

# Naisten Kaupunki - Työkaluja Oman tilan haltuunottoon

Sara Kärpänen

Into Kustannus, 2022

## 1 Extract – ‘Introduction’ from City of Women - Tools for Occupying Space.

We all have a story to tell. I would like to briefly tell you my own.

Around eight years ago, I was a fresh graduate with a Master of Arts degree. While studying for my Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees at university, I worked part time as a journalist for a national newspaper—a job I had determinedly pursued.

However, more often than not, I found myself lying in the fetal position on my living room floor after finishing a day of work, wondering where my passion for life and writing had gone. I began to resent the career choice I laid out before me, as I felt that this kind of work did not give enough space for my own voice or the voices I would have liked to amplify.

During my years in the Master’s programme, I had developed an appetite for deeper understanding of the interplay between public space, art, intersectional feminism and grassroots initiatives. After deciding to not follow the path of a newspaper journalist, I moved abroad, moved into an artist community in London and immersed myself in the creative practice.

Slowly, an idea for this book started to take shape. It was brewing whilst I worked with artists and architects to explore the in-between spaces of public space and activism, and as I travelled to different artist-led communities from San Pancho in Mexico to Lincoln Heights in Los Angeles.

The project has mainly been led by conversations with the community leaders who have occupied space, and by my participation in social movements and observation of the blind spots in city planning as a *flâneuse*, to borrow the term coined by Laura Elkin.

Many angles and tools can drive change. Art and activism are, in my opinion, the most effective. Art is an instrument of exploration, and activism the catalyst of direct change. This book is dedicated to and written for all those who believe that change is possible.

## 2 What is feminist spatial occupation?

Cities are much more than the built environment, streets, parks, pathways and buildings that we see; public space is also formed by situations and interactions. As Henri Lefebvre states, citizens determine their right to space through social relationships.

Urban planning and architecture play pivotal roles in constructing and reproducing identities. What type of space does a busker playing an instrument occupy? What about a professional on a daily commute?

The gendered use of public spaces has a long history. For centuries, women were not allowed to enter spaces such as restaurants or polling stations. The first private and elitist men's clubs, or gentlemen's clubs, were established in London in the early 18th century. Today, eleven of them are still designated for male users only.

The original purpose of the clubs was to strengthen the unity of the upper class. In these private and exclusive spaces—only accessible through status, wealth, and networks—men discussed politics, material possessions and matters of the heart over a glass of fine brandy.

In recent years, cities have seen a boom in female-exclusive workspaces, such as the AllBright in London, The Wing in New York and HER Global Network. These clubs are exclusive facilities with a long waiting list. However, such female-only clubs place particular emphasis on networking, openness, and business skills, to which women have historically received little if any access.

Places such as the Feminist Center for Creative Work in Los Angeles, Sistah Space in London and The Feminist and Anti-Racist Workspace in Helsinki are examples of more open, low-threshold and grassroots feminist communities.

Feminist centres and genderqueer spaces such as these are built on principles to support participants to feel safe to express themselves without being the subject of hate speech or criticism.

That is a practice of a feminist spatial occupation in the city.