

Women & the Sustainable City in Israel

Compact, mixed use urban environments provide greater **security**, **access** and **opportunity** to **women** at all stages of life, from single women and busy mothers to retirees and great-grandmothers. In contrast, the **suburban lifestyle** – with bigger houses to clean and constant ferrying of kids to and fro – places a large burden on working mothers. In the case of **middle- and lower-income families**, housing options are often even further out, distances that need to be travelled are greater, public transportation is less efficient, and most households have only one car, or no car at all.



Merhav – the Movement for Israeli Urbanism (MIU) www.miu.org.il

is the only organization working to promote a more humane, woman-friendly and sustainable built environment in Israel, and to create the planning tools needed to bring that about.

Security

Pioneer urbanist Jane Jacobs described the mechanisms by which **mixed uses** and **urban density** lead to more active street life and constant “**eyes upon the street**”, creating **public safety** for women and everyone else, and preventing muggings and other forms of attack. Crime thrives in desolate, poorly planned built environments, where there is no one to hear the victim’s call for help and intervene.

Healthy public space, on the other hand, fosters a **human presence**, a sense of awareness and greater social interaction, and markedly reduces opportunities for personal crime.

Opportunity

In the Israeli economy of today, both parents must generally work for the family to make ends meet. The traditional single-income family is no longer a viable option. Mothers most often get the short end of the stick, with the additional family and household constraints on their time, naturally narrowing employment options and blocking women’s careers. A compact urban environment provides for a greater concentration of employment opportunities within each working mother’s daily activity area.

Access and exercise

In many households, women still bear the main responsibility for shopping and looking after children, in addition to providing an often much needed second income for the family.

Urban planning in the second half of the 20th century aggravated problems of access, through land use zoning that generally required the separation of housing and employment (including commerce and services). Mixed land uses and provision of services within residential areas reduce the need to travel, and make shops and services more accessible to a wider range of the population, including those without cars. For many women, **walkability** and the density



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and frequency of **public transportation** are critical factors determining the extent to which they can juggle the basic logistics of running the household, bringing children to different destinations, and work. A walkable neighborhood allows women to live a **healthier lifestyle** – burning calories and exercising the musculoskeletal system, heart and lungs – and **frees women** from the need to chauffeur teenagers and children big enough to get around on their own. Furthermore, since women comprise the **majority of shoppers**, seeking to improve the quality of women’s experience in urban centers and commercial streets within walking distance of residential areas contributes directly to towns’ and neighborhoods’ overall **economic and environmental sustainability**.

Inclusion in the planning process

Planners' traditional lack of awareness on women's needs is one of the main reasons for insensitively or impractically planned built environments that women encounter every day. Women were mostly excluded from urban planning processes.

Merhav successfully imported the charrette model of involving residents and local stakeholders in urban planning processes – in itself a groundbreaking achievement in the history of women’s participation in physical planning in Israel.

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works to create economically, environmentally and socially viable alternatives for women and families that foster **safety, access, health and flexibility**



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