

Gendered spaces

by Daphne Spain

Review by Elizabeth de Ridder

A prevalent question regarding the connection between urban and regional planning and gender, especially in South Africa, is what does it have to do with each other? Daphne Spain has gone to great lengths to address this issue most admirably in her book *Gendered Spaces*. She became intrigued by this subject after a joint appointment in sociology and urban planning at the University of Virginia, USA.

Gendered Spaces highlights the connection between gender stratification and spatial institutions. Typical examples of "a woman's place is in the kitchen" at home and "the women's typing pool" at work is evaluated based on studies that investigate from Tibetan tents to modern American offices. Ceremonial men's huts in traditional societies and the "Men's Club" in modern societies are all examples where women are excluded from specific spaces and thus the power that accompanies these spaces. The spatial division of labour indicated that a greater separation between men and women exists regarding traditional and subsistence tasks, which also relates to a lower status of women. Yet, in modern society there is still differential spaces based on gender in homes, educational institutions and the contemporary workplace. This gendered differences

in spatial arrangements also informs gendered differences in power, knowledge and privilege, to the disadvantage of women. The book furthermore emphasises the importance of advancing with the path of degendering of institutional spaces, resulting from the Feminist Movement. There is strong opposition, however, found against degendering of spaces as some feminist groups argue that women can be more suitably empowered away from male spaces and some religious and male dominated groups argue in favour of maintaining the *status quo* that ensures them the traditional privilege of power and knowledge.

Daphne Spain (1992:243) concludes with: "[...] the twenty-first century could well see a decline in the number of gendered spaces, accompanied by improvements in women's status."

This book is essential reading for all people involved in the study and ordering of spaces, be they urban and regional planners, architects, designers, developers, politicians, educators, sociologists or geographers. It will educate, enlighten and especially deprogramme the gender-insensitive nature of South African education, legislation, spaces, institutions and practices.

Published in: 1992
Publisher: The University of North Carolina Press
Place: Chapel Hill
ISBN: 0-8078-4357-1

Daphne Spain is an associate professor of urban and environmental planning and associate dean of the School of Architecture at the University of Virginia.

Elizabeth de Ridder is a lecturer in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of the Free State, Republic of South Africa.