

TODGE

THE FEMINIST CITY



CUSHMAN &
WAKEFIELD

INSIGHT. Spurred by the article-storm around International Women's Day we were curious to explore how we do good for women in public spaces and office environments. This topic is not

new. Ever since women entered the workforce in large numbers, research has shown that both public spaces and offices are designed using reference man, rather than reference woman.

THE

THE FEMINIST CITY

by

Claudia Vermeulen - *senior workplace strategy consultant*

Anouk Donkervoort - *senior strategy consultant sustainability*

Sophie Schuller - *lead scientific research and insights*

///

CONTEXT AND HISTORY

///

A vibrant, full-page photograph of two women laughing and holding beer at a festival. The woman on the left has dark hair, wears sunglasses, a black halter top, a long gold necklace with a circular pendant, and a teal skirt. She holds a beer glass with 'VEZA SUR' on it. The woman on the right has long brown hair, wears sunglasses and a light blue denim shirt, and holds a beer glass. They are in front of a colorful mural with abstract shapes and a string of colorful confetti. The word 'INTRODUCTION' is centered in white text.

INTRODUCTION

Spurred by the article-storm around International Women's Day we were curious to explore how we do good for women in public spaces and office environments. This topic is not new. Ever since women entered the workforce in large numbers, research has shown that both public spaces and offices are designed using reference man, rather than reference woman. Urban spaces are designed around traditionally male paid working patterns. While women or people taking on traditionally female unpaid tasks on top of a paid working day (grocery shopping, picking up kids from school, and dropping them at various activities) are struggling to make urban spaces work for them.

The article series the feminist city features a journey exploring how urban spaces generally and office buildings in particular can function better for women. The series of articles busies different perspectives of women in cities, and dives into how urban planning, urban governance and office design can better support women in their daily life. Within the series we focus on the Netherlands, so most examples and laws that are described originate in the Netherlands. Academic research used to compile this article mostly originates from Europe or the US.

This first article lays the foundation of the history of women in cities and the workplace. This foundational article is necessary because without understanding the history, we cannot define solutions. We take a historical perspective of women at work, and dive into who the Reference Woman is, how she lives and what her requirements are for the spaces around her.

In this article, feminism refers to the basis that all genders have equal rights and opportunities. We believe in respecting the rights, experiences, knowledge, and strengths of all groups whether they identify as women or other genders. With this article we would like to contribute to levelling the playing field between different genders. To do so we need to understand the intended and unintended consequences of centuries of inequality. Only by understanding these inequalities and why urban spaces and offices do not work for anyone besides reference man, we can endeavor to move towards a more equalized society.

/ / / / / / / /

Who is the reference woman?

As commonly happened in history (and in the bible), it started with the creation of a man. In the bible we called him Adam, but in science he is called the 'Reference Man'. He was created in 1975 by the Task Group on Reference Man. According to the Task Group, he was between the ages of 20-30, male, weighs 70kg, was 1,70 tall and Caucasian. The Task Force created Reference Man to assist in calculations of radiation safety, but his characteristics were later applied widely in a range of industries. He represents a 'normal' or 'average' person, and his influence was great: he was used as crash test dummy, to design office temperature requirements and participated in scientific research models of nutrition, pharmacology, population, and toxicology. Reference man was the standard for all humans, not just humans who looked like him but also the majority of humans that did not look like him. At the time this was largely disregarded by the research he helped to do.

From reference man came reference woman, as well as more research into non-white reference people. According to 1995 research, the reference woman is between the ages of 20-50, weighs 60 kg, is 1,63 tall and Caucasian. This data only skims the surface, as there are many well-documented differences between the physiology of men and women. Most jarring are the differences documented in medical sciences. Currently, medical science is still behind when it comes to women, as it assumed for a long time that men and women were equal, except for their sexual parts. This view is called the 'bikini-view': woman's body as a variation to men. Therefore, the reference man could be the standard human for such a long time: the physical differences between men and women were simply not recognized. We now know this to be untrue, but medicine has only started making headway into female research the last 30 years, but we still see an enormous discrepancy in our knowledge of these differences and the impacts. Emphasising the reference woman in real estate and urban planning is not only important for women but for every group that cannot identify itself with the reference men.

Hindsight provides clarity, and what this clarity tells us now is that reference man never really worked the way he was intended. It's a very small group that resembles this reference man, but many things in society are built using him as the default human. This does not work if you're not white, heavier, or smaller, or even if you have a different voice than the reference man (as voice-recognition software has been proven to respond better to male voices). Reference man provides an illusion of uniformity, while in reality we all differ from him. So how do we minimize his impact and make sure that our spaces work for everyone?

/ / / / / / / /



THE FEMINIST CITY

THE REFERENCE WOMAN

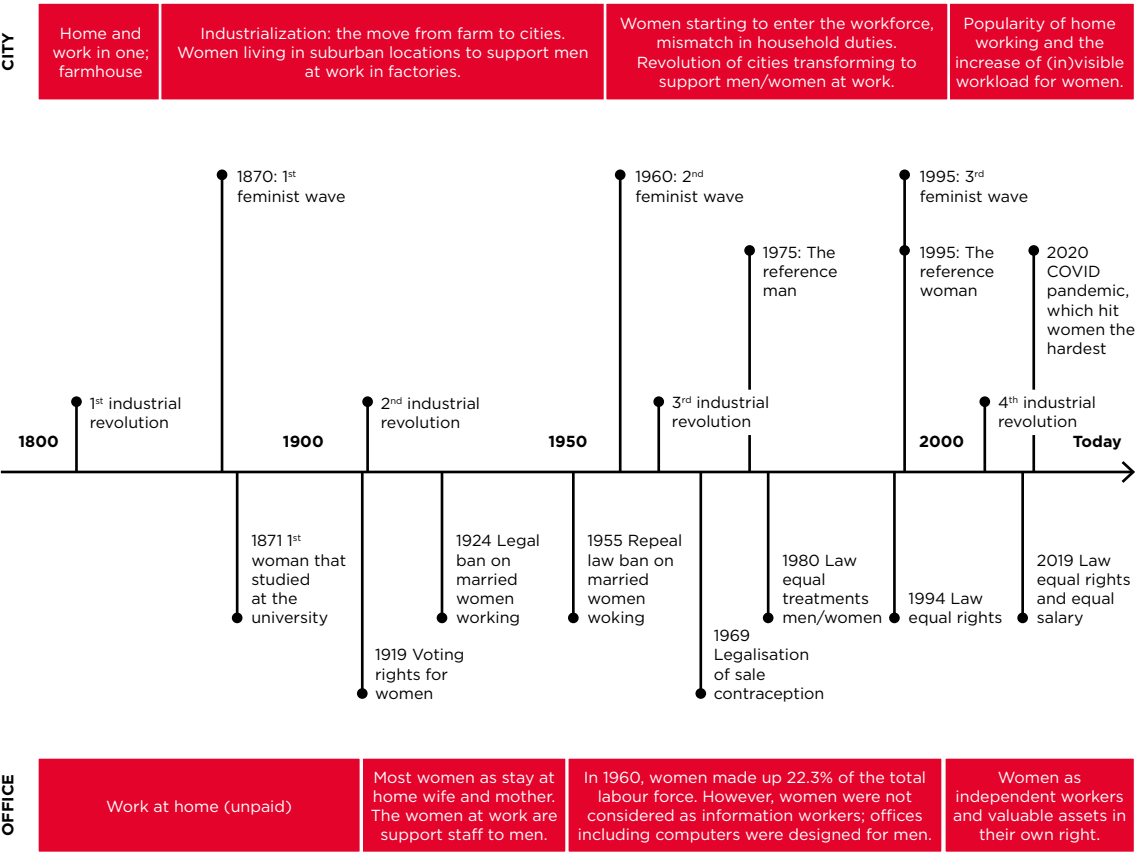


**WHERE DID
SHE COME
FROM?
A HISTORY**

How did we get here? To understand how current social structures were formed, we need to take a step back and examine our history, the timeline below highlights the key moments in woman’s rights, women at work and women in urban spaces.

Throughout history, women have traditionally played supporting or caring roles such as midwives, housekeepers and caretakers. Women’s careers and educational levels have only started improving exponentially over the last 100 years. However, their role as primary caregiver and housewife has not adjusted accordingly. Societal norms and legacy gender roles continue to fuel the disproportionate amount of unpaid work completed by women in the home. And according to a recent study by Harvard University and London Business School; it’s now on the rise.

IMAGE A





/ / / / / / / /

During the first industrial revolution in the 19th century, jobs became available in cities. As a consequence, families moved from the farm into the city as they started to work in factories. The industrialisation changed the labour conditions drastically, as it became paid-labour and people lost their freedom of self-employment. To earn enough money for survive entire families worked in factories, as laws on child labour did not exist at that time. Not until later, at the end of 19th century, men were expected to take care of their families by themselves following the breadwinner ideal.

This breadwinner model describes the ideal that each household has one adult who brings in the money (the breadwinner, often the father), and one adult who takes care of house, home and the children (often the mother). In practice, women would often work before marriage or pregnancy. When they got married or fell pregnant they would be fired to perform unpaid labour at home. This was the ideal scenario in the middle class at the time. In economically lower-class families, women did need to perform paid labour and would therefore often work part-time to supplement their husband's income. Following this ideal, labour participation of women in the 20th century was low – much lower in the Netherlands than in surrounding countries. Although women did work, this took place mostly indoors and unpaid. This pattern spurred the first feminist wave in the Netherlands – woman's emancipation.

/ / / / / / / /



image b

FIRST FEMINIST WAVE

The drivers of the first feminist wave were: voting rights, work and education. In this first feminist wave, women fought for political power and their voice in politics. Moreover, they wanted to have the rights to participate in paid labour, and the right to education. As it stood at the time, laws limited the possibilities for women to participate in the paid labour market. Influenced by the industrialisation and the popularity of the breadwinner's model, the idea of a working woman been inappropriate. As a result, the legal ban of married women in the workforce was adopted in 1924. This law echoed the sentiment in society at the time. As an advertisement in 1950 states: "Mother in the family and not in the factory". (image b)

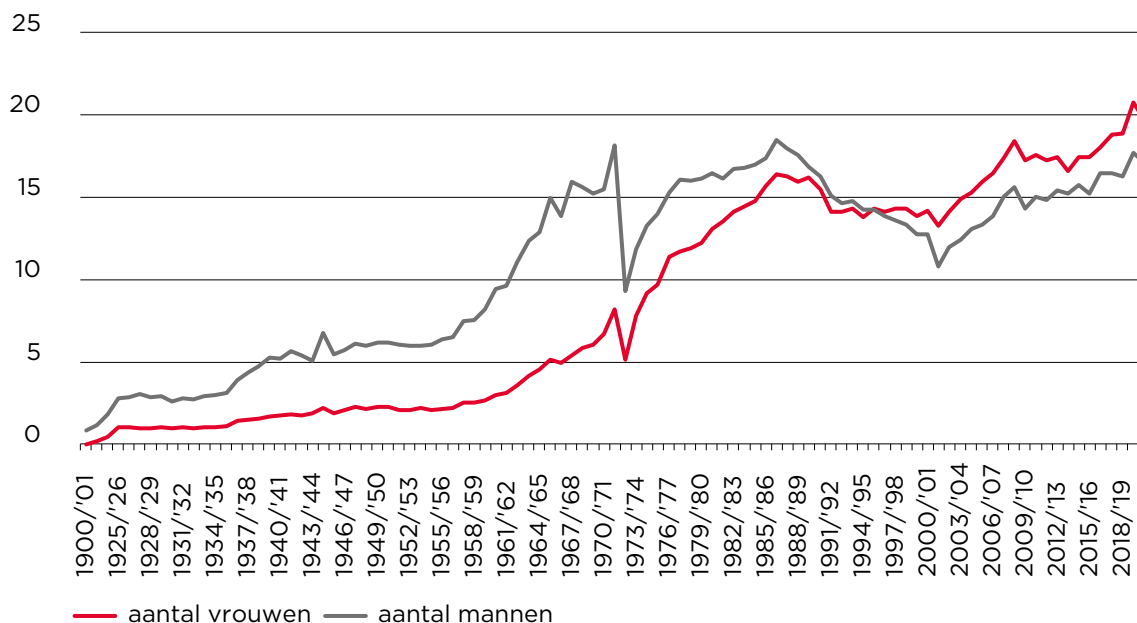
To formalize their submissive role in society, until 1956 all married women were legally incompetent, meaning they could not sign contracts or make large purchases. They could not have their own bank account or get insurance without the permission of their husband. In short, both society as a whole, religion and laws more specifically, told women that they were subordinate beings to their husbands or fathers. Women's role in life was defined to support men rather than women being equal to men.

Although the Dutch first feminist wave was hampered by women's decency, fear, and the church's perception on the traditional role of women, it did achieve women's voting rights and thereby gave them a voice in the way the Netherlands was governed. Even though the first Dutch women, namely Anna Maria van Schurman and Aletta Jacobs, graduated university, their buildings were not designed around women and women were not allowed in all areas of university buildings. Women were even obliged to attend classes behind a curtain in order to be 'no distraction for men'. Society at the time made few changes for women as they were not considered equal to men. However, the first feminist wave was the start of a major shift that would occur over the next decades. All achievements of the first wave contributed to the removal of the law making women legally incompetent that prohibited women to work after marriage or pregnancy. This meant women were allowed to work, but gendered roles in society meant they usually did not.



Amount men and women with a pre-university high school diploma

x1,000



Amount of men and women with a university-level master's diploma

x1,000

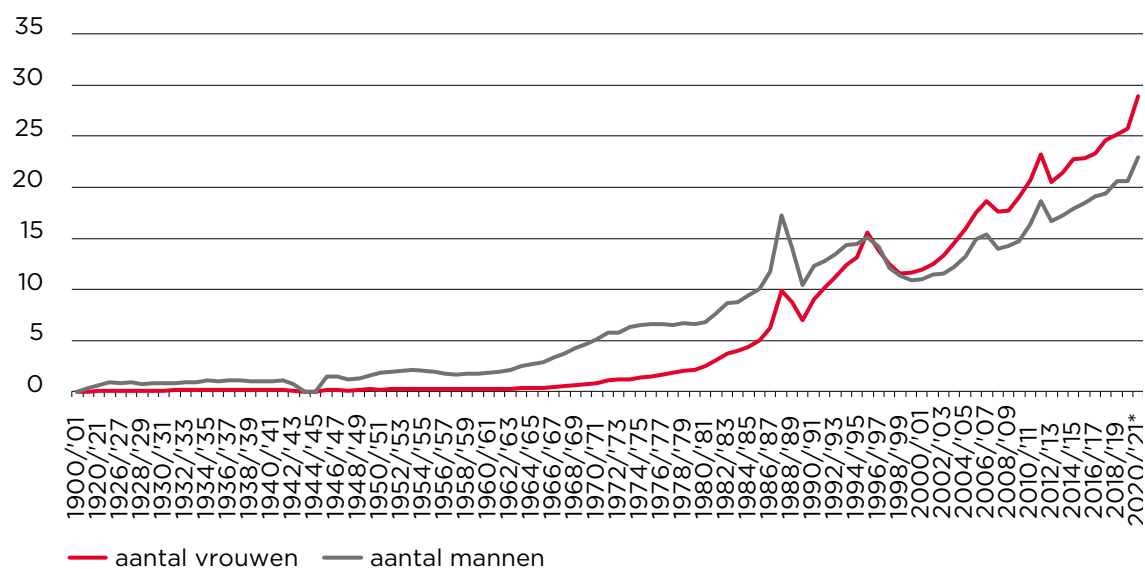


image c



image d



SECOND FEMINIST WAVE

By the second feminist wave, women were generally frustrated by their role as housewives. There was even a medical condition called the 'housewifesyndrome' causing depressions, obsessive compulsive disorders and general feelings of uselessness. In the Netherlands the second feminist wave is often related to Joke Smit's article "The unease of women" in 1967. She wrote about her dissatisfaction with the social position of women: 'I can only hope that some women share my unease and that it will be shared on a larger scale'. This was the emergence of the feminist organisations 'Men-Women-Society' and 'Mad Mina'. (image c).

The drivers of the second feminist wave were: repeal of legal discrimination against women, financial independence, increasing equality of women's labour and education (university), division of household duties, access to child care centres and sexual freedom (access to contraception through the contraceptive pill and legalizing the right to abortion). Moreover, the second feminist wave challenged the 'ideal' breadwinner-model.

The feminist organisations created awareness in the Netherlands, especially the Mad Mina organisation that was known for their explicit actions (image d). Over the years the second wave gained many achievements: social acceptance of contraception and the legalised sale of the contraceptive pill which resulted in women's sexual freedom. In 1976, 40% of Dutch women were taking the contraceptive pill. This resulted in a decline in birth rates during the 70's, as women were able to control their future.

Another achievement was the law on equal rights between men and women and women started to enter the workforce in significant numbers. In 1971, the divorce law 'durable breakdown of the marriage' was accepted. The law that the man was 'the head of the marriage' and the woman 'owed obedience' to him was removed. This meant women started to be recognized as equal and were able to divorce their husbands. In addition, it was in the second wave that the difference between a man's and a woman's body was officially acknowledged, and in 1995 the first reference woman emerged to join reference man in medical sciences.

THE THIRD FEMINIST WAVE - ARE WE THERE YET?

As it stands today, well into a third feminist wave which started in the Netherlands in 1995, we can definitely state that much is achieved on equality and the empowerment of women. However, we still see evidence of gender roles and discrimination based on gender. Part of this we have inherited from the past thousands of years, during which cities, factories and offices were mainly designed for men. To this day, most cities and offices are still being designed around the reference man and therefore work mainly for people close to this image. Why is it, that even though the reference woman exists she is taken into account in urban planning and professional environments?

Women entered the workforce about 60 years ago but it took us until 2019 to amend the law on equal rights including equal payment. Can we all say with a straight face, that each woman is getting paid equally nowadays? The Netherlands is known for their high number of part-time working women. In 2019, the OECD reported that 73% of Dutch women worked part-time compared to 28% of men. Dutch policies of part-time work are often heralded as a driver for equality, providing a framework for a combination of work, family caregiving and free time to enjoy other pursuits. This arguably fuels the Netherlands consistently topping the global ranking for the happiest children and happiest population in the world. However, it has also been argued that mainly women working part-time fuels wage gaps and the persisting low number of women in high-ranking positions.

Currently women hold only 26.6% of management positions in Dutch corporates, one of the lowest rates reported by the OECD and well below the OECD average of 32.5%. Dutch female CEOs are few, fewer even than the number of male CEOs called Peter. Even though recent statutory changes requiring Dutch listed business to have 30% representation of women on the supervisory board starts to address this inequality in business, it doesn't mean anything if the number of women currently holding or working towards senior roles, are not there.

So, if you were to ask us "are we there yet?" Our answer would be: not yet. Even though the past 100 years of women's rights have seen women enter the workforce and increasingly taking an equal role in society, we still experience the leftovers from patriarchal society. All genders currently have access to the same spaces but this has not led to substantial shift in those spaces. And while women have access to certain spaces, it has been well-documented¹ that women experience gendered microaggressions in the workplace, leading to overall lower opportunities than men in those spaces. In urban spaces, the way we designed cities in the past has perhaps unintentionally limited women's opportunities² and even safety³ in those urban spaces.

1 Amongst others: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10551-022-05203-0>

2 https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/full/10.1146/annurev-soc-071913-043446#_i5

3 C.C. Perez. 2019. Invisible women: exposing data bias in a world designed for men. Chatto & Windus London.

**PROTECT
WOMEN'S
RIGHTS**





**WHERE ARE WE
NOW?**

EQUALIZING THE UNEQUAL

If we want to make meaningful change, we have to level the playing field. We must redefine and promote a greater role for men at home, as caregivers and part-time employees. Redistribution of home-related work can alleviate some of the pressure felt by women and provide the necessary space and time to achieve equilibrium. Part-time working and job sharing are mechanisms that could not only address female burnout, but the chronic pervasion of overworking for everyone, synonymous with modern corporate life. Unless we address the archaic constructs of gender and their role in the office and at home, all the female leadership and wellbeing training in the world will not promote the necessary changes needed to give women more time, money, and space to invest in themselves and equalize the unequal.

THE WAY FORWARD

The variety between men, women, and all non-reference people should impact the way we design cities and how we think about a welcoming office and a functioning city for all people. If we want to increase diversity, we should create welcoming environments for all. Reference man and reference woman are not real people. We are all people with variations of requirements for our surroundings. These variations of requirements are not only based on our gender but are also impacted by the phases of life that we are in, or whether we are carers or maybe if we just want something else from our life.

In the following two articles in the Feminist Cities series, we explore how we can build the feminist city and the feminist office.

THE FEMINIST CITY

Experiences of public spaces, urban planning and urban governance have historically been centered around men and the breadwinner ideal. While urban planning is a field that moves slow, changes were observed when women entered the workforce in high numbers. However, research still shows that men and women experience the city differently. Cities should therefore be designed and planned according to this variety of needs. The cities of Vienna and Doha boast urban planning examples taking on board gendered needs, leading to neighborhoods that are enjoyed by more.

THE FEMINIST OFFICE

Nowadays, we still see offices designed with the reference man in mind. Standard office temperatures are set on the requirements of 40-year-old reference men, and we all see women sitting behind desks with scarfs and blankets. Office buildings with large iron grids in front of the building, which doesn't work for women wearing pumps. Architects designing wide staircase steps, again doesn't work for women, who are generally shorter. Remember these stairways of glass, you can figure this one out yourself why this is not working for women! So, how will a workplace look like when it is designed around the reference women?

/ / / / / / / /

Influence of the pandemic on women (in the workplace)

Can we state that the pandemic caused women a setback? The pandemic has pushed everyone to the edge, but some more than others. Over the last 12 months, the rate of burnout amongst women has drastically overtaken men, according to McKinsey's 2021 'Women in the Workplace' report. 42% of women reported feeling burnt out versus 32% of men. This disparity may be caused in one part by the disproportionate dual role of women as carers and business professionals. In another part by the fact that generally part-time work is commonplace and historically favored within the Netherlands.

During COVID, women, especially mothers, spent significantly more time on childcare, home-schooling and chores than they did pre-pandemic compared to no change for men. Even though many families look to distribute the chores equally, the invisible emotional load of "thinking for everyone", is largely absorbed by women and costs a significant amount of emotional and physical energy. McKinsey's recent study quantified this work at five or more hours a day for 60% of women. This is equivalent to a part-time job. In absorbing this additional work, women have less time to invest in their careers, their mental wellbeing and balance.

/ / / / / / / /



THE FEMINIST CITY

THE PANDEMIC

WE MAKE IT INCLUSIVE

