

Universities and Re-Construction of Cities: the Role of Research and Education

Report of the World Café Sessions

Table 4: Building Equity and Fairness into reconstruction activities (with special reference to Gender)

Host: Cristina Demaria, Vice-Rector Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna, Italy

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This World Café Table aimed to discuss the importance of building equity and fairness when reconstructing social spaces. It sheds light on how significant the inclusion of diverse needs of social groups is. The Table deliberated on groups such as students, academics, refugees, migrants, and nations struck by war with a specific focus on gender. Professor Cristina Demaria explained the concept of equity, which is often confused with equality. While equality implies offering identical opportunities to everyone, equity acknowledges the disparities in our starting points and emphasizes the need to recognize and rectify these imbalances. The same space can be perceived differently by the various social groups. For example, a park near a university that lacks light infrastructure can seem more deterrent and dangerous for young students or women than for older men. Another example of imbalance is the situation of Ukrainian women being more educated than men, yet facing the problem of finding jobs that worsen during the war. The Host emphasized the importance of good planning while rebuilding the spaces and asked how to build narratives and reconstruct spaces to achieve equity and fairness.

The Table's participants were from different backgrounds with different opinions; however, they all agreed that equity and equality are far from being achieved. The first thing the host asked was how many of the speakers during the Magna Charta conference were female. Contributors' answer was not many, but most of them realized that only after the question was asked. It showed that a lot of spaces are still far from being achieved. Taking academic grounds and this conference as an example, however, there is much more than that. Uneven division in work, education, or cities' spaces is still visible.

Addressing and resolving problems with equity and fairness of the spaces might be a big challenge for reconstructors. Firstly, reconstructors have to define for whom they are rebuilding spaces, therefore, allowing the division that meets the needs of all groups. Such standards can create economic problems when rebuilders cannot afford solutions to all needs. Another challenge might be the political situation of reconstructed spaces. Ruling governments might not be supportive of all ideas and do not prioritize changes. The last challenge mentioned is a primal culture of the spaces and how hard it is to initiate

the changing process, as morals, beliefs and traditions can be deeply rooted in peoples' minds and behaviors; consequently, many remain hostile towards transformations.

The possible resolutions discussed during table sessions were as follows:

- More equal division of genders in spaces.
 - The example was based on the observed disproportion within the administrative sphere (mostly women) and university authorities (mostly men) in home institutions of table participants.
- Creating and encouraging institutions such as research centers or academic establishments to promote diversity and equity.
 - Women Studies Application and Research Center of the University of Istanbul - the first women's studies center in Türkiye was mentioned, as well as the International Office of the University of Lodz that helps international students adapt to the new environment.
- Governmental policies that would create a set of rules and practices regarding equity and fairness of various spaces.
 - For instance, Polish law limits the age of university authorities, creating more opportunities for younger candidates.
- Reconstructions of public spaces that would allow everyone to feel safe and accepted within them.
 - The creation of stress relieving rooms, baby rooms, diverse kinds of bathrooms etc. might construct and enhance a more equal milieu.
- Civil movements that are spreading awareness of problems and highlighting the needs of the social groups.

Achieving equity and fairness requires a lot of resources and this will continue to be the case, yet we need to start somewhere. Speaking, showing, giving examples, and putting the issue in the agendas of public events and meetings can start a significant change. Winning the gender battle can help resolve other battles.