

Gender-Neutral, Gender-Blind?

How Dutch Public Transport Planning Overlooks Gendered Mobility

Introduction

- The Netherlands ranks highly on EU gender equality indices, yet persistent gaps remain in unpaid care work, economic participation and political representation
- Women's travel consists of shorter journeys, is more multimodal and is more dispersed across purposes
- Public transport (PT) is mostly built around linear commuting, a pattern that reflects men's travel more than it does women's
- Gender-neutral planning treats unequal travellers as having equal needs, and that reproduces inequality

Research Question

How does public transport planning in the Netherlands address gender differences and what are the implications for gender inequality?



Methodology

1. Literature Review

- Thematic analysis of existing literature on gender differences in PT behaviour/use
- Focuses on concepts such as trip chaining, perceived safety and perceived accessibility

2. Quantitative Analysis

- Netherlands Mobility Panel (MPN) data from 2017-2023
- Descriptive statistics, logistic regression(s) and OLS regression(s)
- Controlling for socioeconomic and household characteristics

3. Legal Analysis

- Socio-legal approach informed by legal feminist theory
- Uses Vijayarasa's gender legislation typology
- Analysing primary legal sources:
 - Passenger Transport Act 2000 (Wp2000)
 - Action Programme on Social Safety in Public Transport

Results

Gendered Mobility Patterns

- Gender differences in Dutch PT behaviour are statistically significant, but generally modest in size
- Women's mobility differs more in composition than in overall use:
 - Women are slightly more multimodal and their trips are around 13% shorter in distance
- Women's PT trips are less commute-centred and more associated with shopping, leisure, and care
- Women report slightly lower perceived PT accessibility
- The clearest gender gap is in mobility of care
 - However, women are not significantly more likely than men to make care trips by PT
- Even after controlling for socioeconomic characteristics, car access and trip purpose, women remain significantly less likely to use PT, suggesting that the Dutch PT system may not adequately meet women's mobility needs

Gender-Neutral Laws and Policies

- ← Equality Goal Inequality Risk →
- | | | | |
|-------------------|----------------|--------------|-------------------|
| gender responsive | gender neutral | gender blind | gender regressive |
|-------------------|----------------|--------------|-------------------|
- Dutch transport laws and policies such as the Wp2000 are gender-neutral
 - Wp2000 delegates planning via Programma van Eisen (PvEs) → binding regional documents setting requirements for transport operators
 - Wp2000 mandates no gender impact assessment
 - PvEs and concessions refer only to the gender-neutral term "travellers"
 - Actieprogramma Sociale Veiligheid frames all safety measures generically
 - Women's heightened safety perceptions entirely absent
 - Responsibility → for gender-responsiveness is deferred at every governance level institutionalised non-responsibility

care-related trips are ~69% less likely to be made by PT

women are ~32% less likely to use PT for any given trip

~50% more care trips by employed women vs. employed men

Conclusion

- Dutch public transport planning does not fully account for gender differences in mobility → gender-neutral law produces gender-blind outcomes
- The problem is not encouraging women to use PT more → it is whether the system is designed to serve the journeys women need to make
- Despite legal commitments to gender equality, substantive equality in the Dutch PT planning cycle has not yet been achieved

Recommendations

- Mandatory gender impact assessments in transport legislation and PvE frameworks
- Gender mainstreaming obligations across all governance levels
- Integrate concepts such as mobility of care, perceived safety and perceived accessibility into the PT planning cycle
- Collect (more) gender-disaggregated and intersectional mobility data
- Improve off-peak and local service frequency to support non-linear travel patterns