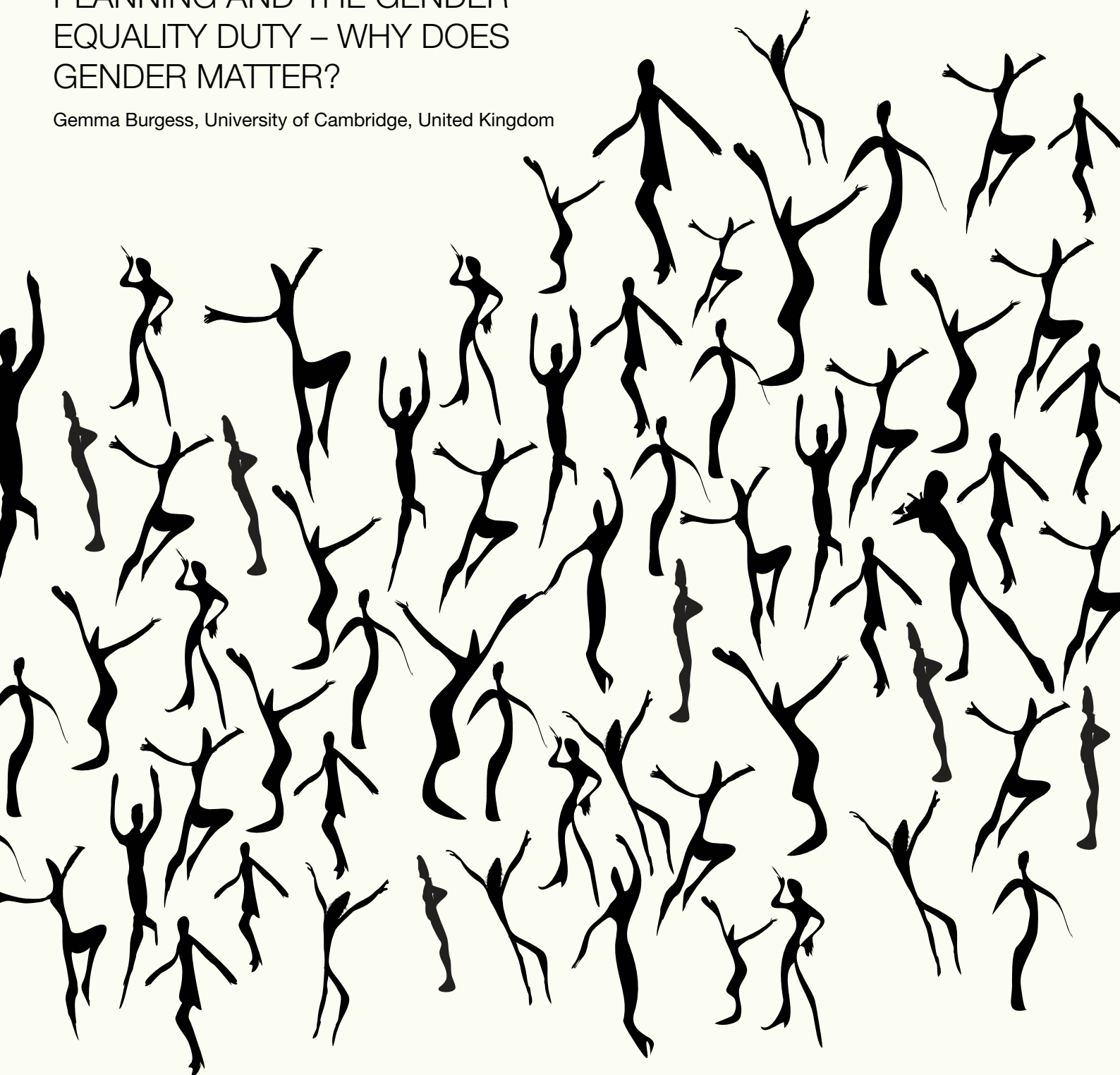


FIBRE SERIES

PLANNING AND THE GENDER EQUALITY DUTY – WHY DOES GENDER MATTER?

Gemma Burgess, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom



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Key points

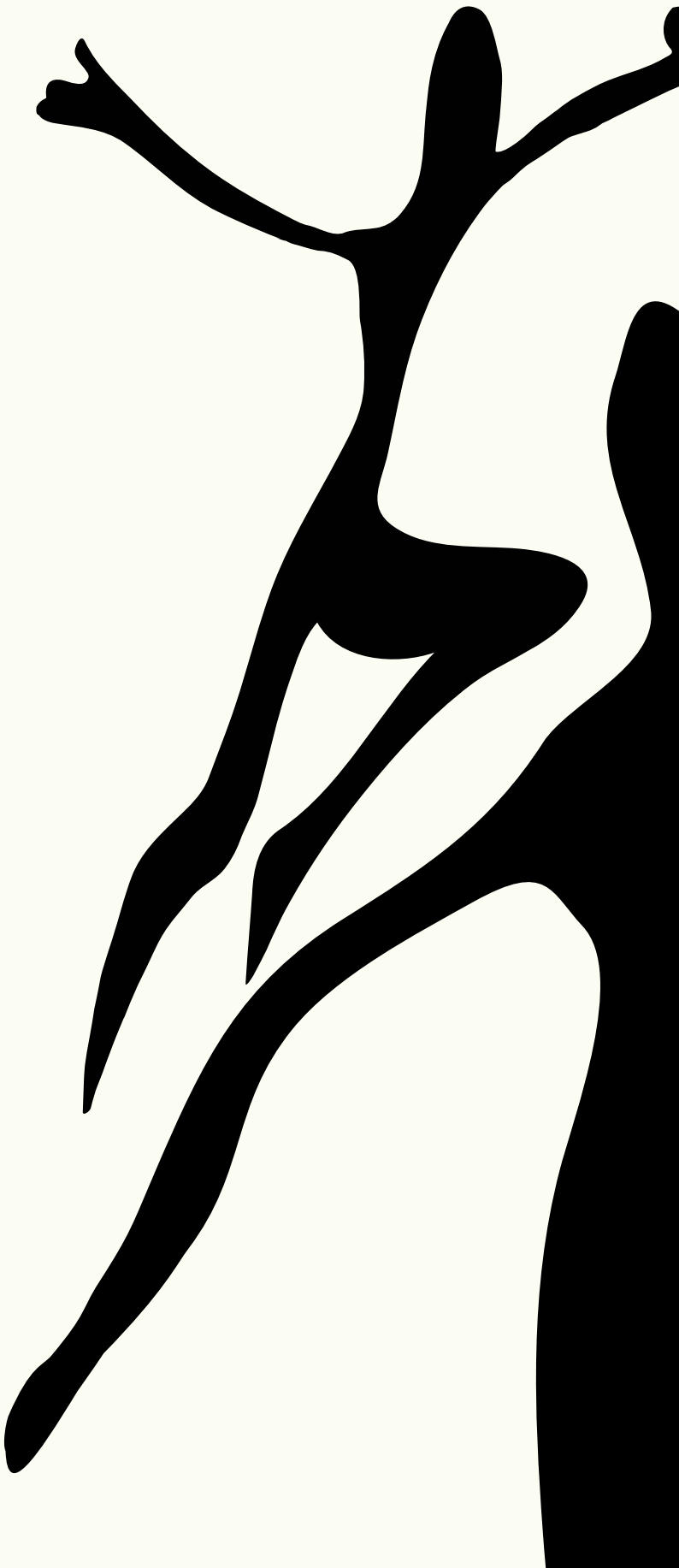
New equality legislation in the form of the Gender Equality Duty, introduced in 2007, places a legal responsibility on all public bodies in England and Wales to promote gender equality, both as employers and as service providers. Local authorities have to comply with the Duty across all services, including those related to planning and regeneration.

With funding from the RICS Education Trust and the Higher Education Funding Council for England, Gemma Burgess of the University of Cambridge looked at how those involved in planning and regeneration in local authorities have been including an emphasis on promoting gender equality in their work. The study took an early look at how the Gender Equality Duty is shaping planning and regeneration policy and practice.

As Gemma Burgess emphasised in why she felt this research was needed, it has been argued for some time that “If we can more effectively integrate gender into spatial planning and policy-making, it would result in a more sustainable, equal and accessible built environment for all members of society.”

The key messages that emerged from the study were as follows:

- There is a **lack of awareness** of how gender issues are directly relevant to planning policy and practice and a more general lack of awareness of the ongoing existence of gender inequality.
- Far more needs to be done to promote the **need to think about gender issues in planning related policy and practice** and it needs to be recognised as a legal requirement for all public bodies.
- Instruments such as Equality Impact Assessments are useful tools that would **enable gender to be more effectively embedded into planning decision-making** and hence improve service delivery.
- Strategic use of the Gender Equality Duty and greater consideration of gender in planning **would result in improved outcomes for the public at large**, and not just women.



Introduction

In April 2007 the Gender Equality Duty came into force. This new legislation is part of the Single Equality Act (2006) and requires all public authorities to promote gender equality and remove gender discrimination. Local authorities are one set of public authorities to which the Gender Equality Duty applies. They are now required to promote gender equality across all of their services, including across the range of services that come under the broad label of planning and regeneration.

The Duty implies that a more explicit consideration of gender is needed in both how planning is delivered and in its wider impacts. Planners and practitioners involved in urban regeneration programmes and spatial planning will need to examine who benefits from their projects – men and/or women – and to take appropriate action on the results.

However, thinking about gender equality is not what commonly comes to mind in considering the work of a planner or regeneration officer. Previous research has shown that planning policy and practices have tended to ignore the fact that women and men use public space differently and have different concerns about how it meets their needs. This suggests that meeting the requirements of the Gender Equality Duty and ensuring that planning promotes gender equality may be a challenge.



Planning policy and practices have tended to ignore the fact that women and men use public space differently.



Introduction

Researchers have argued that urban and suburban spaces support stereotypically male activities and planning methodologies reflect a male-dominated society (Fainstein and Servon, 2005). Gender differences have implications for all aspects of spatial planning and the design of the built environment, from the interior design of housing to the planning of entire cities.

Work by Clara Greed has highlighted that it is most commonly women who suffer disadvantage within a built environment that has often been developed with little reference to their needs (Greed, 2005). She also provides other examples of the differently gendered uses of space. Women make more complex journeys than men, often travelling to childcare, school, work, and shops in journeys that are often referred to as 'trip-chains'. Other work by Clara Greed has highlighted the divergences in travel patterns - more than twice as many women as men are responsible for escorting children to school, seventy-five per cent of bus journeys are undertaken by women and only thirty per cent of women have access to a car during the daytime (Greed, 2007). Poor public transport and a lack of caring facilities and shopping outlets near employment locations restrict women's access to the labour market.

Recent work by Carolyn Whitzman has highlighted the extent to which women feel less safe than men being out alone after dark (Whitzman, 2007), especially in the inner city, or in social housing estates. Poorly considered land-use zoning policy separates residential areas from employment locations, with a greater impact on women's mobility. Commented Gemma Burgess, *"What is being argued is that if planning could more effectively take account of the different needs of women and men with the aim of promoting greater gender equality, it would lead to public transport routes that support women's travel patterns, it would make public space feel safer at night, and would encourage employment opportunities locally"*. The result would be that more women would be able to take employment, training, and leisure opportunities, economic development opportunities would be increased and social inclusion programmes would be more effective (Oxfam, 2007).

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This study explored ways in which local authority officers with an interest in gender equality issues are trying to reflect this in policy and practice. It looked at how the Gender Equality Duty is shaping their work and discussed what may hinder its implementation in this field.

Details of the work

The aim of this research was to consider how gender is being taken account of in planning policy and practice in response to the introduction of the Gender Equality Duty.

The research was not intended to be representative of all local authorities. As the introduction of the Gender Equality Duty is quite recent, and other research has shown that gender is not a common consideration in planning activities, this study tried to find examples of practice where gender is being explicitly considered and/or where the Duty has been engaged with in some way by the planning team of a local authority. The aim was to explore possible barriers to implementing the Duty in this field but also to highlight the possibilities for using it in practice in planning to improve service delivery and meet the requirements, and fulfil the potential, of the Duty.

This was a qualitative research project based mainly on semi-structured interviews and the collection and analysis of documentary data. Gemma Burgess also attended related events and conducted interviews, participated in focus groups and engaged in formal and informal discussions with those working in this field.

The case studies were 34 local authorities. As the link between gender and planning is not commonly considered, the case studies were selected through a 'snow-balling' process. Interviews with experts and activists working in this field led to some suggestions of local authorities that were perhaps considering gender more explicitly in planning and/or regeneration activities. Interviews with officers at these local authorities led to suggestions of further local authorities to contact. Quite a high proportion of the case study local authorities included regeneration areas. An Oxfam training and awareness raising programme that was running during the research had a regeneration focus so attracted planners with regeneration concerns, and contacts were made here for study participants. The case study local authorities were not chosen to be representative of particular types of authorities but were sampled because they were reported to have been focusing on the Gender Equality Duty or gender issues more broadly in some particular way.

The case studies involved interviews with local authority officers and related planning practitioners to explore what difference the Duty has made to their work, what barriers they face in implementation and in what ways they are already working to explicitly consider gender in planning. The local authority officers interviewed included those working directly in planning and regeneration, consultation officers and equality and diversity officers. Some interviewees were happy for their local authority to be referred to by name, but some participants in the research preferred that they remain anonymous. This confidentiality enabled participants to speak freely and voice criticisms and concerns.

The research also involved interviews and discussions with organisations, experts and activists interested in gender and planning and the new Duty. These included:

- Those involved in running Oxfam's ReGender training programme
- People who have participated in the ReGender programme
- Members of the Women's Design Service
- Representatives of Planning Aid
- Representatives of Communities and Local Government
- Academics focusing on gender and planning
- Representatives of the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Findings

Lack of awareness

There seemed to be an almost universal view that there was a lack of awareness, and even hostility, towards gender equality issues. Most of the people that Gemma Burgess spoke to have a commitment to working towards greater gender equality but said that most colleagues dismissed this need; the view seemed to be that it is generally assumed that gender inequality has already been 'solved' and there is little awareness of ongoing gender inequalities.

Interviewees reported a general lack of awareness of the existence of the Gender Equality Duty amongst colleagues and what it means. Participants in the research felt that there is a lack of practical knowledge and a lack of examples of how to take account of gender in planning.

The introduction of the Duty has led to a degree of knowledge-sharing and awareness-raising amongst practitioners, but this is generally only taking place between those who already have concerns about gender inequality and the real issue is how to engage those who are less aware.

"In the LDF consultation on use of space we asked if they had considered gender in any way and they looked at me as if I had two heads. Some just do not see it as relevant to their service. The main barrier is ignorance. People do not understand what a gender issue is. They think it is radical feminism, or 'Fathers for Justice' etc, or they just don't think about it at all. Or if they do, they just look at the numbers of men and women and don't think about why they are different." (local authority)

Findings

Gender equals women

It was very clear from the research that whilst the legislation is framed around gender equality, in practice the focus tends to be on women. Of course, this is for good reasons as most statistics point clearly to women experiencing gender inequality far more than men.

All of the interviewees for the research were women. Almost all participants at events relating to gender and planning and/or regeneration were also women. This raises questions about the degree to which the Gender Equality Duty is engaged with by men. Many of the women championing gender equality in local authorities do not hold positions of power and influence, which may inhibit the extent to which they can bring about fundamental change.

The role of individuals – gender ‘champions’

Another key issue that emerged is the role of gender ‘champions’. Individuals play a very important role in promoting the Gender Equality Duty in local authorities, and gender equality may be championed by one individual who frequently raises it as an issue, regularly pushes for change and encourages others to learn and be involved. It is evident from the research that one individual can make a difference, raising awareness and introducing new practices. However, it does raise questions about what happens if this individual leaves their post. It is possible that the impetus for change will be lost when they leave. The Duty is new and translating the efforts made by one individual into standardised practices is likely to be a challenge.



Many of the women championing gender equality in local authorities do not hold positions of power and influence.

Findings

A hierarchy of equalities

It was also apparent that gender is not prioritised or measures taken to address it to the same degree as the other equality duties such as race or, in the context of planning, as disability although, as Gemma Burgess observed, “These duties have been in place for longer”. Research participants felt that gender equality did not have the same status or degree of commitment as the legislation promoting equality around race and disability. They said that most officers involved in planning found disability issues easier to comprehend than gender, as it was easier to see how it is related to the built environment and the work that they do.

This is worrying given that the law around equalities is changing very quickly. The Equality Bill, announced in the Queen’s Speech in December 2008, will streamline the law by distilling nine pieces of legislation into a single Act. This will create a single new Equality Duty on public bodies to tackle discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and encourage good community relations. The new duty will cover race, disability and gender, as now, but also include age, sexual orientation, gender reassignment and religion or belief, replacing the three existing, separate duties with a single, more effective framework (see Government Equalities Office for more information). The concern is that despite this, a hierarchy of perceived importance will exist between the different equality strands and that gender equality will not be a priority. It also raises concerns that the equalities field will become even more complicated with the introduction of the new duty and that, without awareness raising, the worry is that people will simply not engage with it.

“Staff are not aware generally about the Gender Equality Duty. But it is also more fundamental in that people are not also aware of the differences between men and women. Officers are more aware of the Disability Duty as it is more obvious to them what it means and how it should be applied, but they are less clear about gender equality and what that means for the work they do.” (local authority)



Findings

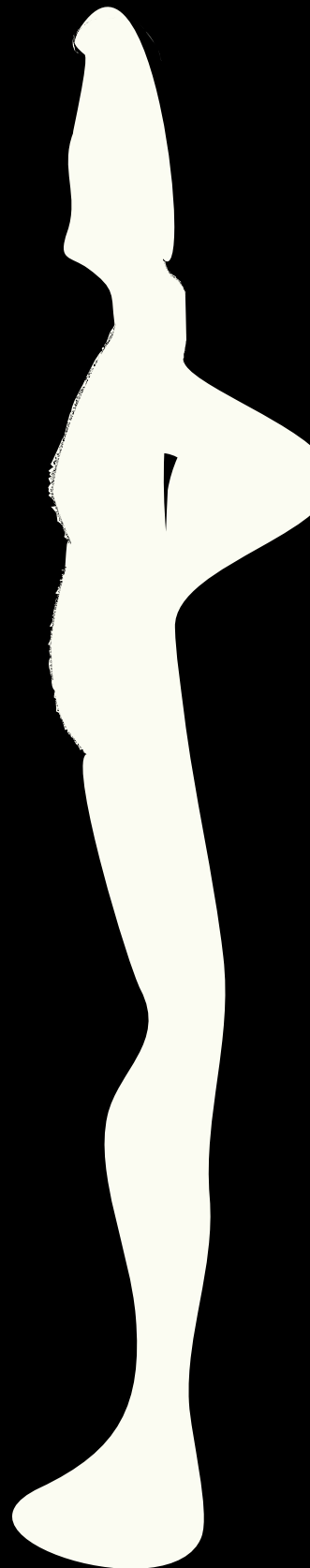
Difficulties in using Gender Equality Schemes

From April 2007, amendments to the Sex Discrimination Act (SDA) 1975 required public authorities to comply with a general duty to pro-actively promote gender equality. To support authorities in meeting the general duty, there are a series of specific duties applicable to key public bodies, one of which is to produce a Gender Equality Scheme (GES).

The research found that whilst most of the local authorities have GES in place, most are quite generic and do not specifically refer to planning and/or regeneration activities. Most research participants said that they are struggling to use the schemes in a practical way, often because the schemes were very long and unwieldy. One planning officer said that their local authority GES was over 100 pages long and they were overwhelmed by it and did not have the resources to engage with something so large and complicated. Many interviewees said that many of their colleagues were not even aware of the existence of the schemes. This suggests that the Gender Equality Scheme itself is not necessarily a practical tool for engaging with gender equality issues in planning. The schemes may give a local authority general aims for improved service provision, but there is a need for more practical guidance on how this could be achieved in planning policy and practice.

Differences between local authorities

The research found that there are marked differences between local authorities in how far they have engaged with the equality duties, even though the research looked for examples where local authority officers were involved in some way in thinking about gender in their work. Some local authorities do not have Gender Equality Schemes (GES) in place yet, despite the legislative requirement, nor do they carry out Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) that include gender issues. Some local authorities have had a corporate approach to thinking about gender equality in planning and regeneration by, for example, holding seminars about why gender is important in planning and regeneration and inviting a range of people, from planners to the mayor. In others, gender equality in planning and regeneration is only an issue engaged with by one or two individuals.



Findings

Equality Impact Assessments

An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is a tool for identifying the potential impact of a council's policies, services and functions on its residents and staff. It can help staff provide and deliver good services to residents by making sure that these reflect the needs of the community. By carrying out EIAs, a council may also ensure that the services that it provides fulfil the requirements of anti-discrimination and equalities legislation. EIAs should make sure that equality is placed at the centre of policy development and review, as well as service delivery.

Some research participants found the EIAs to have been very helpful in taking gender into consideration in planning. They said that conducting EIAs is a learning process and they are improving all the time. The research suggests that EIAs are a useful tool for planners in considering gender equality issues in a very practical way. However, some research participants said that colleagues tended to see the EIAs as a bureaucratic burden, rather than a tool for improving service provision.

"EIAs have helped massively in policy and planning. Before officers did not think about gender differences. EIAs give a better overview and we are getting better at doing them. We look back now at earlier ones and think of other things we could have thought of. It is a learning process." (local authority)

Gender not mentioned in planning policy

For gender to be considered in planning practice, it needs to be considered in planning policy. Few local authorities involved in the research had such explicit reference to planning issues in their gender equality schemes, although some did mention gender differences that needed to be thought about in regeneration activities. Planning policy itself did not make any explicit reference to gender equality in any local authorities.



Equality Impact Assessments are a useful tool for planners in considering gender equality issues in a very practical way.

Findings

Participation and consultation

Public participation and consultation are widely sought on planning and regeneration issues. This is an area where gender equality is being thought about more explicitly. Local authority officers participating in the study said that, particularly since the introduction of the GED, they had taken care to evaluate their consultation processes to ensure that local men and women had equal opportunities to participate.

Some research participants felt that women had been less involved in area plans than men, particularly as most of the planners and consultants who were drawing up the plans were male. A few local authorities have developed ways for local women to be more involved, for example, by asking designers of local plans to go on a 'walkabout' of the area with local women to understand how they feel about the area.

How gender is considered

Some local authority officers are explicitly considering gender in their work, but at different scales and in different depths. They tend to consider it primarily in terms of women's safety and women's participation in consultation events. The ways in which gender is usually thought about were found to be in terms of:

- Women's safety in the built environment
- Women are more likely to live in deprived areas and poor housing
- Women are more likely to be involved in community groups but not in decision making positions
- Women tend to rely more on public transport
- Poor health as a result of poverty presents itself in different ways for men and women.

However, the research showed that concerns about gender equality do not really appear in terms of high level policy or land use planning and it is these which could have a wider influence on society.

Key barriers to implementing the Gender Equality Duty

The research explored some of the barriers that may hinder effective application of the Gender Equality Duty to the field of planning policy and practice. Gemma Burgess summarises the key barriers to change in local authority planning departments as:

- Not seeing gender equality as an important strategic goal
- Lack of awareness of the legislation, for example, not knowing that the Gender Equality Duty exists and has to be legally met
- Lack of awareness of how gender and planning are related
- Prioritising other equality strands, such as disability, over gender
- Letting individuals shoulder the responsibility for pushing for more emphasis on gender equality, rather than taking a corporate approach.

Implications

The key message that comes out of this research is that there needs to be an ethos throughout a local authority, including the planning department, that welcomes new equality duties as a way to improve public services.

As Gemma Burgess stresses, “This needs to go beyond the efforts of individuals and must be translated into standard practice and procedures”. It is also important to emphasise that thinking about gender equality in planning policy and practice and regeneration and considering ways to better promote equality would actually lead to services that better met the needs of users, and hence would be cost efficient.

The research suggests that Equality Impact Assessments can be a useful tool in building a consideration of gender into planning activities. These assessments can be standardised and used by everyone. However, they need to be seen as a useful instrument that supports the work of a planning department, not merely an administrative burden. The assessments have to be engaged with, and their findings acted upon, for them to have a positive impact.

Equalities legislation is changing rapidly but it is also becoming increasingly important. Public sector bodies such as local authorities are having to develop new policies and procedures to meet the new legislative requirements. This research suggests that in the field of planning, thinking about gender equality is not common practice. Hopefully this study will help to raise awareness of the existence of the legislation and point practitioners towards resources and guidance that will help them to build a consideration of gender equality into planning policy and practice.

A number of ideas were put forward by participants for steps that could be taken to more effectively embed gender equality issues in planning. These include:

- More opportunities to share experiences with others working on similar issues were thought to be of great value. A forum for discussion, to share ideas and good practice, would be beneficial. For example, some local authority planning departments have been developing their Equality Impact Assessments for some time and it may assist others if there was a means to share this knowledge, perhaps through an online network
- Local authorities should take a corporate rather than an individualistic approach, emphasising the need for planning policy and practice to work towards promoting gender equality at all levels in an organisation
- The forthcoming Single Equality Bill should be used to raise awareness of equalities legislation and why it is needed
- Professional bodies could disseminate more information and point practitioners to practice guidance. Practitioners should make use of the tools that are already available, such as guidance from the RTPi and Oxfam.



About the study

This report is based on research conducted at the University of Cambridge by Dr Gemma Burgess in 2008. The study was funded by the Higher Education Council for England and the RICS Education Trust. The full report is available at: www.rics.org/research

Dr Gemma Burgess
Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research
Department of Land Economy
University of Cambridge
19 Silver Street
Cambridge CB3 9EP
United Kingdom

e glb36@cam.ac.uk
t 01223 764547



Further reading

Burgess G. (2008) 'Planning and the Gender Equality Duty – why does gender matter?'

People, Place & Policy Online: 2/3, pp.112-121.

Fainstein, S. and Servon, S.J. (2005) *Gender and Planning: A Reader*. Rutgers University Press.

Greed, C. (2005) 'An investigation of the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming as a means of integrating the needs of women and men into spatial planning in the United Kingdom.' *Progress in Planning*, 64, 243–321.

Greed, C. (2007) *A Place for Everyone? Gender equality and urban planning. A ReGender Briefing Paper*. Oxfam.

Whitzman, C. (2007) 'Stuck at the front door: gender, fear of crime and the challenge of creating safer space', *Environment and Planning A Online*.

For more information about gender equality, planning and regeneration please see:

Gender and spatial planning: RTPi Good Practice Note 7

<http://www.rtpi.org.uk/download/3322/GPN7.pdf>

Oxfam ReGender

<http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/ukpoverty/regender.html>

The Gendersite

<http://www.gendersite.org/>

Women's Design Service

<http://www.wds.org.uk/>

Government Equalities Office: The Equality Bill

http://www.equalities.gov.uk/equality_bill.aspx

Equality and Human Rights Commission: The Gender Equality Duty

http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/forbusinessesandorganisation/publicauthorities/gender_equality_duty/pages/introduction_genderduty.aspx

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rics.org**RICS HQ**

12 Great George Street
Parliament Square
London SW1P 3AD
United Kingdom

Worldwide media enquiries:

E pressoffice@rics.org

Contact Centre:

E contactrics@rics.org

T +44 (0)870 333 1600

F +44 (0)20 7334 3811

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Europe

United Kingdom
12 Great George Street
Parliament Square
London SW1P 3AD
United Kingdom

T +44 (0)870 333 1600

F +44 (0)207 334 3811
contactrics@rics.org

Asia

Room 1804
Hopewell Centre
183 Queen's Road East
Wanchai
Hong Kong

T +852 2537 7117

F +852 2537 2756
ricsasia@rics.org

Americas

The Lincoln Building
60 East 42nd Street
Suite 2918
New York, NY 10165
USA

T +1 212 847 7400

F +1 212 847 7401
ricsamericas@rics.org

Oceania

Suite 2, Level 16
1 Castlereagh Street
Sydney
NSW 2000
Australia

T +61 2 9216 2333

F +61 2 9232 5591
ricsoceania@rics.org

Rest of Europe

Rue Ducale 67
1000 Brussels
Belgium

T +32 2 733 10 19

F +32 2 742 97 48
ricseurope@rics.org

Africa

PO Box 3400
Witkoppen 2068
South Africa

T +27 11 467 2857

F +27 86 514 0655
ricsafrica@rics.org

Middle East

Office F07, Block 11
Dubai Knowledge Village
Dubai
United Arab Emirates

T +971 4 375 3074

F +971 4 427 2498
ricsmiddleeast@rics.org

India

48 & 49 Centrum Plaza
Sector Road
Sector 53, Gurgaon – 122002
India

T +91 124 459 5400

F +91 124 459 5402
ricsindia@rics.org