



ندوة البحث العلمي في العمارة والتخطيط

The Retreat of the Gendered Public Space in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

ورقة بحثية مقدمة لندوة البحث العلمي في العمارة والتخطيط: بحوث نوعية في ظل الرؤية الوطنية 2030
كلية العمارة والتخطيط، جامعة الملك سعود: الرياض

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Introduction

For a long time, KSA was known to be one of the most gender-segregated countries in the world. Gender segregation and exclusion were applied in all services, schools, work environments, restaurants, and coffee shops, as well as other settings (Almahmood, Scharnhorst, et al., 2017; Le Renard, 2008). This gender segregation and exclusion model meant more to women since they faced harsher restrictions and limitations (Le Renard, 2014).



Introduction

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) called to ease gender segregation in public space as a part of a new government program launched on May 4, 2018, to improve the quality of life in KSA (Nereim, 2018). This program is a part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's (MbS) Saudi Vision 2030 (SV 2030), in which a key part pushes for the easing of social restrictions and empowering women in KSA (*Quality of Life program 2020*, 2018).

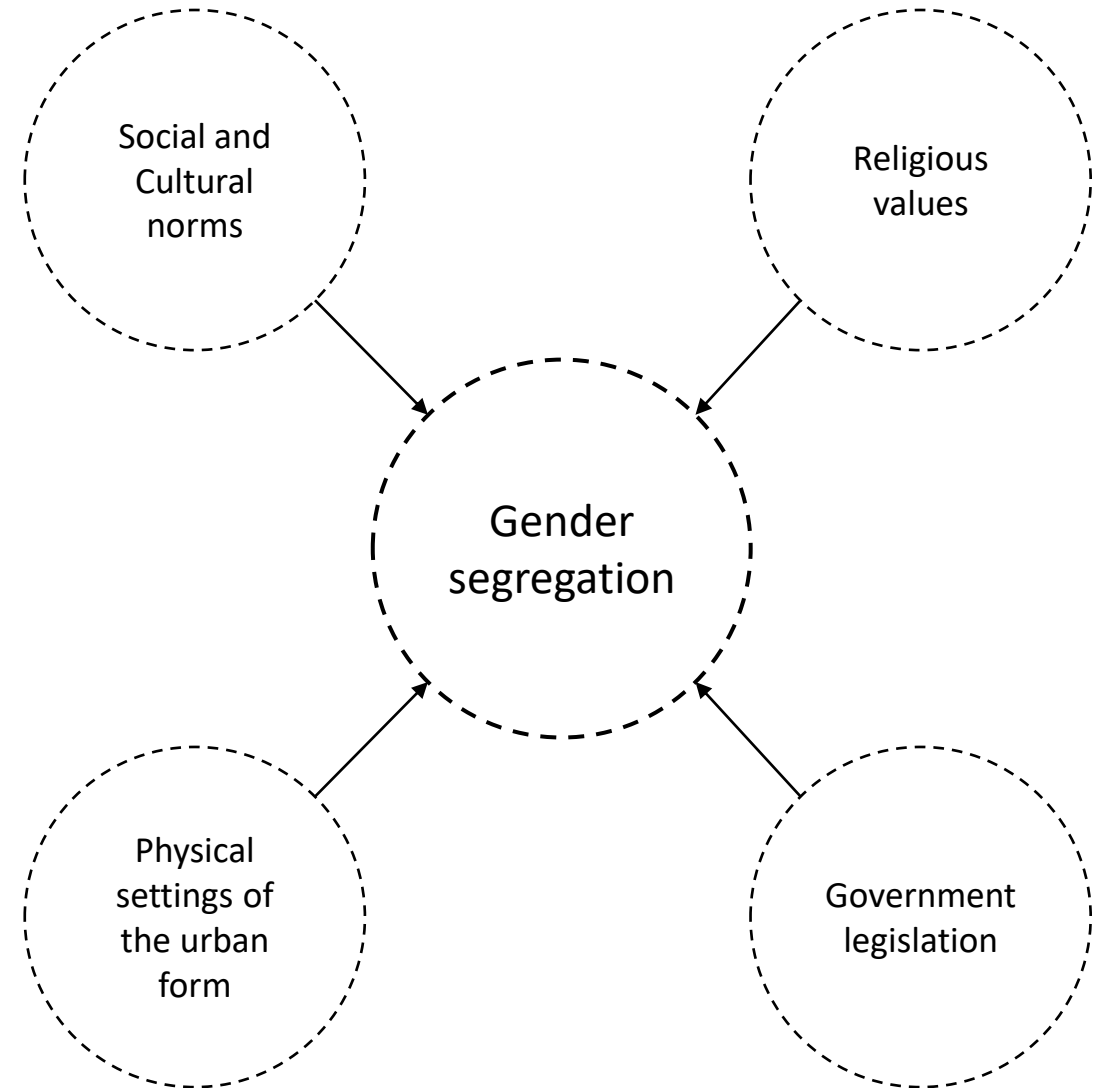


برنامج جودة الحياة
QUALITY OF LIFE PROGRAM



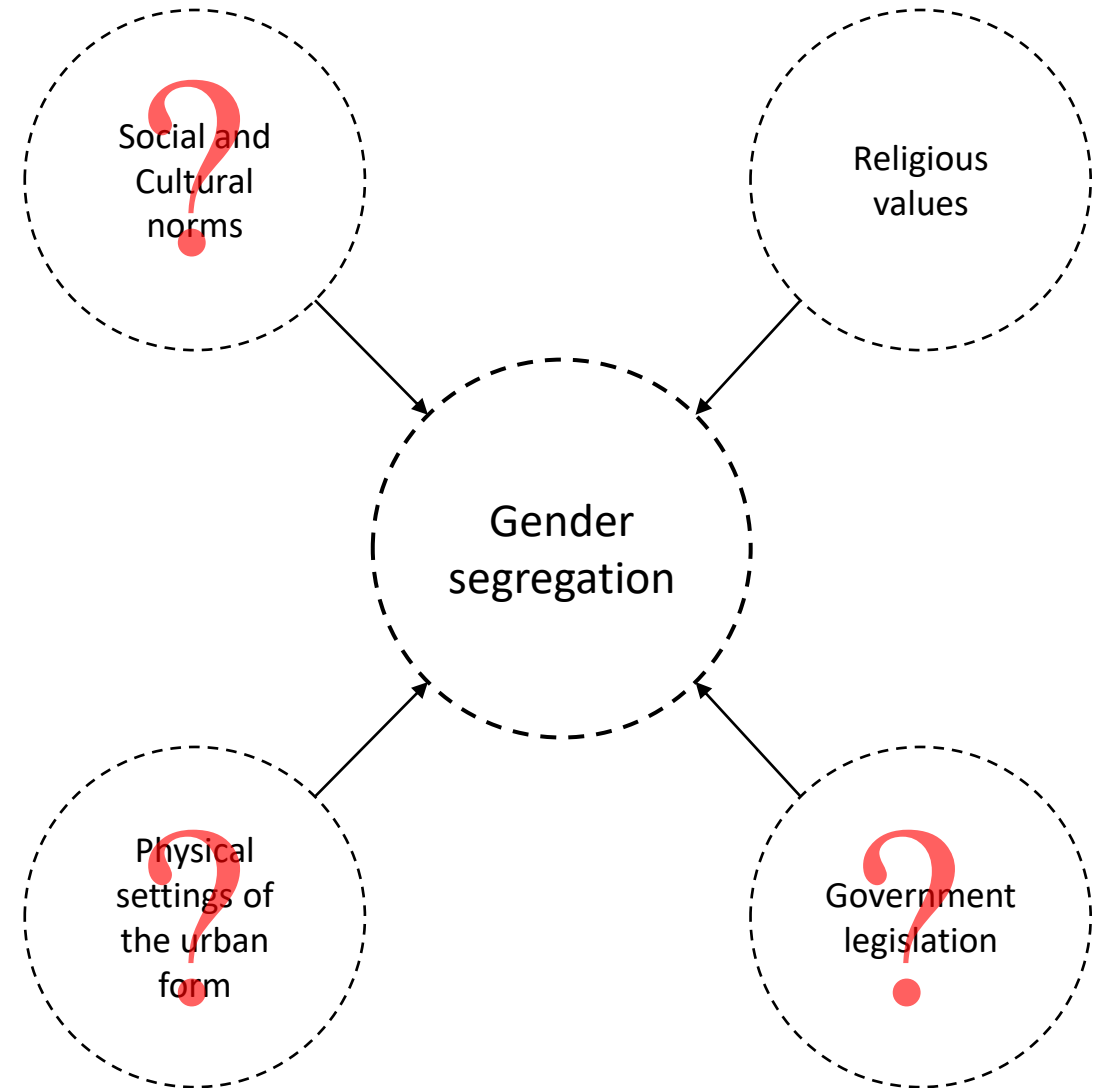
Research Problem

Extensive literature exists on the issue of gender segregation in public space (Abu-Lughod, 1987; Addas, 2015; Al-Abdullah, 1999; Al-Hussayen, 1996; Al-Rasheed, 2013; Almahmood, Scharnhorst, et al., 2017; Alsanea, 2005; Bahammam, 1995; Le Renard, 2008, 2014; Meijer, 2010; Menoret, 2013; Mustafa, 2015). Most of these studies argue that the practice of gender segregation in KSA is seen as an issue of gender-equal Rights to Public Space (RPS) (Almahmood, Schulze, et al., 2017; Le Renard, 2011; Mustafa, 2015). This regime significantly decreased the quality of public space in cities throughout Saudi Arabia by both restricting RPS and limiting the possibility of social cohesion (Almahmood, Scharnhorst, et al., 2017; Alsanea, 2005; Le Renard, 2014).



Research Problem

However, the conventional idea of the gendered public space has been fading away as a result of current social reform. Therefore, it is necessary to revisit earlier results about gender issues in KSA's public space that have been explored in the literature KSA to describe the influence of the reform on women's and men's RPS.



Research Objective

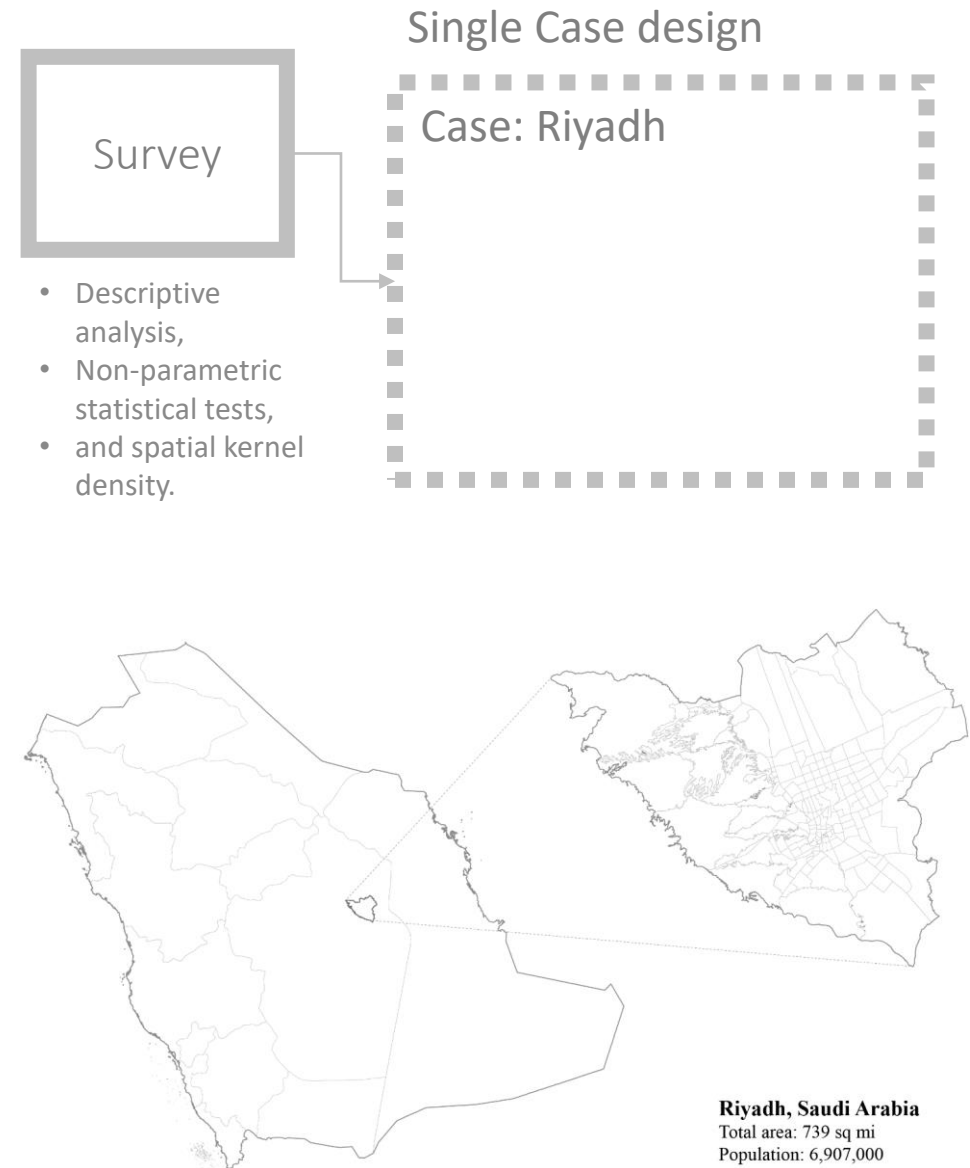
In this paper, I take on the task to assess whether the current KSA's social reform allowing gender mixing has boosted the gender equal RPS. As such, I intend in this paper to answer the following research question:

How have the social reforms in KSA shaped the individual rights to public space for women and men in Riyadh?



Methodology

- This paper adopted a **single case** study design (**Riyadh, KSA**) with web-based survey as a primary data collection method.
- The **web-based** survey was distributed to Riyadh's inhabitants (**Snowball sampling**) using two social media platforms: Twitter and WhatsApp.
- The survey was active online for 18 days, starting from September 10, 2020, to September 28, 2020.
- During this time, I received **1,252 participants**.
- After the cleaning procedure, I had **606 valid responses** (Table 1).
- Then, I ran some non-parametric statistical tests to assess gender differences on multiple variables to determine the level of **gender-equal RPS** using Stata. I used Fisher's exact test for binary variables, Chi-square test for categorical variables, and Wilcoxon's rank-sum test for ordinal and continuous variables (Parab & Bhalerao, 2010).



Methodology

Table 1. Descriptive summary of survey respondents' demographic information

	Total		Male		Female		p
	Mean or %	SE	Mean or %	SE	Mean or %	SE	
Use public space	0.71	0.02	0.80	0.03	0.65	0.02	0.000
Age	39.12	0.51	34.20	0.74	42.23	0.64	0.000
Saudi	0.96	0.01	0.93	0.02	0.99	0.01	0.000
Married	0.68	0.02	0.57	0.03	0.74	0.02	0.000
Have Children	0.63	0.02	0.48	0.03	0.73	0.02	0.000
Own a Car	0.62	0.02	0.96	0.01	0.41	0.03	0.000
Income		0.07		0.12		0.08	0.000
- Less than 3500Rs	19.3%	-	18.3%	-	20.0%	-	
- 3500-8699Rs	14.9%	-	11.1%	-	17.3%	-	
- 8700-11999Rs	19.5%	-	13.2%	-	23.5%	-	
- 12000-15299Rs	18.0%	-	17.0%	-	18.6%	-	
- 15300-20159Rs	13.5%	-	16.6%	-	11.6%	-	
- 20170Rs and more	14.9%	-	23.8%	-	9.2%	-	
Education		0.03		0.04		0.03	0.000
- General education	2.3%	-	0.9%	-	3.2%	-	
- High school graduate	15.5%	-	16.6%	-	14.8%	-	
- College graduate	63.7%	-	56.6%	-	68.2%	-	
- High education	18.5%	-	26.0%	-	13.8%	-	
Residence Status		0.04		0.06		0.04	0.000
- Single-family house	67.2%	-	60.0%	-	71.7%	-	
- Duplex	5.9%	-	4.3%	-	7.0%	-	
- Apartment/single floor	26.9%	-	35.7%	-	21.3%	-	
N	606		235		481		

P-value reported using Fisher's exact test for binary variables, Chi-square test for categorical variables, and Wilcoxon's rank-sum test for ordinal and continuous variables.



Results





Results

Gender and the
Users of Public
Space

<i>Users of public space by Gender</i>	Total		Male		Female		P
	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	
Use public space	0.71	0.02	0.80	0.03	0.65	0.02	0.000
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<i>Reasons to avoid going to public space</i>	Total		Male		Female		P
	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	
Feeling insecurity	0.11	0.01	0.09	0.02	0.12	0.02	0.421
Issues of belongingness	0.19	0.02	0.23	0.03	0.17	0.02	0.114
Afraid of being sexually harassed	0.10	0.01	0.07	0.02	0.12	0.02	0.038
Afraid of being seen as inappropriate users of the place	0.06	0.01	0.10	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.001
Public space restricts me on doing the things I like	0.24	0.02	0.28	0.03	0.21	0.02	0.063
Public places are far away from home	0.26	0.02	0.25	0.03	0.27	0.02	0.637
The weather is not suitable for going out in public places	0.58	0.02	0.54	0.03	0.61	0.03	0.092
I don't have time to go out in public	0.20	0.02	0.26	0.03	0.17	0.02	0.010
Family restrictions prevent me from going out to public places	0.09	0.01	0.08	0.02	0.10	0.02	0.316
I do not have easy transportation	0.07	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.10	0.02	0.002
I don't care about going to public places	0.22	0.02	0.21	0.03	0.23	0.02	0.689
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Results

Gender and the Selection of Public Space

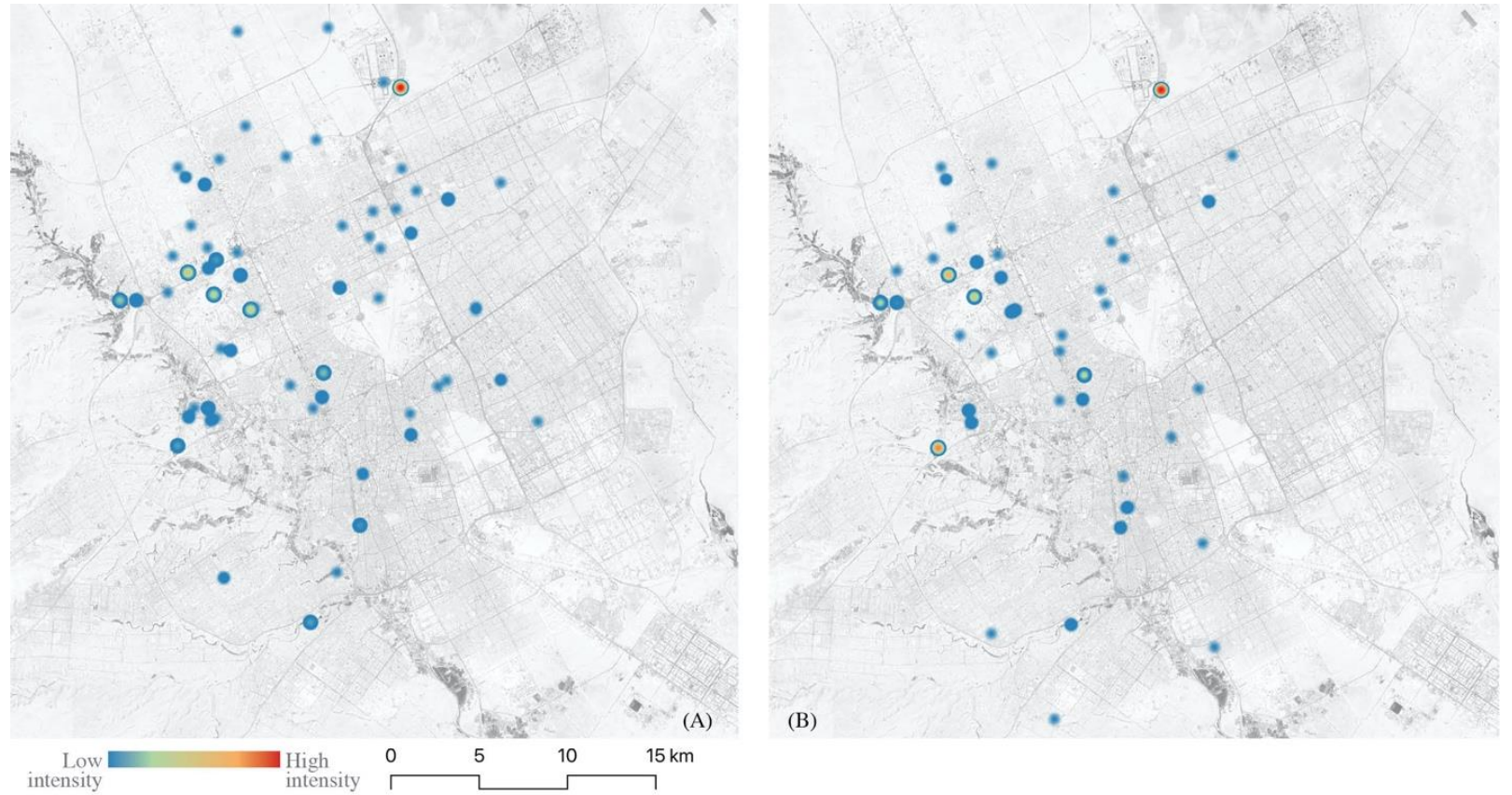


Figure 1. Two heatmaps showing the clustering of the selection of favorite public spaces; (A) women and (B) men.



Results

Gender and the Selection of Public Space

Table 4. Comparison between men and women on the selection of their favorite public space.

	Male	Female	Total	P-Value
All public spaces				0.019
Use				
• Commercial	41.1%	53.5%	48.2%	0.005
• Civic	41.7%	33.8%	37.1%	0.260
• Mixed	16.7%	12.7%	14.4%	0.393
• Sport	0.6%	0.0%	0.3%	0.437
Type				
• Plaza	51.8%	56.1%	54.3%	0.206
• Urban park	3.0%	7.5%	5.6%	0.048
• Urban St.	7.1%	6.1%	6.6%	0.840
• Natural Park	19.1%	7.9%	12.6%	0.002
• Indoor Mall	3.0%	4.8%	4.0%	0.442
• Neighborhood Park	10.7%	14.5%	12.9%	0.230
• Urban District	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%	1.000
• Sport Facility	0.6%	0.0%	0.3%	0.437
• Walkways	3.0%	1.3%	2.0%	0.305
Ownership				
• Publicly owned	59.2%	46.5%	51.9%	0.064
• Privately owned	40.8%	53.5%	48.1%	0.005
N	207	329	537	

p-value founded using Fisher's exact test for dummy variables and Chi-Squared for the category variable.



Results

Gender and the Selection of Public Space

Table 5. Reasons to go to their favorite public spaces.

	Total		Male		Female		p-value
	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	
Availability of spaces to walk	0.75	0.02	0.76	0.03	0.74	0.03	0.734
Availability of spaces to sit	0.59	0.02	0.61	0.04	0.57	0.03	0.422
Availability of shaded spaces	0.17	0.02	0.15	0.03	0.19	0.03	0.297
It has diverse options	0.30	0.02	0.29	0.03	0.31	0.03	0.592
Availability of favorite restaurants and coffee shops	0.48	0.02	0.44	0.04	0.51	0.03	0.166
Availability of shopping	0.21	0.02	0.18	0.03	0.24	0.03	0.147
It is close to my home	0.34	0.02	0.32	0.03	0.36	0.03	0.404
I like the people in that place	0.14	0.02	0.16	0.03	0.12	0.02	0.250
I feel safer in this place than others	0.28	0.02	0.28	0.03	0.28	0.03	1.000
N	415		180		235		

p-value found using Fisher's exact test.



Results

Gender and the Selection of Public Space

Table 6. Results of women's answers to three Likert-scale statements related to their perspective of single men in public space.

Item	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neuter (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)	Median
The presence of single men makes the space dangerous	3.3%	31.4%	30.6%	25.2%	9.5%	3
Having only women (or families) public space	2.9%	13.6%	16.1%	33.9%	33.5%	4
Divide the time to have times for women (families) only and times for single men	7.9%	28.9%	26%	17.8%	18.4%	3



Discussion

- Generally, my findings suggest that gender segregation still exists at the city level, and women's spatial domain is still restricted. However, I found that the new social reform has allowed for gender-inclusive public places to emerge.
- My data reject previous findings that men dominate the urban public space and women prefer indoor malls (Almahmood, Scharnhorst, et al., 2017; Le Renard, 2011; Mustafa, 2015). The data showed no significant difference between men and women in selecting urban spaces or shopping malls.
- Also, my data reject the previous claim that women's spaces tend to be central and close to one another (Alfayez et al., 2017). The heat maps showed no pattern of women's or men's locations of visited public space.
- My data raised a new pattern of gender differences in users' choice of public space in Riyadh. The data showed that women are significantly found to prefer commercial spaces and privately owned public space (POPS).





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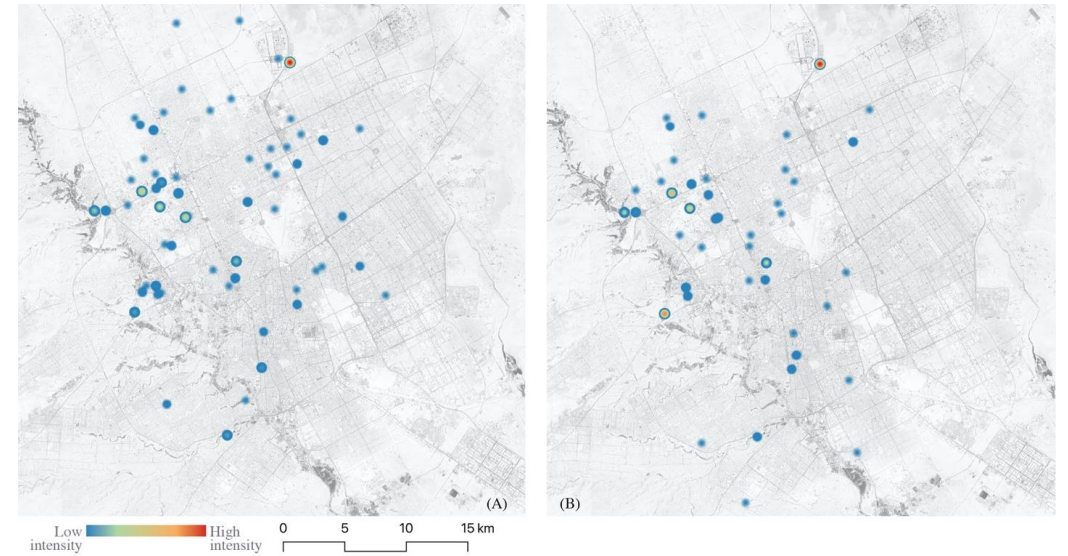


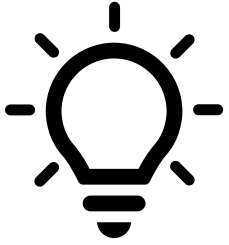
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Conclusion

This assessment of the RPS has unfolded current issues and offered a set of rights that should be protected in public space. I attributed the issue of the current gender spatial inequality to the gender segregation that has been practiced in the city for more than three decades. We cannot expect that this reform will put an end to this problem in such a short time. This finding is important for policymakers and public space users because it shows them that the current KSA reform has not yet resolved issues of gender spatial inequality in the city and that more reform is needed to achieve the ambition of gender spatial equality.

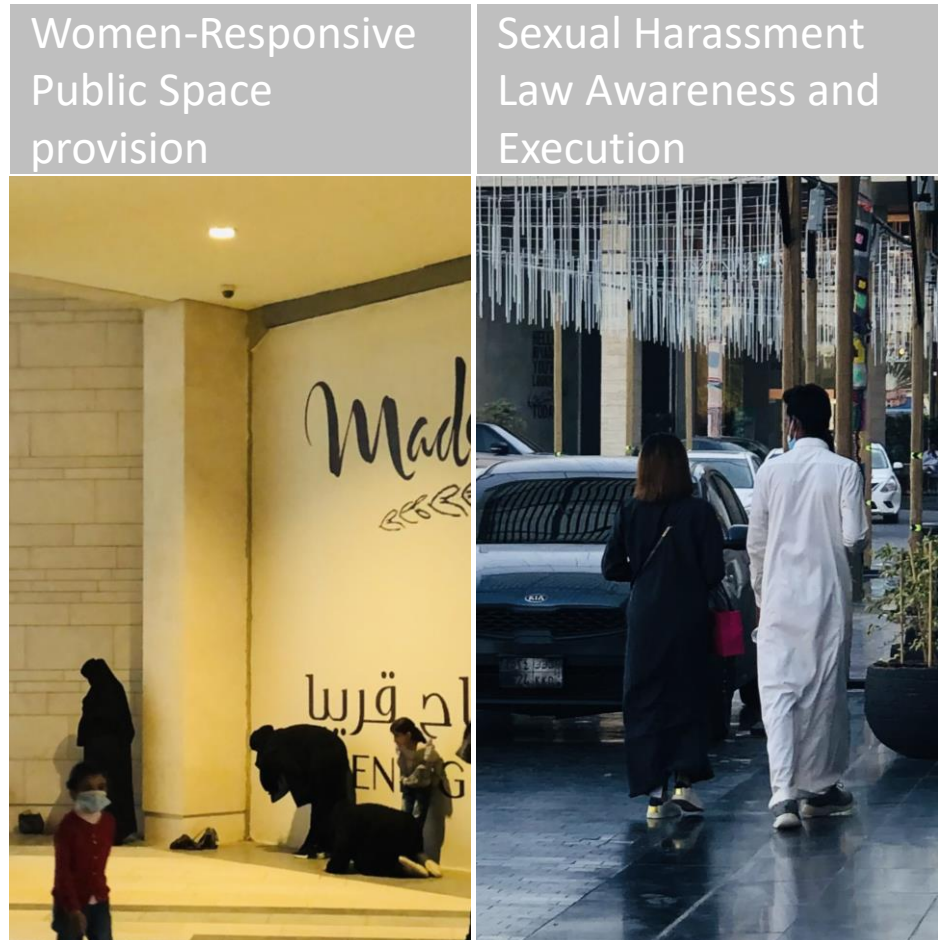




Recommendations

I attribute the issue of the gender spatial inequality to the failure of providing public places that accommodate women's needs. Women's experience in public space, as opposed to men's, is restricted by gender norms and fear which significantly influence their rights to access and use public space (Boys, 1984; Day, 1999b; Franck & Paxson, 1989; Kallus & Churchman, 2004). The obstacles women face in public space are beyond women's control; hence, they have restricted their presence in or avoided going to public space. Therefore, officials and policymakers should take advantage of the reform to develop practical policies that support the following:

- Provide more women-responsive public space
- Setting policies that limit sexual harassment



Women-Responsive
Public Space
provision

Sexual Harassment
Law Awareness and
Execution

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شكرا لكم،،،

Thank you،،،