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Gender-sensitive spatial development in an era of neo-liberalism: co-option and oppositions

The persistence of gender inequalities has stimulated a renewed interest in feminist ideas. Running alongside the UK's adoption of the gender equality duty, its planning system has gradually been co-opted as tool for neo-liberal spatial governance. While neo-liberalism extends and deepens inequalities and feminism seeks to eradicate them, there are aspects of feminist ideas which have been taken up by neo-liberalism. This article critically examines three examples of co-option, highlighting economic growth and empowerment, the recognition of diversity and 'New Everyday Life'. The article concludes by outlining some radical changes the UK would need to adopt to 'engender' spatial development.

Keywords: gender, spatial development, neo-liberalism, planning, feminism

Introduction

This article addresses the extent to which urban planning in a period of neo-liberalism has absorbed and co-opted key feminist ideas, thereby diminishing their transformative potential. The context which prompted this account was a frustration with the limitations which neo-liberalism as a political philosophy and political project (Adkins, 2018) places on the advance of the feminist cause in urban planning (Huning, 2020; Peake and Rieker, 2013), despite increasing interest in theory, legislation and practice (Sanchez de Madariaga and Neumann, 2016; 2020). Demonstrably, advances in UK gender policy and practice in planning have been limited (Divine and Biquelet-Locke, 2021; Greed, 2005, 2006; Burgess, 2008).

The intention is to make an argument for feminist urban planning in the UK to have a deeper engagement with ideas from the socialist feminist tradition as expounded by leading political thinkers such as Nancy Fraser (2020). The article extends the arguments of feminist scholars in politics, geography and cultural studies (Prügl, 2015; Brown, 2015; Eisenstein, 2017), who have critically examined the alignment of neo-liberal and feminist ideas, into the field of planning.

The commentary has not resulted in a simple account, but has noted contradictory elements. It has had to move from the high-level abstractions of political economy and discourse to planning as a practical field of intervention and to make conceptual interpretations and extrapolations in the process. The study has not been advanced

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in the positivist tradition, nor is it a report of empirical research, but has combined reflection with practical examples and models.

The article has been structured into seven sections. The first discusses neo-liberalism and feminism as meta-narratives and their points of intersection as outlined in recent feminist research. The second section explains how the concepts of a neo-liberal feminism have been interpreted into three categories relevant to planning. The rationale for the selection of empowerment and economic growth, diversity and 'the New Everyday Life' as topics is set out. This section also explains the limitations of the study in terms of evidence and scope. The third section briefly sets out the 'parallel paths' of the incursion of neo-liberalism into planning systems and the adoption of gender equality legislation in the UK. The fourth, fifth and sixth sections consider economic growth, diversity and the city of everyday life in more depth. The seventh section provides some suggestions for how the planning system in England and Wales might be reformed to enable a deeper engagement with the project to achieve gender equality.

Neo-liberalism, liberal feminism and neo-liberal feminism

Neo-liberal policies favour entrepreneurialism and the logic of the market over the caring functions of the state, prizing economic growth and the responsibility of individuals for their own welfare (Peck, 2012). Proponents of neo-liberal economics argue for the outsourcing of state functions to the private sector, for a reduction in public expenditure and for attacks on workers' rights (Harvey, 2007). Urban theorists argue that neo-liberalism is not a twenty-first-century version of nineteenth-century capitalism, but represents a qualitatively different era (Peck and Tickell, 2002; Peck, 2017). While both *laissez-faire* capitalism and neo-liberalism argue for a shrinking of state intervention as a whole, neo-liberalism recognises that some state intervention is necessary to facilitate competition and economic growth. Purcell (2009) argues that neo-liberalisation incorporates both a retreat from and an incorporation of the state, identifying measures such as the provision of an 'efficient infrastructure' as part of the process of 'aidez-faire'; that is, helping capitalism to flourish. Furthermore, in social democracies government has to gain legitimacy for its policies and its ideology has to be accepted by its citizens for the system as a whole to function (Peck and Tickell, 2002; Spencer, 2016).

Feminism offers an apparent opposition to neo-liberalism in its demands for a transformation of gender relations with an outcome of equality (Aruzza et al., 2019). Feminist political theorists such as Rottenberg (2014) argue that feminism has been eviscerated of its radical content by neo-liberalism. As a political project, feminism is not a homogeneous movement or ideology and there are many variations in its interpretation (see, for example, Banet-Weiser et al., 2019). In a liberal democracy

the abstract ideals of equality, freedom and social justice can contain the ideals of the women's movement for liberation (Brown, 2015). But as an expanding seam of feminist scholarship has argued (Fraser, 2020; Rottenberg, 2014; Nygren et al., 2018), such liberal feminism can morph into a 'neo-liberal feminism'.

Neo-liberal norms demand the 'responsibilisation' of the individual as a self-provider and self-investor. This line of thinking finds a congruence with the feminist objective of women's empowerment through financial independence. Hence individual women are feted for their achievements and success, regarded as evidence of society's transition towards equality with men (Eisenstein, 2017). Critics of this form of 'neo-liberal feminist subjectivity' have demonstrated that it reinforces social class inequalities between white middle-class educated women and those who are regarded as 'other', for example migrant women and single mothers (Kern, 2020; Dabrowski, 2021; Listerborn, 2017).

The processes by which neo-liberal ideas are absorbed into society are complex, but the incorporation of apparently contradictory ideas, such as empowering communities (Hall, 2011), form part of the picture. With regard to feminism, this contradiction is exemplified by neo-liberalism's absorption of identity politics, to the extent that attitudes opposing, say, sexual harassment or racial discrimination have now become mainstream, even though the reality of both still exists and many effective actions remain to be taken. Fraser (2020) argues that this is because the politics of 'recognition', while important in giving credibility and space to the voices of marginalised groups (Fincher and Iveson, 2008), has become divorced from the politics of redistribution. Her argument, as a political and philosophical theorist, is that neo-liberal governance can afford to invest in female-targeted projects, such as microfinance in the global South or the support of a cadre of gender experts in the global North, because the underlying issues of inequality and oppression either are not being addressed or are being made even worse.

This is not to suggest that only a completely state-financed style of feminist projects is progressive, but as Kantola and Squires (2012) comment, in the neo-liberal-inspired move from a 'state feminism' to a 'market feminism', priority is given to projects that resonate with free-market agendas. Added to this is the extensive feminist critique of paternalistic features within the welfare state, leading to Walby's (1990) analysis that a 'private patriarchy' within the family has moved towards a 'public patriarchy' within institutions. A critique of state provisions and a tendency towards anti-authoritarianism are shared by both feminism and neo-liberalism (Fraser, 2020).

Having noted the alignment between the feminist goals of empowerment through financial independence, the complexities of recognising the voices of women and other marginalised groups in society, and the contradictory role of the state in its interaction with market economics, it is important to highlight the oppositional trajectories of neo-liberalism and feminism. These are set out in Figure 1. These can

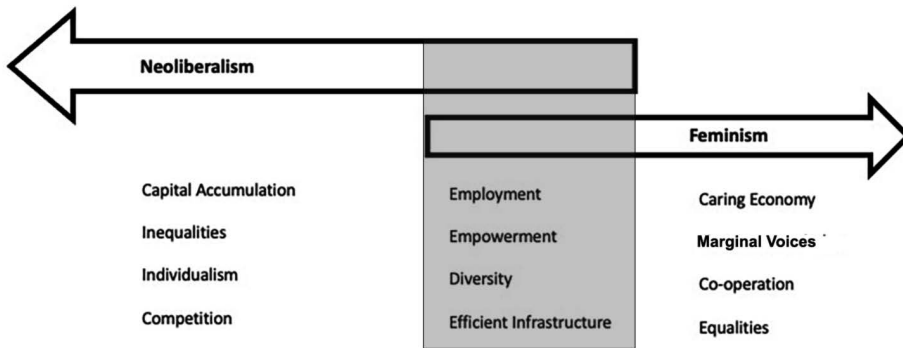


Figure 1 Neo-liberalism and feminism: co-option and oppositions

be summarised as the oppositions between competition and cooperation, between individualism and collectivism and between the accumulation of wealth for individuals and social provision.

Planning, neo-liberalism and feminism

Fraser (2020) has provided the most comprehensive and authoritative account of the convergence between neo-liberalism and feminism, and her analysis, as discussed above, offered a useful starting point for this exploration into urban planning. The three issues highlighted above – individual economic responsabilisation, the divorce of a politics of identity from a politics of redistribution, and an ambivalent attitude to the welfare state – were extrapolated into the field of statutory planning in the following ways. The goal of facilitating female entry into the waged labour force through attracting employment and inward investment is a key feature of the tilt towards neo-liberal planning policy, and in this sense Fraser's critique proved capable of a direct translation into a commentary on neo-liberal planning. This issue is explored further in this article in the section on empowerment and economic growth.

While subjective issues of identity might seem to lie outside formal planning systems, 'gender-sensitive' planning takes on the issue of the recognition of difference between groups in the population. Huning et al. (2019, 14) define gender-sensitive planning as focusing

on women and men and their relations as well as gender-specific roles and stereotypes. It values spatial realities according to their qualities for (gendered) everyday life and includes age, period of life and social background. In this way it comes close to the concepts of gender+ ... gender planning is transformative in that it aims to change

unequal power relations and the planning concepts and instruments which underpin these.¹

In the UK ‘diversity’ and the recognition of the needs of different demographics have been incorporated into planning, mainly through a mechanism of statutory consultation and impact assessments in plan making in order to evaluate projects at the inception phase. This method of mainstreaming gender issues into the UK’s planning system has been criticised very ably by others (Greed, 2005; Reeves, 2005; Burgess, 2008). Rather than repeat the same exercise, the argument extends Fraser’s point about how foregrounding a recognition of difference can mask ‘structural’ societal inequalities in gender relations, which Fraser (2020, 306) characterises as inherent within the systemic injustice of contemporary capitalism. Furthermore, in the context of austerity, neo-liberal norms are frequently portrayed as rational ‘common sense’ (Griffin, 2015) to legitimise austerity measures and to silence opposition, including women’s authentic voices of dissent. These ideas are elaborated further in the section on diversity.

The second wave of feminism – that is, the feminism of the 1960s and 1970s – stimulated a model developed by a consortium of European feminist planning academics, dubbed variously the ‘New Everyday Life’ or ‘Everyday Routines’ (Gilroy and Booth, 1999; Horelli et al., 2000; Tummers and Wankiewicz, 2020). This concept grew out of time–space geography with its focus on ‘daily routines’. The objective was to create sociocultural and material conditions to support of the complexity of contemporary life so that the goals of gender equality could be achieved within the socio-physical space of the city. The section ‘New Everyday Life’ explores how the concept can become aligned to neo-liberal planning objectives, providing an example of Purcell’s ‘efficient infrastructure’ for capital accumulation. Furthermore, as the impacts of globalisation have deepened in the two decades since the formulation of the the ‘New Everyday Life’ model, the concept of neighbourhood planning around ‘everyday routines’ has come under increasing strain through the pressures of migration and population flows.

Neo-liberalism and feminism are ideological constructs that are not limited to national states (Brenner et al., 2010). Confining a discussion to the UK and Europe can be criticised for reproducing the colonial dominance which has been a factor in the oppression of women in the global South. Furthermore, migration and supply chains extend across continents and the deep inequalities exacerbated by neo-liberalism are not restricted to particular countries or regions (Peake and Rieker, 2013). Speak and Kumar (2017) provide eloquent evidence for the specificity of the global South, where the drive for economic growth overwhelmingly overrides gender justice, particularly

1 Gender plus in this context refers to the fluidity of gender definitions to include lesbian, gay, queer and transsexual and its intersections with age, ethnicity and dis/ability.

with regard to land and property rights. Even within Western Europe, with its tradition of social welfare and social democracy, there are considerable differences between the gendered content of each nation state's planning systems (see Zibell et al., 2019, 39–57 for an analysis). For these reasons, the article has concentrated detailed attention on the experience of neo-liberalism and feminism in the UK. But because feminist research in the UK has been extremely limited in the past two decades, the article has had to draw on examples of empirical research and scholarship from Europe, where there have been some examples of the successful integration of gender sensitivity into planning, to illustrate the argument.

The article starts with a discussion of the British context and ends with some thoughts as to how the project of engendering planning in England and Wales could proceed. Some areas of planning practice that have been the subject of feminist and LGBTQ commentary are briefly referred to, but have not been examined in depth for lack of space. These include gender mainstreaming (Bacchi and Evelyne, 2010), consultation and participation in the planning process (Horelli, 2017), planning cultures (Doan, 2011), implementation (Jarvis, 2009; Greed, 2019), and leadership and education (Roberts, 2013).

Parallel paths: neo-liberal spatial governance and gender equality legislation

The UK began its movement away from a planning system based on liberal ideals of social welfare towards a form of neo-liberal spatial governance (Allmendinger, 2016) in the 1980s.

The Thatcherite Conservative government promised a 'bonfire of regulations' and tilted the planning system towards private development, with the exception of conservation areas which had stricter controls. This was challenged a decade later by a movement to end the regime of 'private affluence and public squalor' (Tibbalds, 2012). The subsequent New Labour government took a different turn, introducing a 'softer' form of land and property development. Its policy of spatial planning reintroduced social issues into the planning system, but the underlying model was of facilitating economic growth and diverting some of profits back into localities. Legitimacy was sought through consultation and the introduction of public-private partnerships, with a plethora of initiatives and programmes aiming to achieve a consensus between the balance-sheet-driven priorities of the development industry and the social and environmental interests of neighbourhoods (Imrie and Raco, 2003; Tallon, 2013). Initially this model provided benefits for London and the provincial cities which could attract inward investment, since it afforded a degree of certainty and coordination (Roberts, 2017). Areas of Britain struggling to recover from deindustrialisation were, however, disadvantaged.

Since legitimacy involved consultation, raising expectations and producing delays, fundamental tensions could not be resolved (Baeten, 2017). Local communities were presented with voluminous planning documents espousing vague and abstract principles and objectives but left bewildered as to what this actually meant in terms of practical outcomes (Heykoop and Rutte, 2019). This confusion was exacerbated by subsequent governments, who stripped out the ability of local planning authorities to realise social objectives, such as providing social housing or public infrastructure to meet need. Instead the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was introduced in 2012 (MHCLG, 2012, revised 2019), which prioritised economic growth. Consultation could not make up for the power imbalance between citizens and private property (Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 2002). This, combined with substantial cuts in local-authority expenditure, the abolition of newly emergent regional bodies and the more progressive of the arrangements for partnership, fundamentally ‘hollowed out’ the planning system (Raynsford, 2018).

The Treaty of Amsterdam (European Union, 1997) set the framework for gender mainstreaming in public policy for all the states in the European Union. The Gender Equality Act (HM Government, 2007) reached the UK’s statute book a year before the global financial crisis and the period of financial austerity that followed. In 2010, the Gender Equality Act was subsumed in a wider reaching Equality Act (HM Government, 2010), which included other parameters of discrimination as well as gender, all categorised as ‘protected characteristics’. These are identified as age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Under this Act, a public-sector equality duty directs organisations in the public sector to have ‘due regard’ to eliminating discrimination, ‘advancing equality of opportunity’ and ‘fostering good relations between people in carrying out their activities’ (Government Equalities Office, 2011). Local planning authorities throughout the UK have an obligation to conform to this duty in relation to groups with ‘protected characteristics’, frequently referred to as ‘minorities’ even though women and girls make up slightly over half the population (Clarke, 2021). Section 1 of the Equality Act, which refers to socio-economic inequality, has never been implemented in England and Wales (UK Parliament, 2019).

Empowerment and economic growth

While neo-liberal planning policies prioritising economic growth benefit certain groups of women by encouraging full employment, these benefits are not shared equally. The feminisation of the UK’s labour force, at 72 per cent (ONS 2021) masks a 13.9 per cent gender pay gap between men and women in full-time work and an aggregate figure covering all employment of 18.1 per cent, which has persisted for approximately two decades (Breach and Li, 2017, 4). This is reinforced by the ‘horizontal’ segregation

of the labour force into higher-paid and lower-paid jobs so that, for example, jobs in the personal-services sector (e.g. nursery assistants, hairdressers) are 84 per cent female (Bosworth, 2015, 23). Women make up 60 per cent of the employees on low pay and 73 per cent of part-time employees (Reis, 2018, 5). While advances have been made in narrowing the gender pay gap for the under-forties, the impact for women of taking time out of the waged labour force for caring duties results in a gap at pensionable age of almost 40 per cent (Rahman, 2019).

Caring duties are not shared equally within households. A gendered division of labour persists and is still stark in terms of childcare and housework. A central government report headlined ‘women shoulder the burden of unpaid work’ (ONS, 2016), found that women were doing 26 hours of domestic work and childcare compared to men’s 16 hours. A European-wide survey found that 85 per cent of women and 49 per cent of men do cooking or housework on a daily basis in the UK (Eurostat, 2019, s.3.4). Although this issue might seem indeed to be a facet of ‘individual responsabilisation’ (Brown, 2015), there is some evidence that urban planning can facilitate gender equality in dual-earner householders. Sakizhoglu’s (2018) literature review of the gendered relations amongst gentrifiers found that the institutional and spatial contexts of particular cities are important for enabling and sustaining more egalitarian relationships between heterosexual couples. Physical features such as the availability of childcare facilities, the scale of the city and the duration and mode of commuting are critical factors in affecting how gender relations are remade during parenthood in different cities. Nevertheless, in an empirical study Berg (2013) noted that Rotterdam’s policy to become a child-friendly city encouraged the merging of smaller apartments and the construction of larger family houses, which only dual-earning, middle-income families could afford. The benefits of the policy were not equally shared, as the ensuing rise in property prices disadvantaged lower-income households.

Neo-liberal policies of city boosterism, encouraging trends for cities to establish themselves as centres for consumption, provides a key tool for planning policy in the aggressive post-crisis competition between cities (Griffin, 2015; Sager, 2011). An example of the legitimacy sought from the feminist ideal of financial independence can be found in the expansion of nightlife in the UK. A handful of corporate-hospitality companies created branded chains of venues designed to specifically attract women (Eldridge and Roberts, 2013). The capacity to create these has been severely constrained by the requirements of an investment market and property sector requiring high returns, in a business environment favouring high-volume alcohol sales (Hadfield, 2006). This is not to suggest that the expansion of nightlife has been without benefits for gender and gender-plus equality. Surveys of night-time visitors to city centres report a substantial female presence combined with new opportunities for employment (see, for example, GLA Economics, 2018). Although struggling, many

gay and lesbian hospitality, entertainment and cultural venues managed to remain in business, pre-COVID (Campkin and Marshall, 2017).

Neo-liberal political philosophy encouraged the expansion of public–private forms of governance into planning (Allmendinger, 2016). The language of empowerment may be deployed for projects targeted at women, but as Prügl (2015) argues, within these schemes there are opportunities for feminist solidarity and oppositions to the status quo. McRobbie (2013) offered a detailed case study from Berlin, reporting how a cooperation between planners and young female entrepreneurs facilitated the expansion of an alternative small-scale fashion industry. The characteristics of their work included the formation of cooperatives and collaborative working, as well as a willingness to integrate the work of migrant women in the craft aspects of production.

Even the ambiguous benefits derived from public–private partnership interventions have been undermined by reductions in public spending. For example, the Women’s Design Service, which provided action research, including consultation on regeneration, was forced to close down because funding from local councils dried up (Berglund, 2013). Quantitative research on regeneration has not been able to capture the gendered impacts of area-based initiatives (ABIs), with the exception of the impacts on mental health, noted as slightly more positive for women than for men (Mohan et al., 2020).

The impacts for women of cuts in local government expenditure have been severe. ‘Precarity’ and actual destitution have reappeared in the UK, affecting 1.5 million people (Fitzpatrick et al., 2018; Wyporska, 2018). The Women’s Budget Group (2018, 5) note that between 2010–2011 and 2016–2017 there has been a 48 per cent drop in the number of local-authority-subsidised bus services and more than 10 per cent of libraries have closed. Since 2014, 1,000 early-years parent-and-child (Sure Start) centres, almost 350 playgrounds and 159 community centres have closed; £42 million has been cut from parks and open-spaces expenditure; and there were one million fewer streetlights. These cuts have a greater impact on women because women remain primary carers for young children, form the majority of bus users and are more fearful of going out at night. The cuts have had a racial dimension, in a 17 per cent drop in living standards for the poorest households between 2010 and 2017, with lone mothers and Black and Asian households the most severely affected (Women’s Budget Group, 2018).

Diversity

Because women are not a homogeneous group and planners have to take account of other ‘protected characteristics’, as identified in the Equality Act 2010, attempts to track gender across these markers of difference causes problems. Fraser’s (2020) argument about integrating and balancing redistribution, recognition and representation is

relevant to this issue. This is not to say that the recognition of different ‘voices’ and lived experiences should be disregarded, since such interventions provide an opportunity for planners and politicians to resist the imposition of the primacy of economic development over other values (Sandercock and Forsyth, 1996).

To elaborate these points, Jupp (2014, 1318) comments, ‘the ambivalences and complexities of contemporary gender analysis can seem paralysing, in particular around the differentiated nature of gendered identities’. Greed (2005) also criticises the uncritical adoption of diversity by planning authorities and its masking of the structural differentiation of gender. In a further illustration, Beebeejaun (2017b, 324) comments that the 2016 iteration of the London Plan, produced under the leadership of Tory London mayor Boris Johnson, ‘contains language that is deliberately vague, discussing inclusivity, access and safety in largely abstract terms’, while recommending that the city takes gender and other forms of difference into account, but providing no examples of how to do this.

The move to charting features of difference and searching for adverse impacts leads to documentation of overwhelming complexity for local planning authorities. For example, an integrated impact assessment, which was prepared for the 2018 London Plan, covers inequalities in policies as they might affect ‘protected’ groups and environmental and health impacts too, and has over 100 pages of policy analysis organised into tables graded into a ‘traffic light system’ (ARUP, 2017). This complex document, with its grids and voluminous notes for each page, obscures the brutality of economic inequalities with regard to gender. Women and disabled people and people of colour experience the highest poverty rates (Rahman, 2019).

Grappling with the concepts of identity can have a more positive aspect, by shifting attention from bodily characteristics to gendered practices and gendered power relations. Identities are constructed within and between groups and dominant groups skew what is regarded as legitimate knowledge within planning discourse. Sandercock and Forsyth (1996) and Peake (2016) argue for the validity of a different way of knowing, constructing knowledge from the bottom up and situating it in the specific geographical and historical contexts within which it is produced. Beebeejaun (2017a) provides a case study in challenging elite narratives of group identity, bringing the construction of knowledge into focus in her study of an inquiry into a site for extracting shale gas by fracking in a particular site in the UK. The case study was of the resistance mounted to fracking by community groups. She discussed how the community groups, who were dominated by women, drew on traditional feminine tropes of mothers wanting the best for their children, of caring, and how this came into conflict with the scientific rationales of the oil companies. The oil and gas companies were able to represent community groups’ views as irrational, even neurotic, by calling on a ‘superior’ and masculinist discourse of scientific reason. Further examples of groups putting forward their own ‘story’, that intertwine gender and class, are

found in activist groups such as Focus E15, started by low-income mothers, who first campaigned in 2014–2015 to stop the demolition of their council housing estate in east London by arguing for ‘social housing not social cleansing’ (Hardy and Gillespie, 2016). This campaign continued into 2020, after rehousing, and expanded to include actions against poor housing conditions within the adjacent area.

The ‘New Everyday Life’

To date, the city of Vienna has been held to be the most advanced with regard to gender mainstreaming and is cited as a model for others to follow (Reeves et al., 2012). Austria’s federal system and Vienna’s position as the country’s capital means that gender mainstreaming can be embedded at all spatial scales in the city (Damyanovic et al., 2013). The underlying model is that of the ‘New Everyday Life’. The example of Vienna has done much to advance the cause of gender-sensitive planning and has received late recognition in the UK (Palit, 2020; Divine and Biquelet-Locke, 2021). However, subsequent developments in urbanism have led to a critical reappraisal of some of its key elements. To explain, Table 1 shows attributes that are features of the New Everyday Life criteria for planning neighbourhoods and districts (Reinwald et al., 2019).

Table 1 Key attributes of gender-sensitive planning for neighbourhoods and districts

Mix of uses	Mix of residential buildings, workplaces, shopping and leisure facilities
Mix of housing	Provision of a wide range of housing types and tenures
Access to employment	Ease of access to employment for all genders, with regard to both range of employment opportunities and transport links
High-quality public and green spaces	Adequate private and communal open spaces for everyday tasks, children’s play and leisure, differentiated functions of various open space types (e.g. open/green spaces near the home, streetscapes or parks and squares) ranging from totally private to totally public
Essential everyday life and social service infrastructure	Systematic planning and inclusion of social infrastructure facilities for all population groups, high-quality planning for kindergartens and schools with respect to their location, availability of easily reachable basic shopping outlets and service providers in the immediate vicinity of housing
City of short travel distances	Environmentally friendly public transport infrastructure – tightly knit route network especially for pedestrians and cyclists, orientation of development towards public-transport stops, quality of streetscape
Safe and barrier-free city	Effective and clear-cut spatial orientation and social control – in the neighbourhood, use of street level/ground floor, support of good neighbourly relations by e. g. neighbourhood management
Representation and participation	In planning and decision-making processes

Source: Adapted from Reinwald et al. (2019, 117)

Sixty pilot projects for gender mainstreaming and the experience of their implementation and evaluation helped to inform a design and planning manual codified from these experiences (Damyanovic et al., 2013). Gender mainstreaming continues in the new urban extension to Vienna, Aspern Seestadt. The commitment of the city council is demonstrated by the methodology employed in its gender-mainstreaming activities. This is resource-intensive as it involves socio-spatial surveys of need and post-evaluation surveys of use, as well as detailed design reviews, including gender experts, at all stages of proposals.

It is important to recognise the radical change underlying the New Everyday Life proposal. At its heart lies a refusal to accept the ‘financialisation’ and commodification of neo-liberal economics, which places the demands of financial institutions as the marker of wealth. In foregrounding the importance of the unpaid work of care and the need for planning and urban design to facilitate a high standard of living that values the contributions of all groups in society, New Everyday Life poses a transformative challenge. There is an ambivalence, though, in that the model both challenges and may be co-opted by neo-liberalism.

Examples of how the New Everyday Life model can be co-opted to neo-liberal economic ends are illustrated by the trajectory of its closest equivalents in ‘micro-rayons’ or microdistricts in the former USSR. The ‘microrayon’ was intended to be a relatively self-contained neighbourhood organised around a physical infrastructure that provided for employment and most everyday social needs. Zarecor (2018) argues that the strength of this model of urbanism, characterised as a ‘socialist scaffold’, was that these cities were able to repurpose themselves when the Soviet Union collapsed, replacing steel mills and industry with shopping centres, office towers, light industry and research centres. Purcell’s (2009) concept of ‘aidez-faire’ in neo-liberalism was exemplified by the ‘socialist scaffold’. In a similar vein, an empirical study of the transition from communism to capitalism in the former Yugoslavia provides another illustration of how an efficient infrastructure can aid private capital yet decrease gender justice. Pajvancic-Cizelj and Hjuson (2018) noted that prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall cities encouraged gender equality and recognised the ‘double burden’ at a time when it was not recognised in Western Europe, with kindergartens, nurseries, breastfeeding facilities within factories, workers’ restaurants, babysitting arrangements and financial support to working mothers. After the fall of communism, the drive for neo-liberal growth in major cities led to a transition from an industrial to a post-industrial society and women lost out in factory work and social care. A feminisation of poverty resulted as women were less represented in the new digital technologies and financial services.

The threats posed by neo-liberalism led Tummers et al. (2019, 79) to contend that ‘social conditions in Europe have evolved and, in many places dramatically degraded

as a consequence of the neo-liberal policies of the twenty first century'. They suggest the New Everyday Life's concentration on the proximity of employment, services and facilities at the neighbourhood scale is outdated because of the reach of transport systems and new technologies, which disrupt a neighbourhood approach to transforming gender relations. Other major changes, such as global flows of migration, destabilise a concept of an established life, which can then be characterised by planners in the identification of 'everyday routines'. Vaiou and Lykogianni's (2006) empirical study of two neighbourhoods in Athens provides evidence about the limitations of focusing on the scale of the neighbourhood and on 'everyday routines' in an effort to transform gender relations. They found that migrant women were forced to travel far outside their neighbourhood to find domestic work and their relative economic independence could provoke tensions with their husbands. Ortiz Escalante's (2017) action research in Barcelona with female care givers who work at night exposed their concerns about harassment and risk as they travelled to and from their jobs.

The impacts of the footloose nature of capital, immigration and heightened mobility have led to attention turning to the regional scale. The clearest example of a regional planning policy that directly targets gender issues comes from the Basque Country's Regional Plan (DOT) in Spain. Sanchez de Madariaga and Novella Abril (2019) describe how this plan highlights four areas of action in which gender issues are particularly relevant. These are urban environment and land use planning, sustainable mobility, the rural environment and governance. These action areas call on different tiers of governance within the region to implement a variety of measures. These include, for example, exposing gender differences through reviewing transport statistics, creating funds for pilot projects, producing guidance and recommendations from a gender perspective for urban development and urban renewal, and boosting the involvement of women in governance.

The overall conclusion from this commentary is that for gender-sensitive planning to become a reality, a challenge has to be made to repurpose the objectives of government towards redistribution and the valuing of the caring functions of society, from unpaid work within the home to collectively provided social-welfare institutions and organisations. In a UK context this suggests it would be worthwhile to overhaul and remodel the entire system.

'Engendering planning' after neo-liberalism

This section sets out some initial ideas for the reform of the planning system in England and Wales, to revisit the transformative elements of gender mainstreaming while recognising its potential for co-option. In the tradition of the UK planning system, principles need to be set out at a national level in order for their implementation to be embedded at a more local geographical scale and political level. This means

that in the existing system a firm commitment to gender-plus equality would have to be explicitly written into the National Planning Policy Framework. However, this commitment would be of little value, unless substantial investment were simultaneously to be made into social-welfare and infrastructure provision and their delivery significantly reformed to be more accountable (Reinwald et al., 2019). In tandem with these changes, structural legislative changes would need to be made to intervene in land and property markets to reduce speculation, to enable public authorities to buy land at a reasonable price (Monbiot, 2019). Major transformational changes will need to be made to the balance of power between public and private sectors to relieve the current housing crisis (Bowie, 2017).

The political will to make changes at the national level is crucial, but as has been discussed above, planning at a regional scale can make a substantial difference. In the UK these decisions could include the locations of major land uses as well as integrating transport and land use planning. A regional authority could be given the powers to designate a hierarchy of urban centres and integrate transport provision. For example, the greatest employers of women are currently health and social care and the educational services (Devine et al., 2021). Integrating a mass public transport system with these major nodes of employment, such as hospitals, care homes and schools, would have the benefit of reducing the need to rely on the private car as well as helping to balance the requirements of waged employment and caring responsibilities. Regional authorities have the capability of gathering a meaningful database and hosting monitoring and research departments. Resource-intensive activities such as gender auditing and gender budgeting become possible. The evaluation of initiatives, from the redesign of public space to measures to improve access to employment, could come under this remit. Fine-grained data could be used to enable 'levelling up' between different social groups, balancing an intersectional approach to inequalities as well as recognising major differences between the two majority genders (Wankeiwicz, 2013).

Research to support gender mainstreaming in planning has been most clearly articulated at the scale of the neighbourhood (Jupp, 2014; Tummers and Wankiewicz, 2020; Sturm et al., 2019). While, as noted, this can be criticised and cuts in social infrastructure have put up barriers to its successful implementation, many of the policies and procedures are still relevant. For example, much effort has been made with regard to consultation with women's groups and different demographics (Berglund, 2013; Ortiz Escalante and Gutierrez Valdivia, 2015). While there are many criticisms of consultation on planning issues, strengthening democracy at the scale of local government and neighbourhood is also desirable. A well-resourced consultation and participative democratic process can capture the experience of different social groups (Casanovas et al., n.d.) rather than relying on the experiences of white able-bodied professionals.

Fraser's (2020) critique of the feminist co-option of neo-liberal ideology included challenging the creation of 'gender experts' over political activism. This debate does not really apply to the UK, where gender expertise in planning and urban design is limited to academic texts and individuals and there is no convincing cadre of 'gender experts' engaged in practical planning. Planning and urban design do involve technicalities and, as Allmendinger (2016) points out, trade-offs between different possibilities. For example, widening pavements, which Vienna City Council implemented in the Mariahilfe district to help elderly citizens, the majority of whom were women, get about, means that road space for vehicles is decreased. Such choices are not to be denied, for as the political philosopher Moufffe (2013) argues, rather than seeking consensus, citizens need to be offered alternatives in a flourishing, pluralist democracy. Given the complexity of these choices, there is a strong case for developing specific gender-plus expertise to assist local groups and local politicians at neighbourhood level as well as officials and politicians at regional and national levels.

Concluding comments

While neo-liberalism claims a strong set of ideas, it does not yet comprise a hegemony and undergoes reversals and contestation. Furthermore, as this particular form of capitalism has evolved in the UK over four decades, government has been able to draw on objectives and ideas which might seem to be in opposition. Feminist political scientists have examined these points of co-option in detail, mainly in the context of the USA (Eisenstein, 2017). This article has drawn on those analyses and extended them into observations on the UK planning system, gathered into three topics. The contradictory nature of neo-liberalism as a philosophy has been illustrated, for policies included potentially transformative elements, yet simultaneously deepened divisions.

This study faced limitations in tackling a broad subject area. Owing to a lack of research on gender issues in spatial development in the UK, it had to place reliance on other secondary sources. While this had obvious disbenefits, one bonus was that within the planning discipline, a body of work is emerging from the 'socialist societies' of the former Eastern bloc. Their transition from communism to capitalism provides insight into how 'an efficient infrastructure' can be repurposed to a different set of ideological objectives. The prime example of gender mainstreaming, Vienna, offered an exemplar within the framework of European social democracy, albeit one which has also had to bend to the demands of resource constraints and competition (City of Vienna, 2014).

The arguments of this article have amplified the contention that incremental change will not be sufficient to tackle structural inequalities. This article ended with suggestions for developing gender sensitivity in the UK's planning system, with the caveat that many fundamentals about public investment and the regulation of the

land and property markets had to change too. The article argued for gender sensitivity to be explicitly incorporated within the UK government's national policies. A major change proposed, which revisits previous feminist research (Reeves, 2002), is to shift the focus of research and intervention from the neighbourhood scale to the region. This shift in emphasis was based on the findings of research and scholarship from Europe. More empirical research is needed on how effective regional intervention can be.

While the investigation focused on the political underpinning of urban planning, an emergent argument is that the impacts of globalisation, migration and increases in inequalities have led to complexity in terms of pursuing the principles of defining a good quality of life in a society that places care before economic growth. It has therefore made the case for gender experts to advise civil society on the difficult choices which are implicit in planning practice. These choices point to the need for a renewal of feminist empirical research within the UK, with many aspects of planning and urban design as its focus.

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