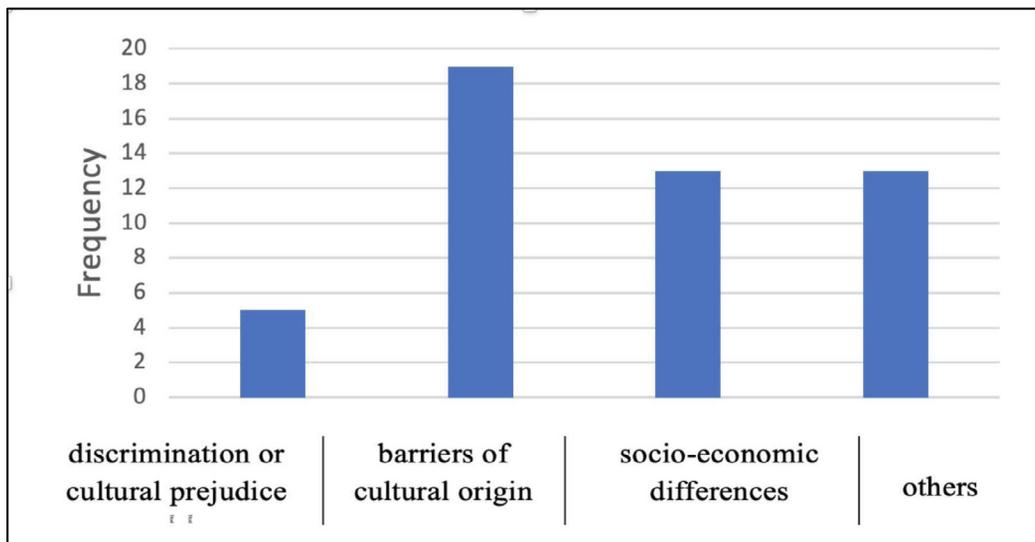


Fig. 23: Diagram on the causes of cultural inequalities

placemaking practices can be reimagined to promote more inclusive, responsive, and safe public spaces for women. This positive perception highlights the potential for transformative urban interventions when gender considerations are systematically integrated into planning processes.

The influence of placemaking practices on the use of the Ben-Boulaïd alleys for public decision-makers

Summary of variables used in Figs. 25 and 26.

Table 9 indicates that the two-dimensional model, with satisfactory internal consistency, accounts for 63% of the observed variance. Figs. 25 and 26 illustrate the robustness of this model, particularly in highlighting the significant influence of cultural level on the appropriation and use of public spaces by women. This finding underscores the importance of integrating sociocultural variables into spatial

Table 7. The impact of urban policies and developments on gender equality

The answers	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
They promote gender equality by improving accessibility and safety for all	7	6.9	7.0	7.0
They do not appear to have a significant impact on gender equality	50	49.0	50.0	57.0
They can improve on the genre in some aspects, but there are still gaps to fill.	43	42.2	43.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	-

Table 8. The influence of placemaking practices on the use of the Ben-Boulaïd alleys

The answers	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Negatively	28	27.5	28	28
Positively	72	70.6	72	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

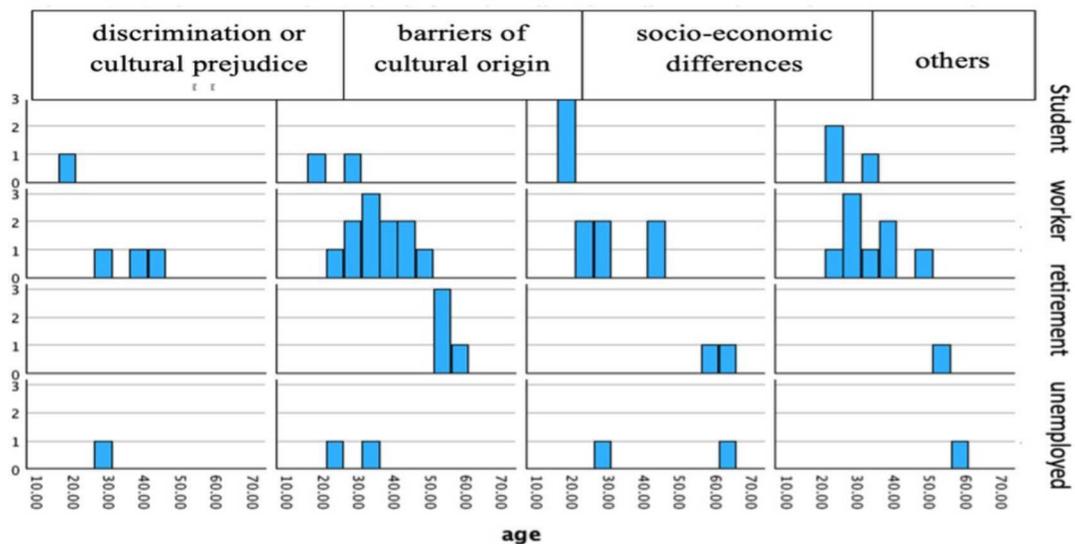


Fig. 24: Diagram on the causes of inequalities by profession

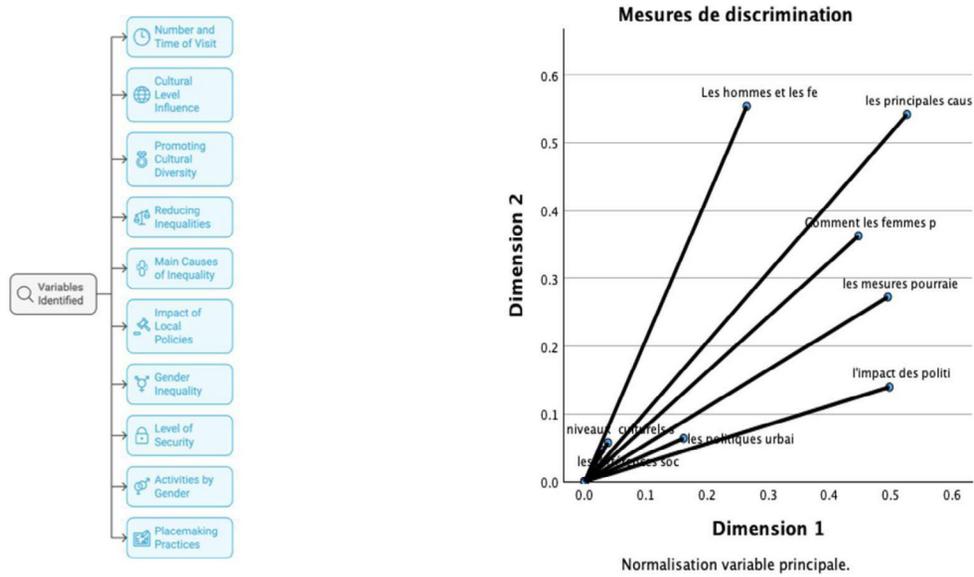


Fig. 25: Diagram on a set of variables studied

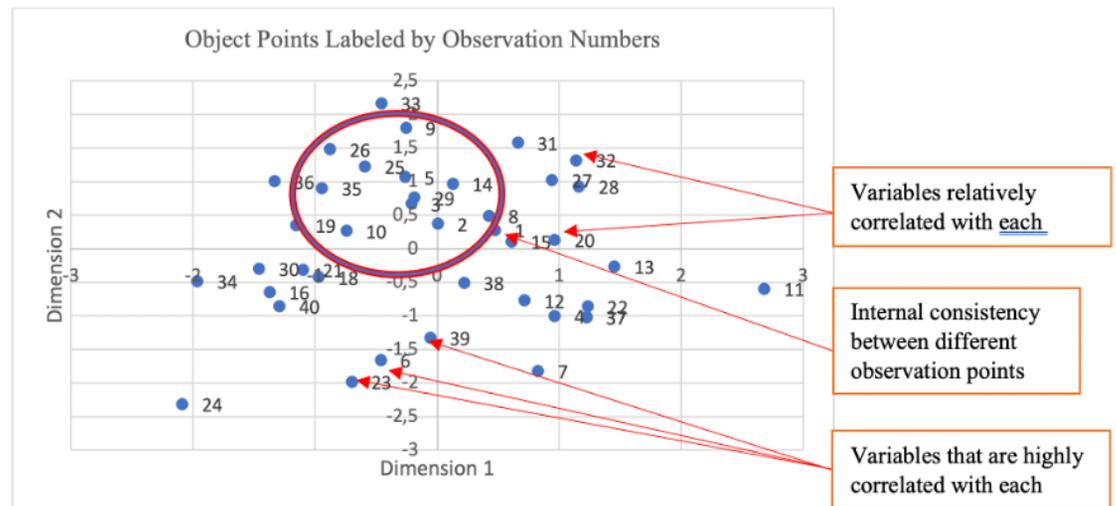


Fig. 26: Diagrams on the number of observations

Table 9. Summary of the models studied: Model summary

Dimension	a Cronbach's alpha	Total (Eigenvalue)	inertia
1	.687	2.432	.347
2	.581	1.991	.284
Total	1.268	4.423	.632
Average	.639a	2.212	.312

a. Cronbach's alpha is based on the mean eigenvalue.

analysis frameworks. It calls for a rethinking of public space design that is sensitive to differentiated patterns of use. More specifically, the data point to the necessity of creating inclusive environments where women can circulate freely, feel safe, and access spaces adapted to their daily practices. In this perspective, participatory design processes where women's voices and experiences are structurally embedded appear not only beneficial but essential to achieving genuinely inclusive urban planning.

CONCLUSION

This research on cultural norms, placemaking, and social justice in creating inclusive public spaces for women through the case study of Ben-Boulaid alleys in Batna reveals significant spatial inequalities rooted in socio-cultural barriers and infrastructural deficiencies, with mixed-method analysis of 100 women demonstrating that age and professional status determine temporal engagement patterns while negative correlations between gender equality perceptions and spatial access ($r = -0.167$, $p = 0.098$) confirm asymmetrical public space utilization. The positive association between adequate lighting and perceived safety ($r = 0.165$) underscores the infrastructure's critical role in women's spatial belonging and points to concrete intervention pathways. Applied recommendations include mandating women's participation in municipal planning processes and policy revision to address gender-specific spatial needs, implementing gender-sensitive infrastructure improvements such as enhanced lighting systems and child-friendly pathway design by urban planners, and developing targeted community awareness campaigns to challenge cultural stigmas and promote equitable public space usage. Although this research presents certain methodological limitations, including its focus on a specific urban context and cross-sectional design with 100 women participants, future comparative multi-site studies across diverse Algerian urban contexts and longitudinal analyses tracking policy intervention effectiveness would strengthen the understanding of gendered spatial dynamics and inform evidence-based urban transformation strategies. Ultimately, transforming Ben-Boulaid alleys into inclusive environments requires sustained commitment to intersectional

equity, where urban policies actively foster collective ownership and universal right to the city rather than perpetuating exclusionary spatial practices, thereby contributing to broader theoretical understanding of gendered urbanism while providing actionable frameworks for municipal authorities, planners, and community stakeholders seeking to implement gender-responsive urban development in North African contexts.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

A. Hadid contributed to the research design, theoretical framework, data collection, analysis, and writing. B. Marir contributed to the literature review, experimental design, data analysis, and interpretation. A. Mebarki contributed to the interpretation of the results and the preparation of the manuscript.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in the publication of this work. In addition, they affirm having respected ethical standards relating to plagiarism, informed consent, responsible conduct of research (including fabrication and falsification of data), double publication and/or submission, as well as dismissals.

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ABBREVIATIONS (NOMENCLATURE)

N	Observation number
M	Average
p	Sig. (bilateral)
r	Correlation coefficient
SD	Standard Deviation

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