INTRODUCTION

At the centre of Rinkeby, as one exits the metro, lies a square always filled with people. The square, although lively, is dominated to a large degree by men. Even though Sweden has come far in its work towards equality between the sexes, it has only begun to have an impact on the way we design our cities. The design of many public spaces still overlook the female perspective, resulting in spaces that occupy the public spaces on other terms than men. This project explores ways to redefine the relationship of women and space through urban design. The effort has been put on understanding the variety of female voices in Rinkeby, and starting a discussion about which tools we as planners and architects, have at our disposal when we aim to create a more feminist urban experience.

• How do the women in Rinkeby experience the public spaces?
• Which structural hinders can we find in Rinkeby today that prevents spatial equality between men and women?
• Which tools can we as planners and designers use when trying to create gender equal public experiences in the context of Rinkeby?

GENDER INEQUALITY: SPATIAL ASPECTS

Transport is a factor of course on women’s geographical position and who is having access to the public use of spaces. Women have more difficulties in avoiding the risk of harassment and crime when they use public transport. Research has shown that men are more likely to have access to cars and public transport. Women also experience less space in social public spaces. In Rinkeby, 70% of the area is dominated by men.

MEDIASCAPES: THE STORY OF RINKEBY

The media image of Rinkeby has been negative and has contributed to the further spatial segregation. Hence, it is important to look at how the media are portraying Rinkeby. The media often use their own interest and gain to inform about the area, leading to highly impaired views. Thus creating an area that is not often seen or heard about in the media.

ADDED COMPLEXITY: IN THE CONTEXT OF RINKEBY

This project arises from different contexts that have not previously been connected. There are different areas that space and gender is being studied in. When we look at cities like Sienna, New York, and Paris we can see a pattern of women in public spaces and how they are used. Space is an aspect of the whole system; thus the need for women in public spaces is a need for the whole system.

ANALYSIS: UNDERSTANDING WHAT IS

Counting men and women in city environments is one way of understanding what is happening. We need to understand the differences in perception and experience of spaces between men and women. The following table shows the difference in usage of public spaces between men and women.

FEMINIST PRECEDENTS: PROJECTS

DOCKWRA WOMEN

In Melbourne, a group of women have transformed around them everyday spaces. They have transformed areas with public art, parks, and social space into a vibrant and attractive area. The areas are transformed to create a better place to live in.

ROSENGRÖN RÖDA MATTA

A space created by women in Göteborg. A space created in a cooperation between the city, an art centre, and a feminist organisation. The space is created to create a more equal experience of space.

RINKEBY

An area in Stockholm where the project is based. An area where the project is based to understand the situation in the area and to find solutions that can be applied to other areas.

WIPKIL

A space created in Stockholm. A space created to create a more equal experience of space. A space created to create a more equal experience of space.

FUNKABO YOUTH CENTRE

In Kalmar, a youth centre transformed to create a more equal experience of space. A space created to create a more equal experience of space.

TRANSFORMING SPACES

In order to determine the truth of media’s image of Rinkeby, the project was transformed to create a more equal experience of space. A space created to create a more equal experience of space.

RINKEBY

THE STORY OF RINKEBY

ADDED COMPLEXITY

MEDIASCAPES

GENDER INEQUALITY

EXPLORING FEMINIST DESIGN TOOLS

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INTERVIEWS: HEARING OUT THE WOMEN

The Greeks Association

The Greeks Association (on Thursdays). They presume other women don’t meet at home.

INTERVIEWS: CONCLUSIONS

• Women feel observed and judged by the male gaze close to male-dominated spaces, sometimes so much they tend to completely avoid the area.

• The most male-dominated areas we found in the centre of Rinkeby are the corner of the square and the grill next to the library.

• There are informal, “hidden” meeting spaces for women like the back rooms of the Somali clothing shops.

• Many women, even when not bothered by the male gaze, seek activities and entertainment elsewhere because they feel Rinkeby doesn’t offer good options.

• Younger women often need permission from their family to hang out in male-dominated spaces, which often they don’t get. Getting older, and becoming mothers, makes it ok to be in public spaces with the family or children. Women often need social excuses to be allowed to be in public spaces.

• The older women seem much less bothered by the male gaze than the young, and have described the it as natural that men and women chose to socialize in different places.

• Unemployment and not knowing Swedish or English can often make women more dependent on their families and often feel isolated.

• The presence of people on and around the square late at night produces two interesting and differing reactions: Some experience it as safer this way, whilst others feel more unsafe for the exact same reason.

• Media has had a clear effect on the perception of safety around Rinkeby, and was often brought up during our interviews.

FEMINIST PRECEDENTS: PROJECTS

The Women Center in Tulse-Hill

A non-profit, grant-reliant organisation focused on strengthening the cohesion among women and young men on the project's social and educational background. They hold workshops and self-defense classes in the city centre, and also host a variety of activities such as discussion forums, lectures, events, self-defence classes, in addition to childcare services.

GREAT SCOTT

A worker’s co-operative dedicated to improving the conditions of women. An overtly feminist organisation in the belief that women’s voices were not being heard, and that ‘mutual knowledge’ was needed to be adapted in order to make the design process more understandable and engaging for clients and users. Important project was the Jagonari Centre for Bangladeshi women in London.

MATRIX FEMINIST DESIGN

A mainly female architectural office that works as an overtly feminist stance in working and designing. A worker’s co-operative dedicated to improving the conditions of women. An overtly feminist organisation in the belief that women’s voices were not being heard, and that ‘mutual knowledge’ was needed to be adapted in order to make the design process more understandable and engaging for clients and users. Important project was the Jagonari Centre for Bangladeshi women in London.

NEED A ROOM

A women’s committee in communities that works as an overtly feminist stance in working and designing. A worker’s co-operative dedicated to improving the conditions of women. An overtly feminist organisation in the belief that women’s voices were not being heard, and that ‘mutual knowledge’ was needed to be adapted in order to make the design process more understandable and engaging for clients and users. Important project was the Jagonari Centre for Bangladeshi women in London.

THE GREATER LONDON COUNCIL

A women’s committee in communities that works as an overtly feminist stance in working and designing. A worker’s co-operative dedicated to improving the conditions of women. An overtly feminist organisation in the belief that women’s voices were not being heard, and that ‘mutual knowledge’ was needed to be adapted in order to make the design process more understandable and engaging for clients and users. Important project was the Jagonari Centre for Bangladeshi women in London.
The plans focus on developments along Rinkebystråket and Rinkeby Allé. The two axes will host commercial and entertainment activities, mostly retail and restaurants. The main desired connections are towards Kista, through Rinkeby terassen, and Stora Ursvik, through a bridge. These connections are planned to be reinforced by commercial activities, that will create greater pedestrian flows, and a possible new bus line on Rinkeby Allé. The development on Rinkeby Allé includes restructuring of the current built environment, addition of buildings and functions, as well as creation and redesign of a public space on the east exit of the square.

The most influential part of the proposal is the new multicultural center on Rinkeby Allé, that will house a new mosque and other facilities, hoping to become a new small center for the neighborhood.

**SPECULATIVE PROPOSALS:**

1. **PROGRAM**

The ground where this research started was Rinkeby square. After our observations, it was only natural to look into ways of increasing the female presence on this site. We proceeded to do that by adding female facilities that support, allow or excuse their presence on and around the square, as we have discovered that it is not uncommon for women to feel they need socially accepted reasons to validate their being in such a central area.

Taking a feminist stance for us meant that we needed to enforce and establish the female presence in Rinkeby. That involved making a statement in a central place, while shifting it’s focus from men to women. We considered the female needs and desires that we gathered from the interviews with residents and organizations, and tested what would foster stronger female flows.

At the same time, we couldn’t ignore what was revealed to us from discussions with elderly women and was supported from literature: women often operate and meet in hidden networks, like the back rooms of small clothing stores. Those marginal spaces are not only sites of deprivation, but sites of radical possibility. We discussed, then, the balance between the women’s comfort zone and thriving in peripheral spaces, a little bit further away from the public eye.

As architects and planners, we are more or less the outsiders that often impose their own ideas in an area. We believe that the best way to tackle that is by keeping an open dialogue with the locals, both while analyzing and understanding the area, but also when deciding and taking actions. The most involving and including way to do so, is by opening up to participation and leaving aside our own power to let women’s voices be heard. Although we believe participation is a tool that should be used more extensively, in this exploration it is imagined and planned in a future development site, the one of the new mosque and multicultural centre.