



Woman in Culture and Arts

Development of Women's Participatory Governance Model in Shaping the City's Cultural Architecture: A Case Study of Cities in Mazandaran Province

Majid Ahmadpour¹ 

1. Corresponding Author, Department of Architecture, Faculty of Art and Architecture, University of Mazandaran, Babolsar, Iran. E-mail: mj.ahmadpour@umz.ac.ir

Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type:	Introduction
Research Article	<p>This study investigates the role of women in generating the cultural architecture of cities and seeks to provide a comprehensive model for women's participatory governance in urban environments. Attention to the interaction between architecture, culture, and women's roles in urban life is of critical importance because women's engagement can result in the design of inclusive, sustainable, and culturally significant urban spaces. Prior studies have highlighted that women often play a restricted role in urban decision-making and public space design, particularly in cultural and social areas, which can result in diminished social equity, unequal access to spaces, and inadequate reflection of community cultural identity. Accordingly, this research seeks to answer the query of how women, through their social experiences and active participation, can efficiently influence the cultural architecture of cities and whose mechanisms can enhance their engagement. The underlying presumption is that active participation of women not only improves the quality of urban spaces, but also contributes to sustainable urban development, social justice, and reinforcement of cultural identity.</p>
Article history:	<p>Despite the growing discourse on spatial justice and inclusive urban governance, women's participation in urban design and cultural architecture in numerous Iranian cities remains largely symbolic rather than substantive. Urban spaces are frequently generated without adequate consideration of women's everyday needs, lived experiences, and cultural practices leading to diminished psychological security, cultural mismatch, and the underutilization of women's creative capacities in enriching urban identity. Evidence from successful international and regional cases indicates that women's active involvement in urban governance enhances safety, fosters local identity, and enhances the overall quality of cultural architecture. Yet, structural barriers including male-dominated management systems, cultural constraints, and poor participatory mechanisms continue to limit women's effective engagement. Therefore, there is a clear need for a comprehensive, context-sensitive model that explains the roles, challenges, and opportunities of women's participation in urban cultural governance, grounded in empirical data and aligned with Iran's socio-cultural conditions.</p>
Received: 5 December 2025	Methodology
Received in revised form: 14 January 2025	<p>This qualitative research was designed utilizing Glaserian Grounded Theory to enable the development of a data-driven theoretical model. The research population comprised of 25 professionals and elites in architecture, urban planning, and urban management in Mazandaran Province, possessing practical and specialized experience in urban planning, cultural architecture, and participatory governance. Sampling was purposive, aiming to capture a diversity of professional perspectives and experiences. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and analyzed concurrently with data gathering. The analysis involved open coding, axial coding, and the extraction of core concepts and patterns regarding women's participation in shaping cultural urban architecture. This methodology facilitated the identification of multiple dimensions of women's roles, challenges, and opportunities for efficient engagement and provided a framework for designing a participatory governance model.</p>
Accepted: 4 April 2026	Results
Published online: 1 July 2026	<p>The analysis revealed that women's participation in generating cultural urban architecture is multi-faceted. Initially, women contribute creative ideas and local knowledge to the design</p>
Keywords:	
<i>Participatory Governance,</i>	
<i>Urban Cultural Architecture,</i>	
<i>Women in Architecture.</i>	

of public and cultural spaces that reflect community values and cultural identity. Secondly, their involvement in urban decision-making, via local councils, cultural associations, and civil institutions, increases transparency and accountability. Thirdly, establishing collaborative networks among governmental bodies, civil society, and women's groups strengthens their influence and facilitates the implementation of urban policies and projects. Fourthly, women's empowerment through training, workshops, and skill development enhances their active participation and enhances the quality of urban spaces.

Six main dimensions emerged from the analysis: 1) influence in designing and revitalizing urban spaces, 2) engagement in cultural and social decision-making, 3) empowerment through education and skill development, 4) networking and interaction with other urban actors, 5) enhancing safety and accessibility of spaces for women and children, and 6) constant monitoring and assess of women's participation to improve policies and programs. These aspects form the primary components of a model that can serve as a practical framework for women's participatory governance in urban contexts.

Conclusion

The study's findings indicate that women's participatory governance can result in sustainable, flexible, and culturally appropriate urban spaces. Active participation of women enhances the quality of public space design, fosters social justice, strengthens cultural identity, and ensures equal opportunities for access to urban environments. The research also highlights that challenges such as gender inequality, cultural constraints, and lack of institutional support can limit women's influence; however, the creation of supportive institutions, collaborative networks, and specialized capacity building can significantly enhance women's participation. The model presented in this study provides a practical framework for policy-makers, architects, and urban planners, offering practical strategies to increase women's participation in shaping the cultural architecture of cities.

Cite this article: Ahmadpour, M. (2026). Development of Women's Participatory Governance Model in Shaping the City's Cultural Architecture: A Case Study of Cities in Mazandaran Province. *Woman in Culture and Art*, 18(2), 317-338.
DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/jwica.2026.407303.2237>



© The Author(s).

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/jwica.2026.407303.2237>

Publisher: The University of Tehran Press.
