

# **THE RIGHT TO BE WARM: EMERGING WINTER CITY DESIGN INITIATIVE'S IMPACT ON EQUITABLE PUBLIC SPACES**

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Master of Science  
in  
Urban & Regional Planning  
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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

A recent planning trend is designing cities for winter activation, which is framed as enjoying public space without attention to the inequities embedded in how we design and manage public space. Most of the new winter design guidelines only prioritize the experience of the public realm in the wintertime for those of a particular affluence and socioeconomic status. These frameworks are being adopted in winter cities across the globe, where cities and planners are trying to encourage people to get outside, have fun, and get more all-year activation.

New guidelines focus on aesthetics and enjoyment but lack a social context. Public spaces are used by vulnerable populations, where snow and cold temperatures create dangerous conditions which are being ignored in these new plans. The goal of my research is to understand what user groups are being considered when creating their policies and drafting new guidelines, and who might be left out in the cold.

Through a literature and policy review I analyzed how strategies are interacted with over the winter months. I also looked at journal articles and grey literature to compile a comprehensive

review of current planning practices for public spaces and social equity with a focus on urban design elements to enhance social inclusion.

As well, I conducted semi-structured interviews to understand the views of those involved in creating these winter design guidelines and documents and those affected by them. Speaking with planners, urban designers, architects, and subject matter experts helped me to shape the discourse around public space and winter activation and delve further into the discrepancies of these.

The research was approached through two perspectives: Ethics of Care and systems thinking frameworks. These provided the basis of the analysis which aims to bring dignity, kindness, and an interconnected approach to the findings. Findings are then discussed which point to the need for a greater emphasis on infrastructure that enables dignity and then move to be contextually sensitive like for winter conditions.

Finally, I call for further research into areas around the definition of 'community' itself to help further the understanding of who is considered to be important in public spaces. This research helps place social equity in the context of winter activation and designs to help urban planners gain new insights that the impacts of winter design guidelines have on vulnerable populations who are being left out in the cold.

## **KEYWORDS**

SOCIAL EQUITY    PUBLIC SPACES    URBAN DESIGN    WINTER CITIES    ACTIVATION