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THE FEMINIST CITY

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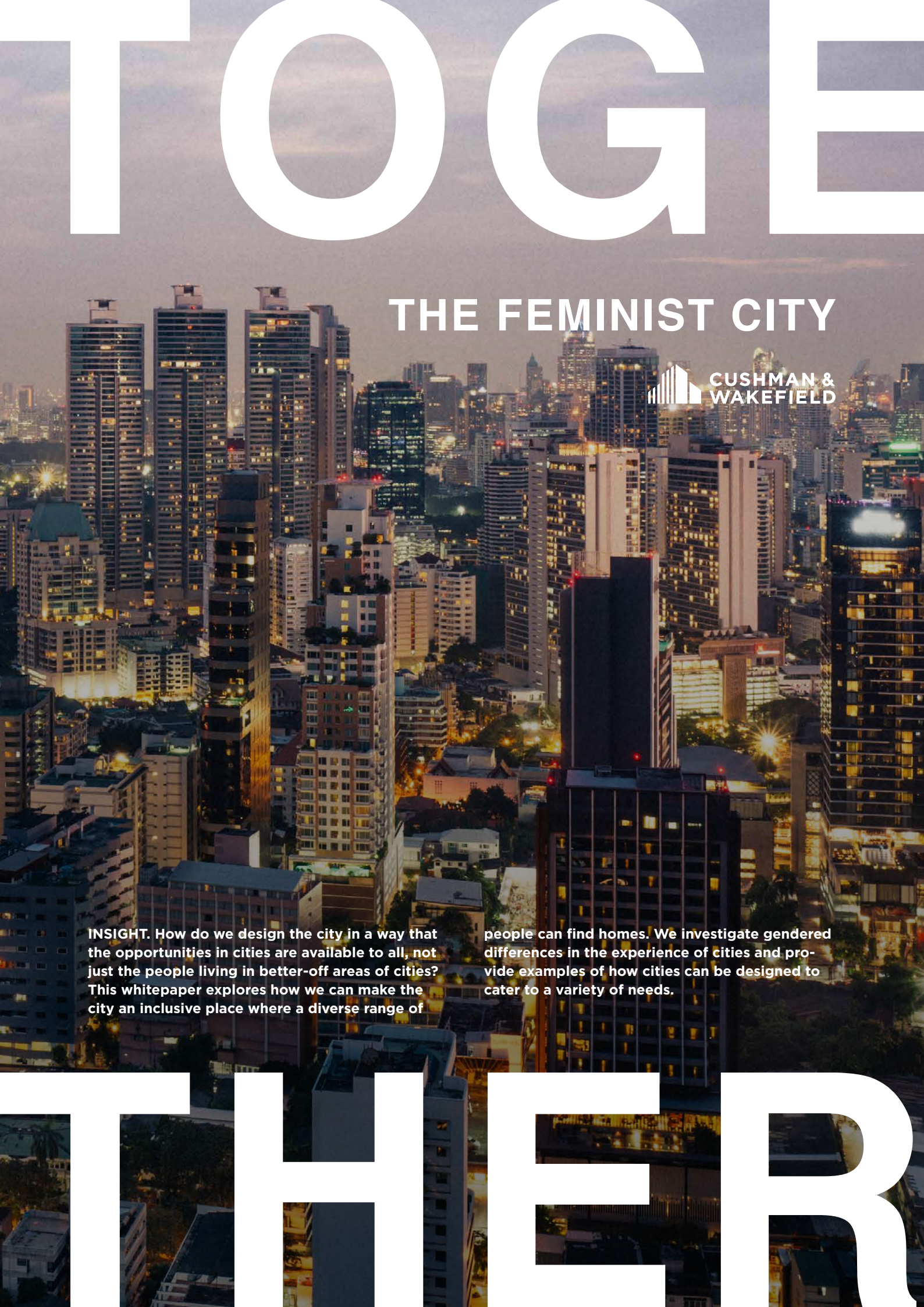

INSIGHT. How do we design the city in a way that the opportunities in cities are available to all, not just the people living in better-off areas of cities? This whitepaper explores how we can make the city an inclusive place where a diverse range of people can find homes. We investigate gendered differences in the experience of cities and provide examples of how cities can be designed to cater to a variety of needs.

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THE FEMINIST CITY

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THE GLASS CEILING OF URBAN SPACES

CUSHMAN & WAKEFIELD

INTRODUCTION

Since their inception, cities have been the centres of all that humans have achieved: they contain our histories, our innovations, our relationships and policies. They show how we choose to live and interact with one another (Boone and Modarres, 2006). The way we talk about cities showcases how we think about them. Chicago was long ago named the “city of opportunity”, and “if you can make it in New York, you can make it anywhere”. However, while cities present opportunities and are avenues of social mobility, they commonly also show evidence of inequality and segregation. When cities are not designed for inclusiveness, evidence of this segregation is clear to see. Just think about how we think about the different neighbourhoods in our cities. We all know the “bad neighbourhood” in the city we live in. Commonly, this area is where people live that do not have the means to move to richer, more well-off areas of the city. In big cities, these concentrated areas are commonly well-known and well defined. Think about the Banlieue areas, Favela’s or slums, areas, in short, where you don’t want to end up because they are known as poverty traps.

On a more granular level, urban spaces are often not experienced as equal. This may have various origins. A well-documented source of frustration is the absolute domination of cars and car parking in our urban spaces, pushing out all other functions as secondary. Another source of inequality in our urban spaces lies in safety-concerns specifically at night when parts of the population do not feel safe inhabiting public spaces meant for all. To combat this, the initiative “Reclaim the Streets” started to reclaim communal ownership of public spaces in the early ‘90s. The activism of reclaim the streets ranged from blocking streets to protest actions against globalization. The Reclaim the Streets movement spurred other movements with similar objectives worldwide. What these movements show is that the call for public ownership and public presence of all groups in urban spaces is needed and desirable. However, cities were designed with a certain way of living in mind. This is a fact not easily nor instantly changed. In order to ensure cities and their urban spaces are available and welcoming for all, we need to be thinking about who we’re designing for.

So how can we tackle these issues of segregation and inequality in cities? In order to do this, we need to not only analyse cities as physical places, but as social structures as well. Therefore, we may consider different policy and design layers. At the core, we need to examine three aspects that operate on various levels in the urban space: people, place and connectivity. People-based policies entail creating opportunities for all people in the city. Place-based policies are about the physical upgrading of the city, ensuring a socio-economic mix of households in high-quality neighbourhoods. Connectivity-based policies ensure that people and opportunity are linked rather than separated. An aspect of improving inclusivity of cities which is not often explored is that of gender inclusiveness. This is the practice of ensuring women and men are accounted for equally in policy, legislation and resource allocation.

FROM SMALL-SCALE INTERVENTIONS TO LARGE-SCALE REDESIGNS

Small or large: every intervention in public spaces can have major implications for the inclusivity of cities. A large-scale development which exemplifies urban planning from an inclusive, gender mainstreaming perspective is the Aspern neighbourhood of Vienna. A large-scale social housing development finally finished in 1997, its design centred around the patterns known to be specific for women or people taking on caring responsibilities. This resulted in a neighbourhood filled with gendered place-based spatial interventions. These included pram storage on every floor, wide stairwells and even the heights of buildings ensuring social safety through “eyes on the street” (Hunt, 2019). Smaller-scale place-based interventions in the city of Vienna ensured an increased sense of safety and an increase in female participation in public life. These interventions included additional placement of streetlights, and the implementation of volleyball and badminton facilities in park areas.

While we cannot singularly rely on place-based interventions to create an equal society, we can design cities in a way to ensure they work for all people. Whether it is a mother taking a car to work, or a father walking his child to day-care.

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO OPPORTUNITIES EQUALIZES THE CITY

The easiest way to connect people to opportunities is by designing mixed-use neighbourhoods where people and opportunities are neighbours or even stacked on top of one another. It is important to keep an eye on diversity of housing opportunity in this case, so people do not have to leave the neighbourhood when their life changes (from single to in a relationship, to starting a family, to retiring). If diverse needs are met in the same neighbourhood, it ensures connection between people and opportunities.

However, any of our cities are historically divided. We have neighbourhoods in the periphery where people live, and there are central business districts where people work. While there are mixed-use neighbourhoods (oftentimes the centre of the city), cities often have homogenous neighbourhoods like the suburbs. These historical patterns cannot easily be broken because we cannot simply demolish existing neighbourhoods to build completely new ones. Therefore, we should be thinking about how we connect people in homogenous neighbourhoods to opportunities. This connection can be made using physical connections such as bridges or railway stations, or (in a post-covid era) through implementing non-physical connections such as high-speed internet. Not having these connections separates people and neighbourhoods from one another and isolates opportunity.

In addition, we also need to think about who we are connecting to opportunity. Before the ‘90s connectivity of workers was established using cars and highways. This mainly supported the breadwinner model of 1 working partner, while the other partner stayed at home to care for the household. The breadwinner model was even formalized in Dutch perspectives on Urban planning (see text box).

The introduction and popularity of cars in the ‘60s caused a shift in where people wanted to live. Car mobility for the masses made it possible for people to live far away from their jobs and suburbanization started. At first spatial planning governance attempted to develop the lesser populated east and north of the Netherlands as an alternative to the growing cities in the west but it soon became apparent that rural municipalities close to bigger cities like Amsterdam, Utrecht and Rotterdam grew rather than municipalities in lesser populated areas. In order to prevent unbridled urban sprawl close to already big cities, spatial planners decided to bundle the growth in so-called “growth cities”. Some of these appointed growth cities were small or non-existent before, but were now growing exponentially. In the 70s and 80s, hundreds and thousands of homes were built in these growth cities, but employment remained in nearby cities. Following the breadwinner ideal, it was mainly the man going to work in the city and the woman who remained at home in the growth city with the children in huge suburban areas. Essentially, these growth cities cemented gender segregation in spatial planning.

This gender segregation was finally recognized in 1988 and spatial planning governance shifted from suburbanization in growth cities to the concept of the compact city. Place-based policies dictated that quality of urban spaces needed to be improved and the contract between city and countryside had to become much starker. The new mindset meant that living, working and recreation was much closer together. Offices within cycling distance of residential areas, or offices close to (intercity) trainstations was the new ideal.

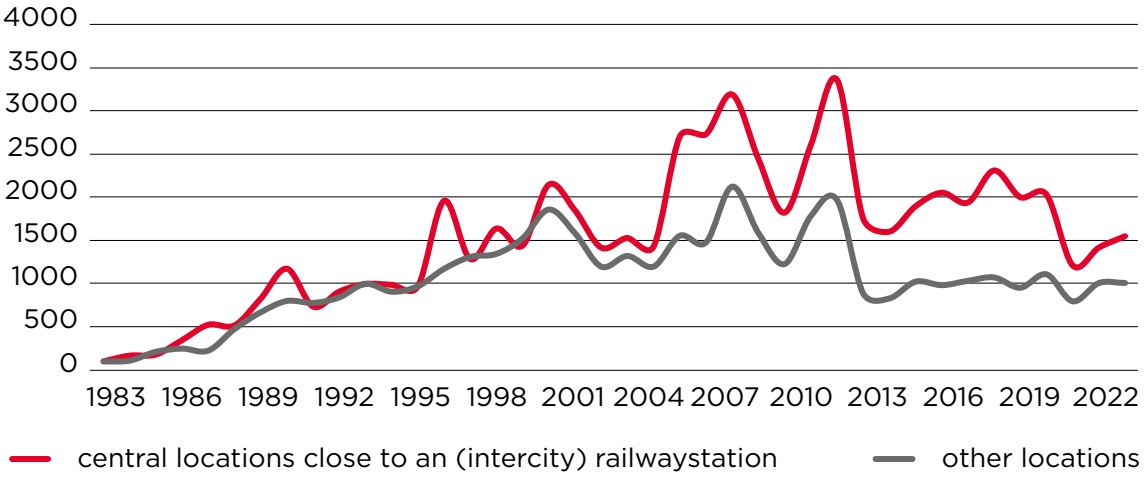
uitgezonderd

HOW FEMALE LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION GROWTH IMPACTED OFFICE LOCATIONS

Female labour market participation growth accelerated between 1997 and 2007, and this has an impact on where we locate our offices to ensure connection. In the 90s, we saw a shift from offices relocating to public transport locations from previously favouring locations close to highways. While this shift in office location preferences can have many reasons, we think that this shift was (at least in part) driven by the increase in female labour participation.

Historical growth of office take-up split by location types

%-growth compared to the previous year, >500m^2, within 750 meters of a trainstation vs. other locations



Female labour participation is defined as the extent to which women participate in the labour market. In other words: the extent to which women perform paid labour. Growth of female labour participation doubled in the second half of the '90s. This growth may have caused (in part) the desirability of office locations in central urban areas close to mobility hubs such as intercity stations. The shift from favouring highway locations to mobility hubs can be caused by companies taking into account the "time geography" component of their employees' day.

A decreased acceptance of a long "time geography" can be the driving force behind the move of companies to more centralized locations. The concept of time geography was developed by the Swedish Geographer Torsten Hagerstrand in 1969 and focuses on the relation between individuals and the time and space they operate in. In essence, time geography describes how individuals split their time between different activities and how this influences their interactions with their surroundings. Understanding how time geography developed during and after the growth in female labour participation may identify drivers of change in office market dynamics. Moreover, this understanding also could identify urban planning and design obstacles for gender equality and economic growth.

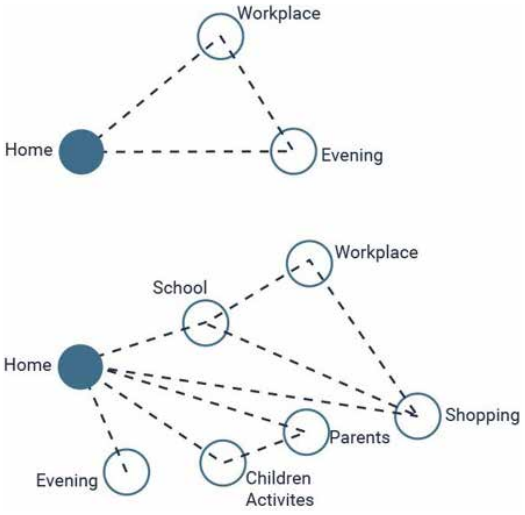
It has been widely recognized that while female labour participation grew, caring and household responsibilities are still mainly women's responsibilities. Even if women and men perform the same amount of paid labour hours, the unpaid caring burden is still distributed unequally. Women commonly take on more of the unpaid labour responsibilities such as childcare and domestic work. We recognize that this does not need to be the case in every household, therefore we will refer to the person taking on most unpaid labour as the "carer". The carer in this case is the person in a one- or two parent household taking on most unpaid labour. This unpaid labour can influence the time geography a person is willing and able to accept.

ACCEPTED TIME GEOGRAPHY DEPENDS ON THE ROLES WE HAVE

The time geography of the carer and the non-carer looks different. To give two examples: the non-carer leaves the house in the morning to go to work, may visit the gym at the end of the day and then return home. The time geography of the carer looks a little different. They leave home in the morning, drop the children off at school, and then go to work. They may use their lunchbreak to do some groceries or pick something up at the drugstore before spending the afternoon at work. At the end of the workday they pick up the kids from school and bring them to after-school activities. After these activities, they pick them up to return home. The key difference between the carer and the non-carer is that the carer makes a lot of (short) trips. They have to move between different activities and responsibilities. This leads us to conclude that the carer will accept a shorter time geography compared to the non-carer.

Understanding how employees (carer or non-carer) move between different responsibilities can help identify the barrier to the labour participation of carers. Ensuring connection of the labour force to offices by locating those offices close to (intercity) train stations is one of the ways companies support growth of female labour participation.

This conclusion draws a straight line from the increase in female labour participation to an increased desirability in office locations close to public transport. Undoubtedly, companies can implement many more policies than choosing their office location to support carers, but this is one policy we already see when we analyse the data.



CONCLUSION

Cities are both physical places and social constructs. In cities we live, work and enjoy or lives. We need to ensure that our heritage of physical barriers does not limit the ways we want and need to use the city now. Our ideas of the ideal city change. We went from spatial planning based on the breadwinner model to the equal city ideal. Through place, people and connection-based interventions we make our urban spaces better for all people who use them.

People, place and connectivity-based policies can take many different shapes based on aspects like physical geography, historical structure of the city, and the needs of the inhabitants. Likewise, interventions to improve the inclusivity of cities can also take different shapes.

The connection between urban design and the breadwinner model is clear. This is our heritage, but this does not mean that we have to accept and maintain this heritage. The demand (and transaction volumes) for offices near mobility hubs leads us to believe that many companies are already seeing a change in the accepted time geography of an increasingly equal labour market.

WE MAKE IT INCLUSIVE

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