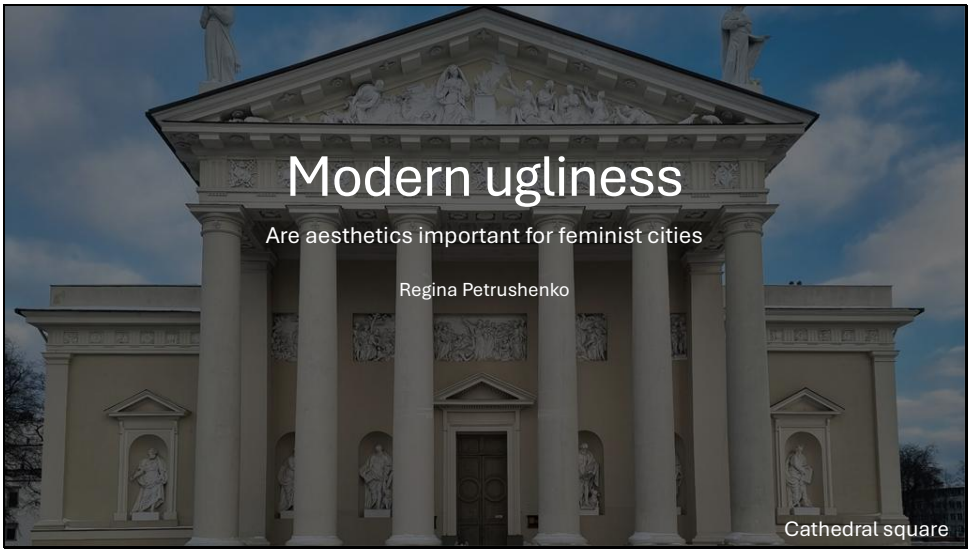
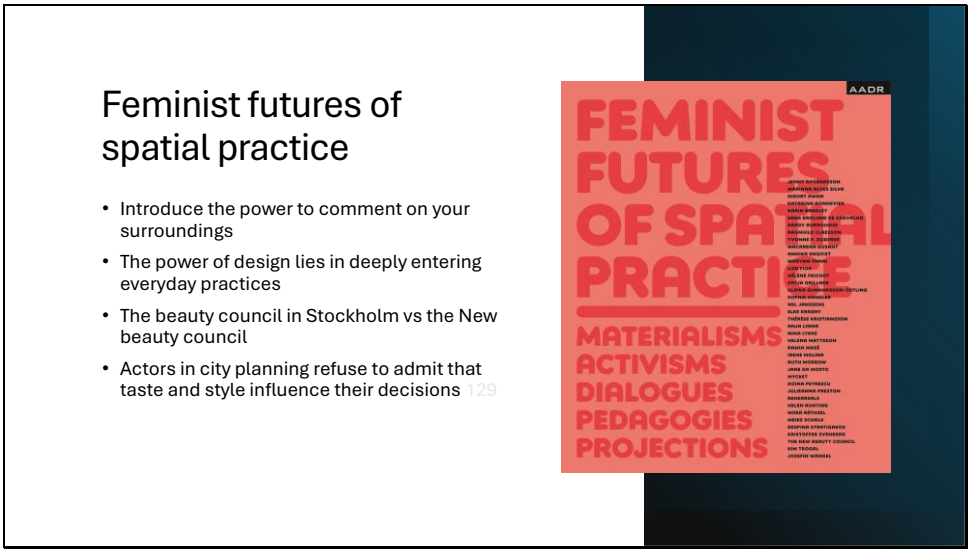


What is the role of aesthetics in feminist city planning? This is the question that I entered the conference with, and tried to answer through the discussion following my presentation. I was sure that questions about practicality were going to be addressed by other presenters, so I wanted to talk about something that is rarely discussed, in my experience, in feminist city planning. As a gender scholar, I really missed talking about how our environment *looks* and make us *feel*.

I began my presentation by introducing myself and how I became interested in architecture at all; when studying in Swedish universities, I noticed how the lack of sound proofing affected my ability to study, as my neurodivergency makes me sensitive to loud sounds. When sitting in the lecture hall, I could simultaneously hear several floors' worth of students talking, walking around and zipping their bags. That made me notice how I felt every time I entered a building; relaxed and focused, or tense and unable to focus?

My interest in architecture continued with a very eye-opening lecture by Swedish researcher, architect and urban planner Alazar Ejigu, who talked about city planning that is diversity sensitive, and also urban safety. How do women feel when walking in the city? I started to notice how the buildings had an effect on my well-being, and that feeling comfortable is not just a question of "personal confidence", but it's a result of city design and real choices made by decision-makers.



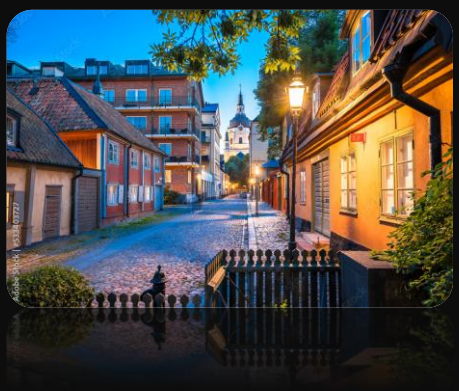
Being originally from Sweden, I also had one other influence that shaped my discussion topic; Architects' revolt (Arkitektupproret). They are an activist organisation that focuses on protesting against the modern, soulless, brutalist architecture that new buildings are built in. Instead, they want to reintroduce beauty and aesthetics into the cities of Sweden, using classical architecture but with modern elements.

So why is beauty important when talking about feminist urban planning? Why can't we just build functional square buildings in grey or black and just ensure there is space for strollers and enough female public bathrooms? It's because a feminist city, in my opinion, needs to provide more than just survival. The city needs to encourage connection between people, for example so that it's enjoyable to hang out outside. It needs to inspire pride to belong to a city, and be welcoming to different ages, not just the working age where people can afford to visit beautiful places, but also teenagers and pensioners can visit them for free, outside. There is also a question of class, where only people of a certain class can afford to live in a beautiful place, usually it's city centre. The suburbs ("sleeping regions") are too often build out of grey concrete, and there is a visual reminder of where the city wants to put effort, versus where there is no effort.

City aesthetics are a question of intersectional feminism where class and age are important, as well as gender. A feminist city is safe for its inhabitants, especially if they go by foot or with bicycle, so ugly multiple car lanes don't really have a place in an aesthetically pleasing, welcoming city.

A feminist city is human-friendly

- Forgotten perspectives such as age and class
- Friendly to eyes and senses
- Supporting connection
- Pride
- Combining tradition and future
- Safety



And lastly, what I wanted to talk about was how cities don't need to try and get back to the "good old days". Instead, the ideal is to combine tradition and futurism, for example modern comforts but with classical aesthetics. Why not create an aesthetic of its own?

The discussion following my presentation was interesting and full of opinions, and interestingly, some of the participants could relate to getting stressed and tired by loud sounds, but not identifying the reason until now. If there is one thing I want to leave with the reader, it's that the city is not designed by an objective force of nature, but every decision is made by someone with a bias, and an idea of how the city "should" look, and that these decision-makers are often men with limited understanding of moving through the streets as a woman. So dare to have opinions!

Swedish protests against ugliness

- Arkitektupproret tarted as a Facebook community to share pictures of ugly modernist OR narcissist housing
- Goal is to develop *new* progressive styles in the classical or local tradition, complete with modern amenities.

MONOTONY	HARMONY	CHAOS
NEO-MODERNISM	CLASSICAL TRADITION	DEKONSTRUCTIVISM
		
Residential building, Kalmar, Sweden, 2017	Administration building, Kazan, Russia, 2011	Office building, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2011
Anonymous standard building	Historically inspired creativity	Narcissistic "starchitecture"