



Malaysia Architectural  
Journal

Journal homepage:  
<https://majournal.my/index.php/maj>  
e-ISSN : 2716-6139



## Gendered Experience in Public Space: Design as Tool of Empowerment towards Social Sustainability

Melody Hoi-lam YIU<sup>1\*</sup>, Sze Wai Veera FUNG

School of Architecture, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, HKSAR

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Article history:</b> Received: 30 April 2024 Received in revised form Accepted: 15 October 2024 Available online: 22 June 2025</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b></p> <p>Public space, Gendered experience, Domesticity, Design Empowerment, Creative expression</p>	<p>Although gender-inclusive design has received increasing awareness in recent years, the nominal consultation process tends to lack an in-depth understanding of female users' genuine needs and experiences. A reason could be that women in Asian culture, especially those in domestic roles, are neither used to nor equipped to express themselves, therefore limiting their feedback to pre-established options. This paper investigates the gendered spatial experience and addresses the need for effective communication and creative expression by the undermined female voices. Current literature recognises the capacity of arts and cultural practice to engage and empower people, and this paper will demonstrate how the creative design process can be a form of gender empowerment through the case study of a public space design workshop in Hong Kong. While the immediate workshop findings describe the specific needs of female users in public spaces, this paper further reflects upon the programme design and process, with the results of establishing a framework to facilitate the expression and articulation of embodied gender experience. The paper concludes by highlighting domesticity in public space and how bodily engagement is essential in an experiential investigation to inform design. In response to growing literature and advocacy to foreground culture's significance in social sustainability and gender issues, the research contributes to the discourse of gender empowerment through creative means and its position within the SDG framework.</p>

### 1. Introduction

Domesticity has a gender-specific connotation that is culturally tied to the role of a woman within the privacy of the household, while men have extra-domestic professionalism that is public-facing [1, p.446]. However, even for a lifestyle that occurs mainly around the premise of a home, domesticity is not confined to the interior private space but extends into the urban public spaces. Places such as the

<sup>1\*</sup> Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [MelodyHLYiu@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:MelodyHLYiu@cuhk.edu.hk)

market or the park/playground are the most visited public spaces by women in domestic roles, as they directly relate to daily activities such as cooking or taking care of family members. These places are where women in domestic roles participate in public life by interacting with their neighbours or vendors and accomplishing the many tasks no less than a dedicated office worker.

However, in a male-dominated architecture and planning design industry, urban environments are often designed with the presumption of the enabled-body male user. This has led to a problem in the practice of urban design, causing the many issues that women face daily, as vividly illustrated by scholars and researchers [2]. The problem is compounded for female homemakers who have special needs but often with little voice and negotiation power. The recognition of gender issues in public spaces has only progressed slowly in the last several decades, requiring more advocacy work and thoroughly unpacking the problem.

Among the targets of UN SDG5 on gender equality, Target 5.5 advocates for women's "effective participation in the decision-making process." The point to note here is the meaning of *effective* participation and the agency for the female voice to be heard. Complimenting the abundant literature that illustrates the problem of gendered public space, this paper proposes a proactive stand to investigate how to enable women to contribute and effectively influence public space-making.

At the same time, there are also increasing concerns about public participation in the process of architectural and urban design, although its level of engagement varies due to the time and effort that an organisation can put into it. According to Arnstein's conception of the Ladder of Participation [3] for community design, citizen participation is not dichromatic but in different degrees. From non-participation (such as manipulation, therapy, and informing) to actual citizen control (partnership, delegation, and citizen control), many participatory programs nowadays remain as tokenism, that is, consultation or placation. While many factors contribute to the failure of participatory design projects, a key attribute is the effectiveness of communication between stakeholders. In most cases, local stakeholders are not trained in the professional language spoken by designers and policymakers, which creates a power dynamic that depends on how well one articulates to argue for their needs.

This problem is even more complicated in public space issues affecting females in domestic roles, which is shadowed by the cultural stereotype that they are confined to. Although gender roles at home are becoming more diversified as men also take up some household responsibilities, domestic females are still expected to be subordinated, particularly in Asian cultures, as the acceptance of circumstances and hardships is regarded as a wifely virtue. There is a systematic lack of channels for female to express their opinions and needs. Therefore, even with emerging opportunities to participate in various types of stakeholder consultation, many are not trained or used to express their opinion. In many cases, their feedback is regarded as emotional responses that fail to articulate legitimate problems and risk being neglected or misinterpreted.

### *1.1 The Communication Gap in Effective Participation*

This paper identifies a gap between women's participation in the public space decision-making process and their capacity to do so effectively. The study draws upon the authors' experience conducting a community design workshop in 2022 - "Her Place Her Say" (HPHS), to understand gendered experience in public space in Hong Kong. Through early-stage interaction with community partners, it is realised that instead of women needing more opportunities to voice their opinions, the pain point lies in the need for more capacity to articulate their needs clearly in spatial terms. Building upon this premise, the program investigates effective ways of expression and articulation for the untrained female participants against the cultural norms of women not being good at expressing themselves rationally. Furthermore, this research aims to challenge the cultural stereotype of Asian women in domestic roles and explore the public space where domestic activities are extended.

Therefore, the key research questions in this paper are as follows: Firstly, *how does the issue of gendered inequality manifest in public space?* The HPHS program began with participants sharing the inconvenience they experienced in public space, followed by field observations to delineate specific spatial elements that might cause it. These extracted public space instances can illustrate how our city is designed with the presumption for a homogenous male user, a symptom used to investigate the root cause of discriminatory urban design. Secondly, *how can creative acts in design be used to empower gender expression?* As the program is of a research nature to understand gender issues in public space, it is limited by the lack of actual means to bring direct environmental change. Therefore, the program is designed as a mediating step of capacity-building in self-expression and problem articulation, which also helps build confidence in participants' expression. The results not only bring awareness to the issues but empower participants with the capacity to make their case.

## 1.2 Culture, Sustainable Development, and the SDGs

The workshops designed for the HPHS program are not only instrumental as a tool for spatial solutions but also a means of cultural expression through the acts of drawing and making. In recent years, there has been increasing evidence to argue for culture's role in social sustainability and how it should be explicitly addressed in the upcoming edition of SDG in 2030. The British Council published several reports defining culture's multiple roles in/as/for sustainable development, most prominently in *The Missing Pillar: Culture's Contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goals* [4]. As a result, culture is now generally recognised as the fourth pillar along the current dimension of environmental, economic, and social sustainability.

Besides regarding culture itself as a subject to preserve, cultural activities can be used to address different social issues, such as education (SDG4) and gender equality (SDG5), as well as some aspects of SDG8, 9, 10,12 [5]. This paper is interested in the potential of participatory design activities as a tool for sustainable development and the cross-sectional capacity as a cultural activity to address gender issues in public space. The case of the HPHS program is used to discuss culture's instrumental value in the context of Sustainable Development Goals and to build on the current advocacy of culture as a driver and enabler of sustainable development.

A key intersection is found in SDG5 (gender equality) and SDG11 (sustainable cities and communities), with contributions to specific targets across these two goals: Target 5.2 "*to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in the public spheres*", and Target 11.7 that calls for "*universal access to safe, inclusive, and accessible public space (for women and children)*". These targets align with the HPHS project vision to create safe and equitable public space for female users. Furthermore, Target 5.5, "*to ensure effective participation in decision-making regarding public life*," is addressed by the design workshops that provide a capacity-building opportunity for women to articulate and express their experiences and opinions. Ultimately, the project empowers women by giving them a tool to articulate their voice for future practices, directly answering SDG5 towards gender equality. It also recognises culture beyond the built heritage but with a more significant implication in everyday life as a way of living [6].

## 2. Methodology: Research through Design Workshops

The HPHS program adopts the design thinking approach, which originates in service design [7] and is now used for many social and community projects [8]. This research aims to understand gender experience in public spaces and the means to articulate their spatial needs; therefore, it focuses on the front-end aspects of empathy and ideation in design thinking and leads to the output of preliminary prototyping. Considering that the participants are local stakeholders instead of professional designers,

the exercises guide user expression through creative means with fewer expectations of the resulting solutions in terms of design practicality. This workshop process is also documented and used as data to observe participants' interaction and study the participatory design exercise's effect. Therefore, the project has a two-fold collection of data, first through direct response from the workshop participants to illustrate gender issues in public space, followed by analysis of the observations of interactions during workshops to develop an experiential framework of gender expression.

The project consists of a 3-stage workshop repeated for the two investigation sites, allowing iterations of the conclusive workshop in stage 3. After each workshop, the participants' responses and creative outputs are collected and analysed to illustrate gender issues embedded in the specific public space locations. The program is conceived as a reflective cycle of research and application, where initial findings from the first design workshop are used to inform and make iterations of subsequent workshops. Based on the collective findings, including participants' feedback and facilitators' reports, an application framework is developed to facilitate the expression and articulation of gendered experiences for future programs or similar initiatives.

### 3. The HPHS workshop design and findings

The Her Place Her Say (HPHS) program is conducted in partnership with the Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres (HKFWC), a local civic organisation promoting gender equality for grassroots women. The program design took reference from the [World Bank Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Design and Planning](#) [9], which is widely used as a guidebook for social organisations, governments, urban planners, and practitioners to incorporate voices of women and gender minorities in urban planning and design. The handbook addresses six issue areas of gender inequity in the built environment, including access, mobility, safety and freedom from violence, health and hygiene, climate resilience, and security of tenure. The tools from this handbook are adopted in the HPHS program as incremental exercises for women to articulate opinions related to public space design, working towards a vision of their ideal everyday environment. The overall program aims to equip participants with the skill of spatial expression, which will be helpful for them to communicate effectively in current and future participatory design opportunities, with three objectives in mind:

- (1) To articulate – with varying education levels, most women in domestic roles are not trained to present their needs even when given the chance to speak up, which the exercise is designed with graphic prompts to translate abstract feelings into concrete spatial vocabulary.
- (2) To discover – it challenges the stereotypical perception of public space design and its intended usage, where the act of mapping and survey leads to observation and discovery of the hidden details in their familiar environment.
- (3) To connect – the program emphasises participants working together, with collective tasks that require communication among the participants to complete, which allows them to connect and build relationships through shared experiences or challenges through non-verbal collaborative activities.

Recruited through two HKFWC locations, participants are primarily residents of the same district who would share similar experiences in the common everyday environment. Two high-density residential districts in Hong Kong, Fanling and Wah-Fu, are selected as the sites, with participants living in both public and private housing estates. Each workshop has about 20 participants, of which the majority are aged 50 or above (71%) and primarily homemakers and/or retirees (84%) (fig.1).

Before the design workshops, an introductory survey was conducted to learn about the participants' habits in public space usage. The survey included three questions: (1) What is your most frequently visited public space? (2) Who do you usually go to this place with? (3) How do you travel to this place? Among the responses (with multiple responses allowed), 42% named a leisure space such as a park, waterfront promenade, or playground, and 74% suggested markets, shopping malls, and supermarkets

as their most visited public space (fig. 2). 70% responded that "friends" or "family" were the main company when visiting public spaces. However, "going alone" was also a dominant choice of 32%, indicating that some women would also spend time alone in public spaces. More respondents take a bus or mini-bus as the mode of transit (74%) over the MTR (mass transit railway), reflecting that their activity area is usually closer to home than across districts (fig. 3).

These participants form a sample of women in domestic roles to discuss gendered experiences in public spaces. Informed by the results, the public space typology of neighbourhood parks and markets is chosen as the scenarios for spatial experience and design exercise in the following workshops.

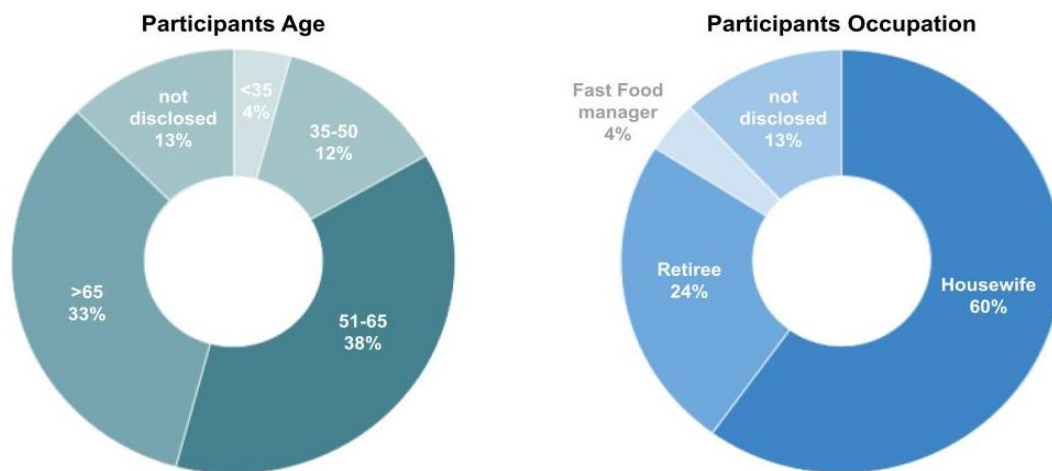


Fig. 1. Workshop participant profile showing participant age (left) and occupation (right)

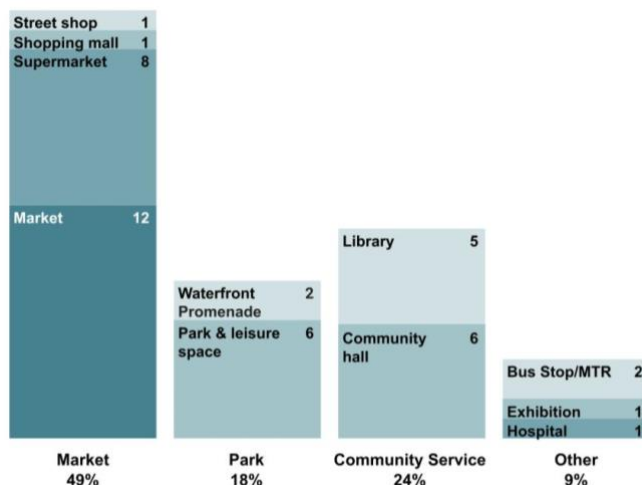


Fig. 2. Survey result of most frequently visited public space



Fig. 3. Survey result of mode of transit

### 3.1 Workshop 1: Gendered Bodies Experience

The first workshop aims to establish a common understanding of how inequitable gender and urban issues intersect, highlighting the importance of having multiple voices in matters of urban space. It includes two activities to gain buy-in among participants: The first exercise, "Step-Up", is a role-play about the situation of a woman in a different urban space scenario (fig. 4). Standing along a line marked on the ground, participants are asked to step forward if they feel comfortable or step backwards if they feel uncomfortable in scenarios presented by the facilitator, such as "walking in the neighbourhood

late at night”, “being in a crowded train”, or “doing morning exercise in the park”. After several rounds, each person will be in a different position and notice how others might feel similar or different in common public spaces. Participants are then invited to share their reasons for stepping forward or backward and elaborate on their feelings in various scenarios. In this initial workshop exercise, most participants ended up behind the starting line, citing situations where they felt unsafe or intimidated. This exercise builds empathy among participants and highlights the environmental conditions that many females have a common reaction to.



**Fig. 4.** The "Step Up" exercise (left) and the slide showing the public space scenario (right)

In the second exercise, “Place-Feeling Reflection”, participants in small groups discuss and rate their experience as a woman in a different public space, including a street, a park, and a market in their neighbourhood. The worksheet is designed as a radial chart with four quadrants of impressions – safety, comfort, convenience, and entitlement to the space (fig. 5). The outer ring of the concentric diagram represents positive feelings and transitions to negative feelings towards the centre. Participants place stickers and post-its on the diagram to describe their feelings with some explanatory keywords. The same typology of a park and a market is used for both the Fanling and Wah-Fu sessions, where similar patterns and characters are found. The leisure spaces, including a neighbourhood park in Fanling and the waterfront promenade in Wah-Fu, receive generally positive impressions in the safety and comfort quadrant. In contrast, both Fanling and Wah-Fu markets receive more criticism in nearly all aspects. Across all locations and typologies, the response regarding entitlement to public space is predominantly negative, which reinforces the problem of how women feel voiceless in expressing public space opinion.

During the sharing session at the end of this exercise, participants elaborate verbally about abstract feelings such as safety or comfort and match them with tangible spatial elements, where a correlation is found between the physical environment and the impression attributes. The most commented physical conditions include the smoothness of floor surface contributing to comfort and safety and the width or obstruction of pathways regarding convenience in the street market. The lack of facilities such as water fountains, nursing stations, or accessible restrooms is also a critical element that accounts for the negative feelings of convenience and comfort in parks and markets. These concerns directly reflect the everyday experience of women in domestic roles, such as mothers with young children in baby strollers, caretakers who travel with the elderly in wheelchairs, or going to the market in a roller cart.



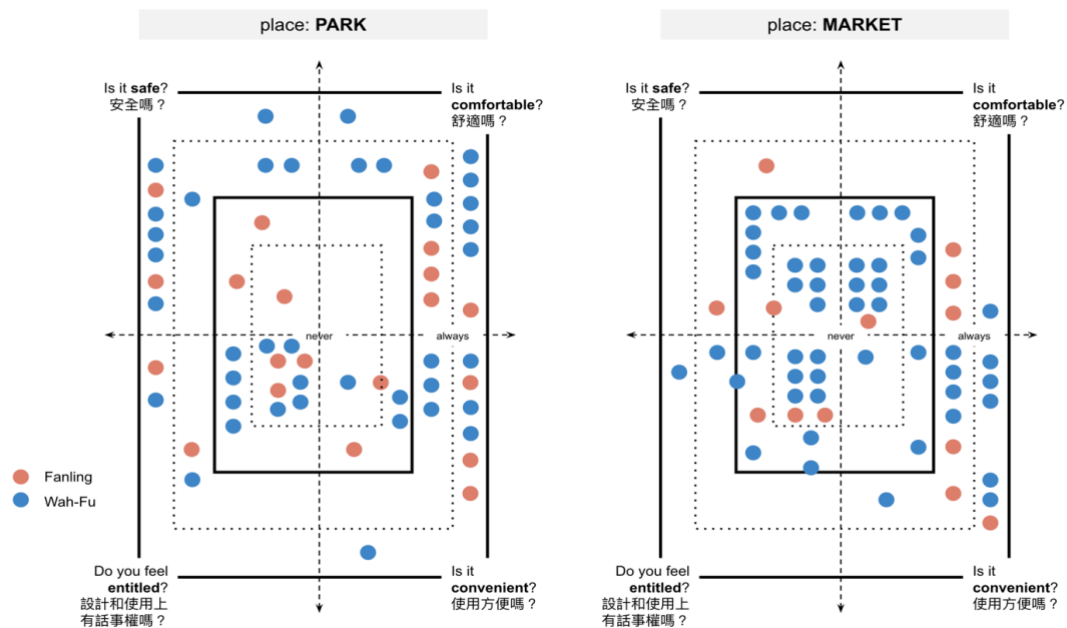


Fig. 5. The “Place-Feeling Reflection” exercise results

### 3.2 Body-in-Space Mapping

As participants feel confident in connecting abstract feelings about public space with descriptions of physical conditions, the second workshop expands the verbal elaboration through an on-site walk audit to gain evidence supporting their impressions about specific public space locations. The activity involves visiting the everyday spaces cited in the last workshop with the task of documenting the disposition and design of spatial elements. The objective is to discuss further what constitutes a (non) inclusive public space experience for women users.

A warm-up exercise was first conducted to reiterate the impressions collected in the previous workshop and to relate them with specific spatial detail. Participants are given a scorecard to provide ratings of a specific location they are familiar with in two sections: (1) convenience, safety, and hygiene and (2) spatial elements, including floor condition, shading, brightness, location to rest, and facilities. The exercise then asked the participant to draw connections between the impression rating and specific physical elements to help participants clarify how and why they felt a certain way in public space and articulate those feelings with spatial terms. Figure 6 is a consolidated representation of the collective response from the participants, showing a similar pattern in conditions that attributed to the result of the previous session. For example, lighting is most frequently linked to the impression of safety and the availability of facilities is connected to the feeling of convenience and hygiene. Other physical conditions, such as floor conditions or shading, also contribute to convenience.

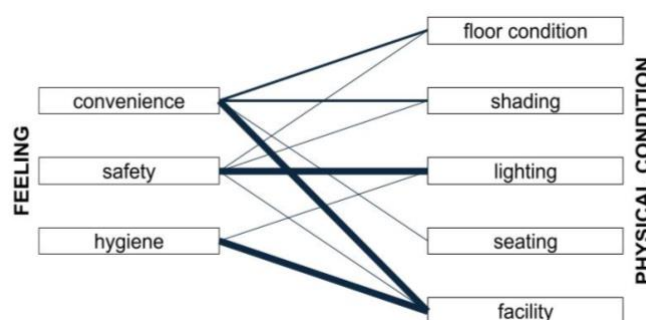


Fig. 6. The “Feeling-Condition” exercise findings

The core activity for the second workshop is a survey walk to observe and document the environment, provided with a fieldwork toolkit designed to guide the walk creatively and enjoyably (fig. 7). It includes a site plan with markers and stickers and a log sheet to take count of numbers and variety of physical elements. The facilitator also explains with a set of guiding questions, from simple questions like the number of benches to more complex ones that describe a scene of people's interaction in a public space. Learning from the participant feedback, in cases such as when they look up to count different types of lighting fixtures or look down to measure the pavement shape or curb transition, the mundane exercise of counting objects gives them fresh eyes to see the familiar environment and re-consider it with a new lens of gender-inclusivity.



Fig. 7. The field walk (left) and the fieldwork toolkit (right)

After walking through the neighbourhood, each group shares and discusses their documented data to compile an extensive mapping collectively, which visualises the observed issues graphically (fig. 8). It is also an opportunity for communication and exchange that turns from individual observations into a collective impression. There were already lively discussions among the participants during the walk as they became more open to expressing opinions, and they would recall specific incidents and problems that happened on-site and begin to suggest how the condition might be improved. For example, one group in Fanling surveying the neighbourhood park cited dangerous traffic incidents for children as the pathways are shared by pedestrians and vehicles and suggested that bars or gates should be installed. They also noted that while the running track is well-lit, the open lawn is too dark even during the early evening, which raised some safety concerns. Similarly, the group who surveyed the local shopping centre in Wah-Fu pointed out that unclear signage at the driveway has brought unnecessary traffic and potential accidents. They are also concerned with hygiene issues such as the poor maintenance of public toilets, garbage in the planters or floor, and pigeon waste. Besides the comments on problematic conditions, there was also enjoyable amusement, as some participants highlighted the "parrot street" in Wah-Fu, which brings a bit of nature and wildlife into the urban setting.



Fig. 8. The participants work in groups to compile data and findings on collective maps.



### *3.3 Workshop 3: Public Space Expression*

The third session gathers participants from previous workshops in Fanling and Wah-Fu and new recruits from Sham Shui Po, who share a similar background as women in domestic roles but with different experiences from their respective living environments. The workshop aims to develop a graphic illustration of gender-friendly urban spaces, where participants assume the role of urban planners and designers. Through guided steps to design two typical public spaces, a neighbourhood park and a street market, the workshop includes exercises to negotiate the needs of different stakeholders, followed by a hands-on model-making session to represent their vision. Each group of 6-7 people have a young designer serving as a facilitator, helping them to learn about model-making and basic urban design concepts such as scale and material.

The workshop began with a warm-up exercise to reiterate the needs of different female users in the public space typology of a park or a market. Participants picked up a profile card with descriptions such as “a 16-year-old female student” or “an old lady in a wheelchair” to discuss and consider their needs in such a place. The participants then select and prioritise the most important concerns into a list for that particular space. The next step is to identify the physical spatial elements (such as shading canopy, seating, public toilet, garbage can, etc) to match the needs. With the experience of previous workshops, participants by this time are generally familiar with the idea of public space components and their relationship with gendered experience. During this exercise, they elaborated on spatial details like size or material and how they could improve the public space experience, which becomes an “inventory” of items to be put into the sandbox model in the next step. This exercise concludes with presenting a one-line “design statement” of their ideal park or market as a vision to build a model of the ideal public space.

With the help of the designer facilitator, each group is given a 60x60xm “sandbox” with a base plan and model-making materials to create their ideal park or market (fig. 9). This exercise is inspired by the concept of Sandplay (Hakoniwa) in psychology therapy, which highlights the potential of non-verbal communication to express emotion and ideas better [10]. In addition to basic stationery, such as coloured pens and papers, the participants were given scaled street furniture models, such as trees, lamp posts, trash cans, etc., to create their sandbox model. The emphasis is not on constructing a design solution model but on taking it as a creative and fun medium that encourages participants to explore and express ideas. Several observations can be made of their response through the sandbox models, such as that trees and planters are most frequently used among the given items, even though they were not cited in the verbal discussion earlier. This reflects a subtle inclination for greenery that contributes to a positive vision of public space. Other findings from the model reinforced some assumptions and feedback from earlier workshops, such as the frequent use of lighting and seating elements in the model.

Along with the findings from the model output as design proposals, more observations can be made about the participants' transformation during the model-making process, providing insight into the differences between physical making and verbal opinion. Besides the prepared scaled-model items, participants found creative ways to use different raw materials to craft model items to their liking, such as the colour paper umbrella or lawn patch or various types of seating arrangements made with ice cream sticks or blocks. Another key finding through the facilitator's feedback is how keen the participants are to discuss their thoughts and experiences on the topic of “what is good public space”. Although there were some opposing opinions, they get a sense of companionship when they find out others share their needs and impressions.



Fig. 9. The physical models made by the participant group

#### 4. Result: The “Tell-Walk-Make” Framework for Public Space Expression

The workshop findings highlight the diverse and multi-dimensional nature of the gendered public space experience, even among groups with similar backgrounds. The program result suggests that the multi-sensory engagement is instrumental in capturing the diverse gendered experience, which is developed into an experiential design framework that facilitates public space expression (fig. 10). It consists of three components - Tell, Walk, and Make – to open up senses and deepen bodily experience in relation to the physical environment. The principle of this framework is to allow multi-faceted responses that create space and flexibility for participants to come up with creative ideas for the issues they encounter.

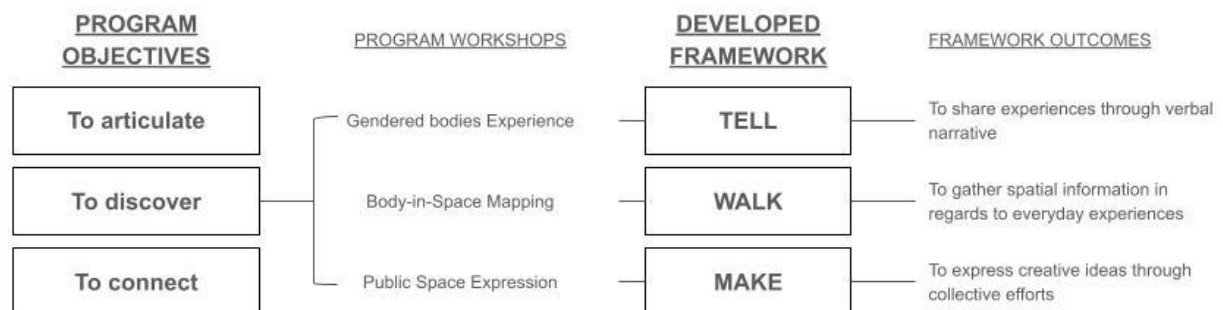


Fig. 10. The tell-walk-make framework developed from the program

##### 4.1 Tell: the verbal expression

The first component is an exercise of verbal expression, the *telling* of public space experience. Referring to the early HPHS workshops, participants were asked to recall a specific public space scenario and describe how they felt with a detailed account of the setting, including the environment, time, and events. When telling these stories, participants not only recounted the incident but also deliberated on remembering the subtle encounters in public space and interpreting them with personal verdicts. The time and space given for “telling” are essential to women in domestic roles, as they give room for the individual to process their experience and emotions, which are often left unchecked, especially in Asian culture. By constructing words to describe specific incidents, women can make sense of the experience related to their values and understand how positive or negative impacts are formed.

Besides the individual, telling also serves an educational purpose and forges connections with others [11]. The process of telling establishes a common ground for the listener to engage in the personal worldview of the teller, which entails an open-ended quality of communication. As participants share their public space experiences, others might empathise with them and reflect on their personal experiences in similar situations. It allows listeners to discover their meanings from other's stories and review their surroundings differently. This aligns with the workshop's objective to develop a shared understanding of diverse public space experiences with participants of different backgrounds and forging a sense of community and connection.

#### *4.2 Walk: the physical presence*

The second component focuses on walking and being in place. The second workshop brought the participants to locations described earlier, expanding the verbal elaboration by gathering spatial information that might challenge or support their accounted experience. The idea is to allow participants to navigate the environment and build rapport with it to generate new insights into the public space [12]. Walking is particularly useful because it is an embodied practice involving multiple senses, enabling participants to respond to the immediate environment while evoking memories about specific encounters in daily practice [13,14].

This approach effectively elevates the discussion of public space experiences with immediate and tactile feedback. As noted by the group visiting a neighbourhood park in Fanling, they observed the temperature differences in various locations and were able to relate them to the design and material of the pavilion. Similarly, the other group walking through the shopping mall pointed out insufficient signage that visitors would easily get lost and suggested specific locations that could use additional way-finding installations by their familiar account of daily routine.

Walking also offers a window for researchers to learn about the participants' itinerary and public space experience [15], with an increasing number of studies using the participant-led walk as a research method [14,16]. This approach allows the researcher to empathise with the subject's sensual and social experience, consider how they belong to a place and make sense of it with subtle cues and actions. Walking as a performative practice also reveals how participants negotiate their social identities in public spaces, thereby understanding what the public space means to them and its impact on their behaviour [15]. In addition, accompanied walking is also an opportunity for participants to have natural conversations, offering the researchers a new form of inquiry unavailable to the 'sit down' discussion in workshop one [16].

#### *4.3 Make: the hands-on creation*

The last component focuses on the tangible process of making something. Participants in the final workshop were involved with not only drawing and speaking but also physical model making, in which they engaged in an experiential learning process where the body and mind unify through handcrafts. As early as the 19th century, the hand was considered one of the most privileged body parts in science and other fields. It was identified as the key to differentiating humans from animal nature and, more importantly, making culture [17,18]. With its advanced interaction with the brain, the hand becomes essential to the embodied learning process, which is when it perceives the world through sensory experience [19].

Making with the hands can also develop a sense of happiness and contentment. With some guidance, the model-making process encourages the participants to interpret their ideas creatively by making conscious decisions about what to produce and where to put them. For example, they need to review the given scaled figures and decide whether they fit their ideal space and, if not, how to make new items from the raw materials provided. The observations of several improvised making techniques during the workshop extend beyond the given craft supplies and include other items, such as using

translucent packaging material to make small canopies. While the given material dictates a specific direction of creation, a broader imagination is opened up of what is possible once participants experience the liberty of what they can make.

Especially for women in domestic roles, who usually only make things for practical purposes such as sewing or cooking, the sense of working with hands through craft-making recalls their delicate skills in handling material and validating personal values, ideals, and aesthetics [20]. The collective hands-on experience also fosters peer learning and collaboration, as they also gain confidence by teaching fellow participants particular crafts such as folding or making joints. The participants were initially shy in expressing their ideas as they usually encounter the perception of ignorance by their domestic role. However, non-verbal communication allowed the discovery of alternative skills for some who might be less articulated in words.

## 5. Conclusion

The HPHS workshop was conceived as a capacity-building program for women in domestic roles. The goal is not the immediate design proposal but the anticipated transformation of the participants in gaining confidence to express and articulate their spatial needs. The program is designed around the topic of gendered experience in public space, taking a scaffolding approach that gradually builds up non-professional participants' skills and knowledge capacity. This project was initiated for academic research purposes and had no direct involvement from the district planning department. Therefore, it could not promise immediate environmental change. However, as a form of cultural mapping that collects and presents stakeholder opinions, it will become important evidence to advocate for changes and inform future practice [21]. The stories and qualitative data collected during the workshop answer the research question on gendered public space that narrates spatial inequality in everyday spaces while revealing potential areas for inclusive interventions. The skills-training exercises enable women without professional design training to participate in public space discussions with meaningful input. This will prepare them for future occasions of public consultation in their neighbourhood, especially for Wah-Fu Estate, as it will soon undergo an urban regeneration process by the Hong Kong Urban Renewal Authority.

The HPHS program is a two-way learning process for the participants and the researcher-organiser. From a research perspective, we learn from local stakeholders who possess critical knowledge about public space experience, while the local participants learn from the program tools to visualise and communicate their embodied knowledge and opinions. Adopting the lens of the participant to navigate everyday public space as a female homemaker verifies and amends research assumptions, which inform the later workshop iterations accordingly. This paper documents the design and process of the HPHS program to examine how skills training in design language can empower women with traditionally weaker voices. The lessons learned from conducting the workshops resulted in formulating the "tell-walk-make" framework for participatory programs towards effective public space expression. In response to the initial research questions, two key messages can be drawn in conclusion as follows:

### 5.1 Domesticity in Public Spaces

The research is built upon the critical inquiry of public space design and its non-inclusive and gender-biased tendency, with findings about the spatial pattern of domestic activities different from city-level public space. Domestic activities extend from the premise of private dwelling into the public sphere but are usually within the vicinity of their home. Learning from the homemaker participants about their daily routine, such as buying groceries or taking the children to play, it can be concluded that the neighbourhood market and parks are essentially extensions of their home, as they demonstrate

a sense of confidence, familiarity and sense of ownership as in one's domestic environment of the private home. Therefore, this neighbourhood public space is a particular typology between domestic and public life, and their design directly affects the everyday life and well-being of women in domestic roles. However, the workshop findings also reveal that most current public space designs need to be more considerate and support the unique needs of domestic practice, which would require more attention to further study and design improvements.

This research and the HPHS program are the first steps to delineate a problem often bypassed in the nominal public versus private space discourse. Recognising and presenting the particular needs of women's domestic life is essential to inclusive design. With a focus on domesticity manifested in public space, further investigations should be conducted into the transactional activities of daily life and its spatial details. Attention should be paid to the multiple physical conditions of neighbourhood public spaces to understand how spatial settings and arrangements can facilitate the intersection of home-making practices and public life. Research should also look beyond the generalisation of women's experiences and focus on capturing the diversified ways of inhabitation in public space. This suggests the emphasis on micro-scale studies that account for individual's narration of public space usage, experience, and feeling.

It should be noted that the idea of inclusive design of public space for domestic activities could be broadened from just females to include all market or park users in a domestic role, as nowadays there is also a trend in sharing household tasks by male partners. The concern of public space design can cater to domestic activities with special needs, such as carrying heavy groceries or commuting with young children. It would be an important next topic of investigation for policymakers and designs of inclusive public space.

### *5.2 The Body as an Agentive Medium*

A further lesson from the program is the individualised experience encompassing great diversity even within a small group of participants with similar profiles, which adds a layer of complexity to the problem of inclusive design. However, it suggests empowerment can happen when the individual's voice is heard. The framework of "tell-walk-make" is a progression of expression from the mere telling of experience to the incremental bodily engagement. It is a form of embodied learning in which the body engages and learns about the surroundings through observing, listening, or simply appearing. As such, the body becomes part of the environment and forms an embodied self-response to the ongoing happenings. Experiencing the environment suggests that the body functions not as a threshold dividing the world and the person but as an agentive medium that allows the externals to internalise within the body and vice versa; as Ingold states, "we are our bodies [11, p.94]."

As we study public space and gendered experience, it would be essential to turn to the body to understand how it impacts the person physically and psychologically [22]. The female body is particularly vulnerable in public space as a "non-self" space, where choices regarding its position are constantly reminded of their distinctive gender identities, feeling both out of place and taking up space whenever they are outside of the home. Taking the case of the HPHS program, this paper argues for an approach to encourage individualised gendered public space experience to reclaim the bodies in public space, which is the foundation of the sustainability goal of gender equality.

### **Acknowledgement**

The Her Place Her Space programme is supported by the HKSAR Government's Women's Commission under the 2021 District Scheme



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