

# A Review on Desirable Urban Landscape for Women in Iran

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## Abstract

Regarding the increasing presence of women in the community as a result of higher education developments, urban spaces have become more feminine and the significant influence of women in urban spaces and landscape is rapidly increasing following the impacts of lifestyle phenomenon, media and globalization. The increasing influence of women on urban spaces and landscapes intensifies the necessity of deep scrutiny. Recently, security is being considered as an important issue for women and women tend to be present at urban spaces more; however, all different types of space are not considered secured enough for women. The absence of women architects and urbanists in the professional community despite the large population of women graduate from Iranian universities accentuates the problem. This research seeks to understand whether urban spaces and landscapes can be regarded as feminine spaces. This paper a review research and the literature and the research problem are described by emphasis on library documentation research method.

**Keywords:** landscape, women, space desirability, feminine urban landscape, security

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## Problem Statement

The urban landscape is the art of integrating the visual and structural aspects of landscape to the buildings, streets and places that organize the city environment. The urban landscape is configured by space information received by the senses and recognized by the perception process through understanding the form, function, and space meaning. The urban landscape concept is perceived as an objective-subjective, human-physical and a social-spatial structure. The main types of urban landscape include wide landscapes, internal perspectives, urban landscapes and visual corridors.

The impact of urban landscape quality on the mental conditions of citizens is considered important since the urban built environment has turned into the living environment of citizens, and the composition of the urban environment is gradually and continuously affecting the human perception and behavior. According to sociologists, the urban environment and the provided social space are recognized as the basic human needs. Therefore, the urban landscape as an important part of human needs has become more substantial.

Focusing on women's perceptions and interests and studying women's psychology is of vital significance which has been forgotten in many cases. Studies show that women's mental and psychological needs in urban design are less regarded than that of men. Sociologists consider the lack of human aesthetics (security, affiliation, order, readability, etc.) in designing and constructing architectural spaces is the reason for the failure of urban spaces and people dissatisfaction. Therefore, the changing role of women in the family, which used to be a traditional role, and the increasing presence of women in society requires a new attitude in urban space and landscape design. Also, the crisis of community identity due to the discontinuity of generations, lifestyle changes, the consequences of globalization, and the effects of media and moderation, are considered the factors influencing the attitude of women towards aesthetic concepts that should be addressed.

Most of the architects and urban planners in the fields of urban architecture and urban settlements in general, and in the developing societies in particular, are male. The role of women as an effective issue in urban identity is disregarded in the physical structures of these societies. In the research conducted by Gholamreza Rezayi and Fatemeh Samipour, it is indicated that the role of female architects and urban designers in this practice is negligible despite the equal proportion of male and female graduates.

Considering the importance of this issue, the main purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of women and feminine approaches in urban landscape, and the social impacts of their presence in the city. This research will be investigated during contemporary era in Tehran, since the major social developments of Iran are shaped during the contemporary era, and the social outcomes are better manifested physically in Tehran and reflected in other cities of Iran.

Iranian women in the Middle East are among the female pioneers of participation in the society. The presence of women during the Constitutional Revolution and the establishment of the Women's Freedom Association in 1906, and their presence after the modernization policies during Reza Shah Period, indicates their active presence. The presence of women in various fields of the urban community has increased in the recent decades, especially after the Islamic Revolution. After the Islamic Revolution (1979), which was won by the extreme popular support of the community, the presence of women and girls of Iranian families was also increased in the society, especially in the scientific community. Another factor in the upsurge of female presence in the new generation is the termination of patriarchal structure and the effects of globalization and the transformation of the traditional family. Following the declining economic conditions resulted from the war and economic sanctions, the presence of women in the society increased due to the need for increasing economic activity in the middle-class households.

Despite the widespread presence of women in the community and the city, the urban space designed by men acts as an obstacle to the presence of women in urban space. In traditional societies, women participated in the society restrictedly. Nevertheless, following the transformation of traditional societies into modern societies, the presence of women was highlighted in social domains. However, the public spaces were not tailored to the increase of female presence. Today, women are increasingly experiencing constraints and inconsistencies in public places. The presence of women as users of public spaces is accentuated due to the fact that the expectations of the dominant culture as well as the characteristics of femininity lead women to normativity. Women have to change themselves in favor of the environment in order to be adapted, in this sense that they ignore their needs and expectations of the environment or leave the environment when their needs are not met (Kazemi, 49,1388).

According to the statistics of Ministry of Science, more than half of the graduates of architecture, urban planning and landscape architecture in Iran are women. However, they are less active in architecture and urban design profession. The current planners and designers are less concerned with the issues of women and there is no high representation of women in Iranian cities.

Gender as a social issue, influenced by the society's culture, varies from the term "sexual category", which is generally used to express the biological type of a being. In this paper, gender is the social function of a being in the society, which includes different gender identities and roles in different spaces.

The initial ideas of female gender and the city was raised since the Renaissance; however, it is observed that this issue is still debatable and women seek to promote their status as first-class citizens. The role of female gender based on her different needs and expectations leads to creation of an environment different from those created by males.

The history of architecture and urbanization, espe-

cially in modern era, has been planned and designed disregarding of gender differences. The "masculine" city, with its "arranged order", manifested in the glorious scale of towers, landscapes, and insolent industrial regions, has consistently been in confrontation with the "feminine" city with its "delightful turmoil" and its mysterious attractions. (Madani Pour, 2000, 126). In fact, cities are a product of masculine urban planning, and the modern urbanism is inherently paternalistic in nature and adheres to male values and norms.

This research explicitly seeks to identify and determine the factors affecting and shaping the feminine urban landscape in the ancient Iranian cities, and tends to recognize and assess the factors that shape this kind of landscape in Iran.

The feminine urban women in this study is the kind of landscape that has been influenced by the social presence of women. By understanding and reading this kind of landscape, the presence and influence of women in various layers of society will be understood. It refers to a landscape to which women feel belonged and comfortable.

The term "feminine urban landscape" and the qualities that make a space into a feminine space, can be well defined by the feminists' definitions from feminine art. The origins of distinctions between masculine and feminine art should be sought in the eighteenth-century thoughts. It was then that the concept of the art began to change from being a "skill" to the concept of "beauty", which resulted to separation of decorative arts from fine arts (Korsmeyer, 2008, 62). According to this definition, the women's artistic practices at home were excluded from fine arts and the history of the art became masculine. Edmund Burke's philosophical enquiry published in 1757 rejected beauty and confirmed the nobility of art. Female attributes (exiguity, elegance, delicacy, and finitude) described by Burke as beautiful attributes of object, which were distinguished from masculine traits (greatness, majesty, uncontrollability, and infinitude), initiated the distinction between feminine and masculine art (Moridi, Taghizadegan, 2009,

133).

In the 1970s, Lucy Leopard spoke of the quality that distinguished feminine art from masculine art; a type of art that is only attributed to women. In her opinion, women's painting has is focused in the center which is often empty. This center is circular-shaped or elliptical-shaped in most circumstances. In these paintings, the details are highly noticeable and lines are used extensively, forms and surfaces are very touchable and they are derived from the artist's personal view (Feshangchi, 2004, 297). Having changed their approach and left the passive state that tried to consolidate femininity in the 1980s, the feminists opposed to the masculine domination on the world of art and the women's limitations that prevented their presence (Korsmeyer, 2004).

Questioning the absence of women in the history of art actually criticized the educational, and cultural limitations on women that prevented their presence in the art world. Feminists believed that the compilation of the history and philosophy of art by men only considered the works in which men were skillful as the fine arts. They believed that this unequal judgment originated from the philosophy of art and aesthetics, and they decided to create their own aesthetics and forms independent of men. They shared women's experiences that offered a unique identity (Moridi, Taghizadegan, 2009, 136). The third approach, introduced in the 1990s, was the discovery of gender identity in women's artwork (Korsmeyer, 2008, 241). Removing the decisive gender boundaries and disrupting stereotypical patterns, along with discovering a set of female features and respecting these features such as sexual identity, is a major paradox that feminine art seeks to resolve (Atayi Ashtiyani, 2006, 66).

Today, urban spaces are considered as the main places for citizens' performance in the society, and half of the social activists in Iranian metropolises are women.

Since urban space plays a crucial role in the social role of women, we seek to find the indicators that determine urban landscape desirability as the spatial as-

pect of urban landscape according to women's needs and characteristics. According to the definitions, we may consider highly desirable urban landscapes as feminine urban landscapes. In the following, some solutions to improve the urban landscape desirability for women is discussed.

### Literature review

Gender and gender differences in urban spaces and territories of Europe was more discussed after the Industrial Revolution, and especially after the world war when massive groups of women started working in urban and social spaces. The role of gender and gender differences were more highlighted in 1980s with the advent of various social and cultural aspects in geographic and urban studies. This issue was accentuated with the introduction of Feminist Geography or Body Geography that was conducted and discussed in research and conferences such as conferences that discussed the role of women in various economic, social, cultural, and urban aspects; including OCDE Conference (1995), *Les Femmes et La Ville: logements, services et environnement urbain*, and academic research of Winchester, Hilary P. M (1992). Several journals, special, general and professional programs were also addressed to investigate the significance of women's role and the impact of their presence in the city through critical, analytical and statistical approaches. This issue has been emphasized since 1980s, and the presence of women in cities with titles such as "Women and the City", or "Gender Identity and Urban Spaces" are more discussed in spatial relations studies.

The founding of women's associations in Iran and studying the role of women and their social presence was debated before the Revolution. After the Islamic Revolution, the women's studies commenced at Iranian universities from 2000s, and systematic academic and purposeful studies were conducted in the field of women's studies. Although most of these studies cover sociological aspects, a few cases have also addressed the relationship between women and the city, including:

-A PhD thesis entitled “an analytical approach to gender and its impact on the quality of space” by Mehrvash Kazemi, in which gender-based public space has resulted in quality decline, ineffectiveness and undesirability of urban space that transforms public spaces into specific spaces.

-The research on “appropriate urban space for women” conducted by Azam Afsharinia and Mansoureh Dareštani, that investigates the relationship between women and community spaces, employment and transportation, with an emphasis on women’s security in urban areas. Their research findings shows that urban spaces are majorly done by men disregarding of women’s requirements in urban space.

-A research entitled “urban and architectural design according to women’s requirements” by Mehrnoosh Zoghi Tutakaboni that analyzes the psychological and sociological issues of women in contemporary urban and architectural spaces in a descriptive-analytical method. The researchers have ultimately provided some tips for designing a desirable urban physic for women.

-A study entitled “Investigating the role of urban landscape components in promoting the level of citizens’ security in public areas of Ahwaz city” by Nadia Daripour and Saeed Maleki. The research, conducted in the Golestan neighborhood of Ahwaz, shows that the residents evaluate the security level lower than the average level due to absence of some urban landscape features (such as sense of place, legibility, and general and visual perception). According to their studies, no research on urban landscapes and women are conducted in Iran which necessitates further studies in this area.

Moreover, the experts’ emphasis and the support of women’s deputies and women’s affairs, have offered the opportunity to hold conferences on women issues in Iran. In this regard, some of the conferences have focused on the presence and relationship of women and the city, including: the conference of “women and the city” held in University of Kurdistan in 2015.

## Goals

Main goal: Recognition of the feminine space characteristics and its innate aspects

Overall goal: Qualitative improvement of the landscape through the development of the humane and fair aspects

## Questions

-Is the definition of women’s urban landscape in Iran different from other definitions in the world?

-Are there any quantitative (or qualitative) factors determined to shape the women’s urban landscape in Iran?

-What are the characteristics of a desirable urban landscape in Iranian women fiction, and what domestic solutions and strategies can be proposed for making the urban landscapes more desirable for women according to the social and cultural structure of Iran?

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