Gender Quota and Women's Needs in Urban Planning Practices by Local Councils: The Case of Ramallah Governorate in Palestine

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Abstract
The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between gender quota and women's needs in urban planning practices by local councils in Palestine which is considered to be a developed country, with a particular attention to Ramallah governorate. Most of the existing studies concerning this topic focus on the importance of gender quota in providing access for women to decision making process without considering well enough the role of gender quota in women's effective participation in fulfillment of their needs and how this influences sustainability of the urban environment. Observations and interviews are used as two main methods. The result of this study showed that although gender quota supports women's access to decision-making process, it is not enough to guarantee the fulfillment of their needs, which restricted their use of the urban environment. Women's awareness of their needs in addition to other obstacles, should be considered for the effectiveness of gender quota.
Keywords: Gender Quota, women's needs, sustainability, Urban Environment, Planning practices, local councils, Ramallah, Palestine.

1. Introduction

Quota is defined as setting up a percentage or number for the representation of a certain group most often in the form of a minimum percentage, for instance 20, 30 or 40 percent. Quotas are used as a measure to increase the representation of historically excluded or under-represented groups in politics. Quota regulations may target women or may be gender neutral, e.g., 'no more than 60% of either sex'., but gender quota in politics always means women's quota. Women are globally under-represented at all levels of governance in relation to their share of the population, there is an enormous demand for more representation of women in political bodies, and their political participation is now a major objective throughout the global women's movement (IDEA 2007).

Gender quota means reserving a certain number of seats for women to compete on them in elections. It is considered as a tool that led to a quantum leap in the political election system in countries around the world, because it ensures a minimum of women in political levels, including the local level.

The United Nations defines 30 per cent female representation as the minimum required in a governmental body. The 30 per cent figure was deemed as a minimum necessary if quotas were to have any impact on existing power relations and mechanisms of decision-making. However, one hundred countries around the world have during the last decades introduced gender quotas for political elections (Dahlerup,2002).

Women's political representation on the local level is important as it is the nearest level to the woman's life and it affects their daily needs and the needs of their families' members on an ongoing basis. Most of charters have confirmed the need for a gender quota for women in local and political level in order to ensure the minimal threshold of the women's participation in the decision-making process in all levels of planning and daily services of the local community.

Several studies have tirelessly discussed gender quota and their types, effects in general, as well as its impact on the political level and empowerment of women (Dahlerup ,2002; Sekhon, 2006; Krook, 2004). Agenda 21, the UNCED Action Plan for sustainable development, proposed action to strengthen the role of women in sustainable development by eliminating obstacles to their equal participation, particularly in decision-making (Corral, 2002, Amen, 2021).

Concentrating on the women's participation in urban planning practices it is agreed that the best way for urban planners to understand the needs of women is to actually consult with women. It should also be noted that, in order for the planning profession to properly understand and accommodate women, planning professionals must consider women's needs to be legitimate and important. Professional urban planners and local governmental officials should not only seek women's active participation and input in planning processes, but they should also ensure that this participation and input is valued and used (Corral, 2002; Woodworth,2005; Jalalkamali & Anjomshoa, 2019; Moser ,1993). Considering women's needs in urban planning practices will decrease the cost required for adapting the urban environment for women's use and enhance women's urban life which contributes to sustainability of the urban environment (Aslaksen *et al.*, 1997; Moser, 1993).

The above literature maintains the role of gender quota in enhancing women's access to decision making process and raise the question: is it true that gender quota guarantees women's effective participation and fulfillments of their needs

when they are decision makers, especially several studies have revealed that women are still facing problems in using their urban environments?

Therefore, this study aims at investigating whether or not gender quota guarantees women's effective participation in decision making process and fulfillments of their needs in the urban environment, and if not, what are the obstacles which control women's effective participation. This will contribute to the effectiveness of gender quota in local councils and to the sustainability of urban environment through fulfillments of women's needs and enhancing their participation in urban life. The focus will be on the Palestinian context which is considered to be one of the developed countries where gender quota has been legalized and approved in local bodies by the Palestinian National Authority at 2004.

2. Material and Methods

In this section, several topics which are related to gender quota, urban planning practices by local councils, women's needs and sustainability of urban environment are explained in general and in the Palestinian context in particular. Ramallah governorate in Palestine was taken as a case study for investigating the relationship between gender quota, women's needs and sustainability of the urban environment using statistical analysis, observations and interviews as main methods for collection of the required data.

2.1 Gender Quota, Local Governance and Urban Planning Practices

Local government is in a unique position to contribute to the global struggle for gender equality and can have a great impact on the status of women and the status of gender equality around the world in its capacities since the level of governance closest to the citizens, as a service provider and as an employer. In order to create sustainable, equal and democratic local governments, where women and men have equal access to decision-making, equal access to services and equal treatment in these services, the gender perspective must be mainstreamed into all areas of policy making and management in local government (Purushothaman,2001).

Through quotas, women have been elected to local government in many countries around the world, while quotas have enabled many women to enter local politics; implementation has caused a number of problems. In certain places, quotas have given women the opportunity to change local government policies, by bringing gender priorities into decision making. In many places, quotas have not lived up to expectations and continue to disadvantage women. For instance, Uganda's first local government election after the establishment of quotas in 1997 proved to be less of a success for women (UN,2008).

Although gender quota is a very important tool in reserving seats for women in Local councils and reaching decision making positions, many obstacles and different factors are facing these women and control their effective participation. In a study conducted by Sekhon (2006) about women's participation in local councils in India, Sekhon's found that women are constrained by a variety of social, cultural, economic, and political factors, for instance traditional gendered believes of the role and position of women in family and community, caste and class inequalities, lack of education, and lack of legal knowledge. Accordingly, women cannot take part in decision making process with full freedom. Moreover, they can get a political position by reservation but may work merely as proxies for their husbands or other family members. Sekhon's explains how men frequently take the initiative to convince the women to contest the election. He adds this does not necessarily reflect a wish promote women's participation in political system. It may rather be connected to a wish to keep the seat in the family or to maintain their control over the local councils by proxies. In addition, socio-economic, psychological/ideological and political/institutional obstacles influence women's effective participation as explained by Shedova´sa (2005). She discussed the masculine model of politics, a dual burden of domestic chores and professional obligations, lack of support from party and a lack of confidence and self-esteem.

However, women's awareness of their needs and how it influences their effective participation was not in the focus of the previous studies.

2.2 Women's Involvement in Urban Planning Practices and Fulfillment of their Needs

Meeting women's needs in urban environments requires their effective participation in decision-making about the design and planning of these environments (The World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). During the 1980s there was an emphasis on involving women in design and management of cities as a means of reflecting their needs (Lansley et al., 1989), and several studies were done on this topic. UN-HABITAT realized the importance of women's participation in urban planning and this showed by many cases of urban planning projects executed by UN. For example; St. Johann Park- Fair Shared City: Gender Mainstreaming Planning Strategy in Vienna, Harass map, Egypt -2010 (UN-HABITAT, 2010).

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, which was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, affirmed women's critical contributions to environmental management. Moser (1993) points out that involvement of women in development and planning processes is a mean towards improving project results. The exclusion of women can negatively affect the outcome of a project. According to Moser, the need to acknowledge women's needs in planning not only

creates better solutions but also more effective ones. In his paper "Women and the Conserver Society", Peterson (1979) notes the hazards associated with having too few women involved in decision-making with regard to new technologies and in the related area of policy-making. He claims that the lack of female perspective in decision-making may lead to a neglect of basic aspects of women's lives essential to analyzing the impact of new technology. Greed (2005) has investigated the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming as a mean of integrating the needs of women into spatial planning in the United Kingdom. She explains that although equalities mainstreaming is widespread within local government, much of the emphasis is upon approaches in which gender is given limited attention.

However, women's needs are not explained or defined well enough, and spatial planning fails to integrate women's actual needs into substantive, spatial policy considerations. This was reflected in the results of several research showed that women continue to face problems in using urban environment. Worpole (1992) wrote about problems facing women in British towns at night. A study in Woolwich shows that 65% of women are afraid of going out at night for fear of assault. 36% of women are afraid of mugging and robbery during daytime. Another study in Edinburgh shows that women feel dissatisfied with the town centre because the streets are dirty and poorly lit, bus services and childcare facilities are inadequate, and the women fear sexual harassment. A study of night life in twelve British towns and cities found that women's view of urban life was completely different from that of men.

The results of previous studies maintain that women's needs in general are not met properly in urban environments even though gender quota has given the opportunity for women to gain access to decision-making process in designing and managing their urban environment.

2.3 Women's Needs and Sustainability of Urban Environment

Fulfillment of women's need is important for achieving both of economic and social components of sustainability. On the one hand it reduces the cost requires for adaptation of different public and urban spaces while on the other hand, it enhances social equity in access to public and urban life. According to Aslaksen *et al.* (1997: 5), sustainable urban environment is that environment which meets the needs of all individuals of all ages, sizes, genders and abilities in different socio-cultural contexts and for different purposes, "without a need for adaptation or specialized design", which complies with the principles of universal design. Involving women and their needs in urban design and planning contributes to its sustainability. It encourages women's access to urban spaces which increases the efficiency of these spaces and reduces the costs required for adapting these spaces for women's use (Moser, 1993; Parfect and Power 1997, Amen & Nia, 2020, Aziz Amen, 2022).

Also, accessibility of services for women helps them balance the multiple roles related to work, household and children by reducing their need to travel and reducing money for transportation, which contributes to sustainability of the urban environment. In addition, providing equal access for all individuals (males and females) to urban spaces and services contributes to sustainability of urban life (Welch, 1995; Community & Public Health ,2019).

Based on the focus of the above-mentioned studies, the scholars of these studies were concerned with the relationship between gender quota and women's effective participation or the relationship between women's involvement in decision making process and fulfillment of their needs or the relationship between women's needs and sustainability of the urban environment. However, the relationship between gender quota, women's needs and sustainability of the urban environment has not been explained well enough.

2.4 Gender Quota, Local Governance and Urban Planning Practices in Palestine

The administrative divisions of the State of Palestine are known as Governorates of Palestine. After the signing of the Oslo Accords, the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip were divided into three areas (Area A, Area B, and Area C) and 16 governorates under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian National Authority; 11 governorates are located in the West Bank while 5 governorates are located in Gaza Strip . Since 2007, there were two governments claiming to be the legitimate government of the Palestinian National Authority, one based in the West Bank and one based in the Gaza Strip. Palestine is considered one of the developed countries in applying the legal type of gender quota. The Palestinian National Authority has legalized and approved the application of gender quota in local bodies at 2004.

Palestinian Legislative Council approved on gender quota according to the faith of the government that gender quota is considered as interim measure which resorted to ensure the participation of women in decision-making positions, and by allocating a number of secured seats or a specific percentage by which women reaches to decision-making positions. Palestinian National Authority resorted gender quota to embrace women's participation in the event of lack of readiness of the community to elect a woman without legal intervention because of discrimination on the basis of sex, the use of the gender quota will be dispensed at the demise of the reasons (MoLG[1] , 2013).

Women shared in municipal councils through recruitment policy and it was asked by the Minister of Local Government in the year 1998 to appoint one woman at least in all the local and municipal councils. Circular was not phrased binding

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[1] Ministry of Local Governance

and has been dealing with temperament of heads of councils and their members in the majority of the sites. The outcome percentage of these women has been (1.6%) only and concentrated in the West Bank (Muftah ,2006).

Palestinian National Authority has conducted local elections three times: the first one was in 2004-2005 and the second one was in 2012 in the West Bank only as a result of the existing political division, while the third one was in 2017 (MoLG, 2005,2012, 2017).

The electoral process in Palestine is organized through a set of laws, decrees and regulations. The Palestinian basic law which was amended in 2003 is considered the legal and constitutional framework for the local government system in Palestine. The election's laws which follow the basic law regulate the electoral process in all its stages. It sets the importance of voters, candidates and time frame that govern the various stages of the electoral process.

Based on a complete proportional representation system (menus), the local elections were conducted through the declared electoral lists only, and the voter can only vote for one electoral list. Only the names of the electoral lists appear on the ballot without the names of the candidates. Results of the elections showed that the proportion of winner women is ranging from 19% -22% in all governorates and the reason for this is that the election law committed electoral lists to represent the minimum number of women (tables 1, 2, 3).

Table1. Election Results in 2004-2005 (www. elections.ps)

Governorate	No. of councils	N0. of seats	Male	Female
Jerusalem	23	235	189	46
Jenin	38	344	280	64
Tulkarem	35	216	171	45
Tubas	4	50	42	8
Nablus	40	348	274	74
Qalqilia	17	167	133	34
Salfit	18	180	144	36
Ramallah	44	427	344	83
Jericho	4	42	34	8
Beitlahm	24	256	212	44
Hebron	18	208	172	36
Total	**265**	**2473**	**1995**	**478**
Percentage			**80.6%**	**19.4%**

Table 2. Election Results in 2012 (www. elections.ps)

Governorate	No. of councils	N0. of seats	Male	Female
Jerusalem	28	286	226	60
Jenin	48	498	403	95
Tulkarem	20	210	168	42
Tubas	11	117	95	22
Nablus	53	513	410	103
Qalqilia	22	222	180	42
Salfit	18	190	152	38
Ramallah	66	664	522	142
Jericho	8	88	70	18
Beitlahm	34	356	281	75
Hebron	45	398	322	76
Total	**354**	**3542**	**2811**	**731**
Percentage			**79.4%**	**20.6%**

Table 3. Election Results in 2017 (www. elections.ps)

Governorate	No. of councils	N0. of seats	Male	Female
Jerusalem	28	286	223	57
Jenin	48	498	464	127
Tulkarem	20	210	215	56
Tubas	11	117	80	22
Nablus	53	513	349	100
Qalqilia	22	222	153	41

Salfit	18	190	146	38
Ramallah	66	664	473	132
Jericho	8	88	62	18
Beitlahm	34	356	236	62
Hebron	45	398	391	98
Total	**354**	**3542**	**2811**	**731**
Percentage			**78.2%**	**21.8%**

Taking into consideration the relationship between local councils and urban planning, it should be differentiated between two types of local councils:

First; municipal council: It is the first local authority from three authorities according to the law, it has extensive powers in urban planning process in addition, it regulates and organizes buildings licenses and construction, in addition to the projects of road networks and land use.

The powers of the local committee, according to Law No. 79 of 1966 (the law regulating the towns and villages) in Palestine related to urban planning practices can be summarized as follow:

- Preparation of master and detailed plans and everything related to regulating, organizing and layout of the city.
- Proven of subdivision plans and projects for land.
- Issuance of licenses of buildings, according to the law.
- Control of reconstruction and construction works within the region and to ensure compliance with the terms and provisions of this licensed law.
- Overseeing the establishment and expansion of roads and all public utilities to serve the citizens.

Second; village council: It conducts the daily affairs of the people, and supervision on community services, but most of urban planning issues that granted to the municipal council as previously mentioned, in the case of the village council all these powers refer to the Regional Committee of MoLG in each governorate, the role of the village council is concentrated in coordination with this committee in urban planning issues.

Based on reviewing the strategic plans for different local councils, urban planning priorities can be classified into two major aspects which are master plan and infrastructure projects especially for roads.

As for the satisfaction of gender quota in Palestine in general, it can be said that it received acceptance from many political parties and families, in addition to full support from civil institutions, non-governmental organizations.

Civil institutions and NGOs, in collaboration with the Ministry of Local Government hold training workshops for women members of local councils about related topics included the laws of the local councils, financial management, effective communication skills, advocacy, networking, public relations and women's rights. However, based on reviewing the agenda of the training workshops, urban planning issues and women needs were not in the focus of these workshops.

Regarding the nomination of women in local councils, it is not separated from the structure of society. Sometimes families had controlled the process of nomination of their members and had intervened in the electoral behavior. In addition, political forces and parties had also play an important role in the formation of the lists for local elections. As an inevitable result most of women in these lists had been representing families or political parties (Muftah ,2006)

2.5 Case Study: The Ramallah Governorate

The Ramallah Governorate is one of 11 governorates of Palestine which are located in the West Bank. It covers a large part of the central West Bank, on the northern border of the Jerusalem Governorate (Fig. 1). According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), the governorate had a population of 279,730 in 2007. Since the inception of the Palestinian National Authority, Ramallah has acted as the de facto capital city of the Palestinian administration.

According to PCBS, the governorate has 78 localities, including refugee camps in its jurisdiction. 13 localities have the status of municipality.

Figure 1. Map of Palestine showing the location of Ramallah Governorate (www.istockphoto.com)

Ramallah governorate in its multiculturalism also contains religious pluralism among Christians and Islamists with a diversity of citizens from all other governorates. Therefore, the political activity in the Ramallah governorate is considered one of its important features. The statistical indicators point to the high percentage of women who are educated and employed here. All these facts give women a wider margin of freedom of expression and participation than other provinces (tables 1, 2, 3). Therefore, Ramallah will be a suitable case for studying the relationship between gender quota and effective participation of elected women.

2.6 Methodology
To investigate the effectiveness of gender quota and fulfillment of women's needs in decision making process, the research design is based on two sections:
- The theoretical section includes a theoretical discussion of the main topic (gender quota, women's needs and urban planning practices).
- The practical section is a case study in Palestine to clarify issues related to the topic of the research as they are discussed in the theoretical section.
For data collection the following methods were used:
2.6.1 Statistical data
These data were used and analyzed to investigate women's participation in public activities.

2.6.2 Observation
The observations were conducted by the researchers in different urban spaces in Ramallah governorate to investigate how women's needs influences both of physical form of urban spaces and women's behavior in these spaces. Photos and written notes were used to document these observations.

2.6.3 Interviews
The interviews were conducted to support the observations and understand the obstacles which control the effectiveness of gender quota, interviews were carried out by the researchers with women and different target groups who are relevant to planning practices as follows:
Interviews with women; these interviews were carried out by the researchers with two groups of women:
The first group includes women where the observations were conducted. These interviews were carried out face to face with women without a prior arrangement. The time spent in these interviews was dependent on the situation. The objective of these interviews was to investigate how women's needs influence their access to public sphere and different

employment fields. The women were asked to explain how they use their urban environments, problems they face in public sphere. Also, if they participate in different events which take place in the streets or cities' centers and if they do not participate in these activities, they were asked to explain why. In addition, women were asked if they were employed in any field or not, if not why and if yes, are they comfortable or not, and if not why. The sets of information were recorded on separate sheets. However, after conducting twenty interviews, the process was stopped because most of the information proved repetitive at this point.

The second group includes women members from the two types of local councils (municipal, village) in Ramallah governorate. The interviews were conducted to collect data about four components: the first is about social status of women such as age, education, political affiliation and marital status. The second is about the attitude of these women towards participation in local councils in general, taking the presence in periodic meetings of the municipal council as indicator. The third is about women's awareness of urban planning process and its relation with women needs, taking any sharing for these women in new concepts or projects that focus on women's need as indicator. The fourth is about the obstacles caused by the society, whether they are social or institutional or external factors which hinder the full participation of these women in local councils.

Selection of the sample

Ramallah governorate consist of 78 local councils, 13 of them are municipal ones. The sample for interview was selected as follow: (from winner candidates in 2004 - long experience period)

- 3 women mayors because the mayor is the top of decision-making process.
- 6 women councilors from municipal councils. (In this way half of municipalities will be interviewed - 9 from 18).
- 6 women councilors from village councils.
- 5 women councilors (from winner candidates in 2012- short experience period)

These 20 interviews have been distributed geographically on most parts of Ramallah governorate because of the existence of some minor social, cultural and political differences between villages and cities of the governorate.

Interviews with managers of different public spaces and services (restaurants, coffee shops…etc.). The aim of these interviews was to understand their attitudes towards women's needs and how this influenced the physical form of the spaces which they manage.

Interviews with planners and architects (both males and females) in different local councils. The aim of these interviews was to understand how women's needs are considered by planners and architects who are responsible for the design and development of urban environment. Also, to find out if there is a difference between males and females planners towards women's needs. These interviews were conducted with six engineers: three males and three females who work in different local councils.

3. Results

The implemented methods (observations, interviews, Statistical analysis) provided sufficient data regarding the effectiveness of gender quota and fulfillment of women's needs, particularly concerning women's use of different urban spaces and physical form of these spaces, in addition to the obstacles that control the effectiveness of gender quota

3.1 Women's Use of Urban Environment

Collected data from the observations and interviews with women in different situations showed that many women do not use their urban areas comfortably because these areas do not comply with their needs, especially concerning comfort, safety, security and privacy. For example, in many situations as in crowded sidewalks, females are obliged to walk in one row behind each other to achieve their privacy and avoid physical contact with males (Figure 2a). Also, in streets where men's coffee houses exist and men usually sit on the sidewalks sit in front of these coffee houses, females are obliged to walk in the street and exposed their lives to danger (Figure 2b) or avoid passing by in these streets and use other alternative one (Figure 2c).

2a). females walked in one line behind each other to avoid direct contact with males

2b). Men are sitting on the sidewalk of the commercial street and women are coming towards them.

2c). Women left the sidewalk and walked in the street avoid passing by in front of men.

Figure 2. Examples of women's use of public sphere uncomfortably

In other situations, women are completely withdrawn from public sphere when it is dominant by males (Figures 3a&3b)

3a): Palestinians, mainly males, help themselves to a piece from the world's largest knafeh

3b): males sit in the street in front of coffee house. Women usually avoid passing by in this street

Figure 3. Examples of women's withdrawal from public

Statistical data about individuals participating in different activities in relation to gender in Palestinian governorates located in the West Bank (including Ramallah), issued by Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics during the year 2012 shows that percentage of females participating in employments is less than males. Also, the average time spent by females in participating activities outside is less than males (Table, 4). However, the table shows that women's participating activities are mainly concerns with household rather than employments.

Table 4. Percentage of individuals practicing and average time spent in performing activities in hours (H) and minutes (M) by sex and activity for the year 2012 (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS))

Activity	Percentage of individuals participating activities (%)			Average time spent in participating activities		
	Males	Females	Both sexes	Males H M	Females H M	Both sexes H M
Employment in establishments	43.9	5.2	24.6	7. 39	6. 17	7. 31
Primary production not in establishments	9.3	5.9	7.6	4.16	2.01	3.24

Services for income and other production of goods not in establishments	17.1	4.4	10.8	4. 00	2. 18	6.50
Household maintenance, management and shopping for own household	39.8	90.9	65.2	1. 20	4. 07	3. 16
Care for children, the sick, elderly, and disabled for own household	20.8	50.3	35.4	0. 59	2. 12	1. 51
Community services and help to other household	7.2	10.4	8.8	2. 13	1. 35	1. 51
Learning	23.6	22.7	23.2	6. 47	7. 08	6. 57
Social and cultural activities	89.5	88.8	89.2	3. 50	3. 14	3. 32
Mass media use	84.7	87.3	86.0	2. 28	2. 47	2. 37
Personal care and self-maintenance	99.9	100.0	100.0	10. 50	11. 25	11. 07
Other activities in the group	9.6	25.2	17.3	0. 26	0. 26	0. 26

Therefore, it seems that women's access to urban environment and public sphere is still restricted, which indicates women's needs are still not fulfilled well enough in the urban environment.

3.2 Fulfillment of Women's Needs in the Design and Planning of the Urban Environment

Results of observations and interviews with managers of public spaces as restaurants and public baths (Figure 4) showed that many of them designate or adapt spaces (Figure 4a) or times (Figure 4b) for the use of women in addition to men. They did this to encourage women's use of these spaces and improve their profits. Therefore, it seems women's needs are fulfilled in the public sphere for economic reason.

4a). A screened wall inside a coffee shop is created by the manager to provide comfort and privacy for women while sitting.

4b). The written sign says that the public bath is reserved for women's use on Tuesday only.

Figure 4. Examples of women's needs and attitudes of managers of public spaces towards women's need

Interviews with decision makers (planners and architects) in local councils showed that women's needs influenced the decision-making process regarding the physical form of public and urban spaces, despite the fact that building codes and regulations do not mention anything about women's needs. The interviews showed that architects and planners consider women's needs in public spaces designed for children. They explained that when they design any space for children, they think about women's use of this space. Also, when they design public toilets, they always separate between males' and females' spaces to provide comfortable spaces for women.

Therefore, it can be said that few of women's needs, particularly those related to culture (women's traditional role in the family in raising children and privacy which is built on the culture of gender separation) are considered informally by decision makers in local councils. In addition, Interviews with female planners and architects showed that they have the same attitudes as males towards their needs. In other words, women do not reflect their needs in professional practice, although they are involved in the design and planning process.

3.3 Obstacles Controlling the Effectiveness of Gender Quota

Results of interviews with the elected women in local councils were classified into four categories according to the types of obstacles as follows:

3.3.1 Gender quota and social status of women

The results showed women's effective participation is influenced by their age, educational level, self-confidence, marital status and their political affiliation. For example, women who are older, more educated and single participate effectively more than other women. Also, women who have a previous experience in work and politics are found to have more self-confidence and participate in municipal council effectively more than other women. Furthermore, the political parties have a major role in forming the structure of local council's members. The interviews with two mayor women revealed that they became mayors due to the political dispute between two major parties and their getting an equal number of seats, five seats for each party. This result led to general agreement and political support for the nomination of these women for the presidency who does not belong to any of these parties.

3.3.2 Gender Quota and Women's Awareness of their Needs and Urban Planning

The results showed that women do not have enough knowledge about different components of the master plans, particularly related to their specific needs. Elected women were thinking about street network and daily services, open spaces, gardens, public facilities similarly as men and without considering their specific needs in these facilities.

3.3.3 Gender Quota and Women's Attitude towards Participation in Local Councils

The results showed that elected women in municipal councils were more careful to attend municipal meetings than women in village councils. Women in village councils did not attend these meeting regularly, and they explained that the reason is due to society as will be clarified in the following section . However, women in the village councils sign the outcome of meetings, in most situations, at home to reach the quorum without any participation.

3.3.4   Gender Quota and the Society

The results showed the following obstacles caused by society restrict the efficiency of gender quota:

- Lack of adequate financial resources for municipal councils in Ramallah governorate which does not support new concepts for development as gender issues.
- Lack of community support and awareness of women's role, in addition to the dominance of the husbands and the families on women's decisions are found to have a strong negative factor on women's efficient participation. Most of the elected women emphasized that they have got motivation from their family members and sometimes political parties to come into politics, but after winning the families and the political parties try to impose their opinions and control women's decisions to achieve their interests and visions.
- Lack of self-confidence for many elected women due to their lack of proper education and experience particularly in the village councils. This was enhanced by male dominance and unhealthy atmosphere from male members which prevent effective participation for elected women in municipal meetings, in addition to their feelings of marginalization because their opinions are not considered.
- Unsuitable time for councils' meetings prevents many women from active participation in local councils' meetings. Many of the interviewed women explained that most of the meetings are held at noon, and they have a restriction of timing as they cannot work outside after evening due to traditions of the society and also due to security reasons.
- Deliberate exclusion of women from participating in vital projects and important committees, particularly in the village councils.

4. Discussion

Regarding women's use of urban environment and sustainability, the results of observations and interviews showed that women's use of their urban environments is still restricted because the physical form of these environments does not provide enough well women with their required needs. Observations and interviews with women showed that in spaces which do not comply with their needs, women achieve their needs through behavioral components. Although behavioral components help women achieve their needs; these components are restrictions rather than motivations. For example, walking in the street instead of on the sidewalk, or walking in one row behind each other, or looking for alternative streets to pass by comfortably, are all components that act as restrictions rather than motivation for making use of urban environment and participating in public life (Al-Bishawi ,2016). This was confirmed during the interviews with women where many of them explained that when the physical layout of the space they use does not comply with their needs, they are obliged to use additional behavioral components.   In other situations, women may also withdraw from public life due to privacy and security reasons.   During the interviews with women, many of them explained that they do not participate in several activities and events in streets and cities' centres because they do not find spaces where

they can sit or stand up comfortably. These results comply with statistical data reflected in table (1), which indicate that women's access to public life is still limited in comparison with men despite both women and men have equal opportunities in different employment fields (Odeh & atallah, 1999). Although the reason for this could be related to women's personal factors or other reasons, neglecting of women's needs is an important factor which restricted women's access to several employment fields. This was confirmed during interviews with women, as many of them explained that they were deprived from job opportunities offered to them because of privacy and security reasons. For example, being male domain or located far away outside their cities caused restriction on women's employment. This deprived women from their right in access to public sphere without restrictions, which contradicts with the principle of sustainability regarding equity among citizens in access to their built environments (Welch, 1995; Community & Public Health ,2019;). Therefore, involving women's needs in the design and planning of urban environments enhances women's right to access these environments which contributes to the sustainability of these environments.

Regarding the fulfillment of women's needs and sustainability of the urban environment, results of the observations and interviews showed that few of women's needs, particularly cultural needs related to gender separation, are met indirectly (informally) in the design of urban and public spaces, since there are no written rules concerning cultural needs exist in building codes and regulations. The reason for meeting cultural needs indirectly is seen as related to planners and architects as being Palestinians, and are influenced by culture in their way of life. Therefore, they reflect women's privacy for example, which is based on the culture of gender separation, indirectly in their design works. But, in the case of other specialized needs (safety, security, comfort) informal rules (culture) will not contribute to women's needs and women will be restricted in using urban spaces.   For example, due to the importance of privacy, as being a cultural women's need, for the inhabitants, decision makers in the municipalities are obliged to approve changes in the physical form of public spaces concerning women's privacy even if these changes contradict the formal rules. Meanwhile, managers of urban and public spaces, in most situations, specialize spaces for women in public spaces not only to comply with women's needs, but also to increase the number of customers.

Although few of women's needs are met informally, this influenced negatively the aesthetic quality and the sustainability of urban environment. The results showed how people make changes either in the physical layout or in the use of urban and public space to adapt it to women's needs. However, adaptation of different spaces to women's needs costs money, which contradicts with the principle of universal design concerning sustainability of the built environment, as explained by Aslaksen *et al.*, (1997).

Therefore, meeting women's needs through the informal rules does not always assure women's right in access to public sphere on the one hand, and causes degradation in the physical form of the built environment on the other hand. This reveals the importance of including women's needs in the formal rules.

Regarding the obstacles controlling the effective participation of elected women, results of the interviews with these women showed that not only obstacles related to women's social status and society's norms are facing the elected women and controlling their effective participation in local councils (Sekhon, 2006), but also women's awareness of their needs is found to be an important obstacle.   Therefore, considering these obstacles will enhance the effective participation of elected women in decision making process. For example, women who participate in the local councils should have a proper education, knowledge, experience and self-confidence which enable them to decide without being influenced by people who try to impose their opinions. Also, appointing a suitable time during day for councils' meetings will allow for women to attend these meetings and enhance their effective participation. Many of the interviewed women explained that most of the meetings are held at noon, which controls their participation in these meetings due to traditions of the society which do not allow for women to leave their homes during night. Also increasing the awareness of elected women about their needs will enhance the effective participation of the elected women and fulfillment of their needs in the urban environment. The results showed that elected women, even if they are planners or architects, are not aware of their needs; they have the same attitudes as males towards their urban environment and do not reflect their needs well in professional practice. This could be seen as related to the standard knowledge taught to planners and architects at the universities that does not differentiate between women's and men's needs and to the exclusion of women's needs from planning regulations (Al-Bishawi, 2016), in addition to the exclusion of women's needs from the agenda of the training workshops which are held for women members of local councils about related topics concerning local councils. However, the results showed that the previous mentioned obstacles control women's effective participation in village's councils more than in municipal councils. This can be seen as related to the nature of society in villages where more restrictions are imposed on women in their works, education and decisions. Therefore, increasing public awareness of the society, including women, about the importance of women's role in decision making process in local councils, with a particular attention to villages, will enhance women's effective participation and fulfillment of their needs.

5. Conclusion

This study provides us with important findings to answer the major question of this research concerning the relationship between gender quota, elected women's effective participation in urban planning practiced by local councils, women's needs and sustainability of the urban environment in general, and in Ramallah governorate in Palestine in particular. Most of the existing studies concerning this topic focus on the importance of gender quota in providing access for women to decision making process in urban planning practices without considering well enough the effective participation of elected women in fulfillment of their needs and sustainability of the urban environment. The results of this study showed that although gender quota is a positive tool in supporting women's access to decision-making positions in local councils, gender quota alone is not enough to guarantee the effective participation for these women, especially concerning the fulfillments of their needs in the urban environment.

Women's awareness of their needs in addition to other obstacles facing elected women regarding their proper education, experience, self-confidence, time of local councils' meetings should be considered to enhance the effectiveness of gender quota and fulfillment of women's needs.

Including women's needs in design and planning regulations and in the knowledge taught to planners and architects at the universities, in addition to the agenda of the training workshops which are held for women members of local councils will enhance the effective participation of elected women and fulfillment of their needs.

Effective participation of elected women in decision making process and fulfillment of their needs will support women's right in access to public life and reduce the money required for adaptation of the urban environment to comply with women's needs, which enhances the sustainability of urban environment.

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