



sense of a
city



TRAKIYA

A project by Bulgarian Fund for Women, part of Plovdiv - European Capital of Culture 2019



BULGARIAN
FUND
FOR
WOMEN



**PLOVDIV
2019**

European Capital of Culture

in partnership with



ga
gender
alternatives



Introduction

Plovdiv, “the next place to be”

After Berlin and Lisbon, Plovdiv seems to be the new city where Europeans fly to find the perfect mixture of modern and ancient culture, unique architecture and culinary experience. Plovdiv will charm you with its amazing people strolling down its peaceful, yet lively streets at any time of the day or the night.

But if one wanders outside the city center, the urban environment changes rapidly. Accessible and lively central streets soon become large boulevards without any resting spaces or shade but with broken sidewalks, overflowing trash cans, streets without night-lights: places where women feel less comfortable and not as welcome in the public space as men.

Bulgarian Fund for Women, together with Womenability, decided to take matters into their own hands, and took the opportunity of Plovdiv 2019 to ensure that the city of tomorrow will respond to women’s needs and wishes, not only in the city center but also in its suburbs.

This participative analysis will serve as a guide and inspiration for the artists selected for the project “Sense of a City” to create art that will benefit the inhabitants of two of Plovdiv’s suburbs, Proslav and Trakiya, and more particularly - women, children, elderly people and other vulnerable groups.

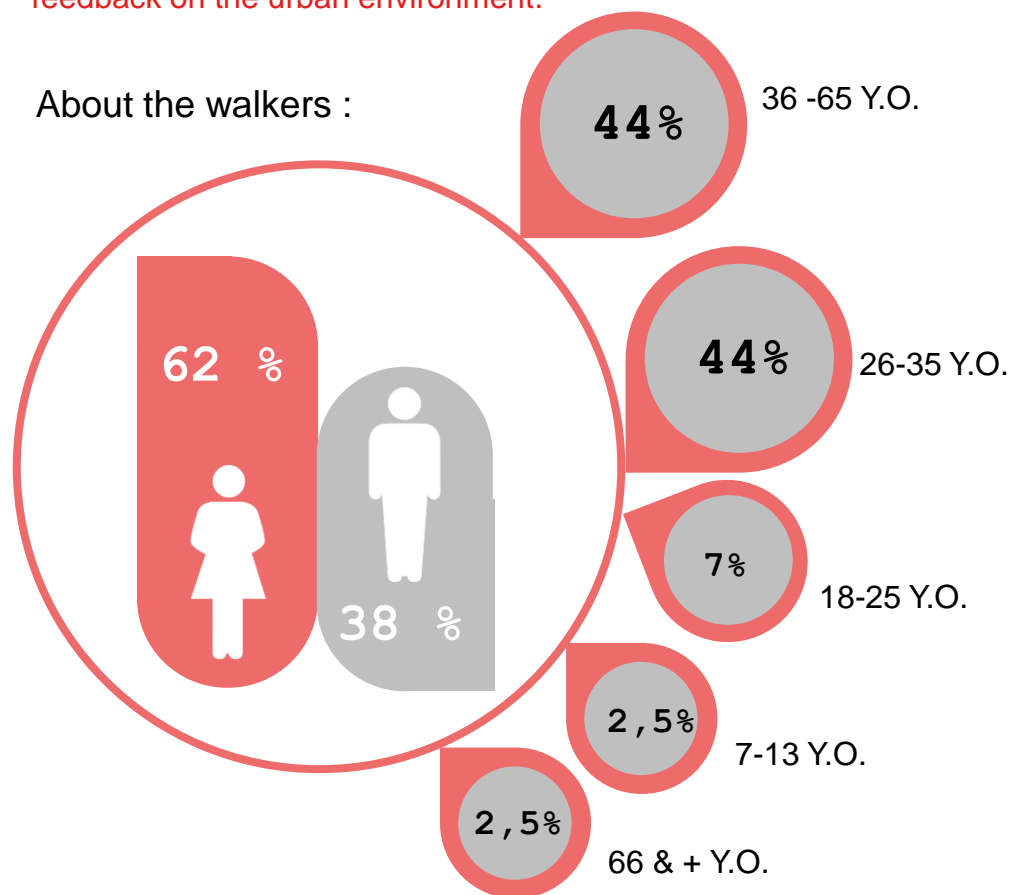
This second report focuses only on the area of Trakiya, located in the South East of the city of Plovdiv and it is based on exploratory walks held in June 2018.

The walks and the report are a part of the Bulgarian Fund for Women’s project - “Sense of a City: an inclusive, safe and sustainable Plovdiv”, which is part of the program of Plovdiv – European Capital of culture 2019. Partners: Womenability, Gender Alternatives Foundation and Association “Consultancy Bureau Progress 7”.

About the walks

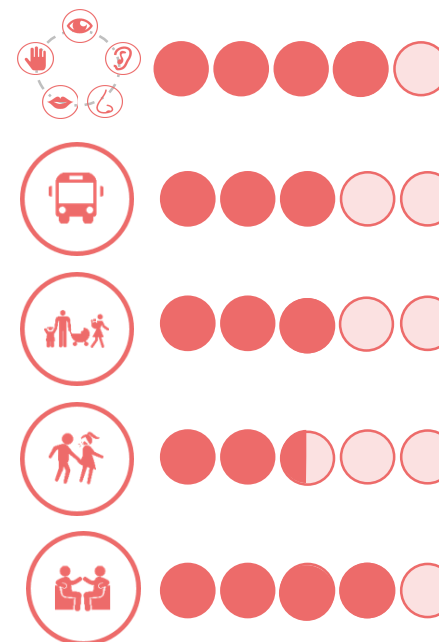
The walks were organized by the Bulgarian Fund for Women and the local partners: Gender Alternatives Foundation and Association "Consultancy Bureau Progress 7". One of the walks was open to women only. We had more than 50 walkers, 44 of them filled out the questionnaires from the exploratory walks in Trakiya. During the walks, we stopped at 5 different spots to evaluate and give feedback on the urban environment.

About the walkers :



TOPIC EVALUATION

Participants gave a general evaluation on a scale from 1 to 5 of each topic. More detailed assessments are presented on the following pages.



Special thanks to all walkers who filled out the questionnaires and made their contribution:



**These are the 3 words used by participants to describe Plovdiv.*



In the area of Trakiya, Plovdiv

The walkers enjoy seeing the abundance of nature (green space, flowers, trees, gardens) and parks. But they don't like **seeing** traffic, broken sidewalks/roads and old buildings in poor condition.

They mostly like to **touch** flowers and trees. But they dislike touching dirty public equipment (benches/bus stop).

They dislike the smell of air pollution (car fumes) and dirt in the streets. But they really like the **smell** of flowers (lilies) and willow trees.



They don't enjoy the traffic noise and rudeness from other citizens. But they like **hearing** bird singing.

They all enjoy the **taste** of quality street food and beer, some wish to have more ice cream shops. But they do not like to taste polluted air, or eat in unhygienic restaurants.



MOBILITY AND TRANSPORTATION



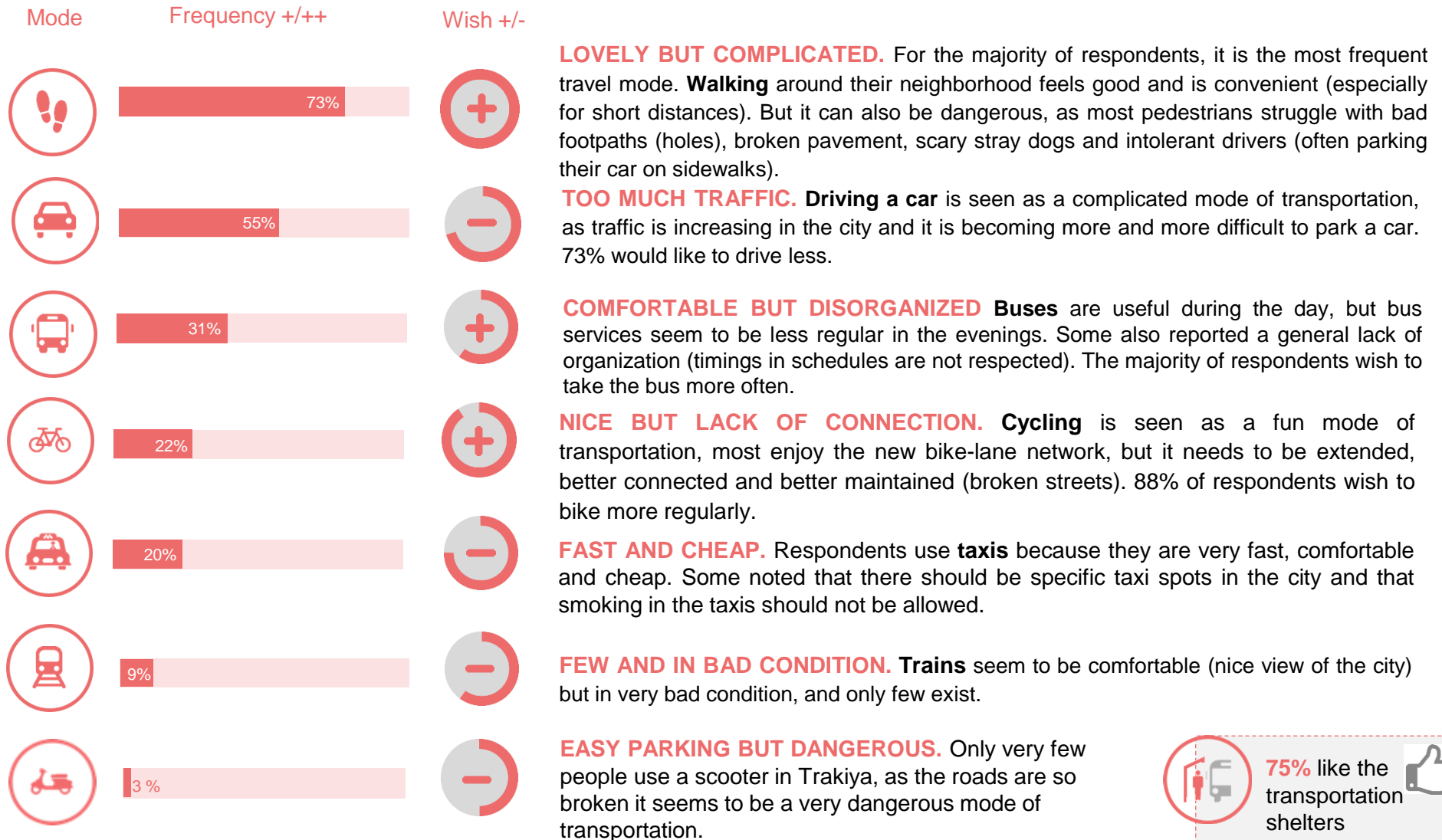
Because women and men have different mobility habits, and therefore, different needs, we asked the participants in our walks how frequently they use the various modes of transportation and why they choose so. We also asked them what their wishes were in terms of mobility, so that officials can focus on improving the infrastructure to women's benefit.

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

- **Fix roads, sidewalks and bus shelters** (add disability ramps)
- **Create more bike lanes** (and bike racks) outside the city center
- **Improve signalization** (better crosswalks, add maps and translate street signs)
- **Upgrade public transportation network** in the area (during the day and in the night)
- **Clean roads and sidewalks during winter** (both large and small)



Frequency and wishes about travel modes



**“Streets need to
be re-paved.”**



About urban signs



55 % are NOT OK with the **ads** in the city, they are ugly, too many and often not suitable for children.



59 % think there are no or not sufficient number of **street signs**. They say that street signs should be everywhere (not only in the city center), and both in the Cyrillic and the Latin alphabet.



72 % of the respondents are not happy with the **maps** in their city. They say there are either no maps (the only one are located in the city center) or they are only in Cyrillic, which makes it confusing for foreign tourists.



50 % are happy with the provision of **street names** in the city, it is marked that they should be transliterated in the Latin alphabet for tourists.

“

However, respondents noted that very few streets are named after women with the exception of

Maria Luiza, Olga Skobeleva, Marie Curie, and Rayna Knyaginya



71 % find that the new **bicycle lanes** are great, but they want more of them, and especially bike lanes that connect Trakiya to the city center!



61 % believe there are enough **street lights on big streets**, but not in the smaller streets. Some residents would like the lighting system to be **LED**.



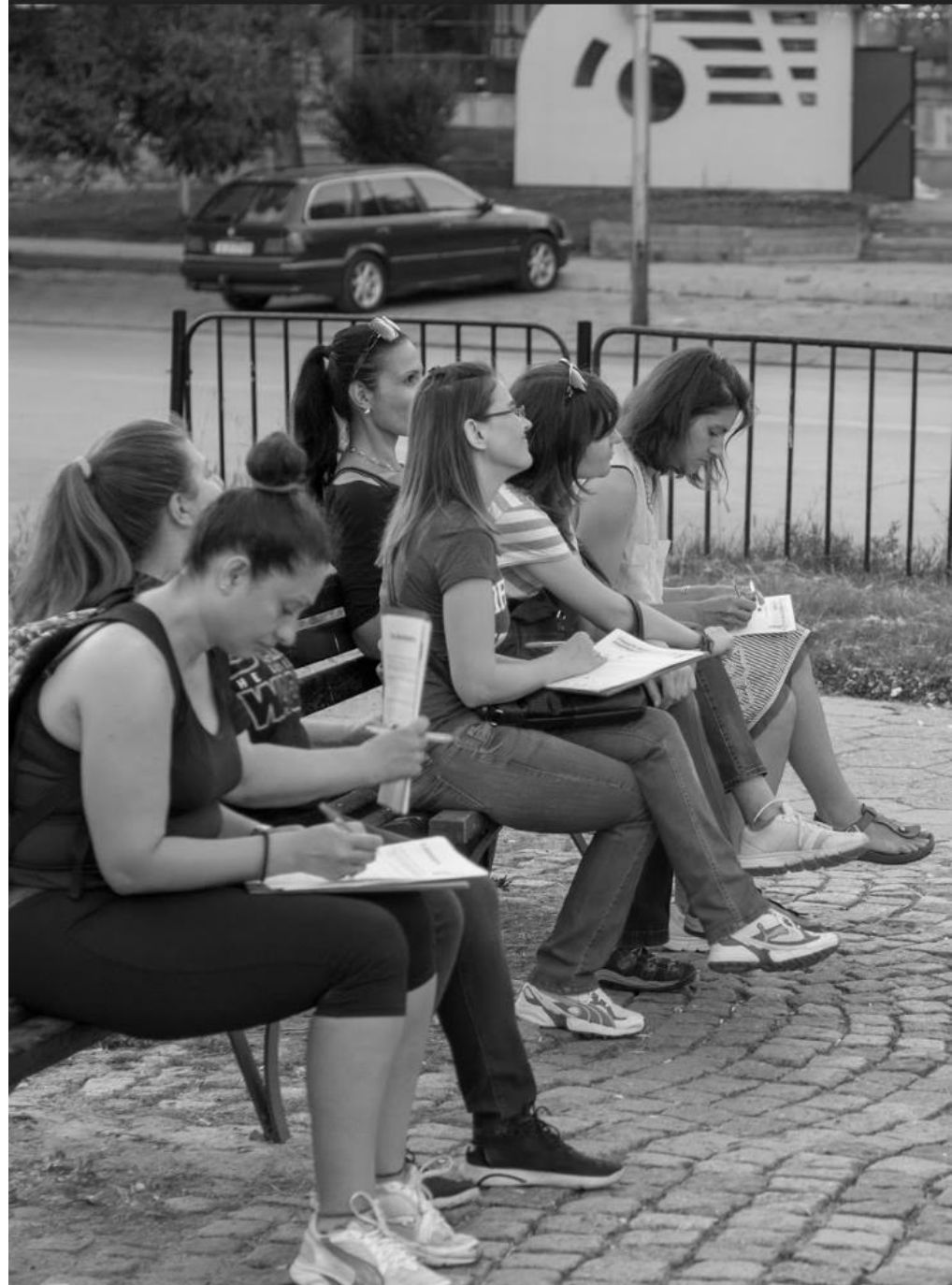
FAMILY AND LOVE



We believe that the more welcoming, attractive and inclusive the public space is to all, the safer women will be in it. This section focuses on women's everyday life experience in public space.

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

- **Add benches** (especially for elderly people and pregnant/breastfeeding women)
- **Improve pavements** (especially for strollers, the elderly, women in heels...)
- **Offer free public toilets** in the city
- **Make the city more accessible** for disabled people and strollers (add ramps)



With your family*



50 % of respondents think that the city is not adapted to fit the needs of parents with children. They point out that because of the broken pavement, it is hard to get around, especially with a stroller.



62 % believe there are no safe spaces for women to change children and/ or to breastfeed. They say there are no such facilities in the city.



53 % believe that the environment is not good for old people, mainly because of the bad conditions to walk; it is unsafe for elderly people to go around with the uneven roads.

“

There could be more playgrounds, some playgrounds haven't been maintained since the end of the communist regime.



35 % of the respondents think the urban environment is favorable to pregnant women with nice places to rest, but the broken sidewalks are still a big obstacle.



68 % are happy with the existing equipment for children but still believe there is a lack of open spaces and parks for children. The few that exist are not well-maintained, and more of them are needed.

“

There are no suitable facilities for changing and breastfeeding.

**Some respondents answered “Non Applicable” for these questions*

Love on the streets



94 %

of the respondents feel safe **holding hands** anywhere and anytime in public space.



97 %

of the respondents explained that **kissing in public** is always possible.



92 %

of the women respondents feel comfortable **wearing anything they want**. Some mention the difficulty to walk in heels.



78 %

think that access to **contraceptives** in the public space is available but only in pharmacies (when they are open).



70 %

think it is possible to express their **sexual orientation**, but only if you are straight, not if you are homosexual, as many people still disapprove of such relations.

“

I am heterosexual and my style and opinions are quite typical for Bulgaria, so I don't experience any problems. But if things were different, I would have had many problems.



SECURITY



Security is the major issue faced by women in public space. Either out of experience or by feeling, it alters their perception and ownership of public space and their right to the streets. In this section we will see what makes women feel unsafe in public space and how we can improve it.

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

- **Increase police presence** and **street lights at night**
- **Increase awareness** among young men about what harassment is so that they don't exercise it
- **Strengthen communities' ties** so people are willing to help each other more



Street harassment

Frequency
legend



42% of the female respondents are victims of **oral harassment** (whistles, catcalling, shouting, etc.) on a **monthly basis**. It mostly happens in the streets (by drivers) or in schools. Most women ignore it.



Physical harassment is annually a part of **36%** of women's lives. It happens especially often in crowded public transport; buses or subways.



36% say they have witnessed or experienced **violence** in public space (parents beating children, men beating women in bars, teenagers groping women).



36% of respondents say they have already witnessed **violence towards homeless** women in the streets.



36% have already **been followed** once in their life. It happens mostly while walking home or in public transportation.

Some of their worst experiences...

“

I was being followed late at night when there weren't many people in the streets.

I have seen people physically beating homeless people. I got involved and the violence stopped.

”

“

I would go to the police to report, so sexual harassment could be stopped and no one else would be hurt.

HELP

On average, **40% of women** will be helped in a situation of aggressive behavior (the more violent the aggression is, the bigger chance she will be helped).

90%

of the women respondents would **report to the police** if they were victims of harassment or assault/attack on the street.



ACTIVITIES



*How can women enjoy their city to the fullest?
How to be provided with access to sports,
nature, socializing spots, etc? How can the
authorities create a more attractive urban
public space for women to make the most of
their city?*

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

- Work towards a **cleaner city** (too much trash and animal feces)
- **Create outside sport facilities** adapted to women's needs (more focus on cardio or fitness)
- **Organize** more cultural events / activities
- Have more **artistic graffiti**
- Offer **free public toilets** in the area



Enjoying your city



“

We need to care more for people with disabilities.



91 %

believe that there are enough **shops** in Trakiya, plus some of them are open late or even 24 hours!



59 %

state there are good **art facilities** but only in the city center, not enough in the suburbs.



69 %

are happy with the local **public services**, especially with hospitals and pharmacies open 24/7. Some point out that many public services are not accessible to disabled people.



87 %

like to hang out in both their city and neighborhood. They can find many **socializing spaces** (parks/café/restaurants) even late at night.



86 %

of the respondents like the presence of nature in their city, and parks for festivals. But feel that the **green spaces** should be better maintained and there should be more of them.



64 %

believe there is some access to **sport facilities** (but could be more). Some notice they are mostly for men and only focus on strength.



70 %

of respondents believe that there are equal number of women and men street **workers**, but they also notice some kind of stereotypes in job representations.

For a clean city



58 %

of the respondents think there are not enough **garbage** bins or that they are overflowing. They also note that the garbage containers are very old and the city should provide new ones with recycling option.



73%

do not like the present **graffiti**, as they often look ugly. People want to see more lovely artistic graffiti in their area.



68 %

complain that stray **animals** are numerous in the city and that dog owners do not clean up after their dogs. Some also point dead birds in parks as a problem. Some recommend the implementation of dog parks and increase the number of squirrels ;)



93%

do not like people **peeing** in public spaces. The participants explain this situation is due to the complete lack of public toilets in the area.





“Too many stray
animals.”



About men

32%

Believe there is gender discrimination in public space.

77%

Understand better how women feel in public space, after participating in the walk

43%

Will modify their behavior after the walk. Most of the people who responded negatively explained that they think they are already tolerant and have a good behavior towards women in public space.

“ *We should serve as role models* ”



Feedback

The respondents thought this was a very **nice** walk, they had a chance to meet new people in their area and felt good during the entire process. It enabled them to visit their own city, take a different look at familiar places and share their impressions with others. People suddenly paid attention to things they usually don't notice.

People also felt **useful**. They rediscovered many issues **and the need for improvement**. They appreciated the participatory approach to urban issues and infrastructures. People were proud to gain this knowledge and to do something to bring change.

“ I noticed things that otherwise wouldn't have caught my attention. I am glad I can contribute to the improvement of my city.

“ Incredibly beneficial. We walked around different places, we saw benefits and disadvantages and discussed possible changes.

“ I really liked the walk. It was interesting to hear the viewpoints of the other participants.



Feedback



90% of the respondents feel **HAPPY** and **PROUD** of Plovdiv 2019

They hope it will be an opportunity to:

- Have more access to cultural events
- Maintain/renovate the city with new investments
- Meet new and foreign people

94% believe that arts can change the way we feel in the city

They believe that :

- A beautifully built environment can create a positive atmosphere in a community
- Art can change the public's opinion/ attitude towards problems and make people feel proud of their hometowns

“ I am very happy and proud. I would like all other countries and people to learn about the treasures we have here in Plovdiv.

I am happy. It means more interesting visitors and events in the city and more investments.

The colors and the ideas of street art immediately influence the landscape and people's mood. ”

Personal experiences in the city



The best experience I had in my city:

“When I was a child, we all played freely around the neighbourhood. I was happy with my freedom.”

“I was 20 years old and at university. There was an open air concert in the city centre. It was an amazing experience.”



The worst experience I had in my city:

“I was a 20-year-old university student and I was groped in public. I ran away even though I wanted to shout at my abuser.”

“Ten years ago I was attacked with the intent of sexual assault on my way to see a friend. I got scared for a moment but then I defended myself.”

What can WE do ?

What can women do?

Be **united** and active about women's issues. Raise **awareness** in public. Participate in **community/volunteering** events. **Educate** their children about equality and tolerance. Be more active in the **political** arena. **Elect** a female mayor.



What can men do?

Be more **welcoming and active** towards gender equality. **Educate** children about **tolerance**. Become **role models** for other men. **Report** bad behavior and problematic urban space. **Respond** when seeing violence, **support** victims of violence.



What can NGOs do?

Raise **awareness** and educate about gender equality. Create more **volunteering projects** about community and **city improvements**. More **lobbying** and campaigns to pressure the municipality. Promote more **street art** installations.



What can the government do?

Listen to what NGOs and communities have to say (use a bottom-up approach). **Improve urban infrastructure** (roads, signs, night lights, parks, etc.). Ensure the city is accessible to disabled and elderly people, children, pregnant/breastfeeding women and parents.



Womenability's Recommendation #1



Repairing broken pavement with art:

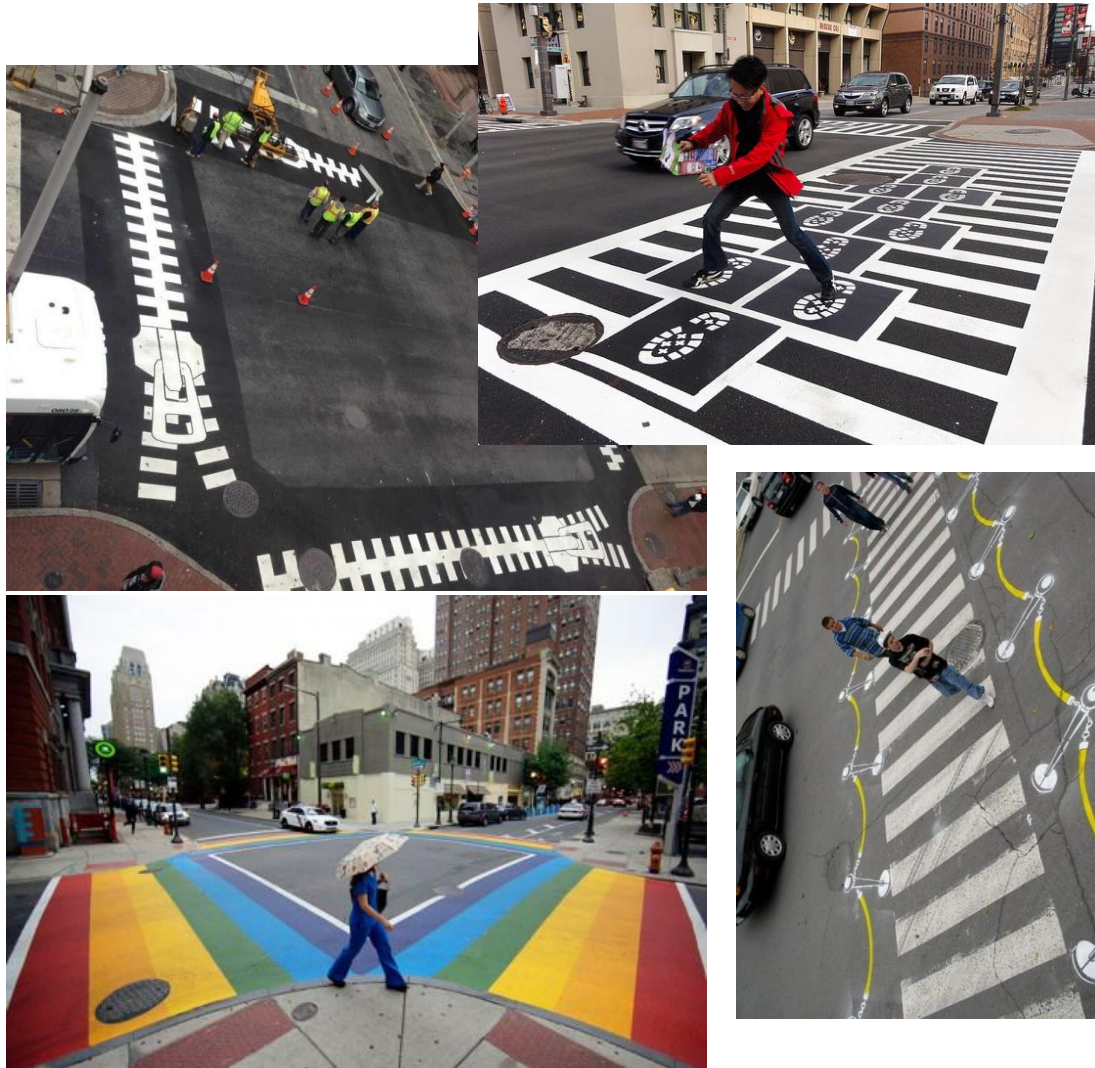
Severely broken sidewalks are dangerous for anyone walking in the streets. But even more dangerous for women wearing high heels, citizens with reduced mobility and the elderly. Let alone for parents trying to get somewhere by pushing their children in strollers!

Sometimes artists and communities take things into their own hands like in the case of Montevideo and Rosario, where broken sidewalks are numerous, and where it seems that it is not a priority for the municipality!

The solution they have applied is very simple: repair the sidewalk with your "home-made mosaics".

It can even become a community project where women and children create their own ceramics that will be exposed on the streets. A great way to engage and valorize the local community!

Womenability's Recommendation #2



Artistic crosswalks to protect pedestrians :

Many inhabitants of Trakiya mentioned that the city lacks proper crosswalks, which makes many women feel unsafe walking with children, especially when having to cross the roads. Crosswalks can not only protect pedestrians but they can also be artistic expressions. Furthermore they can be tools to introduce LGBT tolerance in a neighborhood (many cities are painting crosswalks with LGBT+ colors to support LGBT+ communities).

It can also be done in cooperation with the communities to highlight a specific symbol or culture of the area.

Womenability's Recommendation #3



Artistic murals to end sexual harassment towards women in public space:

Street art can be a great tool to empower women and to educate men. NGOs and artists around the world are using murals to talk about sexual harassment towards women.

The SafetiPin social enterprise (in India) works with a group of women to find the appropriate message to write on the mural. The volunteers paint their message on a wall in the location where harassment has been experienced. Examples of messages written:

>Reminding men that it is forbidden by the law to take pictures of women without their consent

>Empowering women with strong messages, making men aware of what street harassment is and helping women to voice their discontent

Womenability's Recommendation #4



Create fun public benches for everybody to enjoy:

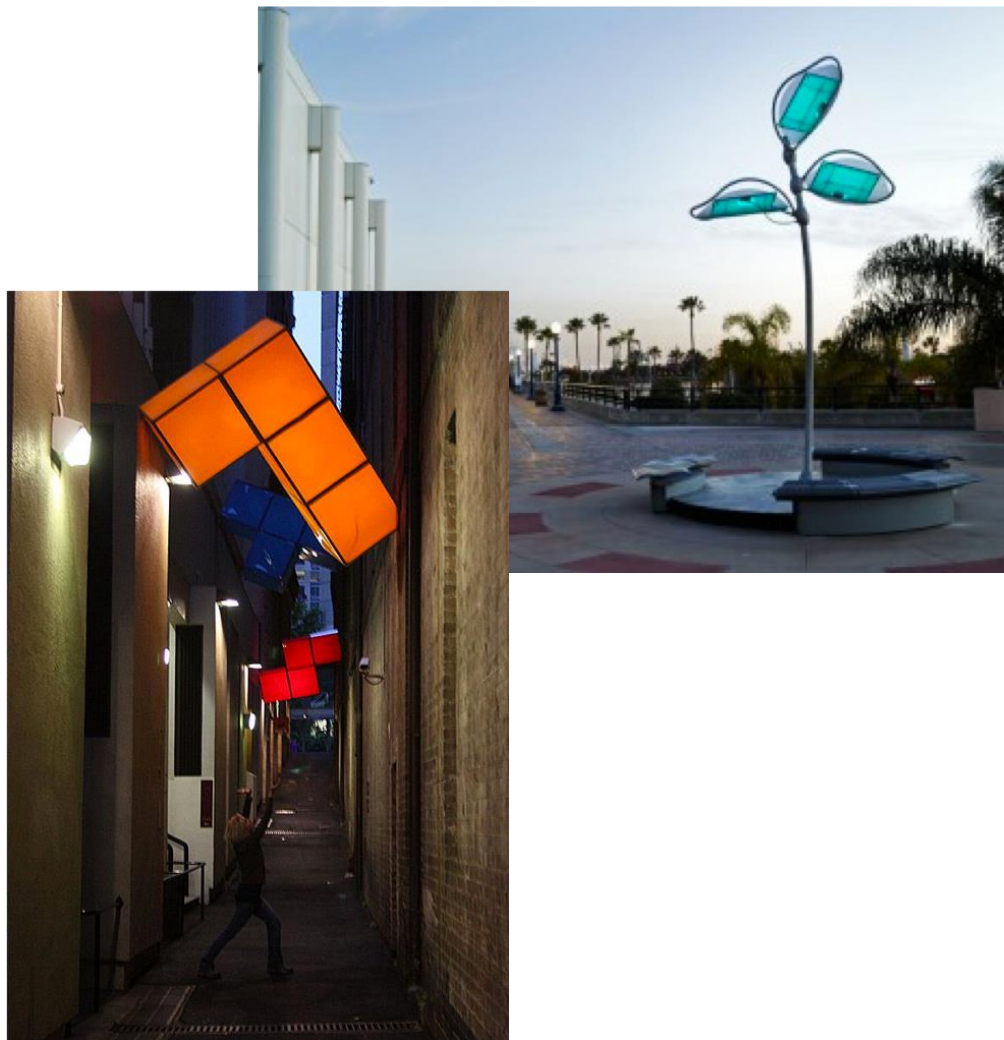
Many respondents pointed out that Trakiya is lacking benches (especially for pregnant or breastfeeding women, and elderly people's needs). Benches create not only a more accessible public space, where people in need to rest can do so, but they also create “eyes on the street” - people are outside taking in their city and able (when possible) to interact or witness interactions.

“Bench-space allows people to loosely belong within the flow of city life, to see and be seen.” (youngfoundation.org)

Benches have a real artistic potential where design and utility intersect to create a unique social **urban artifact** that **can address public needs** like those of social interaction, inclusion and accessibility.

Also, it's not that difficult to create baby-friendly and breastfeeding-friendly benches.

Womenability's Recommendation #5



Fun or green public lighting:

Many respondents noted that the city would feel much more welcoming to women if there was good public lighting in all the streets of Trakiya, and especially the small ones. Artistic lighting can bring not only light but joy and a feeling of security that would encourage women to walk and enjoy public space even at night! Many cities are also implementing solar lights to save energy and money.

Always wished you could hang out in public space, even after sunset? To make sure its residents can enjoy the public space as long as they wish, Malmö has created innovative light designs that made public hangouts more attractive at night. Well done!

By the way, we were told that the city of Zurich has a special person in charge of lighting innovation!

Womenability's Recommendation #6



Artistic / fun trashcans to promote recycling and reduce littering:

Many respondents felt that the trashcans in Trakiya were either too old, broken or non-existent, and thought they give the area an air of neglect. This situation can often increase the feeling of insecurity for women.



But what if a trashcan could be fun, artistic and motivate everyone not only to keep the city clean but also to recycle? Moreover, what if artists could also work with the local community to co-create practical art pieces reflecting the neighborhood and its inhabitants!



Thank you for reading this report and acknowledging women's needs in Trakiya !



Project team

A project by Bulgarian Fund for Women, part of Plovdiv - European Capital of Culture 2019



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