

THE EVALUATION REPORTS

June
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EQUALITY & PUBLIC SPACES

How can we create gender-sensitive public spaces?

*For non-sexist, safer
and more egalitarian public
spaces for all: a review of the
participatory evaluation
and its findings.*

KEY INSIGHTS



Interview with Mahaut Bertu, Nantes deputy councillor in charge of associative life, equality, the non-sexist city and the fight against discrimination in the City of Nantes.

Against what backdrop did the gender-sensitive public spaces evaluation process take place?

This process was part of a global strategy to promote equality between women and men, applied to all public policies. It is based on a dual approach: on the one hand, integrating gender issues in every sector—culture, education, safety, etc.—through the actions of every council member; on the other, developing structural tools such as [gender-sensitive budgeting](#) and consideration of gender-related aspects in urban development.

Public spaces are a priority lever since local authorities play a central role in their design and life. Long viewed as neutral, we now recognise that the way they are developed has a direct impact on how they will be appropriated by inhabitants in the future. Taking account of gender issues as from the early stages therefore promotes a more egalitarian use of spaces by all.

What issues does this process tackle? And why now?

This process comes at a strategic time: the development of public spaces takes three to ten years, highlighting the importance of taking action as soon as possible. It also comes at a time when we have worked during this term to ensure that all conditions are met, for example with the creation of the [Non-sexist city network \(Réseau de la ville non-sexiste\)](#) which is one of the citizen dialogue spaces we relied on for this process. In order to ensure the territory is made aware of these issues, we have also taken structural measures relating to the gendered use of public spaces by launching campaigns on harassment and sexist behaviour, by raising awareness in bars, etc.

The goal now is to root this dynamic in a field-based evaluation, in order to clearly identify uses and levers for action. Ultimately, this will result in a non-prescriptive but operational recommendation guide to be used by professionals involved in city-making, in order to incorporate equality considerations into each and every future development plan.

This is a key step towards building truly inclusive public spaces.

What important lessons should be learnt from this evaluation and how will these lessons fuel public policy in terms of gender issues in public spaces?

Three main lessons are drawn from the evaluation. First is the matter of visibility in public spaces: the ability to carry out passive co-surveillance is essential in order to improve sense of safety.

This notably means paying attention to landscaping, and particularly the height of vegetation, in order to maintain lines of sight, all while reconciling ecological transition and gender equality goals.

Another significant finding is the lack and quality of urban furniture, and notably seating and public toilets. These items, which are still too few or unsuitable, are central to meeting the needs of a diverse population, especially one that is ageing and predominantly female. Improving these is a concrete tool to make the city more inclusive, with four generations currently living alongside each other.

Finally, there is also the place afforded to children in public spaces: better consideration of children's needs—play areas, seating, toilets—automatically improves conditions for women, who are still their main caregivers. If we really want this social reality to change, and for time devoted to the family to be shared equally, we must take this aspect into account in urban development.

WHAT IS A PUBLIC SPACE?

It is an outdoor area that is freely accessible to all and is managed by a local authority. It is the opposite of a private space, which belongs to a person or a group with the ability to restrict access to it. In this participatory evaluation, evaluators focused on squares, small plazas and streets.



Joint interview with **Michel Lucas**, vice-president of Nantes Métropole, councillor in charge of the roadway, and with **Nathalie Leblanc**, metropolitan councillor in charge of gender equality and longevity.

What criteria were used to select the six public spaces studied in the evaluation?

Nathalie Leblanc: These sites are unique and complementary places to test, analyse and nurture a gendered approach to urban development. Some Nantes sites, such as Pirmil or Bouffay, were identified for the specific challenges they pose; others were chosen for the diversity they offer in terms of use and population: train stations, parks, school forecourts, squares in a popular neighbourhood such as Breil. This selection enabled us to study a range of situations, each with specific challenges: a lack of serene spaces around the Beaugard secondary school in La Chapelle-sur-Erdre, a sense of insecurity in Pirmil, appropriation issues at the Minais park in Sainte-Luce-sur-Loire, etc.

Michel Lucas: the City of Nantes and the Nantes Metropolitan Authority both intend to incorporate gender issues into the design of public spaces, in line with the commitments taken following the "[City-making. Together. let's design our future life](#)" Great Debate. This led us to select both Nantes and metropolitan sites representing the wide variety of contexts and the different ageing stages of facilities.

Why did you choose to initiate an evaluation process involving citizens on this topic?

N. L.: In order to better understand lived realities, we adopted an "approach" method, with exploratory walks, observation and *on-site interviews*. This process meant we were able to avoid the bias that comes with traditional participatory mechanisms,

which are often supported by populations that are already familiar with citizen participation in public dialogue. By starting with women's and the LGBTQIA+ community's daily habits in public spaces, we are able to better understand the actual conditions in which these spaces are appropriated: who uses these spaces, who doesn't, their reasons, and the obstacles that limit their access or comfort.

Why choose to conduct this evaluation in collaboration with the City and the Nantes Metropolitan Authority?

M. L.: Because much of the power relating to public spaces lies with the Metropolitan Authority: lighting, urban furniture, transport hubs such as in Pirmil, etc. It was therefore key that we adopt a joint approach, both to ensure our action is consistent and to promote a shared understanding of inclusive development issues.

N. L.: Nantes benefits from strong historical grounding in terms of the fight against discrimination and inclusive approaches, notably as regards gender issues. With confident political backing, this dynamic is supported by a network of committed local stakeholders, with trusted relationships with the local authority. This coordination between the "hard" action taken by the Metropolitan Authority (urban planning) and the "soft" action taken by on-the-ground stakeholders (programming, social relations)—to use a metaphor unique to the digital world—is a complementary and inspiring approach. The idea is also to disseminate best practices in all 23 municipalities, and know-how in terms of design and the implementation of public spaces.



A WORD FROM PASCAL BOLO, VICE-PRESIDENT IN CHARGE OF PUBLIC POLICY EVALUATION

Within the City of Nantes and Nantes Métropole, the democratically-oriented participatory evaluation of public policies is a lever to help councillors with policy decision-making and to improve the service provided to inhabitants. This very unique way of operating in France—with involvement from councillors, inhabitants and stakeholders—was renewed with conviction upon the adoption of the [Metropolitan Citizen Pact](#) in October 2021.

Participatory evaluation provides a cross-examination of all of the points of view held by the stakeholders to a public policy or project, and allows to improve public action by taking account of the expectations and needs of all. This process produces a shared evaluative judgment which invites us to reconsider public action, its purposes and the resources allocated to it. It is a demanding process in which the local authority undertakes to examine every recommendation made and respond to participants. It specifies which recommendations it will or will not heed, providing the reasons behind its decision. This democratic exercise is carried out in a fully transparent manner and the results are systematically disclosed in [Evaluation reports](#) published on the citizen dialogue platform.

PANORAMA

Public spaces as seen by women and the LGBTQIA+ community

This panorama offers a summary of the observations, exploratory walks and mini-interviews conducted in six Nantes and metropolitan public spaces⁽¹⁾ between 24 October and 25 January of last year and put into perspective with local Nantes and national figures.

The influence of cultural representations with masculine connotations



In Nantes, **2 statues** represent famous women having once existed: the Anne de Bretagne statue (in front of Château des Ducs) and the statue of singer Barbara (in the Nantes Erdre neighbourhood).

9% of names given to roads and public facilities in Nantes in 2024 are women's names (against 3.6% in 2016); **34%** are men's names and **57%** are common nouns⁽²⁾.

Did you know?

In France, **94%** of street or public space signs honouring famous figures are men⁽³⁾.

A sense of insecurity that impacts habits



At night, I avoid being alone. I don't wear my headphones to remain alert. I move discreetly, avoiding eye contact. //

34% of women in Nantes (1 in 3 women) have suffered insults or sexist words in the street or in public spaces in the last two years⁽⁴⁾.



Did you know?

In France, in 2022, according to a study conducted by the High Council for equality⁽⁵⁾:

76% of women say that they are scared to return home alone at night.

51% of women aged 18 to 24 do not feel they can dress how they want.

17% of women say they choose to not go out alone after an assault, against **3%** of men⁽⁶⁾.



⁽¹⁾ The centre of Breil (Nantes), around the mobility hub in Pirmil (Nantes), the Bouffay area (Nantes), the area surrounding the station (Mauves-sur-Loire), the Beaugard secondary school forecourt (La Chapelle-sur-Erdre) and the Minais park (Sainte-Luce-sur-Loire).

⁽²⁾ [City of Nantes](#).

⁽³⁾ [Soroptimist International](#), 2013.

⁽⁴⁾ Barometric study conducted on a sample of 1,200 metropolitans, TMO 2023 - Nantes Discrimination Observatory.

⁽⁵⁾ [2022 Annual Report on the state of sexism in France](#), High Council for Equality Between Men and Women, 7 March 2022.

⁽⁶⁾ ["Victimisation et sentiment d'insécurité selon le sexe" \("Victimisation and the Sense of Insecurity According to Sex"\)](#), Insee-ONDRP-SSMSI, Lifestyle and security surveys 2015 to 2019.

In France: gender discrimination in public spaces

Constantly rising anti-LGBTQIA+ violence

+104% increase in the number of anti-LGBTQIA+ crimes or offences over the 2016-2021 period, +15% per year on average.⁽⁷⁾

- 70% of victims of crimes or offences are men.⁽⁸⁾
- 60% of victims are under the age of 35.
- 49% of victims are under the age of 30, 7% are under 15.
- 28% of anti-LGBTQIA+ crimes or offences are committed in public spaces.

LGBTQIA+ women suffer more violence than heterosexual women in public spaces



- **50%** of lesbian people
 - **75%** of bisexual people
- have experienced forms of violence in public spaces (from insults to rape), against **33%** of heterosexual people.⁽⁹⁾



Among the LGBTQIA+ population, transgender individuals are particularly exposed

- 75% have suffered insults and unwelcome advances.
- 27% have suffered physical violence.
- 47% have suffered sexual violence.



Characteristics that favour gender-sensitive public spaces



Lighting

- Public lighting with beacons to mark out pathways and reduce ecological impact.



Programming

- The events organised by community centres and associations promote collective appropriation of public spaces and limit exclusive uses.



“ Shared gardens make me feel safe, whether busy or not. ”

Did you know? Women say that they feel safe in green spaces



During the survey, when asked “In which public spaces do you feel good?”, women and LGBTQIA+ people spontaneously mentioned parks and gardens (e.g.: **Jardin des Plantes, île de Versailles, Grand-Blottereau park, the Sèvre surrounding areas, or the Loiry park in Vertou**, etc.).

Shortcomings in public spaces



“ It’s very hard to go to the toilet. Without making a purchase, it’s an impossible feat. ”

- Public toilets.
- Furniture: varied seating, tables, play areas built in lively and sheltered places.
- More mixed-gender sports facilities.



⁽⁷⁾ [Info rapide](#), no. 20, National security ministerial statistics department, May 2022.

⁽⁸⁾ [Info rapide](#), no. 38, National security ministerial statistics department, May 2024.

⁽⁹⁾ « [Violences et rapports de genre. Enquête sur les violences de genre en France](#) » (“Violence and gender relations. A study of gender violence in France”) known as the VIRAGE study, led by Elizabeth Brown, Alice Debauche, Christelle Hamel, Magali Mazuy, Ined, 2020

AN OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE

A look at inspiring initiatives in France and abroad

Collected in the form of “benchmarks” as part of the evaluation, these inspirations were presented to participants during workshops, to fuel their discussions and proposals.

Seating designed by and for teens

Where? Parc Årstedernas, in Umea (Sweden)

- Sheltered seating enabling several sub-groups to sit together.
- Colourful elements and lighting.
- An open view.



Pleasant breastfeeding areas

Where? In Barcelona (Spain)

- A sheltered space that is both intimate and collective.
- A space designed for mixed-gender uses.
- A space promoting get-togethers and the sharing of experiences.



Welcoming play areas and sports facilities for all

Where? Parc Blandan, in Lyon (France)

- A variety of areas and uses promoting activities by and for all.
- Mixed-gender playing areas.
- Clear visibility, near and far.
- Open, individual and group seating and spaces.



© Shigeru Ban, The Tokyo Toilet Project

Safe and welcoming public toilets

Where? “The Tokyo Toilet” project (Japan)

- Illuminated and easy-identifiable spaces.
- Accessibility for all.
- Translucent partitions allowing to see inside when unoccupied, to ensure their cleanliness and safety.
- Colourful and inviting furniture.

Signage to change representations and reclaim space for women in the street

Where? In Geneva (Switzerland)

- The inclusion of women and LGBTQIA+ people on traditionally male signs.
- Inclusive representation of women: six different pictograms (variety of ages, physical appearances, alone or in groups).
- Signs spread throughout the city.



© City of Geneva

Colourful and reassuring lighting

Where? The “Hypernit” project, place du Commando on the Saint-Nazaire seafront (France)

- Creation of an illuminated pathway.
- A progressive and adaptive nocturnal transition scenography.
- Warm and reassuring colours.
- Long-distance visibility.
- A clear spatial readability thanks to illuminated signage.



© Martin Launay, City of Saint-Nazaire



© Göran Ekeberg, Karavan landskapsarkitekt, Christoffer Skogsmo / Nola

Greenery that promotes the legibility of public spaces

Where? The “Carlshage and Siegbahnsparken” project, in Uppsala (Sweden)

- Complementary uses: picnic areas and shaded seating areas placed near playgrounds.
- A wide range of vegetation heights (including a lot of low-lying vegetation) maintaining visual openness.
- A legible, clean and safe space.

METHOD-RELATED QUESTIONS

EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS

1. Do women and the LGBTQIA+ community make free use of public spaces? What do their habits, views and representations show?
2. What are the specific difficulties and needs of women and the LGBTQIA+ community in terms of the use of public spaces?
3. To what extent are gender-related public space issues taken account of in the public policies led by the City of Nantes and the Metropolitan Authority?

THE SIX PUBLIC SPACES EVALUATED

- The centre of Breil (Nantes)
- Around the mobility hub in Pirmil (Nantes)
- The Bouffay area (Nantes)
- The area surrounding the train station (Mauves-sur-Loire)
- The Beauregard secondary school forecourt (La Chapelle-sur-Erdre)
- The Minais park (Sainte-Luce-sur-Loire)

A BROAD RANGE OF VIEWPOINTS

To provide a shared situational analysis of public spaces from a gender perspective and an in-depth study of public policies, the City of Nantes and the Metropolitan Authority chose to involve all interested parties:

- a **citizen community** of 29 women and LGBTQIA+ people from the Metropolitan Authority's different municipalities and Nantes' various neighbourhoods, selected to represent the diversity of public space habits and profiles (age, professional circumstances, etc.);
- associative, cultural and economic **stakeholders** from the [Nantes non-sexist city network](#);
- City and Metropolitan Authority **officers** from various departments involved in the design, coordination and management of public spaces.

(1) Société d'aménagement de la Métropole Ouest Atlantique

An evaluation divided into three phases, from September 2024 to April 2025

The full process is documented on [the citizen dialogue platform](#)



DRAWING UP A DIAGNOSIS

1

September 2024 - February 2025: exploratory walks, interviews, workshops and field surveys conducted by independent consulting firms Planète Publique and La 3^e Main

“Observing public spaces, understanding and sharing experiences”

- 1 field survey on 6 Nantes and metropolitan public spaces: 11 day and night observation sessions, 100 *on-site* mini-interviews with users.
- 2 workshops with the citizen community (29 women and LGBTQIA+ people) and the Nantes non-sexist city network.
- 6 exploratory walks with the citizen community (centre of Breil, mobility hub in Pirmil, Bouffay area), the Night council and the non-sexist city network (Bouffay area) and with local mobility hub entities (in Pirmil).
- 1 situational analysis of internal practices:
 - > 10 collective interviews with officers:
 - > 1 documentary analysis of the City and Metropolitan Authority's public policies and strategic documents.

2

LAUNCH A DEBATE & MAKE PROPOSALS

February - March 2025: sharing of findings and launch of debates with stakeholders

“Comparing perspectives, identifying room for improvement, making proposals”

- **3 workshops** involving the citizen community, the Nantes non-sexist city network, and 19 Metropolitan Authority and Nantes officers, as well as 2 Samoa partners⁽¹⁾.
- **1 shared forum** bringing all stakeholders together (40 people).

3

REPORT

“Enlightening the public decision-making process and transforming public action”

- **April 2025:** delivery of the evaluative report (diagnosis and 10 priorities) to council members.

4

AND AFTER: WHAT WILL CHANGE

“Processing and deliberating”

- **As from April 2025:** processing of results by the City and Metropolitan Authority's departments, followed by political arbitration by council members, and a reasoned response presented to those involved in the process.

CONDUCTING A SENSITIVE ASSESSMENT OF A PUBLIC SPACE

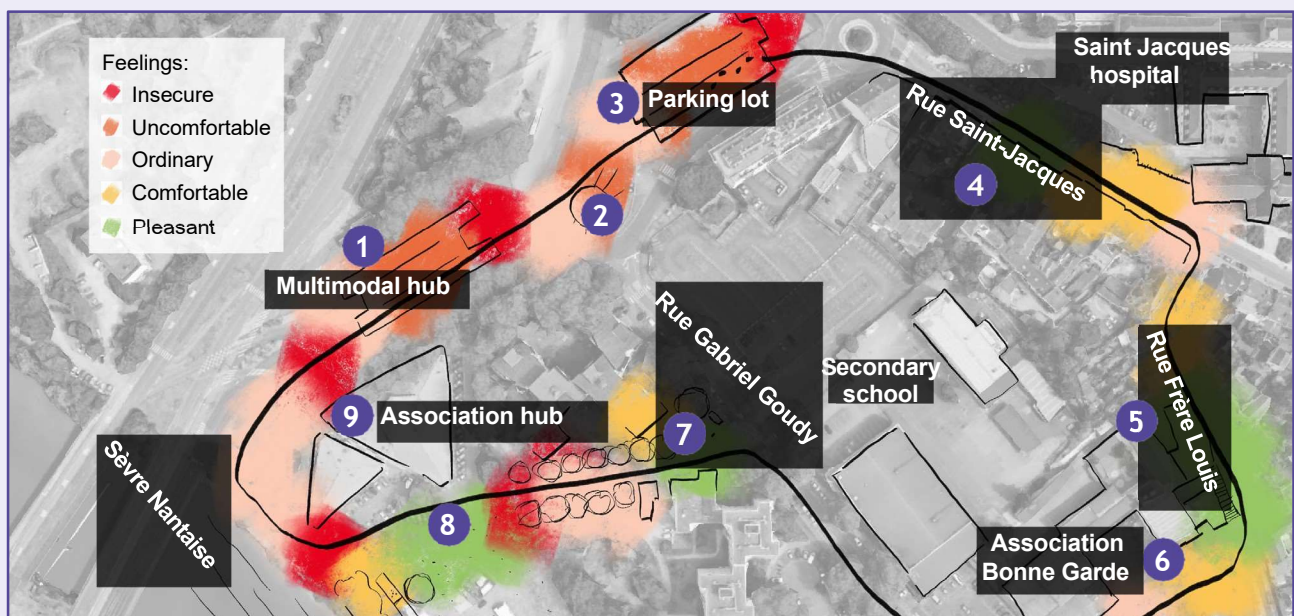
Sociologists and urban planners conducted several observation sessions during the day and at night, along with around forty short interviews with passersby from all over the metropolis and beyond (Nantes, Saint-Sébastien-sur-Loire, Orvault, Haute-Goulaine, Les Sorinières, Rezé, La Chapelle-Heulin, Geneston, Rennes, etc.).

To complete the assessment, two exploratory walks—one with the citizen community and the other with associative neighbourhood entities—concluded the analysis.

The data collected allowed for the creation of a sensitive map (see below) highlighting the feelings elicited in key places in the area, represented by colours, and the gathering of suggestions for improvement.

These sensitive assessments were carried out on each of the six survey sites, and then compared in order to make observations at metropolis level.

Example of the Pirmil site - January 2024



- 1** > Austere, unwelcoming atmosphere
> Open and bright place
> Lack of benches
> Lots of traffic and noise
> Windy place
> Presence, reassuring

- 2** > Cold, lacks greenery
> Noisy place
> Vast empty space
> Surrounded by road traffic

- 3** > Place dedicated to cars
> Very noisy
> Lifeless place
> Lack of legibility in the space
"It feels a bit as if I was hanging around the train station."

- 4** > Lively, diversity of shops
> Lighting
> Wide pavement
> Noisy place

- 5** > Quality urban furniture
> Lighting
> Delineated pedestrian area
"It has a village square sort of atmosphere."

- 6** > Calm
> Safe lighting (colour and intensity)
> Presence of greenery and a wide pavement
"I like to identify landmarks I can use as markers or to take refuge. And there, that's a cinema, I feel authorised in a sense to go in there."

- 7** > Calm
> Pathway with no hidden corners
> Tall trees
> Amenities (compost bin, book exchange boxes)

- 8** > Austere, cold atmosphere
> Lively place
> Beautiful trees
> Male population
"In winter, when night falls, I feel very unsafe because there is no lighting. There's no-one, no events or noise. In the summer and spring, it's the complete opposite."

- 9** > Calm
> In the summer: a pleasant place
> Wide and illuminated pathway
> Lack of lighting
> Waste, obsolete buildings
"There is an associative centre. I think that's great but it's not open to the outside and doesn't make you want to go there."

ANALYSIS

Drafted by Planète publique

Taking better account of gender issues in public spaces?

By analysing the City of Nantes' and the Metropolitan

Authority's public spaces, and by studying current public policies on the development, management and coordination of these spaces, local authorities are striving to understand **how to better guarantee women's and LGBTQIA+ people's "right to the city"**.

The surveys, workshops and exploratory walks conducted reveal that the Nantes and metropolitan territories are marked by gender inequalities in public spaces. Field observations and **testimonials provided by users confirm the issues** already identified at national level. This first wide-scope evaluation at local level shows that Nantes and its metropolis are no exception.

Several essential needs emerge: the need to feel safe, to be able to relax, to perform outdoor recreational activities and to meet basic needs such as having access to toilets or breastfeeding.

The atmosphere of public spaces plays a crucial role in their appropriation. This **sensitivity component** is still too often neglected by public policies which, due to their core area of work and professional culture, favour more functional concerns. Programmes, events and collective activities in public spaces can change how these places are perceived and used by all. The participatory evaluation thus demonstrates that **development alone is not enough:** public action

must **take account of gender-related issues throughout a project's lifecycle, from design to facilitation through to post-delivery management.**

While council members are now driven by ambitions relating to equality for all in public spaces, municipal and metropolitan departments are struggling to translate these main guidelines into concrete action.

The evaluation shows that **the topic is still relatively new to public policies.**

We need to encourage greater ambition by leading on-the-ground experimental approaches, capitalising on pre-existing initiatives and improving collective skill development within both local authorities.

How to read the Analysis

The evaluation was conducted based on a three-dimensional method involving on-site observations and interviews, exploratory walks, and citizen and stakeholder workshops. The *on-site* observations and interviews carried out in the six chosen Nantes and metropolitan public spaces did not identify any LGBTQIA+ individuals among those interviewed. However, members of this community were able to express themselves during the workshops and exploratory walks. For this reason, the analysis primarily refers to women, although the issues that they identify often intersect with those raised by LGBTQIA+ individuals during workshops. When issues are unique to this community, they are explicitly identified in the analysis.

How do women and the LGBTQIA+ community appropriate public spaces?

Women and the LGBTQIA+ community face significant obstacles when appropriating public spaces. Of a predominantly utilitarian nature, their habits are marked by the need to go from one place to another rather than that of settling in a given place.

Despite being shared, the city is still a place where safety and behavioural standards have a deep influence on access to and use of these spaces.

A primarily utilitarian use of public spaces

Surveys and exploratory walks have highlighted a limited appropriation of public spaces by those interviewed. The use they make of these spaces is mostly utilitarian, i.e. to travel to work, go shopping or look after children. This results in more traffic and travel through public spaces than parking and stops. The presence of groups of men is seen negatively and prevents the appropriation of some places and facilities such as sports places and squares for example.

“ The other day, I wanted to sit on a bench in the Jean-Baptiste Daviais square. There were only groups of men and I felt vulnerable; I preferred to keep walking and go home.

a participant

Avoiding parking in public spaces - especially at night, remaining vigilant: these observed practices are signs of the internalisation of danger and self-censorship. *On-site* surveys show that women avoid certain places and change their behaviour in public: avoiding alcohol, some clothing or eye contact.

FOCUS ON THE BOUFFAY AREA IN THE NANTES CITY CENTRE: DIVERGING USES BY MEN AND WOMEN

The Bouffay area was the topic of a survey before the end-of-year celebrations in 2024. It is a very lively and commercial area located at the heart of the city. It is a high-traffic area where men, women, teens and families can be found travelling in a continuous stream which, despite lessening as the hours pass, is still significant until late in the evening.

Observations generally show differences in appropriation that increase as night falls. During the day, men and women primarily travel between different places of consumption (shops, restaurants, bars, etc.). Only men settle for a time (leaning against a wall, watching others, smoking or drinking, or waiting for their partner or daughter when leaving a shop). Meanwhile, women are more mobile, only stopping in private areas (cafés, shops, etc).

Out in number during the day, on highstreets and café terraces, women are less present at night, especially when they are alone. Like elsewhere, they mostly travel in groups and seek major arteries and places where there are a lot of people and they can seek refuge if needed.

In the Breil neighbourhood, the women interviewed state that only those travelling to or from work are outside after nightfall. Women's use of public spaces is therefore limited in terms of habits and time.

During workshops, the citizen community summarised the impact of these public space inequalities as follows: they prevent women and LGBTQIA+ individuals from “living”, “being alone outdoors” and “being themselves”.



Exploratory walk
The Bouffay area - Nantes

© Céline Jacq - Nantes Métropole

Limited recreational activity in public spaces

Those interviewed, and particularly women, regardless of their age, rarely use public spaces for recreational activities. Their sports activities are mostly limited to active walking or running, or travel-related activities.

The youngest are more inclined to stay in some public spaces, but generally in groups whether of mixed-gender or not. Groups of young girls were notably observed on benches in the Breil neighbourhood in the north of Nantes or on urban furniture in the Minais park in Sainte-Luce-sur-Loire. This observation shows that these socialisation moments are carried out in open places where they feel visible whilst having the ability to watch what is going on around them.

To encourage greater use by women and LGBTQIA+ individuals, associations also report the need for secure and sheltered spaces dedicated to mixed-gender artistic and sports activities.

For their part, young girls sometimes occupy public sports amenities habitually used by boys, such as skateparks and urban sports courts, but mostly use these spaces during times of lesser affluence such as on Wednesday mornings or early afternoon.

Knowledge of places and programmes: factors and key levers for appropriation

Knowledge of places, whether due to regular attendance, living in the neighbourhood or participation in community programmes (events, walks, etc.) appears to facilitate the appropriation of public spaces. For example, the Bouffay square in Nantes is perceived differently by those who have lived nearby for a long time and have walked through it on a daily basis.

FOCUS ON YOUTH: *ON-SITE SURVEY* AROUND THE BEAUREGARD SECONDARY SCHOOL IN LA CHAPELLE-SUR-ERDRE

The area features a secondary school forecourt, a skatepark, a youth area ("Secteur J") and a daycare.

The skatepark is primarily used by young boys, although some young girls do visit to skate or ride scooters outside of peak times. Youth amenities are also predominantly used by boys according to the director (two-thirds of attendance by boys, one-third by girls).

The secondary school forecourt is little used and only briefly occupied. After classes, within fifteen minutes, it is empty of all occupants. A lack of seating, lighting and shelter against rain is noted near both the secondary school and the skatepark, which limits appropriation of these public spaces by girls and boys alike.

Similarly, one interviewee reveals that her perception of the square, which she had only experienced as a thoroughfare, changed after a street show that she had attended.

The furniture allowing to physically settle in this public space—notably tables and seating—is seen in a positive light. The existence of shared places and facilities—whether occupied or unoccupied (such as shared gardens or book exchange boxes)—is reassuring since it foretells human presence. Those having participated in exploratory walks around the Nantes mobility hub in Pirmil, for example, all noted a change in the site's appropriation following the addition of a guinguette along the Sèvre.

Atmosphere and vegetation play a positive role.

Exploratory and awareness walks and interviews also show that the atmosphere and readability of public spaces are important aspects.

Atmosphere is determined by both the materials, luminosity and colours found in spaces, as well as by sensory perceptions (intensity of wind, sound atmosphere, etc.). Lighting levels, light colours and lighting continuity throughout a pathway

“ People sit near the château or reflecting pool, likely because it is a calm, open place. The vegetation invites us to stop, it's a pleasant place.

a participant

are all criteria that impact the sense of safety at night, both in parking areas (Bouffay square, or public transport waiting areas), and travelling areas.

Vegetation also plays a role in how spaces are perceived. Parks and gardens (Jardin des Plantes, Procé park, etc.) are spontaneously cited by a wide majority of those interviewed as public spaces “that are pleasant to visit”.

Beyond this, the presence of nature and green spaces is seen positively, if it does not prevent the readability of the space (e.g. low-lying or sparse vegetation).

Furthermore, spaces seen as little or badly-maintained (presence of litter, bad smells or graffiti) cause discomfort and avoidance. They are often associated with a sense of insecurity by those encountered.

Lastly, being able to orient oneself appears to be a vital aspect. The readability of public spaces facilitates their appropriation. The women met with during the evaluation

strongly favour spaces where they can easily identify their surroundings, see and be seen without being too exposed, and where cycling and pedestrian paths are identifiable and safe.

This readability and visual permeability aspect is identified as a priority on the Neptune forecourt near the Bouffay area, on the Pirmil square and mobility hub, and on the Carré gris square and the parking areas surrounding Le Breil.

However, LGBTQIA+ advocacy groups⁽¹⁾ also report the specific need of LGBTQIA+ individuals (who suffer comments and violence when they express their romantic presence) for more sheltered, less visible spaces, where they can stay and show affection away from prying eyes.

Women appropriate spaces dedicated to children

As concerns the lesser appropriation of public spaces by women, spaces dedicated to children are a notable exception. The *on-site* survey highlighted some places that are highly appropriated by this group, notably in the Breil neighbourhood in Nantes, such as the school forecourt, picnic tables, the sunbeds bordering it and the children's playground.

These are spaces where women say they feel free to circulate but also "to sit" whether at tables—tailored to children's height—or on one of the benches surrounding the playground. They say that they meet there before the end of the school day or once they have collected their children. They use this opportunity to get to know each other or chat, and state that they sometimes stay until night falls.

“ *This is a nice little corner to do homework and have a snack (...) Sometimes, we head down in our slippers.* ”

users

⁽¹⁾ Nosig and l'Autre Cercle

What are the needs of women and LGBTQIA+ individuals with regard to public spaces?

The evaluation highlights the key shortcomings and unsatisfied needs of women and LGBTQIA+ people in public spaces: the need to feel safe, to be able to relax, to perform outdoor activities and to meet basic needs such as having access to toilets or breastfeeding.

The topic of safety and the associated feeling of safety is a key aspect of the use and perception of public spaces. Those interviewed state that they use strategies to feel comfortable and be less apprehensive in public spaces, particularly at night (see right).

attest to their limited use of this space due to no public toilets being available.

In addition, the lack of mixed-gender public toilets is problematic for the LGBTQIA+ community (notably for transgender and non-binary individuals), who prefer to avoid them.

primarily occupied by men or boys. The associations and individuals interviewed noted on several occurrences the need to diversity facilities and create programmes targeting women and the LGBTQIA+ community using existing facilities.

Thus, offering shows and demonstrations of practices seen as feminine or queer (ballroom, roller derby, women's football, basketball or handball teams) would help to change the use of these spaces and make them more accessible to those who do not dare to use them.

More generally, those interviewed report a lack of seating, tables and playgrounds. They ask that a variety of furniture be installed, in lively places, with different uses. They also note a lack of sheltered places, whether to escape the heat or the rain.

Feeling safe: a vital need

The *on-site* survey also underlines the need for places of refuge where individuals can go in case of problems or unsafety. While some places are seen as such, it is still difficult for the general public to identify them. There is a lack of clear identification through, for example, dedicated signage and training for the staff occupying these places.

Difficulties accessing toilets or breastfeeding

Those interviewed have experienced difficulties in accessing toilets, which are considered too rare in public spaces or too dirty, which prevents them from being used in public spaces (users are forced to return home, or to make a purchase in a bar in order to use the toilets). For example, users met in the Minais park in Sainte-Luce-sur-Loire

Those having participated in the evaluation report that there is a need for closed and clean mixed-gender toilets comprised of a traditional toilet, a urinary (inside, and not outside as they currently are), a changing table and a sink. Furthermore, they propose adding an emergency call button in closed toilets, like those that exist in public transportation.

The *on-site* survey and citizen workshops also highlighted the lack of amenities and furniture suited to breastfeeding in public spaces. These notably underlined the lack of seating such as benches in calms and less-visible spaces.

Poorly-suitable sports or relaxation facilities

Some sports facilities such as urban sports courts, skateparks or outdoor fitness equipment are

“ We could spread out the outdoor fitness equipment in the garden and combine them with beams or parallel bars.”
one Breil garden user

STRATEGIES TO FEEL COMFORTABLE IN PUBLIC SPACES

- **Stay in open and bright places**

E.g.: squares, major arteries, places near shops. Being able to see far away and in the dark is important. The need for suitable lighting is reported multiple times during the evaluation.

- **Circumvent places considered to be dangerous**

Dangerous places are identified both based on experience and use, as well as injunctions and norms conveyed by family and friends as well as collective culture. Dark and/or smelly streets, places occupied by loitering men or by “strange” people, dealing places, unlit porches, etc., are all examples of places “to avoid”.

- **Approach reassuring people**

Women stay away from a place when they consider the human traffic there to be too dense. They approach other women, while teens approach adults they describe as “normal”, regardless of their gender. This strategy was especially noted during *on-site* surveys in the Bouffay neighbourhood in Nantes.

- **Stay together, in groups**

Teens, and young girls in particular, wait for each other to stay and travel in groups. They accompany one another to public transportation, call or text each other when they get home, or favour private transport to return home (e.g., Uber).

- **Limit interactions by isolating oneself (telephone, music)**

Some wear headphones to listen to music or call someone to limit interactions with the outside world and avoid being called upon by men or boys.

- **Walk with a pet.**

- **Carry self-defence equipment**

E.g.: holding one’s keys, carrying pepper spray or tear gas.

- **Using alternative transport methods to avoid situations deemed to be dangerous.**

E.g., waiting in a given place, using public transport at certain times or in certain places, or walking alone. This can also be requested by parents, who set-up car pooling for young girls (a practice observed for example at the Pirmil Bonne Garde secondary school in Nantes). Workshops and associations also report the need for cycling amenities (parking) near to exits to improve safety for the LGBTQIA+ community.

- **Identify everyday living spaces to seek refuge along one’s route**

Refuge spaces are found to be key both in observations and in the proposals made as part of workshops. These can take on various forms: association premises, shops that are not tailored to the male population, institutional spaces, bars, restaurants, etc.

“ I refuse to give in to certain fears when out alone. But that means adapting my behaviour, thinking about the clothes I’m wearing, my keys in my hand, about the message I need to send to say I got back safely, the earbuds that I’m wearing without any music on to pretend I can’t hear. ”

a participant

How do public policies take account of gender issues in public spaces?

While the implementation of the first emblematic actions demonstrates the commitment of both local authorities to this topic, the evaluation shows that this process must be magnified and, above all, structured to ensure it can be implemented within departments on a wider scale.

The topic of gender issues in public spaces is currently being examined by the City of Nantes and the Nantes Metropolitan Authority. Since the beginning of this term, council members have confirmed their desire to develop gender-sensitive public spaces, with this intention reflected in public policies.

Awareness-raising that must continue internally

The evaluation highlighted recent acculturation within departments. In this regard, we note the following actions: presentation of the non-sexist City public policy, creation of an open governance body ([the Nantes non-sexist city network](#)), thematic visit organised by project managers, involvement of some officers in the evaluation process, etc.

This initiative to raise awareness of gender issues in general, and public spaces in particular,

interviewed officers to reflect on their own practices. However, this acculturation dynamic should be expanded to more departments and directorates, as underlined by participants. To go even further, they would like to have specific resources they can rely on: designated contacts for this topic in all departments, reference documents setting out strategic objectives in an operational manner or training on the main issues encountered and best practices to adopt.

More experimentation and capitalisation

The evaluation also highlights the need to better capitalise on existing initiatives, within the local authority and beyond.

To promote concrete action, officers would like to benefit from feedback from their professional peers, whether internally or from other local authorities.

The collective interviews conducted reveal that officers are interested in experimental approaches. In order to identify and implement best practices in terms of development and programming, they would like to be able to trial certain solutions.

These various interviews underline the need for more concrete action as regards political ambitions.

In particular, the provisions of an operational definition of what an egalitarian or non-gendered public space if within the territory of the City of Nantes or the Nantes Metropolitan Authority appears necessary. What concrete priorities should be targeted? What levers can be used to achieve these priorities?

These need for clarity regarding the changes to be achieved is all the more important since gender-issues can sometimes conflict with other issues such as public peace, nature in the city which must also be taken into account in development projects, such as lighting and energy sobriety. Given the need to work towards better coordination

BEST PRACTICES: THE BREIL INITIATIVE TO BECOME A NON-SEXIST NANTES NEIGHBOURHOOD

Gender is a singular pillar of the Breil neighbourhood's strategy which is structured around three topics: youth support, mutual assistance and solidarity, and the non-sexist neighbourhood. Gender issues are integrated in a cross-disciplinary manner, and not only in public spaces: digital technology, access to the law, recreational offerings for young women, places and spaces in which women can get together. A dedicated body comprising several neighbourhood stakeholders has been created to develop the non-sexist project.

Action relating to the neighbourhood's redevelopment, and notably the Carré gris square, have been designed in collaboration with inhabitants and especially women, in coordination with local associations and entities. In fact, the "Breil, a feminine neighbourhood centre" project led by the Aléas association won the 2023 National Architecture Centre Network award.

“ I'd like to have easy access to feedback and reports and not by accident through informal talks with colleagues. A centralised resource centre would allow us to share and learn from other people's experiences. ”

an officer in charge of local development



City of Nantes campaign
Nantes

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“
During project review, the sensitive approach is rarely afforded its place. Gender is addressed in a summary manner and inclusivity is a bonus that relies on the point of contact’s sensitivity”
“
a development project manager

between these various issues, the doctrine adopted by local authorities on the “gender and public spaces” topic should be clarified, notably by determining the level of ambition sought and identifying the trade-offs that should be made according to the project, budgetary restrictions, time-related constraints or the priorities set out in other public policies.

Integrating gender in development projects

The evaluation reveals that the gender dimension is not currently systematically considered in projects and development operations. Outside of cases in which this issue is explicitly included in policy guidelines, it is unevenly integrated. It relies widely on project leader’s sensitivity, interests and experience.

The design of public spaces is still too often addressed under the prism of its functional aspect and of the regulatory requirements that must be met. As such, putting gender-issues on the agenda and giving them priority is still a complex matter. The evaluation thus highlights the importance of formally recognising gender as an issue that must systematically be considered during project design. This means reflecting on its inclusion in internal processes such as project reviews, and in methodology guides and internal frameworks.

On multiple occasions, officers have underlined the importance of identifying users’ needs as part of participatory processes and programming activities.

These findings consolidate the idea that gender issues must be considered in a cross-disciplinary manner at every project stage: from needs assessment and consultative processes,

through to monitoring and the activation of uses through programming activities. Interviewed officers report the need to consider this integration as from the early stages, by taking account of women and LGBTQIA+ individuals’ specific needs, well before the developments are designed.

Furthermore, it appears that development alone is not enough. To foster a long-lasting change of practices, it is key that programming activities that solidify desired uses over time be scheduled as from delivery. However, these activities are often too-rarely anticipated and are difficult to maintain over time.

“
Girls rarely visit free-activity spaces.
We have to offer group sessions to understand their needs. If we don’t reach out to them, it doesn’t work.”

an officer in charge of
local development

RECOMMENDATIONS

10 priorities resulting from the participatory evaluation process

Throughout these meet-ups, participants brought 10 priorities⁽¹⁾ to the attention of council members in order to take better account of gender issues in public spaces.

Each priority contains several proposals made by citizens, stakeholders and officers. It should be noted that some initiatives may already be taken by the City of Nantes or the Nantes Metropolitan Authority.

PRIORITY 1

Provide a common definition of 'egalitarian public space' across the Nantes Metropolitan Authority's territory.

- Bolster political commitment by officially establishing a "Gender equality" power in the Nantes Metropolitan Authority's governing rules, and by offering training and acculturation sessions to council members on this topic.
- Create a "Gender & Public space" framework in order to share a common culture and facilitate work between the council members of different territories, technicians and developers.

PRIORITY 2

Integrate gender issues in the management of operations concerning public spaces.

- Systematically examine gender issues for each project by introducing a gendered analysis framework for project review and by improving the consideration of gender in prior analyses.
- Better consider women and LGBTQIA+ individual's involvement in project consultations (introduce the topic as a constant, diversify dialogue methods).
- Build an internal network of "Gender & Public space" contact points in directorates working in close proximity.
- Develop an "Egalitarian public space" experiment programme, to further explore certain topics, providing for monitoring, evaluation and capitalisation.

PRIORITY 3

Make culture a tool to change images and symbols in public spaces.

- Increase symbolic images of women and LGBTQIA+ individuals in cities and in transportation: feminise street names, public transport stops and erect statues in honour of female or LGBTQIA+ individuals for example.
- Combat sexist representations in public spaces (notably advertising and gendered pictograms) by proposing a mechanism that allows inhabitants to "report" representations and directly escalate this information to the local authority.
- Create a public space pathway that highlights female and LGBTQIA+ figures, in collaboration with inhabitants and local artists.

PRIORITY 4

Make the city a place of support and refuge for all women and the LGBTQIA+ community.

- Create a network of places identified as *safer places*: a range of places (libraries, shops, museums, companies, transport, travelling desks, etc.) that offer safe places that can be accessed at any time, day and night, with people who are trained to react in case of sexist or sexual violence.
- Develop street mediation and provide public service officers with training on how to tackle street harassment.
- Create safe night pathways, along high-traffic routes, with better lighting, more colour, the introduction of *safer places* and suitable signage.

⁽¹⁾ Priorities are not numbered according to importance.

PRIORITY 5

Make public spaces places to raise awareness against sexism

- Campaign all year round in public spaces to provide information on sexist behaviour, with messages adapted to the various targets (men, women, harassers, witnesses, etc.).
- Use *nudges* to change sexist behaviour: design-based incentives to adapt one's behaviour and not cause a sense of insecurity.

PRIORITY 6

Diversify the use of public spaces that are predominantly used by men

- Introduce moments that are dedicated to women in certain places: promote voluntary diversity as a tool, a stage in a process, a path, to lead towards mixed spaces and experiment with voluntary diversity time slots for certain facilities and outdoor areas (notably sports areas), with different mediation and sanction methods.
- Foster a diversity of uses in the same place: new developments likely to promote gender diversity (climbing wall, ping pong, chess, etc.) and new activities such as demonstrations of activities considered feminine (roller-derby, dance, etc.).

PRIORITY 7

Develop women's cycling

- Increase safe cycling facilities: well-lit cycling paths away from the carriageway, enabling every person to go at their own speed, along with bicycle racks, notably for cargo bikes.
- Make cycling accessible to all: repair workshops, group outings, cycling classes, etc. involving voluntary diversity.

PRIORITY 8

Develop public spaces to enhance their appeal

- Create a high-quality nocturnal landscape and mark out pathways by experimenting with various lighting equipment. For example: ground-level lighting, motion-activated lighting, with brightness and colour control features.
- Create public spaces allowing women and the LGBTQIA+ community to "see and be seen" by limiting vegetation and view-obstructing furniture.
- Create amenities that favour warm materials and colours, both in terms of appearance and of touch, and use more colour (vegetation, flowers, furniture, signage, walls).

PRIORITY 9

Develop welcoming public toilets that are suited to women's and the LGBTQIA+ community's needs.

- Develop a public toilet master plan containing several types of toilet, appropriately spread out across the territory: more aesthetic and comfortable toilets, as well as "quick" toilets (urinals for men but also for women) in high-traffic areas.
- Offer free access to menstrual hygiene products in public areas.

PRIORITY 10

Integrate parenthood in public spaces

- Develop an offering tailored to parents: furniture offering a range of services (breastfeeding, changing tables, secure spaces away from vehicles, etc.), signage and communication on spaces tailored to early childhood.
- Design the city from child height.

And after?

The recommendations drawn from citizen opinion will be the topic of a technical examination by the City of Nantes' and the Nantes Metropolitan Authority's departments, and political arbitrations. This will allow them to provide a "reasoned response" which will inform all participants of the commitments taken by local authorities with a view to building gender-sensitive public spaces.

The Nantes Metropolitan Authority's evaluation process is a part of the [Metropolitan Citizenship Pact](#). It relies on the framework developed by the French evaluation society and its code of ethics. At Nantes Métropole, as at the City of Nantes, participatory evaluation is a lever to improve public policy. It provides a cross-examination of all stakeholders' points of view on topics bridging local public action and social issues. Thus, it contributes towards the democratic debate and the commitments taken to promote citizen dialogue and transform public action. In this context, [Evaluation Reports](#) aim to meet the commitments of transparency and publication of the results of public policy evaluation processes.

To learn more about the process

The full process is documented on [the citizen dialogue platform](#) accessible to all

- [The citizen opinion of the citizen community](#) (March 2025): *Against sexism: let's design tomorrow's public spaces*

- + The [replay of the round table](#) held in April 2023 by Nantes Université and the Nantes Higher School of Architecture: "Shared developments and spaces: towards non-sexist public spaces?"



Scan to learn about the full participatory evaluation process for gender-sensitive public spaces.



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