

Breaking Glass Walls: Public Policies to Counteract Gender Occupational Segregation in Urban Planning

Oscar Loza Hoyos^{ORCID}

Sheridan College, Social Sciences Division, Sheridan, WY, USA
Email: olozahoyos@sheridan.edu

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Abstract

The United States has made significant progress toward achieving equal rights and pay equity; however, gender disparities in employment and advancement persist. Women continue to face systemic barriers that limit their access to leadership roles and confine them to specific occupational sectors, a phenomenon described as “glass walls”. This study examines how gender and racial occupational segregation manifest within the field of urban planning and how public policy can serve as a mechanism to dismantle these barriers. Drawing on comparative analyses with other industrialized nations, this paper argues that increasing women’s representation in public sector urban planning roles not only advances social equity but also contributes to broader economic growth. Greater pay equity and inclusion can enhance municipal revenues through increased tax bases and stimulate more equitable urban development. Ultimately, this research calls for targeted policy interventions to ensure that urban planning reflects the diversity of the communities it serves.

Keywords

Gender Inequality, Occupational Segregation, Urban Planning, Glass Walls, Public Sector Employment, Pay Equity, Public Policy Reform

1. Introduction

Occupational segregation remains a persistent form of discrimination in many workplace settings, particularly within municipal government structures. One of the most enduring challenges involves gender-based disparities in employment and pay. Battaglio (2015) notes that the public sector has made considerable progress since the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972, which

introduced affirmative action policies benefiting women and other historically marginalized groups. These efforts opened doors to positions that were once considered unattainable during much of the twentieth century.

While the concept of the glass ceiling has traditionally described the vertical barriers preventing women from advancing into senior leadership positions, this paper emphasizes the related but distinct phenomenon of glass walls. Glass walls refer to horizontal occupational segregation that channels women into lower-paying, less influential, or redistributive roles within organizations, particularly in public sector institutions such as urban planning departments. These glass walls often precede glass ceilings by limiting access to the professional pathways that lead to leadership and decision-making authority. In this sense, glass walls function as a structural precursor to glass ceilings, reinforcing gender inequality long before promotion opportunities arise.

2. Historical Progress and Persistent Barriers

Despite progress made in the public sector, women continue to earn less than their male counterparts and remain underrepresented in key areas such as urban planning. Achieving true equity will require expanding women's representation across all levels of the public sector to ensure that municipal workforces reflect the populations they serve. Increased participation of women in decision-making roles that have ranged from local to federal levels can enhance the development of equitable policies and foster more inclusive and sustainable economic growth. In particular, greater gender equity in urban planning has the potential to stimulate municipal and state-level innovation, promoting both social progress and economic advancement

In the modern progressive era, gender-based wage disparities persist across both the public and private sectors. According to President Barack Obama, "women make 77 cents for every dollar a man earns" in the United States (Jacobson, 2014). Despite decades of policy reform and advocacy, women continue to experience systemic barriers to advancement, often referred to as glass ceilings, which "refer to the barriers women face in moving up the career ladder into management positions" (Johnson & Crum-Cano, 2011: p. 386).

3. Career Interruptions and Economic Challenges

Another dimension of this inequity involves the career interruptions many women face due to family responsibilities. Studies indicate that employers often anticipate workforce absences for women of childbearing age, which can negatively influence hiring and promotion decisions. Sandberg and Scovell (2013: p. 98) report that "43 percent of highly qualified women with children are leaving careers or off-ramping for a period of time". When women return to the workforce from maternity leave they do not merely lose time but experience an estimated five years of lost promotional progress in their respective fields. These structural and cultural barriers reinforce gender segregation within the labor market, perpetuat-

ing wage inequities and limiting women's upward mobility in both public and private sectors.

Another critical issue confronting women in the workforce is the persistent wage stagnation that undermines their ability to maintain financial stability and support their families. Although the U.S. economy continues to expand by growing more than seven percent annually, wages for many workers have remained stagnant or even declined in some sectors (Sherman, 2015). This paradox underscores the need for significant reform in both the public and private sectors. Despite being one of the wealthiest nations in the world, the United States is also among the most unequal due to its "gaping wealth inequality" (Sherman, 2015).

This disparity is particularly evident among women, especially single mothers. Rising divorce rates have contributed to an increasing number of female-headed households; nationally, 8.17 percent of families are led by single mothers with children under 18, with rates reaching as high as 11.98 percent in Louisiana (Statista, 2015). The economic burden on single mothers with children under 18 is substantial as the median annual income for single mothers is approximately \$26,000, compared to \$84,000 for married couples (Dawn, 2015). These statistics highlight how structural inequities and caregiving responsibilities intersect to limit women's economic advancement. While progress has been made, new forms of occupational segregation is established in the notion of glass walls. Glass walls continue to constrain women's upward mobility, reinforcing patterns of inequality across the workforce.

4. Glass Walls and Occupational Segregation in Urban Planning

Many women pursuing careers in urban planning continue to encounter occupational segregation that confines them within the metaphorical "glass walls" of their agencies. Women in the field are disproportionately employed in government sectors associated with redistributive policies, such as housing, while remaining underrepresented in regulatory (enforcement) or distributive (public works) agencies, where significant influence over municipal decision-making often resides (Johnson & Crum-Cano, 2011: p. 386). These glass walls exemplify how gender segregation persists even within professional environments that outwardly promote equality (Battaglio, 2015: p. 93).

Occupational segregation also reinforces the notion of "comparable worth", which implies that women accept lower-paying or less prestigious positions by choice, thereby justifying persistent wage disparities (Battaglio, 2015: p. 100). While educational credentials or professional certifications can sometimes limit access to higher-level positions, research indicates that men are more likely to apply for promotions or advanced roles even when they lack full qualifications. This behavioral dynamic has historically widened gender gaps in representation and pay. Encouragingly, recent trends suggest a shift: more women are applying for leadership roles in urban planning and other public sector agencies, motivated not

only by personal advancement but also by a commitment to improving economic opportunities for their families and communities.

In many respects, glass walls represent the contemporary manifestation of the glass ceiling that has been persistent in structural barriers that continue to limit women's advancement, even as representation and earnings have improved since the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972. Despite measurable progress, women remain underrepresented in urban planning and other government positions. According to [Johnson and Crum-Cano \(2011: p. 388\)](#), women comprised only 18 percent of respondents in 1981, 27 percent in 1991, and 37 percent in 2006, never achieving parity with their male counterparts.

5. Intersectionality and Compounded Barriers in Urban Planning

Gender-based occupational segregation in urban planning cannot be fully understood without considering its intersection with race and ethnicity. Intersectionality theory emphasizes that women of color often face compounded barriers that differ in form and intensity from those experienced by white women, including racialized job tracking, exclusion from informal professional networks, and limited access to technical or leadership-oriented planning roles. Within municipal agencies, women of color are disproportionately represented in lower-status administrative or community-facing positions while remaining underrepresented in regulatory and distributive planning sectors. These intersecting forms of marginalization reinforce glass walls and exacerbate wage disparities, limiting advancement opportunities and diminishing institutional diversity. Addressing gender inequity in urban planning therefore requires policy interventions that account for both gender and racial dynamics within public sector employment. Recent scholars in public administration emphasizes that occupational segregation operates through intersecting systems of gender and race, producing distinct barriers for women of color that cannot be explained by gender alone ([Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2020](#); [Sabharwal et al., 2021](#)).

6. Civic Implications of Gender Inequity

This enduring disparity raises important questions about democratic representation in public service. Municipal planning decisions funded by taxpayers should reflect the diversity of the communities they serve, yet women continue to lack equitable representation in many of these agencies. The imbalance functions, in a metaphorical sense, as a form of taxation without representation with citizens who contribute to public resources but do not see their perspectives equally represented in the decision-making processes that shape their environments. Achieving gender parity in urban planning is therefore not only an issue of workplace equity but also one of civic fairness and inclusive governance.

The underrepresentation of women in municipal leadership diminishes both the diversity and effectiveness of urban planning processes, ultimately constrain-

ing economic growth at the local level. When municipalities lack diverse perspectives, they risk overlooking inclusive development strategies that could strengthen community engagement and stimulate investment. Limited gender representation can therefore hinder innovation and reduce the efficiency of public resource allocation.

Moreover, cities that fail to leverage the full potential of their workforce may experience slower economic expansion and declining sales tax revenues and funds that are vital for maintaining and improving public infrastructure. Expanding women's participation in urban planning, particularly within regulatory and distributive agencies, has the potential to promote more equitable and sustainable economic outcomes. Greater gender balance in these roles would not only advance women's professional equity but also enhance municipal capacity, fiscal stability, and the long-term growth of local economies.

7. Women's Contributions to Urban Planning

Within regulatory agencies, women often bring collaborative and empathetic leadership styles that can foster stronger relationships between municipalities and diverse stakeholders. Greater gender balance in these agencies could therefore enhance communication and partnership development, particularly in interactions with sovereign tribal nations. In states such as Oklahoma, where numerous Native American nations exercise sovereignty, inclusive representation in public planning and policy can contribute to more equitable and culturally informed decision-making.

Increased participation of women in regulatory and planning roles may also support the creation of progressive policies that expand municipal revenue streams beyond traditional sources such as sales tax and state or federal allocations. By engaging in cooperative urban planning initiatives with sovereign tribal governments, municipalities could promote mutually beneficial economic development. Given that the United States is home to more than 550 federally recognized tribes, collaborative efforts between municipalities and tribal nations have been grounded in respect for sovereignty and shared economic interests that have the potential to strengthen local economies, improve infrastructure, and enhance public services for all communities (Boucher, 2011).

Empirical evidence from Vienna, Austria, illustrates the benefits of incorporating women's perspectives into urban planning. In 1999, the city invited women to participate in a large-scale municipal initiative to "redesign its city to accommodate women" (Marcotte, 2013). The study revealed that women in Vienna "handled the majority of domestic responsibilities", leading planners to prioritize infrastructure and services that reflected these daily realities. As a result, the city implemented a range of community-oriented improvements, including wider sidewalks, expanded courtyard spaces, increased employment opportunities, more localized pharmacies for children's medications, and a greater number of neighborhood grocery stores offering fresh food options—all of which enhanced accessi-

bility and quality of life (Marcotte, 2013).

Vienna's experience demonstrates how gender-inclusive urban planning can simultaneously advance social equity and economic vitality. The United States could benefit from examining and adapting such international models to reduce occupational segregation and dismantle glass walls within its public sector institutions. By doing so, municipalities can foster more inclusive, efficient, and financially sustainable approaches to city development.

A secondary example of women's transformative impact on urban planning is identified in Barcelona, Spain. The city has made deliberate efforts to promote the inclusion of women in planning and design, recognizing that decades of male-dominated "groupthink" had produced stagnant and uniform urban environments. Women planners in Barcelona have since contributed innovative ideas that blend social awareness with environmental sustainability. One notable example involves the introduction of architectural canopies throughout the city, an initiative that reshaped public spaces and improved urban livability (Garcia-Ramon, Ortiz, & Prats, 2004: p. 219).

The Spanish canopies were initially designed to benefit elderly residents who relied on public transportation and frequented city parks. The structures provided shade, seating, and shelter, encouraging greater pedestrian activity and social interaction (Garcia-Ramon, Ortiz, & Prats, 2004: p. 220). Over time, the canopies also increased bus ridership by improving comfort and accessibility at transit stops, while reducing car dependency, lowering pollution, and promoting sustainable mobility. Economically, residents benefited from reduced transportation costs, while municipalities gained from higher public transit revenue.

The influence of women planners such as Via Júlia extended beyond transportation; the canopy design became a feature of local restaurants and cafés, enhancing outdoor dining and supporting small businesses. Today, similar canopy structures are common in cities worldwide, underscoring the global impact of gender-inclusive design thinking. Barcelona's success demonstrates that when women are essential for urban planning, which is beyond traditional assignments like housing and they can drive innovation, strengthen sustainability, and stimulate economic growth. U.S. municipalities could benefit greatly by adopting similar inclusive practices to balance representation and unlock new potential in local development. While these international cases demonstrate the transformative impact of gender-inclusive urban planning, similar efforts have also begun to emerge within the United States.

Within the United States, several municipalities have begun implementing gender-equity initiatives within urban planning and public administration. Cities such as Seattle and Minneapolis have adopted pay equity analyses and inclusive hiring practices aimed at reducing gender-based occupational segregation within municipal departments. While outcomes vary across jurisdictions, these initiatives demonstrate that domestic policy tools exist and can be adapted to promote gender equity in urban planning, reinforcing the applicability of international

models within the U.S. context. U.S. cities including Seattle and Minneapolis have implemented pay equity audits, gender-inclusive hiring standards, and equity accountability frameworks aimed at reducing occupational segregation within municipal departments (City of Seattle Office for Civil Rights, 2021; City of Minneapolis Department of Civil Rights, 2022; National League of Cities, 2022).

8. Structural Inequities and Economic Outcomes

“Many years have elapsed since the passage of Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action legislation, yet women continue to be underrepresented,” particularly within the field of urban planning (Newman, 1994: p. 277). Numerous theoretical perspectives suggest that women’s inclusion in the public sector could strengthen institutional effectiveness across multiple dimensions. However, within urban planning, distributive policies have commonly referred to as “pork-barrel programs” have remained heavily male-dominated, reflecting entrenched power networks tied to financial and political capital (Newman, 1994: p. 278).

Women are often excluded from these distributive arenas and instead concentrated in redistributive agencies, where they manage the allocation of resources rather than influence how funds are generated or invested. This structural imbalance perpetuates the misconception that women are less capable of driving fiscal growth or attracting investment. Yet, empirical evidence challenges this assumption. Newman (1994: p. 279) found that approximately one-third of women employed in regulatory agencies generated greater revenue for their departments than their male counterparts. These findings underscore a paradox: women in urban planning and public administration are both underrepresented and undervalued, despite demonstrable contributions to agency performance. Expanding women’s representation in regulatory and distributive sectors of urban planning is therefore essential not only for equity but also for maximizing institutional and economic outcomes.

Increasing women’s representation in urban planning can generate significant economic benefits, particularly within the housing market. Women are often perceived as “home makers” within this field, possessing a unique and practical vision for residential design and community development. However, despite their contributions, women remain financially disadvantaged in real estate and housing-related professions. Studies reveal that homes sold by women yield, on average, 10 percent less profit than those sold by men, even when controlling for comparable property types and markets (Vasel, 2016). This disparity reflects the persistence of the gender pay gap and the broader glass ceiling effect that restricts women’s economic advancement.

Such inequities underscore the urgent need for policy reforms ensuring pay equity and equitable representation within urban planning and real estate sectors. As Stone (1997: p. 121) powerfully asserts, “Poverty forces the free man to act like a slave”, which is a sentiment that resonates deeply with the structural limitations placed on women in the United States today. The stagnation of wages and the

disproportionate rates of poverty among women in both public and private sectors highlight systemic barriers that continue to undermine gender equality and economic growth. Addressing these barriers is not merely a matter of fairness, but a prerequisite for a more robust and inclusive economy.

Economic inequality has profound social consequences, including the disproportionate incarceration of women for nonviolent offenses. Many women are imprisoned for financial-related crimes such as writing bad checks, which often stem from economic hardship and insufficient wages. Between 1980 and 2014, the number of incarcerated women in the United States increased by more than 700%, rising from 26,378 to 215,332 ([The Sentencing Project, 2015](#)). This dramatic increase underscores the intersection between poverty, gender inequality, and the criminal justice system.

Ensuring equitable pay for women, particularly in sectors such as urban planning, could help reduce the economic pressures that contribute to these outcomes. When women receive fair compensation for their labor, they are less likely to experience the financial instability that leads to desperate measures or criminalization of poverty. Broader reform is therefore necessary to promote gender equity in both the economic and social spheres, helping to reduce systemic disparities and strengthen the social fabric of communities.

9. Sustainable Urban Planning and Female Leadership

Despite the many challenges, there are positive developments in the cultural mindset as women increasingly enter urban planning in contemporary America. A notable figure in this movement was Jane Jacobs, an activist and theorist whose work on sustainable urban planning transformed American cities and promoted more organic, community-focused development ([Jacobs, 1961](#)). Jacobs' ideas laid the groundwork for practices that emphasize livability, sustainability, and citizen engagement, offering a model that could benefit future generations of women in urban planning.

However, Jacobs herself faced significant underrepresentation throughout her career. During the 1950s, women constituted less than 10 percent of urban planners, meaning that Jacobs' influence existed largely in isolation from broader gender inclusion in the field. While her work provided a foundation for sustainable growth in municipalities, the lack of female representation limited the immediate application of her ideas within the profession. This historical context underscores the importance of continuing efforts to integrate women fully into urban planning roles, ensuring that their perspectives shape cities as comprehensively as Jacobs envisioned.

Jane Jacobs was ahead of her time in promoting sustainable urban planning in the United States. Her work predated a broader shift in environmental awareness, which accelerated in the 1970s following Rachel Carson's publication of *Silent Spring*, highlighting the detrimental effects of pesticides and industrial pollution ([Carson, 1962](#)). The environmental concerns raised by Carson led President Rich-

ard Nixon to enact landmark legislation, including the Clean Air Act of 1973 and the Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972. These laws prompted municipalities to prioritize sustainability in urban development for the first time.

However, ingrained professional habits and a male-dominated workforce in urban planning initially limited the adoption of these sustainable practices. The inclusion of women in the field helped to counteract the prevailing “groupthink”, introducing new perspectives that emphasized the interconnectedness of the economy, the environment, and equity, which is a framework often referred to as the “planning triangle” (Campbell, 1996: p. 297). Opposition from profit-driven companies such as Koch Industries and Georgia-Pacific, which lobbied heavily to avoid compliance costs, temporarily undermined this momentum. Job losses occurred as industries resisted environmental reforms, highlighting the tension between sustainability and economic interests (Stone, 1997: p. 41).

Despite these challenges, the green movement created opportunities for municipalities to develop sustainable businesses that generated more employment than pollutant-heavy industries. While criticisms of the movement’s short-term economic disruptions exist, its ethical and moral principles laid the foundation for long-term equitable and environmentally conscious urban planning, demonstrating the value of integrating diverse perspectives, including those of women, into municipal decision-making.

The sustainability movement facilitated greater diversity within urban planning, creating opportunities for more women to enter municipal agencies. Women brought new perspectives and innovative approaches that strengthened planning processes and contributed to local economic development. As a result, urban planning departments expanded significantly, supporting sustainable growth while increasing women’s representation and influence in decision-making. Although these initiatives often required higher municipal taxes to fund new projects, the long-term benefits included more inclusive planning, improved infrastructure, and enhanced services for constituents, demonstrating that gender-inclusive sustainability efforts can simultaneously advance social equity and economic prosperity.

Municipal taxes fund a wide range of local services, and after 1980, these revenues increasingly supported initiatives that expanded representation for minority groups within public sector agencies. This shift allowed for greater diversity in urban planning, particularly with the inclusion of women, who introduced meaningful reforms and innovative approaches to city development. One notable example was the growing demand for parks in metropolitan areas, a trend that women planners were often more willing to champion than their male counterparts (Izmailyan, 2012). The expansion of parks not only promoted physical activity among children but also contributed to lower crime rates and improvements in local schools, illustrating the broader social benefits of inclusive urban planning.

Today, women are far more prominent in the public sector of urban planning than in the era of Jane Jacobs, reflecting both cultural shifts and policy reforms. Despite these gains, occupational segregation persists, limiting women's opportunities to fully advance in municipal and private sector roles. Addressing these barriers remains essential to ensuring that urban planning reflects the diversity of the communities it serves and maximizes social, economic, and environmental outcomes.

Contemporary urban planning continues to be male-dominated, with women comprising only 37 percent of the workforce in 2006 and even fewer represented in distributive and regulatory agencies (Johnson & Crum-Cano, 2011: p. 388). Emerging statistical evidence suggests that increasing women's participation could enable them to lead reforms, achieve equitable representation, and contribute to sustainable job growth within the field. Greater inclusion of women in senior positions is likely to reduce discrimination and foster more diverse, innovative decision-making processes (Levy, 2013: p. 121).

Ultimately, achieving equality for women and minorities in urban planning is essential for ensuring that municipal growth reflects the needs of all constituents. Equal representation in the public sector is not only a matter of fairness but also a critical driver of economic development, social equity, and more resilient urban communities.

Equal representation is critical not only for addressing the needs of municipal constituents but also for promoting equitable opportunities for future generations. Children are deeply influenced by the societal models they observe, yet historically, public and political leadership has been dominated by Anglo-Saxon men, with limited visibility of women and racial minorities. This dynamic began to shift notably during the presidency of Barack Obama, when greater diversity in leadership inspired broader participation in the public sector. Increased representation of women and minorities in municipal and national governance has the potential to reshape societal expectations, demonstrating to younger generations that opportunities in public service and urban planning are accessible to all, regardless of gender or race.

The United States has undergone significant changes since its early history as a predominantly male-led government. Over time, the country has made strides toward a more inclusive public sector, particularly in areas such as urban planning, where individuals from diverse racial and gender backgrounds are increasingly represented. The U.S. has also begun to learn from other industrialized nations, adopting policies and practices that improve citizen participation and municipal development. Despite these advances, structural inequalities persist, and the country continues to function, in many ways, as an androcracy. While more women are entering urban planning and public service roles, ongoing reforms are necessary to ensure equitable representation and meaningful participation for all members of society.

Over the decades, U.S. urban planning agencies have expanded in size and diversity, yet women continue to face systemic underrepresentation, effectively be-

ing “locked in as second-class citizens” (Rosin, 2010). A common argument posits that men should dominate the workforce because more men attend college; however, this assumption is inaccurate. Women now earn approximately 60 percent of both bachelor’s and master’s degrees in the United States, indicating that their underrepresentation in fields like urban planning is not due to educational disparity (Rosin, 2010).

The persistence of occupational segregation confines women to gendered roles, limiting access to higher-paying and decision-making positions. For example, women dominate human resources, comprising 71 percent of the profession (Cook Ramirez, 2012); yet remain underrepresented in urban planning leadership. While some countries are successfully integrating women into primary leadership roles, the United States still lacks adequate representation, highlighting the need for continued reforms to achieve equity and ensure that municipal planning reflects the diversity of the communities it serves.

Women have played significant roles in urban planning in countries such as Vienna, Austria, and Barcelona, Spain, where their contributions were recognized as essential for creating more inclusive and prosperous municipalities. These examples demonstrate how industrialized nations have leveraged gender diversity to enhance urban development and community well-being. In contrast, the United States has been slower to adopt similar measures of equity. Even countries with historically patriarchal structures, such as South Korea, India, and China, have increasingly prioritized gender inclusion in public administration and planning in the early twenty-first century (Rosin, 2010). The U.S. continues to struggle with wage gaps and occupational segregation in urban planning, reflecting persistent systemic barriers that limit women’s full participation in shaping municipalities and achieving equitable economic outcomes (Rosin, 2010).

Women are participating in the workforce at higher rates than ever, yet in many cases this involvement has been driven by economic necessity rather than personal choice. Beginning in the mid-1960s, wage stagnation and declines in household income compelled many women to seek employment to support their families. Over the following decades, women became increasingly integral to the labor force, contributing as much as men in many sectors. Despite these gains, women continue to face a glass ceiling that limits their upward mobility, often being confined to occupational roles with less funding, fewer opportunities, and lower pay than their male counterparts. Addressing these structural inequities is essential to achieving true workplace equality and maximizing the potential contributions of women across all sectors, including urban planning.

As a result of social stigma and lower pay in urban planning, many women are leaving the public sector for higher-paying opportunities in the private sector. This trend has contributed to a male-dominated urban planning workforce, which limits diversity of thought and creativity within municipal agencies. When women exit, they take their unique perspectives and innovative approaches with them, benefiting private companies rather than municipalities. Consequently, decision-

making in municipal planning becomes concentrated among men, increasing the risk of groupthink and one-sided policies that may fail to address the needs of the broader community. Promoting equitable pay and representation is therefore critical to retaining women in public sector urban planning and ensuring inclusive, innovative governance.

Urban planning agencies should recognize the transformative contributions of women, as the profession is no longer solely male-dominated. While societal structures are evolving, the United States has been slow to fully embrace gender equity in public sector planning. Women now comprise a majority in certain design-related fields, approximately 54 percent, and often demonstrate a stronger commitment to environmental sustainability (Grefe, 2011). Research also shows that “women managers who have broken the glass ceiling in medium-sized non-traditional organizations have proven that effective leaders don’t come from one mold” (Rosener, 1990: p. 119). This evidence underscores that leadership effectiveness is not determined by gender; rather, women bring innovative perspectives and problem-solving approaches that have positively shaped urban planning. Municipalities that integrate women more fully into planning roles can leverage this diversity to create more inclusive, sustainable, and forward-thinking communities. Contemporary research demonstrates that gender-diverse public sector organizations exhibit stronger problem-solving capacity, improved policy outcomes, and higher levels of public trust (Ricucci, 2021; Andersen et al., 2023).

10. Policy Recommendations and Municipal Strategies

U.S. municipalities have the potential to use fiscal policy to support gender equity in the workforce. By strategically increasing sales, property, and income taxes, cities could ensure that women in urban planning are compensated fairly while simultaneously generating funds for municipal projects and sustainability initiatives. These additional revenues would not only improve women’s salaries but also strengthen municipal infrastructure, services, and overall economic functionality. Higher wages could have a ripple effect, benefiting all levels of government employees and even private sector workers. California provides a compelling example: by raising taxes and investing in education, healthcare, and wages, the state has become the fifth-largest economy in the world if considered independently (Ausick, 2016).

In addition to revenue strategies, municipalities can adopt targeted administrative reforms to dismantle occupational segregation within urban planning departments. These include:

- Mandated pay equity audits to identify and correct gender- and race-based wage disparities within municipal agencies;
- Formal mentorship and sponsorship programs designed to support women’s advancement into regulatory and distributive planning roles;
- Blind recruitment and promotion processes that reduce implicit bias in hiring and advancement decisions;

- Gender equity benchmarks tied to municipal funding, performance evaluations, or departmental reporting requirements.

U.S. municipalities must continue to grow and modernize to attract residents who support local businesses and community services. Progressive municipal policies would allow women to advance alongside the city, contributing fully to urban development and economic growth. However, challenges remain, particularly in smaller, more conservative municipalities where outdated beliefs about gender roles persist, and women are often denied equal pay. Shifting this mindset is essential: all men and women are entitled to equal treatment, including equitable compensation. Without such equality, women's opportunities are constrained, undermining their pursuit of economic security and participation in civic life, which are fundamental to the broader promise of liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Women play a crucial role in the social and economic progression of the United States. Historically, women have been treated as second-class citizens, facing systemic barriers in both pay and opportunity (Rosin, 2010). Municipalities can take active steps to integrate women more fully into urban planning, including ensuring equitable compensation. One potential strategy is to increase municipal revenues through taxes, which would not only support fair wages for women but also fund critical city projects and services. Equitable salaries would help women remain in public sector roles, reducing the need to leave for private employment, and would improve the financial stability of families, allowing women to provide for their children without undue economic strain. Higher wages could also mitigate broader social consequences, such as the overrepresentation of women in low-income incarceration. Addressing the structural barriers of both glass ceilings and glass walls would yield broad societal benefits. As more industrialized nations advance gender equity, the United States must follow suit to ensure both social justice and economic progress, serving as a model for other countries to emulate in achieving equitable representation and fair compensation for women.

These policy interventions are not without challenges. Efforts to raise municipal taxes or mandate equity reforms may encounter political resistance, particularly in fiscally conservative jurisdictions or during periods of economic uncertainty. Additionally, without proper enforcement mechanisms, equity initiatives risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative. Nevertheless, these challenges underscore the importance of incremental, evidence-based reforms that align fiscal responsibility with social equity. Addressing implementation barriers strengthens, rather than weakens, the case for proactive municipal action. Evidence-based policy tools such as mandated pay equity audits, blind recruitment processes, and gender equity benchmarks have been shown to reduce wage disparities and improve advancement outcomes in public sector organizations (OECD, 2021; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2022).

11. Conclusion

Gender equity in urban planning is not merely a matter of fairness, but a critical

driver of social, economic, and civic progress. Despite decades of policy reform and advocacy, women continue to face structural barriers such as glass ceilings and glass walls that limit their representation and influence in municipal decision-making. These inequities have real consequences, including reduced economic growth, underrepresentation of diverse perspectives, and perpetuation of wage gaps and social disparities.

Empirical evidence from cities like Vienna and Barcelona demonstrates that when women are fully integrated into urban planning, municipalities benefit from more inclusive, innovative, and sustainable solutions. Women's leadership fosters equitable policies, strengthens community engagement, and improves public infrastructure, highlighting the transformative potential of gender-diverse workforces. In the United States, strategies such as equitable pay, inclusive hiring, and supportive fiscal policies can ensure that women remain in public sector roles, allowing them to contribute fully to municipal development while promoting economic stability and social well-being.

Ultimately, achieving gender parity in urban planning is a matter of justice, efficiency, and sustainability. By dismantling systemic barriers and leveraging the talents of women, U.S. municipalities can create cities that are more prosperous, resilient, and reflective of the communities they serve. Ensuring equal opportunities for women in urban planning is not only a step toward social equity, it is an investment in the future of our cities and the nation as a whole. Recent international assessments emphasize that gender-inclusive urban planning is central to sustainable development, fiscal resilience, and democratic legitimacy in cities worldwide (UN-Habitat, 2022; OECD, 2023).

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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