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Investigating Age and Gender Stereotypes

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Abstract: This research focuses on the presence of stereotypes regarding age and gender, using as case study the book Cities for people, by Jan Gehl. Recognized worldwide as one of the most important supporters for the rapprochement of the public urban space towards its citizens, Jan Gehl dedicated most of his career to the importance of the human factor in the planning of cities. This study represents a content analysis of the ways in which the characters from the Cities for people book are being presented according to gender and age. The research represents a quantitative analysis of all the images in the book, comprising individuals or groups of people (collective characters) involved in different types of actions.
The results of the study highlight an a relatively equal presence of both genders (48.8% feminine characters and 51.2% masculine characters). Most of the images present individual characters, which gives us the opportunity to clearly see their general image, socio-demographic characteristics (relative age and gender) or carried actions. However, there is a significant percentage of nearly 21% of the images in which the characters are presented as part of a crowd, as collective characters, which causes an increased degree of un-individualization. Even in these cases, non the less, there can be frequently observed a relatively homogeneous mass of people, most of them male adults.
The biggest discrepancy highlighted by the study of the images of this book is with regard to the distribution of the main age categories (children, adolescents, adults and seniors). When it comes to these categories, Cities for people gives a greater attention to the adults, a category of people which is present in nearly 50% of the images. The other 50% is divided between children, adolescents and seniors, the most disadvantaged of them being, surprisingly, the children's category (present in only 12.1% of the images).

Keywords: *urban public space; gender equality; age equality; activities; stereotypes.*

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1. Introduction

The urban public spaces represent places of interaction and communication between individuals. *"Cities are literally concrete manifestations of ideas on how society was, is and how it should be"*. (Beall, 1997, as cited by Burgess, 2008) Over the past decades, especially since the second half of the 20th century, theoreticians, planners and authorities engaged in a quest to transform the urban public spaces, mostly ignored during the modernist times. Their purpose was to bring them closer to the inhabitants. However, the facets of these interactions are complex and cities, as well as their urban public spaces, need to offer equal access to their amenities for all categories of inhabitants. *"As residential neighborhoods and their inhabitants grow older and less mobile, homogeneity becomes a problem."* (Jaeckel & Van Geldermalsen, 2006) Weather we speak about a child or a senior, a man or a woman, a temporary or a permanent inhabitant, disabled or not, all of them need to have equal access to the benefits of the urban public spaces. This is not an easy task and requires great work in order to raise awareness in the minds and attitudes of all implicated actors.

This research focuses on the age and gender disparities transmitted through the images presented in the *Cities for people* book. Thus, the analysis aims to highlight the stereotypes associated to different characters through seven variables: *type of character (individual or collective character), gender, age group (child, adolescent, adult or senior), activity, apparent height, tactile expression, body posture.*

2. Literature Review

Age represents a permanent guiding scale in our lives. From the moment of birth until the end of our existence on Earth, age is one of the defining factors of our roles in the society. *"All societies use age and sex to classify their members, and they have different expectations for each category"*. (Palmore, 1999) Even if the verges of age have changed during the last decades, and age doesn't represent such a powerful index in the society, with respect to different stages: *end of studies, marriage, having children, retirement*, it still is a sensitive issue for the individuals. Thus, in the globalizing era, *studies* have a more permanent character, stretching throughout our entire lives sometimes, *marriage* can occur at any age, *children* represent a personal option, at the age or moment in life that the couple (or single parent) decides to have them. *Retirement*, or the age of retiring, also represents a factor that fluctuates from individual to individual. Generally, the retiring age is to around 60-65 years, but is the option of the individual if he or she desires to benefit from this or

to continue their active lives inside the society. Many times, after the age of 60-65, people chose to involve themselves in different other activities in order to avoid that sentiment of solitude that comes with *retirement*.

This research studies *the presentation of the characters in the images from the Cities for People book, by Jan Gehl*, thus analyzing, through content interpretation, the stereotypes associated to age and gender. We analyzed here only the images in which people were presented. The book also contains some images portraying only architectural or urban elements. They were excluded from our interpretation, as they didn't represent the focus of our research.

The analysis was first organized starting from the concept of *ageism*. This concept was best defined in 1975 as *a systemic stereotyping and discrimination process towards the seniors, which is based on the fact that they are old, in the same way in which racism or sexism is based on the differences of color or gender.* (Butler, 1975) Similar to *race* or *gender, the age* is usually a defining factor in the characterization of a person and most frequently, in the formation of a stereotype. *"Once a person is characterized as elderly, the non-elderly are likely to apply a host of negative stereotypes on the aged, assume attitude and value differences, and expect that the elderly have different economic and social interests than they do"*. (Bytheway, 1994; Palmore, 1999, as cited by Nelson, 2002) Even if the definition of the concept of *ageism* is oriented towards the elderly, in this research paper we aim to understand the presentation of all age categories by dividing them into four types: *children, adolescents, adults and seniors*. There are different types of discrimination and each age-category comes with its challenges.

Loredana Ivan analyzes the concept of ageism from a psycho-sociological perspective, highlighting the fact that *even if it is a very evolved definition, it reduces the concept of discrimination to the elders, thus excluding the possibility of using the term for other social groups which might be subject to stereotyping or social discrimination based on the age criteria.* (Ivan, 2015) Hence, through the present article, we will only use the term of ageism in order to refer to the stereotypes applied to the elderly, for all the other age categories (children, adolescents and adults) simply using the term of *age discrimination*.

"All societies stratify their members by age. In all these stratification systems, there is an implicit or explicit ranking from higher to lower strata. In gerontocratic societies, the old have the highest status, and the youngest have the lowest. In our society, the middle aged tend to have the most power and prestige, whereas children have the least. The old and the young tend to be in between…". (Palmore, 1999) This age stratification is one of the main themes of this article. The proportion in which the different age groups are being presented in the public urban

spaces represents an index of the way in which society thinks about the public spaces and activities that happen there.

In addition to the age discrepancies, in the human society there are also different roles assigned by gender. Thus, through this study, we are interested as well in the way in which the characters from *Cities for people* are presented and the number of occurrences that the masculine and feminine characters have. Laura Grünberg speaks about the gender differentiation, highlighting the expectations and behaviors that people have when it comes to the sex of their children. *Gender, based on the biological sex of the newborn, generates a series of rituals, behaviors and different expectations from the family, church, school and society in general.* (Grünbert, 2010)

Erving Goffman focused his entire career on the observation of the social behavior of the individuals, arguing that people play different roles according to the scenography, the social décor in which they find themselves. (Goffman, 1959) It is also Goffman who highlights the existence, inside the society, of a predefined social structure which, unconsciously, the individuals are prepared to access. Thus, from the moment of birth, boys and girls are educated with respect to the roles that they are to play inside the society and what the society expects from them. *"Gender displays, like other rituals, can iconically reflect fundamental features of the social structure".* (Goffman, 1979) Throughout time, there have been different movements, especially among the feminists, that claimed equality. *"The feminists attacked both the physical separation of household space form the public space and the economic separation of the domestic economy from the political economy".* (Vestbro & Horelli, 2012) They argued that the entire physical environment of the cities should be redesigned in order to better reflect the equality between men and women.

Gender and age stereotypes equivalate in terms of impact in the society, each of them attracting *expectations* from the others with respect to the projection of a certain image or certain actions. *"One can say that female behavioral style expresses femininity in the sense of providing an incidental, gratuitous portrait".* (Goffman, 1979) Similar to what was mentioned earlier, the age stereotypes have the capacity of describing some implicit expectations in terms of behavior and attitudes of the individuals. Some of these stereotypes, however, can be very harmful and generate several discrimination attitudes among the society members. "*Too many commercials use stereotypes of the elderly, depicting them as feeble, foolish or inept, passing their time aimlessly in rocking chairs".* (Goldman, 1993, as cited by Miller et al., 1999)

The scene, according to the Goffmanian theory, is the décor or the frame. (Goffman, 1959), which we can easily assimilate, in this research, to

the urban public space. Jan Gehl named his work *Cities for people*, aiming to militate for cities that are *"human in scale, sustainable, healthy, safe and lively"*. (Gehl, 2010) The cities and, more precisely, the public frame of the cities, represent a décor which has to be friendly for all the inhabitants, regardless of their gender or age. The vitality of the urban public space has to respond to all the socio-demographic and professional structures. The activities imagined inside this urban public frame are to be directly connected to the way in which humans are being perceived, with respect to their age, gender, culture, rase or other similar elements, which are defining factors for the human stereotypes.

3. The urban public space

When speaking about the urban public spaces we understand, in the simplest way of defining them, "places in a city that belong to all its inhabitants, which anyone can and has the right to access and in which, ideally, people can meet without having to pay an entrance tax". (Tîrcă, 2011) The Danish architect Jan Gehl made a mission out of bringing the cities closer to people, arguing that "dominant planning ideologies – modernism in particular – have specifically put a low priority on public space, pedestrianism and the role of city space as a meeting place for urban dwellers". (Gehl, 2010) Thus, the book Cities for people studies the different aspects of an urban public space that can contribute to reaching these qualities, of a space for gatherings and meeting place for people.

The equal access of people to the urban public space not only insures a good use of the city and its inhabitants. It also represents the basis for a sustainable and healthy relation of the people with the built environment, generating better social connections and interactions. "A sustainable city can only be built together with those who will live in it. All planning should be permeated by openness, democracy and equality. We will develop the city and the public space so that everyone, women and men, children, young people and people with disability, can participate in equal terms. That leads to a city for everyone." (Gustafsson, as cited by Kneeshaw, 2018) The equality between people represents a permanent theme in the European Union. It is not easily obtained, but raising awareness of its impact and importance is a defining factor in coming closer to reaching this goal.

The book speaks through both words and pictures. Present in 162 pages out of a total of 284, most of the images found in the book Cities for people depict individuals or groups of people involved in different types of actions: contemplation, walking, running, reading, dancing, talking or riding

a bicycle. The present research paper analyzes this subtle graphic language and the way in which it makes justice to the inhabitants of a city according to their gender and age. Thus, by militating for an urban public space dedicated to people, the research focuses on a quantitative analysis of the presence of the individuals belonging to both genders and the presence of all age categories.

3.1. Concepts

The article is based on the content analysis of the characters in the images of the book *Cities for People, by Jan Gehl*. The analysis is divided into different variable, such as: *type of character* (individualized, collective character), *gender, relative age groups* (children, adolescents/youth, adults, seniors)*, activities* (contemplation, walking, running, reading, dancing, talking or riding a bicycle) or *position of the body* (sitting, standing straight, bent, leaning on something).

4. Methodology

The research aims to understand the way in which the characters illustrated in the pictures from the *Cities for people* book are portrayed in accordance to their gender and age. The research method is *content analysis* (quantitative research), thus observing the actions and general images associated with the age and gender of the characters earlier mentioned.

The research is based on the study of **162 pages** from the book, comprising all the images in which are portrayed different human characters in various situations, thus counting a total of **635 variables**, double checked by the authors of the article.

The selection of this particular book was not random. *Cities for people* militates for the rapprochement of the urban public space to its citizens. Thus, we found that is a good opportunity to study the manner in which this urban public space is fair and just towards all categories of age and gender. The analyzed images don't represent all the pictures in the book, but they represent all the images in which people are being portrayed, either individualized or presented as a vast mass of people, un-individualized. The images portraying buildings or empty urban public spaces, without human interaction, did not make the subject of this study and were thus excluded from the analysis.

5. Results and interpretation

5.1. Socio-demographic structure of the characters

5.1.1. Gender distribution within the images

According to the data, the distribution with regard to the gender of the characters is relatively uniform, the differences between the two genders being relatively small, more precisely 2.2% in favor of men. This shows us a small, close to none discrimination of the two genders. The distribution also shows a number of 49 images considered *missing*. They represent 7.72% of the total and describe the *collective mixt* type, which made it impossible to put them into a *feminine/masculine* type category.

5.1.2. Distribution according to age

Through the analysis of the data of the characters according to their age, it was highlighted a great difference between individuals. The smallest percentage of characters present in the pictures belongs to children (12.1%), followed by the seniors (20.6%). The largest percentage belongs to the adult population, which represents exactly 49.3% of the characters in the images of the book.

While the distribution of the characters according to their gender was relatively homogenous and we cannot blame a tendency of discrimination towards the masculine or feminine gender, the distribution according to age groups highlights something else. It can be observed that the book contains a large number of images portraying *adults* while neglecting the other age categories.

5.2. The portrayed image

5.2.1. The balance between individual and collective characters

The balance between individual and collective characters is significantly disproportioned. Nearly one quarter of the characters is represented by the *collective characters*. More precisely, these are groups of people that appear in the images of the book, un-individualized, forming different scales of masses of people. The other three quarters represent the *individual characters*. By analyzing the data according to the distribution by gender, we can see that 84 collective characters were able to receive a *gender label* (out of a total of 133). These 84 collective characters enter in the *homogenous group of people* category. By analyzing this small sub-group we could identify as dominant the *adult male*, the other socio-demographic categories finding themselves rather in the mixt collectivities. The collective characters

didn't portray at all the *children* or *seniors*. We weren't able to identify either homogenous groups of *elderly* or *adult women*.

5.2.2. The representation of characters according to the report between gender and age

The analysis of these two distributions highlighted the fact that *male adults* were more present in the images that *female adults*. The difference between them represents approximately 10% in favor of men. There are more *senior women* than *senior men* portrayed in the images. The difference between the two percentages is nearly 16% of the total of seniors portrayed in the book. In the case of *children*, girls are also more present in the images than *boys*. The balance here is 53% (girls) to 47% (boys). The adolescents/youth distribution is more similar to that of the adults. The masculine gender is present in a slightly bigger proportion then the feminine gender, with a difference of 8%.

5.3. Presentation of the character in relation to their age

5.3.1. The presentation of the character, alone or in the company of someone, in relation with the age factor

According to the data, out of the total number of people, 61.82% appear in the company of other people, which makes it clear that most characters identified in the urban public spaces are portrayed as *socializing* and *maintaining a social relation*. The largest percentage of people that appear in the company of others are *children*. As previously mentioned, only 12.1% of the total population is represented by children. Out of the total population, 9.42% is represented by *children accompanied by other people* (which makes it approximately three quarters of the number of children in the book). The second category of people that most appear in the company of others are *seniors*, with a percentage of approximately 62% of the total number of elders portrayed in the book.

The urban public space represents, by definition, a space of interaction and socialization. On the other hand, the dominant categories of people accompanied by others, *children* and *seniors,* represent also signs of the portraying of the *vulnerability*. People in these age categories are considered to be the most likely to not be able to *manage on their own* and an image of a child or an elder alone on the street is unlikely to cause a positive effect on people. *"One contributing factor to ageist attitudes that has emerged in prior discussions is gerontophobia, or the fear of and devaluation of older adults because they remind people of their vulnerability and mortality".* (Nelson, 2002) This is another example of a construct in the minds of the population, contributing to the *stereotypes* built in relation to age.

5.3.2. Relative height of the characters in relation to age

By analyzing the relative height of the characters in relation with their age, we reached the conclusion that the shortest individuals are, of course, children and the tallest are the *adolescents/youth*. The characters belonging to the adult category are generally *medium height* in the analyzed images. The elders were also depicted as *medium height* in terms of tallness.

5.3.3. The position of the body in relation to age

According to the results of the analysis, the position of the body in relation to the age of the characters showed that, most of the people presented in the images as having a *straight posture* are *adults*, while most of the people that are depicted as *bent* are *seniors*.

5.3.4. The position within the image in relation to the age variable

The position of the characters within the images, in relation to the age variable offers relatively stable data. The "*adults"* category is the most depicted from all perspectives (facing forward, sidewise or from behind), obviously, because of the large number of images in which they appear. When analyzing the percentages, we can see that most of the adults appear as portrayed from the front (46.42% of cases). The elders are portrayed mostly from the front (37.38% of cases) or sidewise (33.64% of cases), but they hold the largest percentage of people portrayed from behind. Most of the pictures show us characters portrayed from the front (44.28 % of the total number of images), but the largest proportion of people showed from the front belongs to the children. The proportion in which the children are presented form the front is 51.31%, followed by the percentage belonging to the adult population (46.42%).

5.3.5. Activities of the characters in relation to their age groups

In which concerns the activities depicted in the book, adults hold the largest variety. First of all, the adult population is mostly portrayed as *walking*. 41.53% of the adults presented in the book are portrayed as walking, while the rest of them are *running (1.28%), reading (0.96%), dancing (3.83%), riding a bicycle (11.18%), talking to other people (19.49%) or just contemplating (21.73%)*. This percentages say many things about the perceived purpose of the urban public spaces. Most of them represent connecting zones, serving the purpose of going from one point to another. At the same time, these areas are conceived as relaxation and socialization spaces, destined for interaction and social bounding. What about the other age groups? The activities in which they are portrayed differ massively. None of the children are portrayed as *dancing*. Most of them, curiously, are portrayed as *stationary,*

contemplating (38.96%). Other activities in which they are involved are *walking, talking or riding a bicycle.* Very few people in the book are portrayed as *running*, but, out of this small percentage of only 1.75%, most of them are children. In relation to the total number of children portrayed in the book, however, the children portrayed as running represent only 9.09%.

The age group belonging to the adolescents/youth is largely portrayed as *walking* (38.17%) or *contemplating* (32.06%). None of them are dancing or running and a very small percentage of them are presented as *riding a bicycle* (8.4%) or *reading* (2.29%). The seniors are portrayed in the smallest variety of activities. The three main activities that they are carrying out in the urban public space are *walking, talking and contemplating*. However, we identified a very small percentage of them, only 1.83%, that were depicted as *riding a bicycle*.

5.3.6. Tactile expression in relation to the age group

The analysis of the tactile expression in relation to the age group has shown the fact that approximately 37.07% of the characters in the book are touching or holding something. The largest percentage of the characters that touch or hold something in their hands are *children* (51.32%) and *elders* (40.57%). Again, this representation could be seen as a way of portraying *vulnerability*, the need to hold something or lean on it for protection and equilibrium.

5.4. Presentation of the character in relation to their gender

5.4.1. Presentation of the character, solitary of in the company of someone else, in relation to gender

As previously mentioned in this article, the distribution of the characters in relation to their gender if relatively equilibrated. Out of a total of 586 characters which could be assigned a gender feminine/masculine variable, 48.89% are women and 51.11% are men. There is a larger percentage of characters that are portrayed as *accompanied* in the book (60.03%). Out of the total number of characters depicted as accompanied, a little bit more than half are women (50.86%). As we pointed out earlier in the article, there is also a percentage of 7.72%% identified as *collective mixt*, which could not be characterized within this section of the analysis.

5.4.2. Relative height of the character in relation to the gender factor

The relative height of the characters in relation to their gender does not vary much. Thus, according to the gathered data, the women tend to be portrayed as being a little bit shorter than men, but the difference is not

great. Out of the total of 586 variables, 72.53% are depicted as *medium height*. The percentage between men and women, in this case is perfectly equilibrated, 50%-50%. The percentage of people portrayed as *the tallest* and *the shortest* in the picture represents 27.65%. Out of this total number of 162 characters, almost 60% of the men are shown as *the tallest.* The percentages revers in the case of *the shortest,* where women represent 55%.

5.4.3. The posture of the body in relation to the gender variable

The analysis of the posture of the characters in relation to their gender has shown that more women are depicted as *standing straight* that men. The percentages are reversed when the characters are presented as being *bent, sitting down* or *leaning on something*. Most of the characters are portrayed as *standing straight* (56.4%). A significant percentage of the characters are presented as *sitting down* (22.66%). In this category, almost 56% of the characters are men.

5.4.4. The presence within the image in relation to the gender variable

Through the analysis of the presence within the image (facing foreword, sidewise or from behind), we could observe that a larger percentage of the characters facing foreword were women (52.55%). From the characters depicted from the side or from behind, most of them are men. 53.74% of the total number of characters portrayed sidewise are men, while the percentage represented by men depicted from behind is 53.16%.

5.5. Actions of the characters in relation to their gender

5.5.1. Activities of the characters in relation to their gender

The analysis of the distribution of activities in relation to the two genders has shown more dynamic activities for the men, while the women are engaged in more statically activities. As a result, more men are portrayed as *running, reading, dancing or riding a bicycle*, while a larger number of women are portrayed as *talking to other people or in a state of contemplation*. Both genders are depicted as walking in a relatively similar percentage, representing, as previously stated, the dominant activity associated for the characters in the book.

6. Conclusions

Studied from the perspective of equity of the distribution of characters in relation to age and gender variables, the *Cities for people* book, written by the Danish architect Jan Gehl, highlighted a series of aspects regarding the presence of individuals in the urban public space. While the

distribution of characters in relation to their gender is relatively equilibrated (48.8% women vs. 51.2% men), the distribution in relation to different age categories highlights an evident disparity. The dominant category is clearly represented by the *"adults"*, portrayed in the images in a percentage that almost reaches 50%. In relation to this category, the *children, adolescents/youth and seniors* divide among themselves the other 50%. Interestingly enough, the smallest percentage belongs to *children*. They are the least portrayed in the urban public spaces, with a percentage of 12.1%, followed by the *seniors*, present in a proportion of 17.3% only.

Most of the characters are portrayed individually, even if there exists a significant percentage of approximately 21% represented by *collective characters*, portraying un-individualized masses of people, most of them depicted as *walking* in a certain direction. The analysis of the characters in relation to *gender and age* highlights a greater presence of the *masculine adult population*, while in the case of seniors, the roles are reversed. The presence of *elder women* is more frequent within the images of the book.

The presentation of the characters varies, most of them being described as *accompanied by other characters*, regardless of their age or gender, *with medium height* (especially the adults) and a *standing straight* posture of their bodies. Most of the characters are portrayed *facing foreword* and *walking*, the exception being here only the children's category, which are mostly portrayed as *static, contemplating*. The category depicting the *seniors* is mostly presented as *walking*, but they are presented also as *talking to other people* or *contemplating* in equally significant percentages. The most tactile of the characters are *children*, this category being the only case in which the percentage surpasses 50%. In some case the *seniors* are also depicted as *tactile*, but the percentage is lower than in the case of children.

The analyzed paper presents a clear equilibrium in the presentation of the two gender within the urban public space. However, the study highlighted that the presence of the characters in relation to the age groups varies significantly. The dominant category belongs to the *adults,* thus overshadowing the other age groups.

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