

FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER-JUST AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Cities of opportunities for *all*

Better access to paid employment



Better access to education and advancement



More prospects for social and political participation



More possibilities to redefine traditional gender roles and norms



Greater ease in attaining sexual and reproductive health and rights





2015

4 bn people

50% of all people living in cities



7 bn people

2060

70% of all people living in cities

Urbanisation is a defining characteristic of life across the globe in the 21st century. Cities, in particular megacities and metropolises, offer many opportunities for different types of people to forge a livelihood and lead a fulfilling social life. The diverse options are taken up in particular by women and people who renounce traditional, binary gender roles and norms and are thus often subject to

various kinds of discrimination. At the same time, however, social inequalities in cities are intensifying, and residents – especially women and girls – of poorer neighbourhoods are having a hard time escaping the urban poverty trap. It is not only in the burgeoning megacities of Asia and Africa that increasing poverty on the city outskirts is coupled with gender-based violence – that is also true of Europe, where two thirds of the geographical area has long been urbanised. Social segregation and sexualised violence – problems that are too frequently ignored – pose two major threats to social cohesion globally.

The social inequality of tomorrow will be urban and not gender neutral

By 2050, 90% of new urban residents will be in Asia and Africa – regions that are already home to the highest proportion of socially disadvantaged people.

In the Global South, approx. 25% (1 billion out of 3.9 billion) people live in slums. In Europe too, almost a quarter (24%) of the urban population is impoverished and socially excluded.

Yet for women, who on average own less than 2% of the world's titled land, the city is an opportunity and a chance for survival.

Cities account for over 70% of the global GNP, but women do not receive their fair share of the economic benefits: more than 60% work in precarious conditions in the informal sector and lack social security.

Due to gender-differentiated rural-urban-migration patterns, men still outnumber women in urban areas. There are about 96 women for every 100 men in the world's cities. But women now account for a growing share of the urban population.

Women are overrepresented in slums in 80% of 59 developing countries where data are available. In Africa, there are on average about 120 women (aged 15–49) for every 100 men living in slum conditions.

Compared to men, they do two to three times as much unpaid care work in urban households and neighbourhoods.

Sources:

- European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS): *Global Trends to 2030: The Future of urbanization and Megacities*. Brüssel, 2018. (<https://bit.ly/futureofurbanization>)
- <https://unhabitat.org/harsh-realities-marginalized-women-in-cities-of-the-developing-world>

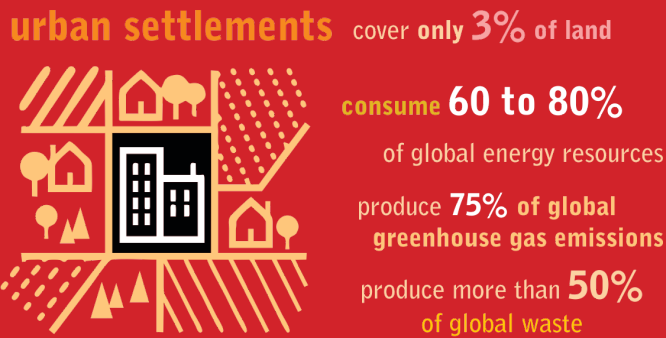
Cities must be inclusive in order to be sustainable

How we live together in the future, including how we address ecological issues, will be decided in our cities and urban areas. The necessary construction of long-lasting public infrastructure – housing and public spaces, utilities, roads and public transport, and healthcare, educational and leisure facilities – will determine the trajectory of emissions for decades to come. Global challenges like climate change and the unfair distribution of limited resources – in particular water – can only be overcome through the participation of *all* urban residents. Sustainable Development Goal 11 in the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable”. It explicitly references providing access to safe transport systems and to green and public spaces for women, persons with disabilities and older persons. The New Urban Agenda developed by UN-Habitat also obliges governments to ensure access to affordable housing – crucial for the large proportion of single mothers who have to provide for big families and for women, girls and queers who seek refuge from violent relationships.

The three criteria for inclusive and gender-just urban planning: Security, accessibility, affordability

The city is essentially built around four functions: housing, work, health & recreation, and transport. Yet, it is not experienced in the same way by women as by men, and the

Opportunities and threats for discriminated groups

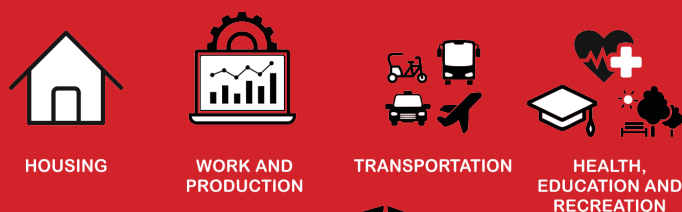


Yet urbanization provides a unique opportunity: 75% of the infrastructure that will be needed in 2050 does not exist today and can be built in a resource efficient, climate resilient and socially inclusive way.

same goes for queers and non-queers, young and old, rich and poor. Urban infrastructure is not available to women, girls and queers – especially those who are socially disadvantaged – to the same degree as it is to men.

Experts have criticised outmoded assumptions about social coexistence and stereotypical gender roles that underlie even some of the most recently developed urban planning concepts. Based on the idea of a “functional city” described in the Athens Charter of 1933, the prototype inhabitant for whom apartments and roads are built remains a city man who at best has evolved from a “worker” to a “banker”. But the shiny glass façades and high-tech infrastructure in the city centre – exported into the expanding global cities of tomorrow as an expression of Western “progress” – are of no use whatsoever to the great majority of people and serve only to emphasise and exacerbate social exclusion.

This is particularly apparent in the area of transportation and mobility: women – who are usually the primary carers and providers in their families and neighbourhoods – are faced with multiple difficulties when navigating around today’s car-



friendly cities and must invest a disproportionate amount of time in doing so. Women, or any individuals providing care and social services, usually travel shorter distances but spend more time out and about in the city, visiting the various destinations required by their often informal employment and/or care work. Yet transport planning is a male-dominated field the world over, and it is only slowly beginning to pay attention to gender aspects such as gender hierarchies and gender-specific interests. If the cities of the future are to be sustainable and inclusive, transport systems must take local routes between residential areas, workplaces and public services into account. This will only be possible if the needs and interests of *all* transport users are addressed. To date, urban planning still does not consider the interests of women and of people with special needs.

Social norms and public life in cities

Even just moving around in public spaces can be hazardous for women, girls, LGBTIQ+ people and disabled people, who often feel vulnerable in such spaces. Secluded bus stops, underpasses (instead of safe footbridges) and even large open spaces can constitute danger zones for attack or sexual assault. In spite of numerous initiatives to tackle everyday violence in public spaces, women and other vulnerable groups (including in particular those who do not conform to gender norms) feel unable to exercise their fundamental rights and civil liberties as individual citizens. Across the globe, the use of public spaces reflects the imbalance of power between the genders. In many countries around the world, girls and women still have to justify their presence in certain places at certain times of day. Case studies in some cities have shown that for LGBTIQ+ people in particular, fears for personal safety affect transportation choice, often leading to reduced mobility. When people with a non-binary gender identity choose to be visibly present on public transport and in the city, they are taking a risk.

“Not having a gender approach in planning is measured not just in money, but also in time and fear.”

Ana Falú, an Argentine expert on gender and urban planning

Where gender-sensitive urban planning and design is lacking, not only is there an infrastructural deficiency, but there are also discriminatory human rights violations, putting the dignity of women, LGBTIQ+ and persons with disabilities at risk.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sop4faq2NV8>

INSIGHT

Urbanisation from a feminist viewpoint:

For many years, the international offices of the Heinrich-Böll-Foundation (hbs) have been addressing social and ecological problems in densely populated cities. They promote the democratic participation of civil society actors in sustainable and inclusive urbanisation processes. The Foundation's projects target inequalities between the genders and the marginalisation of women and LGBTIQ+ people – either as a cross-cutting issue or in explicit efforts to empower discriminated groups. Here, we present some outstanding projects from the wide array of urban development schemes:

MEXICO CITY: CLIMATE-NEUTRAL MOBILITY ON SAFE STREETS

Riding a bike in Mexico City was considered utopian just a few years ago. Now it's the main means of transportation for young people in Latin America's second largest city. The hbs is supporting initiatives in Mexico that aim to expand this form of low-emission mobility, targeting people in the outer boroughs and women, most of the latter of whom have less experience and confidence when cycling in public. Restrictive gender norms from the last century, including the belief that women should keep their legs covered in public, still stand in the way of "freedom of movement for all". Young female skateboarders, including many queer women, are being supported by networking opportunities and webinars. This allows them to make their voices heard, calling for greater safety and freedom in the use of public street space, in a community that continues to be male dominated.

<https://ciclosfera.com/mujeres>



BRAZIL: RESISTANCE AGAINST MILITARISED VIOLENCE AND NO-GO AREAS IN LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOODS

The increasing violence in Brazil's large urban centres means life-threatening restrictions on the freedom of movement, especially for younger women. In many *favelas*, violence is escalating to the detriment of young people, women and marginalised groups. Spaces of fear are growing in their own neighbourhoods due to brutal militarisation on the part of the state. The hbs office in Rio de Janeiro is supporting a network of local feminist organisations in fighting back against the violence. A thematic map of the city highlights threats to women in Rio de Janeiro's various neighbourhoods and shows links between militarised and sexualised violence against women. In this way young women and queers in particular do not simply have to avoid the problematic areas, but can organize themselves and build solidarity among all affected groups.

<https://www.fase.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Cartografia-Violencias-de-genero-em-contextos-militarizados.pdf>



SOUTHERN CONE: URBAN PLANNING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN AND CAREGIVERS

The hbs office in the Southern Cone is supporting feminist urban planning projects in Chile and Argentina that address, in particular, multiple discrimination. In the Chilean port city of Valparaíso, a gender-sensitive urban plan was developed with the active participation above all of women from the poor suburbs. In Córdoba, Argentina, young academics have created an information brochure that makes the daily care work in urban life visible from the perspective of the female caregivers. Project activities will continue despite the restrictions during the pandemic, in order to exert influence on urban design through feminist voices and intersectional gender approaches.

<https://www.ciscsa.org.ar>

Examples from international urban movements

NIGERIA: OPENING UP SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SPACES FOR WOMEN

In Lagos, one of Africa's largest cities, women undertake petty trade in the informal sector to ensure their families' survival. They are being forced out of their homes and public markets by "redevelopment from above". Rigid patriarchal norms prevent them from speaking out publicly and taking action to demand access to public infrastructure – market stalls, drinking water, lighting, transportation. In a coastal slum built on stilts, hbs Nigeria initiated an urban development plan with public participation. This resulted in the building of an ecological neighbourhood centre that has improved income opportunities for women traders. Strong participation by women is enshrined in the centre's charter. The hbs pilot project has since developed into a broad and recognised programme for democratic and inclusive urban development in the megacity of Lagos. It strengthens and encourages young women in particular to become publicly involved in the planning and design of their neighbourhoods.

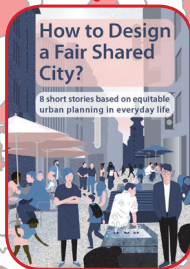
<https://www.boell.de/de/lagos-megacity> / <https://ng.boell.org/en/2016/01/27/open-city-lagos>

CZECH REPUBLIC AND SLOVAKIA: GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN URBAN PLANNING, DECISION MAKING AND DESIGN

What does an urban space look like that is open to and equitably distributed among all citizens – an urban space in which women, LGBTIQ+ people, children and older adults can in equal measure move around freely and without fear? The hbs office in Prague uses educational and study trips to the region's metropolitan areas to convince municipal planners and politicians that the quality of coexistence in cities improves when a gender perspective is taken into account in urban planning. A comic book of sorts helps to reach not only planning offices and architects, but also people whose interests are often ignored in public space. Compact and creative at the same time, the graphic handbook presents obstacles and hazards in everyday urban life and suggests practicable gender-sensitive alternatives for urban planning – so that all genders of all ages can benefit from the power of design.

<https://cz.boell.org/en/2017/02/26/how-design-fair-shared-city>

<http://www.wpsprague.com/fairsharedcity>



LEBANON: LOCAL RECONSTRUCTION AND GENDER-JUST HOUSING POLICIES

More than 300,000 people in Beirut lost their homes as a result of the devastating explosion in Beirut's port in August 2020. But affordable housing has long been scarce in Lebanon's capital due to neoliberal housing policies. Where can women and their children find a safe place to stay when they are in danger of domestic violence? How can the many women-headed households remain in their existing neighbourhoods? The Housing Monitor project, supported by the hbs office in Beirut, is monitoring eviction cases and assisting neighbourhood initiatives that are fighting for houses, businesses and streets to be rebuilt. As an important principle of justice, the project members make sure that cases concerning women make up a certain percentage of their work. Only in this way can transparent and fair housing policies ensure that urban development is gender-just.

<https://publicworksstudio.com/en/articles/housing-feminist-cause>

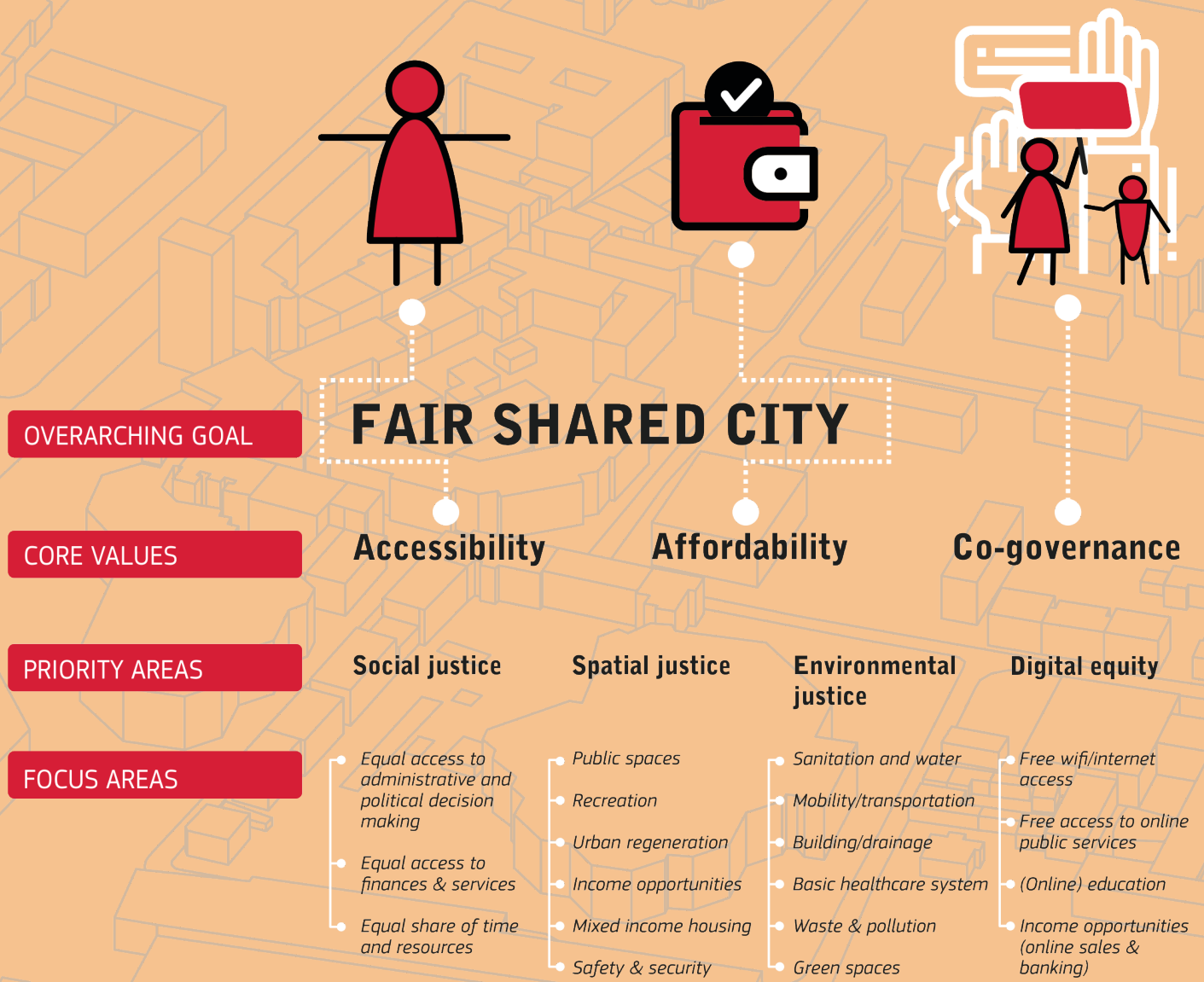
OUTLOOK

The future of a fair shared city:

Gender justice and equality of opportunities for people of all genders are not just internationally protected rights, they are the necessary basis for socially inclusive and ecologically sustainable urban development and city planning. Increasingly, architects and planning professionals, international organisations, and policy makers both inside and outside Europe are coming to realise that holistic approaches will be needed in the future governance of urban societies to stop them disintegrating as the result of social divisions or conflicts over dwindling resources such as water. All measures within an inclusive urban planning approach should give equal consideration to spatial, social and economic dimensions in order to grant socially and economically disadvantaged people more equal participation in the development of new infrastructure.

UN-Habitat has long warned against attempts to confront the increasing problem of the “urbanisation of poverty” without also applying gender mainstreaming. From the very beginning and throughout the entire process, women, girls and disadvantaged sections of society should be enabled to have a say in urban development plans, legislation, financing and the development of economic and social infrastructure, supported by gender analyses that assess the interests of these groups.

But approaches that properly consider climate, gender and generational justice go above and beyond such an integrative approach. They know that environmental justice and digital equity are central tasks in the gender-just urban planning of the future. The concept of a fair-shared city, such as that developed by young Nigerian urban planners, also stresses that urban planning must be updated to reflect modern life and honour the contribution that the informal sector makes to a vibrant city life.



Accessible, affordable and collectively designed



The 3R method

is a tool for analysing the different baseline situations of urban residents as well as the causes of their disadvantage. It is essentially based on the question: Who (representation/political decision-making power) gets what (resources and rights) and why (reality: roles and responsibilities)?

Participation of all genders in every phase from tender to completion

Urban planning is a field that is rife with conflict as it tackles a vast array of heterogeneous interests and divergent aims. It is crucial that instead of the concerns of marginalised groups being played off against one another within broad-ranging participatory processes, public property and spaces are equitably shared among *all* social groups. This is only possible when discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes are questioned from the planning phase onwards. A key instrument for exposing structural discrimination – not only towards women and LGBTIQ+ people – is gender analysis: this tool uses the 3R method to ask systematic questions and thus uncover unequal power relations among the genders even in the pre-planning phase.

In the later phases of construction, building measures and activation of new projects (e.g. larger housing schemes and the infilling or redesign of inner cities and road networks) should be checked regularly in order to assess the impact of these activities on the various inhabitants and to identify best practices. Gender-sensitive monitoring, with gender-specific indicators, will allow urban planners and local decision makers to collect data about positive and negative impact on vulnerable groups and to draw conclusions that can then be applied in subsequent projects to ensure that public spaces in cities are used in a way that benefits all social classes and genders.

Urbanisation is an extremely complex process with a global impact. A key challenge for all inclusive and participatory approaches is the fact that in reality participatory processes

usually occur within a small local area, in the shadow of unequal power relations. In our global cities, free spaces and properties are being sold off on a grand scale without any stakeholder involvement, affordable living spaces and old building stock are being torn down and “converted” in a way that simply maximises profit, and long-established neighbourhoods and small residential and commercial streets are being torn asunder. And yet, city governments and policy makers are becoming increasingly open to incorporating the interests of local stakeholders in plans for redesigning neighbourhood communities, shopping centres and playgrounds.

But in the same way that urban participatory processes should play an important role in economic decision making and not only take place as a “side programme” alongside the main action of the “construction boom”, gender-just urban planning must not be trivialised or permitted to amount to nothing more than gender-sensitive design. Gender-just or feminist urban development is about more than simply providing adequate nighttime lighting for dark pathways, lowering kerbstones, and extending the green signal for pedestrians. Instead, such concrete improvements must be intertwined with distributive justice in urban public spaces – i.e. they must consider the distribution of power within the city. What is needed is inclusive urban development that ensures all non-privileged groups and those people who are discriminated against in various ways – women, queers, people living with disabilities, caregivers, elderly people, children – are enabled to play an active role in the planning, development and, in particular, affordable use of public infrastructure and housing. If the cities of the future are to have any real future within planetary boundaries, individuals of all social groups must participate in the planning and management of urban development.

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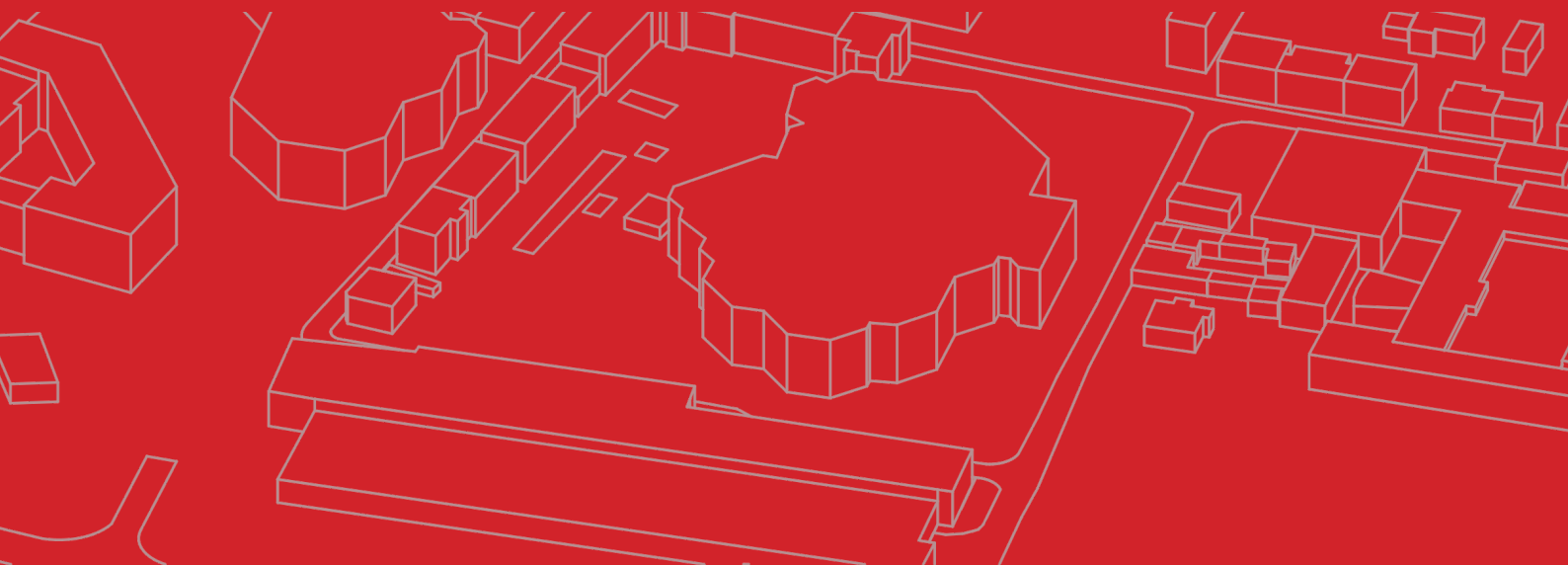
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