



# **“The City Will be Ours: We Have So Decided”: Circulating Knowledges in a Feminist Register**

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## **Abstract**

This article juxtaposes insights from recent urban policy mobilities scholarship on circulating knowledges with an in-depth examination of a long-standing (1976-2013) amalgam of groups and individuals whose focus is safer cities for women and girls. The article addresses three gaps. One, it is an empirical study that draws on in-depth knowledge of its authors to shed light on gender informed efforts to shift circulating knowledges relevant to policies to advance gender equality goals in cities. Two, it examines this terrain with a focus on a variety of actors who are not typically acknowledged as ‘policy-makers’. Three, it provides new insights about the “connective tissue” of policy-making and in particular, the potential power of a methodological approach that recognizes the benefits of linking together women as ‘experts in their own lives’ with professionals who have ‘a taste for justice’. The paper does so by highlighting three



distinct ways in which such knowledge mobilization occurs, including: i) the take-up and adaptation of an already mobilized methodology called the Women's Safety Audit; ii) the circulation and engagement of both local and non-local people experts; and iii) organizational support for circulating knowledges and policy mobilities.

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The city will be ours  
 We have so decided  
 We will make our city safe  
 We have so decided  
 Yes, we have decided! (Bhasin, 2010)

With the singing of these words, the 2010 Third International Conference on Women's Safety opened in Delhi, India. The event was organized by Women In Cities International (WICI) together with Jagori<sup>1</sup> and framed as “**a systemic rights-based approach to women's safety that recognizes diversity**” [bolded in the original] and “an important opportunity to assess some of the current and emerging trends, achievements and challenges in building safe and inclusive cities for women and girls” (WICI and Jagori, 2010, 3). Using this event among others, this article has drawn upon our ethnographic knowledge of WICI and the network of which it is an important member, to explore how their contributions to circulating knowledges might provide new insights into the broader scholarship on urban policy mobilities. It is our contention that the groups we have named here the Safer Cities for Women Network (SCWN) that came together in Delhi in 2010 constitute a particular form of counter-hegemonic movement – informed by feminism and focused on social justice - whose overall goal has been to encourage “spaces of resistance to neo-liberal rule” as well the nurturing of “sites for the production of alternative policy projects, visions, and strategies” (Peck and Theodore, 2010, 171; Mahon and Macdonald, 2010; McCann, 2010). SCWN's counter-hegemonic approach displays some similarities with initiatives that have been the focus of recent European research on community development and social innovation (Moulaert, 2010) as well as with the efforts of the Transnational Alternative Policy groups examined by Carroll (2015). Its distinctions lie in its explicitly gendered urban lens, its action research approach, and its cross-cutting global orientation: it practices somewhat similar knowledge dissemination and place-based action research activities in both the economic North and South.

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<sup>1</sup> Jagori began as a feminist collective, independent of political parties and government, over 20 years ago in Delhi India. For further information, go to: <http://jagori.org/>

We present our argument in four sections. In this opening discussion we highlight certain scholarly gaps in the intersection between urban policy mobilities and gender and elaborate on the contribution that this article makes. We then turn to a discussion of the empirical basis for our claims, situating the authors and outlining our methodological approach. Having thus established the context, in the third section of this article, we identify and then elaborate on our central argument: drawing upon learning from SCWN and WICI practices on the ground, we identify three faces of mobilization that should be understood as elements of connective tissue in how circulating knowledges can be nurtured, sustained and deepened. In the fourth and final section of the paper we offer closing reflections.

While a large body of scholarship has documented the many ways in which gender makes a difference in how cities are experienced and how policy has impacts (Andrew, 2000; Falu, 2010; Fenster, 2005; Fincher, 2007; Klodawsky, 2009; Phadke, 2005; Ortiz Escalante and Sweet, 2013; Whitzman, 2008), the link between these material outcomes and questions of “how – through what practices, where, when, and by whom – urban policies are produced in global-relation context, are transferred and reproduced from place to place, and are negotiated politically in various locations” (McCann and Ward, 2011: xix) is an area of study that has been neglected. Albeit that aspects of feminist preoccupations about cities have been the subject of numerous articles and books (Bashevkin, 2005; Moser, 2012; Peake and Rieker 2013; Shaw and Andrew, 2005; Viswanath and Tandon Mehrotra, 2007; Whitzman, 2008; Whitzman, 2007; Whitzman et. al., 2013), a focus on SCWN through a policy mobilities lens is an important new contribution.

By urban policy mobilities, we mean “socially produced and circulated forms of knowledge addressing how to design and govern cities that develop in, are conditioned by, travel through, connect and shape various spatial scales, networks, policy communities, and institutional contexts” (McCann, 2010: 109). Policy mobilities scholarship is a growing and multi-faceted arena of debates and discussions that raise questions about how urban policy ideas and initiatives develop in particular circumstances that are both based in particular geographies and located in the midst of specific social relations, how they travel to other ‘sites’ (again, both place-based and relational), how those ideas and initiatives change in the course of their travels (Clarke, 2012) and how they are taken up (or not) in the places where they are acknowledged. We fully agree with McCann and Ward’s proposition that: “policymaking must be understood as both relational and territorial, as both in motion and simultaneously fixed, or embedded in place” (McCann and Ward, 2011, xv).

McCann’s (2008) detailed ethnography of the processes that contributed to Vancouver adopting an innovative “four pillar drug strategy” is one noteworthy example of how to investigate interactions between knowledge mobilization and policy change. His analysis of the leading role of local activists and their strategic use of and interactions with the health and legal professionals from places such as Zurich and Frankfurt echoes the understanding of urban change also favoured by

SCWN members such as WICI: “The organization draws on its... staff, members and networks... to develop... women’s safety partnerships between grassroots women’s groups, cities and other governments, researchers across a number of disciplines..., international organizations and donors” (WICI and Jagori 2010, 3).

Yet we suggest here that the specific nature of WICI and other SCWN members’ approach to knowledge mobilization is distinctive and thus offers new insights about efforts to shift policy discourses “from below”. Whereas McCann’s (2008) analysis is closely focused on a particular set of issues in one locale, our claim is about myriad mobilization efforts that retain a measure of consistency across space while demonstrating adaptability and sensitivity to the particulars of place, time and context. Moreover, we want to highlight that this approach to thinking about knowledge mobilization and its political efficacy is strongly informed by our understanding that SCWN and WICI are feminist organizations, in the sense that they incorporate tacit knowledge about the content and methodological implications of accepting a system of values having to do with links between personal experience and the how, what and why of analysis and activism. Gibson-Graham’s (2006) observations about the network characteristics that helped (second-wave) feminists remain connected and on track are relevant to our characterization of the mobilization efforts that we investigate here: “The practice of feminism... fostered alternative ways of being (powerful), including “direct and equitable participation, non-monopoly of the spoken word or of information, the rotation of occasional tasks and responsibilities, the non-specialization of functions, the non-delegation of power...” (p. xxiii).

Reinforcing these observations, Alvarez (2009) recently acknowledged the significance of the strategies utilized by transnational feminist social movements, even while the climate within which they operate has become more difficult. She noted that “[a]s discursive fields of action, feminisms are dynamic, always changing, on the move. They are continually reconfigured by a mix of internal and external forces and have shifting centres of gravity...” (p. 182). Wright’s (2010) reflections about the challenges for feminist geography in engagement with social justice activism are also relevant: “Reckoning with the power dynamics inherent to the production of knowledge continues to represent a challenge for feminist theorists and activists as they negotiate over whose knowledge counts as ‘official’ knowledge, in whose language is this knowledge formed, and who is able to represent this knowledge, have access to it, and reap the rewards of its circulation” (p. 380).

These ideas have informed our interpretation of the extensive available documentation in the form of reports, declarations, and research programs that encapsulate arguments about the potential for multiple initiatives to contribute to “safer cities for all” in the light of growing urban violence, and that have substantiated a growing “consensus among researchers and practitioners of the need to promote interventions that particularly tackle women’s safety and security issues in cities” (Moser, 2012, 437; Falu 2010). Although we acknowledge the

“considerable gap between laws and policies to address different categories of gender-based violence, and their implementation in practice in countries and cities across the world” (Moser, 2012, 449), we also want to raise questions about how counter-hegemonic movement successes are gauged. Should evidence be restricted to easily identifiable policy shifts in one particular sector (such as in McCann, 2008)? Or, should evidence about more subtle and incremental shifts in the texture and composition of multiple, circulating knowledges also be taken into account? Recent mass protests in cities throughout India demanding government action to effectively address widespread violence against women (certainly a long-standing and pervasive problem) have put a particularly timely and visible spotlight on such questions. And indeed, the song written for and sung at the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Seminar on Women’s Safety, fully two years before the horrific gang rape on a Delhi bus that sparked widespread street protests, powerfully illustrates the subtle and not-so-subtle connections between thought, action and policy change.

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**Figure 1: A Special Song for the Third International Conference on Women’s Safety, New Delhi, November 22-24, 2010. Source: Bhasin, Kamla, (2010)**

The city will be ours  
 We have so decided  
 We will make our city safe  
 We have so decided  
 Yes, we have decided!

The world will want us to stay with ‘The Home’  
 How indeed will we agree to such diktaats  
 We will make the ‘entire world’ our home  
 We will show the world our will  
 Yes, we have decided!

In the eyes of the law we are seen as equals  
 It is unacceptable that we face restrictions  
 We will not commit the same mistakes  
 We will claim our rights  
 Yes, we have decided!

Perpetrators will not be let out  
 They will learn respect for women  
 We will no longer tolerate violations  
 The silence will be broken  
 Yes, we have decided!

The roads and the lanes are ours  
So are the offices and the Parliament  
We will challenge such power  
And not be driven by fear  
Yes, we have decided!

We demand public toilets and pavements  
Lit with the best of lights  
A violence free life we will lead  
And pay taxes only for services we received  
Yes, we have decided!

Delhi is ours, so is Montreal  
As is Bogota, so is Seoul  
We will end the violence  
On trains and buses  
Yes, we have decided!

For years we have dreamt of the day  
When we shall walk without fear  
Where the clouds of Equality  
Will shower us with Rights  
Taking governments along with us  
Yes, we have decided!

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Robinson's (2011) discussion of circulating knowledges in the context of city-wide strategic visioning exercises is a useful complement to the questions we raise in this article. She suggests that there are "possibilities for anti-neoliberal political practices... [to] emerge in and through the same geographies of policy circulation as neoliberal policy transfers" (p. xxvi), and explains that "[s]trategic visioning forces citizens, consultants, and urban managers to think across the city as a whole, bringing elements often analyzed in isolation into relationship with one another" (p. 19). Her insights about the value of these exercises help to locate SCWN efforts as contributions to the dense and complex assemblages that are the contexts within which policy ideas circulate, both within and beyond particular places, and that are taken up in cities to greater or lesser effect. Rather than privileging any one policy strand, Robinson highlights the circulation of interrelated policy ideas and how city visioning exercises become occasions for various ideas to become more visible, to brush up against one another, and gain traction (or not). Her "exploration of the spatialities of circulations" allows for investigation of "the scope for local autonomy" while acknowledging and taking into account "the ubiquitous phenomenon of city strategies and the power relations of global governance that frame their adoption" (p. 17). Within this type of a

conceptual framework, SCWN activities are better understood as encouraging women-friendly local grassroots groups to seek points of interaction and connection with decision-makers (such as local politicians and bureaucrats) about areas of potentially common concern (such as lighting, water and sanitation, transportation) where certain policy ideas, were they to be adopted, might also contribute to broader safety goals.

At the same time, we also acknowledge the relevance of Robinson's (2011) caution that the same factors that help open the possibility for city visioning exercises to be influenced by locally specific influences contributing to "progressive gains", also make them vulnerable to countervailing ideas and policies. In this article, we offer an analysis of an on-going empirical case with a unique focus on women, girls, and gender, of "the struggles, practices, and representations that underpin urban-global relations and that assemble or territorialize global flows" (McCann and Ward, 2011, xvii). Moreover, this case examines an "alternative" network of individuals who often are not widely recognized as urban policy actors but who nonetheless interact with, "inhabit and use the same global circuits of policy knowledge to develop alternative assemblages of policy and power" (McCann and Ward, 2011, xxv; see also Robinson 2011). We do so in order to contribute to on-going calls in the policy mobilities literature for greater attention to "the 'connective tissue' of mobility" (McCann 2010, 109), including practices that reveal how "[p]olicy mobilities are embodied, material, piece-meal and often irrational" (Jacobs, 2012, 414) and that contribute to appeals about the need "to thicken... descriptions of policy mobilities" (Jacobs, 2012, 418) Specifically, we examine how SCWN and WICI in particular support the mobilization of individuals and organizations to circulate knowledges about the central concerns of the network: safer cities for women and girls. We have identified three distinct ways in which such mobilization occurs, ways that we refer to as "faces" of mobilization to capture their relational and dynamic natures (Young 1990). These three faces are: i) the take-up and adaptation of an already mobilized methodology called the Women's Safety Audit; ii) the circulation and engagement of both local and non-local people experts; and iii) organizational support for circulating knowledges and policy mobilities. After briefly situating our own relation to the topic and the basis for our claims, we discuss the manner in which these three faces of mobilization might be understood as connective tissue that has contributed to circulating knowledges about safer cities for women and girls transnationally.

### **Locating the Researchers**

For two of the authors, research about and with SCWN is a relatively recent development in a much longer and multi-faceted history of our involvement with this network as executive members of the Board of Directors, as research associates and as academic advisors (Whitzman et. al., 2013; Whitzman et. al., 2009). Siltanen's experience with team-based research on the relations between inequality

and the experience of change at the municipal level has added further dimensions to our research approach and facilitated our commitment to be reflexive about our engaged positions (Siltanen, 2008).

In the mid-2000s, we began to note some intriguing similarities in two organizations broadly focused on ‘women and cities’: one with a focus on the ‘local’ (CAWI-IVTF in Ottawa Canada – see Siltanen et. al., 2014; Klodawsky et. al., 2013; Andrew and Klodawsky, 2006), and the other, part of an international network (WICI – Women In Cities International). Our growing curiosity about the emerging feminist ethos of both organizations spurred on the crafting of a research project structured around the assertion that there were theoretical insights to be gained by approaching the two organizations as paradigmatic examples worthy of being examined as extended case studies (Flyvbjerg, 2001). We also wanted to contribute to a nuanced scholarship about feminist urban policy influence and activism, wherein there have been multiple efforts – both long-standing and recent, both practical and theoretical – to link women’s place-based initiatives to create ‘safer spaces’ within broader efforts to link feminist understandings of progressive urban change to urban policy and program agendas (Wekerle, 2005; Wekerle, 2004).

After receiving enthusiastic support from members of CAWI-ITVF and WICI, we applied for and were successful in receiving funds from Canada’s Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council in 2008 for a three-year programme of study. Our investigative methodologies have included a range of qualitative approaches, including in-depth interviews with key actors in the two organizations, reflexive conversations among the researchers, document analysis, focus group discussions, reflection workshops with larger groups of organization members, and participant and non-participant observation of steering group meetings and events including the wider membership. This paper is centrally about the how, where, what and when of the production and circulation of (feminist) policy-relevant knowledge about women’s public safety in cities and the efforts of SCWN members, in particular WICI, to make this knowledge more actionable among urban-scale decision-makers in a wide variety of places, both north and south.

In the discussion that follows, we highlight how the three faces of mobilization that we discuss below might be understood as facets of how connective tissue is built. We do so by examining these matters in relation to three recent initiatives where WICI has been a leading partner (see Table 1). The first of these initiatives (2007 – 2009) was led by WICI under the title: *Creating Safer Communities for Marginalized Women and for Everyone* (WICI 2010b) (the Canadian Project). WICI worked with identity-specific women’s groups in four Canadian communities to identify and build capacity to enhance women’s safety in those places through adaptation of the women’s safety audit to explicitly take into account the particular needs of each group. The second initiative (2009-2011) - *Action Research Project on Women’s Rights and Access to Water and Sanitation in Asian Cities* - was one in which WICI took a more distanced stance, working



closely with Jagori, a long-standing feminist community organization based in Delhi, and Action India, to support these organizations' long-standing relationships with women residents in two JJ Resettlement Colonies. The project's focus was on safer access for women residents to essential water and sanitation services. WICI was the Canadian partner through which the Canadian sourced research funds flowed and WICI was also tasked with providing administrative and professional support for this venture (Jagori and WICI, 2010; WICI and Jagori, 2011b) (the WATSAN Project). The third initiative – *Gender Inclusive Cities: Increasing Women's Safety by Identifying and Disseminating Effective and Promising Approaches to Promote Women's Equal Access to Public Spaces* (2009 to 2011) was a comparative study of women's experiences of sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence in public spaces, funded by the United Nations' Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women. It was coordinated by WICI in partnership with four organizations associated with each of the four cities involved in this initiative (WICI, 2010a; WICI, 2012) (The GIC Project). The Canadian project was the first time that WICI explored how WSAs might be adapted in a comparative way to address safety issues facing four distinct groups of women deemed to be at risk of social and economic exclusion (WICI 2010b). Both the WATSAN and the GIC Projects used methodologies that built on and extended the comparative work of the Canadian Project.

**Table 1: Overview of Initiatives Under Examination**

Initiative	Timeframe	Focus	Mandate
Creating Safer Communities for Marginalized Women and for Everyone (Canadian Project)	2007-2009	Identity-specific women's groups (women with disabilities, seniors, aboriginal women and racialized and immigrant women) in four Canadian communities (Women of the Dawn Counselling Centre of Regina Saskatchewan; Centre des aînes de Gatineau, Québec; Catholic Crosscultural Services of Peel, Ontario and Action des femmes handicapées Montréal).	To identify and build capacity to enhance women's safety through adaptations of WSAs to explicitly take into account the particular needs of each group
Action Research Project on Women's Rights and Access to Water and Sanitation in Asian Cities (WATSAN Project)	2009-2011	Support for Jagori and ActionAid in relation to girl and women residents of two JJ Resettlement Colonies (Bawana and Bhalswa)	To identify current barriers to as well as strategies to achieve safer access to essential water and sanitation services

<p>Gender Inclusive Cities Programme (GIC Project)</p>	<p>2009-2011</p>	<p>Community organizations and local government organizations in four cities in three continents (Exchange and Services Centre– Latin America Women and Habitat Network, Rosario, Argentina; Jagori, Delhi, India; Information Centre for Network and Information Centre of the Independent Women’s Forum, Petrozavodsk, Russia; and Independent Centre for Network and Information on Crime, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania).</p>	<p>Systematic baseline analysis and targeted interventions in four cities in three continents to identify promising approaches to promote women’s equal access to public spaces</p>
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**The Safer Cities for Women Network: Three Faces of Mobilization**

The network’s origins have been traced broadly to the Habitat 1 Conference in Vancouver in 1976 (Whitzman, 2007; Greed, 2001) where a first gathering of academics, practitioners and activists gathered “following the recommendation of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment and... the General Assembly by which the nations of the world expressed their concern over the extremely serious condition of human settlements, particularly that... in developing countries” (United Nations, 1976, 1). The *Vancouver Declaration* produced at that gathering reflected the era in which it was conceived: one of hope that the everyday life circumstances of women and men should and could be better with the help of governments and communities (Modlich, 2012). Such ideas were shaped in part by newly emerging scholarship in urban planning, environmental psychology, human geography and allied fields, including the perspectives of feminists (Peterson et. al., 1978; Wekerle et. al., 1980).

***The First Face of Mobilization: Take-Up and Adaptation of Women’s Safety Audits***

The original Women’s Safety Audit was developed in the mid-1980s by METRAC in Toronto Canada. Since that time, it has been taken up and adapted in dramatically divergent circumstances (Whitzman et. al., 2009; WICI, 2008). In fact, the relationship between the take-up of this already mobilized tool and the incremental emergence of SCWN as a network is central to the discussion that follows – Women’s Safety Audits (WSAs) have been a tool both *of* and *for* mobilization. The efficacy of this tool in attracting the attention of so many

feminist and women-friendly groups in different places is an important insight into what might constitute connective tissue in relation to knowledge mobilization.

WSAs have been defined as “a process which brings individuals together to walk through a physical environment, evaluate how safe it feels to them, identify ways to make the space safer and organize to bring about these changes” (Women’s Action Centre Against Violence, 1995, 1). It is also understood as “a diagnostic tool to identify safe and unsafe spaces, and how unsafe spaces can be improved” (Whitzman et. al., 2009, 11). Two touchstones in these audits are that: i) women users of a space are regarded as experts in their own lives, and ii) assessments of their physical environment need to take into account, in a central and authentic manner, the feelings, perceptions and observations of these users. From this starting point, the goal becomes to trace the lines of connection between a particular physical environment and the decision chain that produced it, with the intent of using that same chain to challenge the status quo and to work for changes that produce safer cities. In this framework, safety is defined very broadly as experiences, feelings and perceptions about a space that promote engagement and/or disengagement in the daily life of the city. It is an effort to address violence against women in a manner that recognizes the pervasiveness and multifaceted nature of gendered violence in the public as well as the private sphere, and to highlight that experiences of violence are situated – they are shaped by questions of who, where and when. Among the SCWN, there is broad agreement with the assertion that:

the underlying concept of women’s safety audits is radical: that residents without any particular urban planning or crime prevention expertise can quickly and easily be ‘trained’ to turn their everyday consciousness of ‘how they are going to negotiate insecurity in public space... into recommendations for concrete action. The increased capacity for concrete action can empower the participants, both to see themselves as ‘experts of experience’ and as legitimate political actors. Through this kind of piecemeal transformation of both urban space and public participatory practices, women’s safety audits help build a more equitable, as well as less violent world... (Whitzman et al, 2009, 11).

From this perspective, WSAs are centrally about the translation and refinement of participatory action research in order to, on the one hand, provide ‘local’ women – ‘experts of experience’ - with tools and strategies for systematically identifying problems they face in the public sphere in their day-to-day lives with the support of ‘professional experts’, and on the other hand, to inform the primarily municipal-scale decision makers who have authority to implement (or not) the diverse array of recommendations generated through these action research activities.

Since 1989, WSAs have been widely used, both within Canada and beyond, and have been adapted in a variety of contexts: in high-, medium and low-income

countries (including Argentina, Burundi, Cameroon, D.R.C., India, Kenya, Poland, Russia, South Africa, Tanzania) as well as in diverse communities in Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia (Whitzman et. al., 2009; WICI, 2008; UN-HABITAT, 2008). A 2007 global survey of 163 women's community-based initiatives to improve safety revealed that the WSA was the tool used most often in pursuit of safer communities and that it was an internationally recognized 'best practice' (UN-HABITAT, 2008).

Although the three studies highlighted in this paper differed in terms of their collaborators, their geographic locations and their specific objectives, the core philosophy of the WSA connected each of the projects in fundamental ways and allowed each of them to build upon the insights of the others. In each case, a starting point was the voices of 'experts of experience' about their key public safety concerns. For example, the Canadian Project began when an Aboriginal community leader in Regina approached WICI explaining that "she had heard of women's safety audits and felt there was a real need to use them in Regina with Aboriginal women" (WICI 2010, p. 10). In the case of WATSAN, consistent reports to Jagori and ActionAid by women and girls about their lack of safe access to toilets was a key motivator: "Girls feel uncomfortable going to toilet complexes when instead of one caretaker a whole bunch of his friends are sitting there and staring at them" (Jagori and WICI, 2010 p. 11). And, for those who became involved, experience with the WSA further reinforced its value. As one community leader in the Canadian project noted, "...a lesson that I've learned is don't underestimate the women... the way they all come together and they pulled it off... made me realize ... there is a lot of strength out there.. It was a good lesson..." (WICI 2010, p. 53).

### ***The Second Face of Mobilization: The Circulation of People Experts***

A 2007 survey and follow-up interviews with 18 organizational representatives about the use of WSAs internationally, highlighted a process of dissemination that was primarily informal, based on word-of-mouth and other mostly one-on-one opportunities for gaining knowledge. WSAs have both inspired and spurred on the coming together of key actors as a result of their use in diverse circumstances.

A new phase of interaction took place in 2002 at the First International Seminar on Women's Safety in Montreal Canada and in the *Montreal Declaration* that emerged from it. The seminar included about 150 women and men from grassroots organizations and municipal governments in Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, France, Ireland, Jamaica, Kenya, the Netherlands, Papua New Guinea, Peru, South Africa, Tanzania, and Vietnam, and various Canadian cities and towns. Participants heard about the seminar and were inspired (and sometimes funded to attend) through diverse inter-personal encounters with specific staff in such organizations as the International Union of Local Authorities, Canadian International Development Agency, UNIFEM, UN-Habitat, and the Huairou

Commission. Cross-cultural communications at the event were greatly facilitated by the availability of simultaneous translation in English, French and Spanish, not only in the plenary sessions but also at the many workshops that comprised the seminar (First International Seminar on Women's Safety, 2002).

The seminar's stated purpose was to bring together for the first time, various experts who had the potential to help strengthen the SCWN. These experts included donors, instigators, grassroots practitioners and scholars associated with myriad, geographically dispersed, governmental and non-governmental initiatives. Addressing the problem of violence against women in both its public and private manifestations was framed as being central to creating safer cities for women and therefore for everyone (Michaud, 2002). The foundational principles that were highlighted at the seminar closely reflected participants' experiences with place-based, women-centred initiatives for safer cities up to that point in time (Figure 2). They were an encapsulation of what the WSA was understood to be able to offer (see section titled 'Considering That') and simultaneously, they helped to consolidate how SCWN members would tend to approach gendered urban concerns in a broad range of places (First International Seminar on Women's Safety, 2002).

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**Figure 2: The Montréal Declaration on Women's Safety [excerpt]**  
**Source: First International Seminar on Women's Safety (2002)**

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**GIVEN THAT:**

Well-founded fear of crime, and various forms of violence against women, represent, for all women, a major obstacle in the exercise of their freedom and the achievement of gender equality.

The effects of violence against women constitute an obstacle to the development of communities and societies around the world.

**CONSIDERING THAT:**

The strategies put in place by public, private and community-based organizations must put women at the centre of the action, and aim to reinforce the capacity of women's individual and collective actions.

Co-ordinated approaches to intervention, including partnerships, and the pooling of resources, are essential principles for effective action.

Good urban governance is a prerequisite to women's empowerment. This must include, amongst others, the allocation of adequate resources to women's organizations.

The success of initiatives to address women's safety and security depend on the full involvement of men as well as women.

The solutions introduced by women to increase safety and security make cities and municipalities safer for all.

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The connections made at and subsequent to that seminar played a key role in how the three projects highlighted here were conceived and implemented. As noted in the first sentence of a WATSAN publication, "This handbook is a wonderful example of partnering with people across continents to co-produce a work of knowledge and learning on globally shared concerns" (Jagori and WICI, 2010).

### ***The Third Face of Mobilization: Organizational Support***

WICI began in the wake of this first seminar and its formation illustrates a third face of mobilization – organizational support that was expected to accelerate and enhance the effectiveness of circulating knowledges. The motivation to establish WICI was driven by a wish to empower the many like-minded actors and organizations that were operating somewhat independently of one another, to become more aware of one another's activities and to accelerate collaborative possibilities. Involved actors and organizations were located in a wide variety of places but knowledge of them, at the time of WICI's establishment, depended largely on personal networks, with 'femocrats' (Eisenstein 1996) located in the City of Montreal, the International Centre for the Prevention of Crime, Canadian International Development Agency, and at the United Nations (at UN-HABITAT and UNIFEM, especially its Latin American regional office), playing key roles in both identifying funding opportunities and locating possible collaborators and partners (UN-HABITAT, 2008, 7). The growing opportunities to communicate virtually via electronic communications played a significant role in allowing typically cash-strapped, shoe-string operations to be in touch with one another (or at the very least to 'meet' on another on-line) (personal interview #3, August 2010).

Since inception, WICI has helped to enhance the ties between geographically dispersed groups with an interest in safer cities for women. As well as consolidating knowledge about what was known about WSAs, it became a leader in developing projects that have taken WSA adaptations to a new level of practice that incorporated a comparative element and broadened the manner in which WSAs intersected with other types of participatory action research. In doing so, WICI together with other SCWN members have also amplified efforts to further mobilize local expertise. Methodological adaptations reached a new level of sophistication. So too did the depth of success in mobilizing local expertise.

Each three of the projects discussed in this article was feasible (in both conception and implementation) only through a combination of pre-existing

networks supported by the circulation of people experts discussed above, and the financial and social infrastructure that WICI offered. Its ability to successfully ‘manage’ complex and multi-faceted projects where the various local partners differed dramatically in their capacity and in their contextual circumstances is an oft-cited strength of the organization. As one donor noted: “WICI combines the capacity to work at a high technical level of competence but also is very inclusive in its approach” (personal interview # 2, July 2010). The Gender Inclusive Cities Programme, for example, included the challenge of comparing the experiences of women and girls across four cities in three continents in relation to both how “public gender exclusion and its interaction with other marginalised identities” operated as well as identifying “activities, tools and public policies that act as enablers of or barriers to greater gender inclusion and equality” (WICI 2010b, p. 10). Powerfully, it identified unexpected factors and relations that helped to explain variations in the extent to which women and girls were able even to name experiences such as sexual harassment, and the interactions between the capacity to name and the likelihood of policy take up. Whereas the Delhi and Rosario sites yielded important information about women’s resilience and capacity to build upon existing strengths, the Russian case was one where the baseline findings signalled and helped to explain the particular unwillingness of officials to address issues of gender-based violence (GBV):

For Petrozavodsk the findings are much more tentative than for other cities because significantly fewer women were willing to answer street survey questions related to personal experience. This means that any cross-city analysis which involves street survey data from Petrozavodsk cannot be considered conclusive. ...in this city, the FGDs [focus groups] were far more successful than the street survey for gathering information from research participants on sensitive topics such as their fear of GBV (WICI 2010b, p. 116).

...there was a reluctance even to acknowledge that sexual violence in public spaces was a problem... [and the local partner’s] task was made more difficult by public sector stakeholders not normally seeing civil society having any role in setting policy agendas or developing initiatives in areas like GBV [Gender Based Violence] prevention... (WICI 2012, 97).

Yet, it is also important to acknowledge the increasing difficulties as of late to maintain the sort of organizational support that WICI has offered. The organization has been successful because of it has taken the time required to build trust among very diverse groups, and also ensure that the quality of the work produced was such that its conclusions and recommendations would be difficult to challenge. In recent years, the availability of funding to support such efforts appears to be diminishing and WICI’s ability to sustain itself is not at all certain, despite the implications of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals that gendered knowledge of cities should be central to their success.

## Closing Reflections

In this paper, we have contributed to scholarly explorations of circulating knowledges and policy mobilities by drawing insights from our long-standing work with the Safer Cities for Women Network (SCWN). In particular, we delved into the specific interactions and widening influence of one important member of the group – Women In Cities International (WICI) - in order to explore how the “connective tissue” of mobility might be understood and imagined in a more robust manner. Three faces of mobilization were suggested as particularly pertinent to our case, including: i) the take-up and enhancement of an already mobilized methodology; ii) the circulation of people experts; and iii) organizational support for mobilities.

In this closing section, we want to reflect on this analysis and its potential relevance for other efforts to circulate “alt” knowledge in potentially effective ways. We suggest that there are two primary lessons to be drawn from our examination. The first is that methodological tools, organizational evolution, and key individuals (in the right place at the right time) each, potentially, have an important part to play, but that in each instance, the quality of the relations between and among these elements should not be taken for granted. On-going assessments of what is gaining the most traction (and how and why) are important; while the particulars may vary, the sensibilities are what count. The broad and deep take up of the WSA was not anticipated but once noted, it was important to reflect on why it should be so. The central commitment of WSAs to connect, build trust and bring into conversation with one another experts of experience and professional experts and link them with key decision-makers, has informed the other two faces of mobilization, including organizational support and the interactions among various types of people experts. Secondly, while our analysis hints at a certain order to these mobilizations, we want to stress that we do not see such an order as necessary or even likely in other such efforts. WICI’s story is one of continuity of effort, reflection and re-assessment over a significant period of time in circumstances where such continuity certainly could not be assumed.

The lack of attention to issues of gendered social citizenship in the extant policy mobilities scholarship, together with certain gaps within feminist studies related to urban scale policy innovations (but see Andrew 1995; Moser 2012) is another contribution of this paper. Until now, the activities of the SCWN have received only limited attention in the policy mobilities literature. This article has drawn upon our insider knowledge to explore how this network’s activities might contribute to broader insights about urban policy mobilities and circulating knowledges. The paper’s emphasis has been on actors who are not typically the subject of investigation in this body of scholarship, and their interactions with a cluster of methodological tools that have been shaped by and have in turn shaped a particular ethos or register among the network’s membership.



This focus is noteworthy because it has revealed details of the manner in which diffuse and poorly resourced groups have been able to maintain a value-based commitment to the pursuit of policy-relevant interventions to promote cities of inclusion and diversity across the world. These activities and focus have been aided by the use of common participatory tools that have also been the source of strategies for promoting sensitivity to the particularities of site-specific interests and concerns. As demonstrated above, the tools themselves have opened up possibilities of further sophistication beyond the anticipated results of its initiators. At the same time though, this orientation in no way elides the reality that this network operates within a complex field full of divisive, often neoliberal-influenced pitfalls that work against efforts to address and mitigate marginalization in daily life. Robinson's (2011) caution about the difficulty of predicting when thoughtful, well-intentioned actions are likely to have constructive outcomes, or Moser's (2012) observations about the remaining gaps between the apparent successes of SCWN related 'circulating knowledges' and their embedding in place are noteworthy and point to the on-going challenges that face groups and networks such as WICI and SCWN. Despite these important limitations, this article highlights what might happen when "experts of experience" work with "professional experts" in the realm of social justice across multiple scales and places, and when there are methodological tools in play that make it impossible to elide the central role of 'experts of experience'.

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