

האוניברסיטה העברית בירושלים  
THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM



The Federmann School of Public Policy and Government

**Gender-Derivative Differences in Perceptions of Significance**  
**A Case Study of Elected Officials of the Finance Committees**  
**In Israeli Local Authorities**

Master's Thesis

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**December 2018**

**Jerusalem**

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## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Anat Gofen, who exposed me to the fascinating world of gender and policy and have played a central role in my intellectual growth.

I would like to express my gratitude to my classmates from the Federmann School of Public Policy and Government for the moral and academic support throughout the years.

Finally, I would like to thank my mother, Stacey Tzur, for always making my education a priority. Lastly, I would like to thank my supportive and encouraging better-half, Gabriel Bendheim.

## **Abstract**

This study explores whether, to what extent and how female and male members of the Finance Committee in local authorities differ in their perceptions and prioritization of local public issues. This study also attempts to shed some light on the whereby female and male members of the Finance Committee in local authorities promote the public issues they deem important differently. The findings highlight the fact that women and men differ in their methods for promoting important public issues. The findings also present a few insights regarding the advancement of women's municipal needs in light of public issues that are given top priority in local authorities. The findings indicate that women and men promote subjects and projects in different ways and practices. Findings of this study also indicate that education is the issue that is top prioritized on both the moral and the practical level, equally by male and female serving in the local authority councils, thus challenges the common understanding of education as prioritized only by women. The findings lay extra stress on the cardinal importance of gender awareness and awareness of the municipal needs of women, due to the revealing of the fact that male electives are willing to actively promote women's municipal needs, unlike women electives that hesitate to promote feminine issues in fear of negative reputation. The conclusions of this study reveal a dissonance between the aspiration or the Israel regulator for equal representation in local councils and the purpose of the law for equal representation, and the tension or discrepancy that exists between an awareness of municipal needs of women vis-à-vis the promotion of these needs.

## Introduction

Gender has been studied for decades around the world and has become a major issue in research. One of the most burgeoning issues examined in the gender perspective is the difference between male and female public servants and the promotion of the municipal needs of women, both at the local and national level. Moreover, this issue has not been limited to the purely academic or scholarly purview but has rather become the province of governments, in western democracies, as reflected in taking active measures to promote representation and opportunity equality between men and women in the local government system. The consciousness and actions of elected officials regarding the municipal needs of women and the influence of gender on ascribing importance to public issues, have been gaining ground while attracting scholarly and government attention, and underlie the current study.

The decisions of local governments have a direct impact on the private lives of women (Stokes, 2005). The present study seeks to delve into the important question of the impact of gender identity on the public issues that get precedence at the municipal level, focusing on furthering women's municipal needs. The questions that guide this study is what are the considerations that underlie the perception of a local issue as important among women and men who serve on the Finance Committees of local authorities. A derivative of the question is what public issue or project the women and men who serve on the Finance Committees of local authorities perceive as important or less important.

The findings of this study reveal that both women and men serving in the local authority council perceive education as the most important local issue. This finding is in contrast with the current literature that states the education is a public issue promoted exclusively by women. another significant finding is that women proclaim to use aggressive practices when promoting important public issues while men state they use a diplomatic approach in promoting. Women have testified to use practices such as the rhetoric of shouting and threats, protests and goading residents into uproars and clamorous acts of resistance of all sorts. This finding echo Rebecca Traister's (2018) *Good and Mad: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Anger* examines the gender related circumstances in contemporary American politics. Treister argues that men and women in the United States are in conflict and that women are going to succeed only if they prevail over men and dominate key positions, mostly political ones that allow for moral

superiority. According to Treister, female rage directed to these issues can turn women's movements from movements with revolutionary potential into a movement that can make a real difference in the distribution of power.

Beyond the attempt to expand the field of knowledge, the research ventures to draft the existing dissonance among elected officials and public figures in local government, mainly between the declaratory level of gender-awareness (as reflected in the interviewees statements) versus the practical level of willingness to promote women's municipal needs. Motivated by this intriguing point, this study delineates conflicting realities: male council members who lack gender awareness and understanding of women's municipal needs that testify to the advancement of women's needs vis-à-vis female council members who assert themselves as feminists, but these soi-disant feminists refrain from promoting women's specific municipal needs.

It is interesting to note that even during the current period, when the public discourse reflects the perception that the awareness of women's needs and gender budgeting at the level of central government is high, women who serve in the local government still find it difficult to represent women's needs in various aspects, from the declaratory level to the promotion of action items. The desire for gender equality in Israel has been well reflected in the amendment to the Local Authorities (Election Financing) Law, 5753-1993. Section 7 (a) (3)<sup>1</sup> stipulates that a party group, faction or list whose female members constitute at least one third of the council members who are elected and appointed to the city council receives 115% of government funding. One of the most recent references to the subject was published in the local media in southern Israel during the last municipal elections. At a conference held by the *Local Coalition 2018*<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Mazal Shaul, CEO of *We Power*, said “The underrepresentation of women, who make up more than half the country's citizens, is particularly prominent in the local authorities in Israel, where we have the highest influence on our lives. The fact that there is so little representation of women in senior positions on boards of directors of local authorities and that

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mevaker.gov.il/he/Laws/DocLib/LAW-Rashuyot-Mekomiyot-1993.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> "Local Coalition 2018" is an ad hoc coalition initiated and led by the *Women's Power Association* in cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Dafna Foundation, which unites 29 women's organizations and works to promote women around the decision-making tables in order to reduce gender disparities in local authorities.

the proportion of female council members is so small is inconceivable<sup>3</sup>". Dr. Shaul expresses the notion that an equal representation is a key to advancing the needs of women. However, the findings and conclusions of the present study point to significant conundrum regarding equal representation, one that is more commensurate with the proportion of women in the general population: the lack of awareness of the municipal needs of women will not be solved by achieving equal representation solely. The conclusions of this study indicate that the council members are successful in promoting local issues that correlate to their personal experience, for example children's education. Thus, there is a substantial need to raise awareness among elected male council members in Israel about gender-related municipal issues and needs for better municipal accommodation of these needs.

The theoretical background is presented below, followed by research method. The research findings are detailed thereafter in the subsequent section. The final section that follows winds up this study and is devoted to discussing the findings as well as possible policy implications.

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<sup>3</sup> Report from the Branz'a News of Beer Sheva and the Negev website, "Danilovitch: More Women on the Municipal List, "Danny Beller, Monday, July 30, 2018.

## **Theoretical Background**

The literature review seeks to examine the existing literature on gender differences in decision-making processes in terms of prioritization, preferences, sentiments and ways of conduct in the realm of local government. I start by examining the relationships among social structures that dictate gender identity. I then canvass how gender identity affects various aspects of policymaking: how it influences budget distribution and appropriate gender representation in the city hall, broaching also the connection between voters' preferences vis-à-vis those of representatives. I wrap up the literature review with an examination of the influence of female presence in public positions on the nature and form of government and legislation.

### **Gender Behavioral Differences**

Social norms influence all aspects of life, including governance and policy making. Furthermore, social norms are one of the strongest predecessors of gender behavioral differences (Booth & Nolen, 2012). In order to participate as an elected official in municipal councils, one must compete, in the form of election, to secure a position. An examination of the competitive behavior of girls who study in all-girls schools as opposed to girls who study in co-education schools revealed that girls in single-sex schools were as competitive as boys (Booth & Nolen, 2012). This conclusion reinforces the hypothesis that social norms are likely to make girls less competitive and not innate genetics, and that social learning gives rise to the difference between the sexes rather than gender traits. Social preferences in the form of altruism, inequality aversion, reciprocity and envy also affect the levels of competitiveness and risk assessment.

Additionally, women are more situationally specific than men regarding social preferences; they are neither more nor less socially oriented, but their social preferences are more flexible (Croson & Gneezy, 2009). Social norms influence mature women, making them more risk averse than men in most environments and tasks. Furthermore, women are more averse to competition than men. In relation to this study, competitiveness is a significant trait a council member must possess, both in the political aspect and the practical aspect.

## The Relationship between Gender and Different Facets of Policymaking:

### Gender and Finance

This study aims to shed some light on the influence gender has on perceptions of importance regarding local issues, by examining the Finance Committee members. Gender plays a critical role when it comes to public finances and social preferences. Gender is also significantly related to asset allocation (Sunden & Surette, 1998). Yet, there may well be some cultural biases in addition to social norms and social preferences causing gender differences in fiscal risk taking. An investigation of the allocation of defined contribution plan assets found that single women were less prone to take fiscal risks than single men. Similarly, married women also invested less in common stock than married men (Bajtelsmit & VanDerhei, 1997). Hinz et al. (1997) found that women invested their pension assets more conservatively than men, and that a large percentage of women opted for the minimum-risk portfolio when choosing how to invest. In terms of corruption and irregularities at the local level, Brollo and Troiano (2016) found that female mayors were less likely to engage in administrative irregularities. According to their research, the probability of observing a corruption is 28-33 % lower in municipalities headed by female mayors compared with those led by men. Likewise, a laboratory experiment Dreber and Johannesson (2008) examined differences between female and male legislators and found that men were more likely to lie in order to gain financial benefits.

### Representation Quotas

It has been suggested by the Israeli legislator that higher representation of women in local and central governments improves the governance-related representation of women (as manifested by the amendment to the election laws). Correspondingly, the existing literature suggests that leaders are inclined to invest more in infrastructure that is directly relevant to the needs of their own genders (Chattopadhyay & Duflo 2004). Another two studies examining the impact of representation quotas found that increasing the number of women legislators and the representation of women in decision making capacities, positively affected the investment in infrastructure relevant to women's needs. This implies that the lack of female representation or small representation of women affects the promotion of certain public projects or subjects that answer specific criteria. Svaleryd (2009), for instance, examined whether the degree of



representation of women in the Swedish local councils affected the patterns of local public expenditure. One of his conclusions was that women should be represented in the various policy mechanisms in order for their views to be taken into consideration. However, this conclusion was based on the assumption that politicians and voters have the same preferences, which called his advice into question.

### Gender-Related Preferences

The decisions of local governments have a direct impact on the private lives of women, due to the influence the local governments have on daily-life alongside the fact that women are traditionally responsible for caring and maintaining the domestic households in most countries (Stokes, 2005). It is therefore not a wonder that there exists ample field evidence in the literature demonstrating that women exhibit higher levels of altruism and stronger preferences for redistribution. These findings suggest a more economic, rather than pure psychological, explanation for women being more left-leaning. Women may prefer more redistributive policies because they are more likely to be the beneficiaries of those policies due to their disadvantaged socioeconomic status and average earnings that tend to be lower than those of men (Marianne, 2011).

As this study attempts to portray the local issues that the Finance committee members in local authorities find most significant, the existing literature states that men and women differ with respect to the issues that interest them. Women are more interested in domestic political issues such as education, health, law and order than their male counterparts are (Campbell & Winters, 2008). Along similar lines it has been found that women are more concerned about the quality of housing, the appearance of cities, violence against women and health, and are more likely to favor government being actively involved in achieving a good work-family life balance (Campa, 2011).

The current wisdom also reveals how women prefer higher spending on all three welfare services than men do (Ågren, Dahlberg & Mörk, 2007). Also, highly educated individuals prefer more spending on schooling, but less on childcare and social care, whereas married individuals prefer a higher level of spending on both schooling and childcare (Ågren, Dahlberg & Mörk, 2007). In the same vein, education is more important for women in urban

areas, because return on education is higher there, as can be approximated by the wage differential between educated and uneducated women in those areas (Clots-Figuerasa, 2012). Under that rubric, the process of prioritization among elected officials is paramount.

#### Voters' Preferences versus those of Representatives

Passive representation, sometimes called descriptive representation, has to do with the bureaucracy having the same demographic origins (gender, race, income, class, religion, etc.) as the population it serves (Mosher 1982). Active representation, in contrast, is defined as bureaucrats using their discretion to advocate the interest of their constituents and eliminate discrimination that has an impact on one group or another among the agency's clientele (ibid). Already in those mere definitions is implicit the notion whereby passive representation does not always lead to active representation, otherwise there would have been no need for two separate definitions. Stated differently, be them elected or appointed, public officials do not necessarily share the same preferences and hence the discrepancy: passive representation is by no means to be equated with active representation, although there are cases where passive representation was found to be synonymous with active representation.

Wilkins and Keiser (2004), for instance, discovered that passive representation led to active representation in child support-enforcement bureaucracies for women, which supported their hypothesis that passive representation led to active representation for women in gendered policy areas. They nonetheless qualified their conclusion by claiming that the link between passive and active representation only existed when the distributional consequences of the policy directly benefited women as a class (ibid).

In the same vein, Schwindt-Bayer (2007) found in a study of women's policy mechanisms that women successfully translated the high priority they placed on "feminine" issues into policy. Furthermore, it is more likely that female legislators would promote legislation on gender equality, children, family and welfare than male legislators. Holman (2003) studied local government in the United States and found that a city's leadership has a large and positive impact on the city's chances of funding social welfare programs. According to Holman, high levels of female representation in city councils along with the presence of a woman mayor significantly increases the resources invested in welfare and the size of welfare programs in that city. Brollo and Troiano (2016) found that having a female mayor led to better

health outcomes related to parental care delivery. Ågren et al. (2007), who examined the relationship between citizens' preferences vis-à-vis those of elected officials, demonstrated that voters and politicians had significantly different preferences when it came to local welfare services, which suggested that voters did not necessarily vote for candidates whose preferences were identical to theirs.

The empirical analysis of the findings showed that when a politician of a certain age, gender, education level, and marital status was compared with a voter with the same characteristics, the politician opted for a higher level of expenditure on services provided locally, which indicated that active representation of different groups did not always lead to greater representation of the agendas of these groups, i.e. active representation. However, further research on the relationship between passive and active representation offers another explanation. Reingold (2008) found that when women constituted a small minority among council members (about 15% or less) the pressures to conform to male norms were considerable. It follows that transforming politics by women to politics for women is expected to occur in cases where women are represented in the amount of "critical mass", namely, when women constitute at least a significant minority (20-30%) of the legislators.

### Gender Mainstreaming

Gender Mainstreaming is a globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality. Mainstreaming is not an end in and of itself but rather a strategy, an approach, a means to achieve the goal of gender equality. Mainstreaming involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities - policy development, research, advocacy, legislation, resource allocation, planning, implementation and monitoring of programs and projects<sup>4</sup>.

As a practice, gender mainstreaming is a process meant to promote gender equality. It is also intended to improve the effectiveness of mainline policies by making visible the gendered nature of assumptions, processes, and outcomes. As a form of theory, gender mainstreaming is a process whereby key concepts are revised in an attempt to grasp more adequately a world that is gendered, rather than establish a separatist gender theory (Walby,

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<sup>4</sup> U.N, Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women rev. August 2001, GENDER MAINSTREAMING: STRATEGY FOR PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY,

2005). Walby pointed out a few major issues in the analysis of gender mainstreaming, one of which was the relationship of gender mainstreaming with other complex inequalities, especially those associated with ethnicity and class, not to mention disability, faith, sexual orientation, and age. An open-ended survey from municipalities in the U.S. found that gender consciousness had a significant effect on both policy priorities and policymaking: those with gender consciousness were more likely to value and work on issues that had to do with education, affordable housing, and welfare, and were less likely to value economic development policies (Holman, 2010).

### Gender legislation

Past studies in countries where women have achieved comparatively high levels of representation report that women legislators place a higher legislative priority on issues concerning women's rights, as well as children and families. This insight links directly with this current study, in its attempt to portray the correlation between the representation on women's municipal needs and prioritizing of local issues by council members. The current wisdom also depicts that women are also more engaged in debates over bills involving women's rights and issues related to women and families as opposed to bills that have to do with issues that have traditionally concerned men (Taylor-Robinson, & Heath, 2003). Furthermore, women are more likely than men to introduce bills to reduce gender discrimination and to sponsor bills related to education, health care, issues pertaining to children, and welfare policy (Bratton & Haynie, 1999). Thomas (1994) also found that women legislators placed high priorities on policies that were associated with women, family, and children, whereas male legislators focused on business and economic legislation

### The Influence of Women Politicians

Researches have been attempting to unveil the sort of influence women have on the political arena. This study will attempt to assist with the depiction of this unique influence, by investigating into the influence of women in the Israeli local government. One of the most common evidence in this regard is that when women undergo evaluation for positions traditionally or predominantly held by men, there tends to be negative bias against them, by both men and women (Isaac, Lee and Carnes, 2009).

Having said that, a study monitoring the female candidates' agenda in the election for the Senate in 2012 in the U.S., revealed that the female candidates did not follow through with the campaign's commitments. Although they had spent much of their campaigns pushing a platform that was focused on women's issues such as education funding, health care subsidies, or equal pay legislation, once elected, they did not initiate as much legislation as one would have expected to match their promises and platform (Schilling, 2013). This exhibit can possibly indicate that a higher percentage of women representation in politics does not necessarily mean substantive representation, a notion that tallies with the findings of the literature revolving around passive versus active representation.

Having said that, most of the current literature does suggest that women politicians positively affect the legislation that touches on education policy. In India a study found that increasing female political representation by 10 percentage points increased the probability that an individual attained primary education in urban areas by 6 percentage points (Clots-Figuerasa, 2012). The same study also found positive correlation between the percentage of female politicians and the educational achievements of those of their gender and caste in urban areas and that female politicians cared about the needs of women. Furthermore, higher proportions of female educators (teachers, math teachers, and superintendents) in Texas school districts were associated with higher math achievement scores among female students (Keiser et al. 2000). Considering that education is more important for women in urban areas, due to the fact that returns to education (as can be approximated by the wage differential between educated and uneducated women in those areas) are higher there, that correlation is even more momentous (Clots-Figuerasa, 2012).

Another interesting evidence in the existing literature is that although women legislators tend to be younger and better educated, they paradoxically see themselves as having less influence over county activities than their male counterparts (Navarro & Medir, 2015). Data from a survey conducted in Finland claimed that municipalities were forced to prioritize economic needs and to reject any additional initiatives such as potential 'women friendly' reforms if they involved extra costs (i.e. would have entailed extra budget or funds) or were not legislatively obligatory (Holli, 2011).

In conclusion, there is extensive literature that deals with gender differences between men and women, especially when it comes to the influence of gender on the performance of public servants in the domain of local government and politics in particular. The current wisdom probes the various facets of policy making: from appropriate representation to budgeting and choosing to further certain projects rather than others. It should be noted that local government in Israel is not identical to other forms of local government that are usually presented in the existing literature. Moreover, most of the studies that have focused on the specific case of local government in Israel do not deal with the decision-making process and/or the influence of gender on decision-making processes or the relationship/correlation (or lack thereof) between female representation in municipal councils, and especially in executive roles, and a battery of aspects that in essence compose public policy. In general, little of the existing literature that centered on local government in Israel and scrutinized gender differences that affected public servants dealt with dilemmas of importance and practice in promoting important issues. Moreover, no research was conducted on the members of the council who serve on the local government Finance Committees. This group was also not examined with an emphasis on success stories, and thus far there has been no research in Israel that examined the authorities that succeed in promoting issues and projects that met the needs of women.

The research is guided by the following questions: **What are the issues and/or projects that the members of the Finance Committee in the local government perceive as important?** and also, **How do the members of the local government Finance Committees determine the importance of a project and/or a public issue?**

The overarching goal of this thesis is to understand the dilemmas that council members in local government face: How, in light of these quandaries, do they shape their opinion and preferences in terms of the importance they ascribe to a certain project or public issue and what is the mechanism whereby they decide to promote it (or not)? And also, what practices and strategies do council members employ to advance the important projects in their midst?

Following the literature review, the general research hypothesis is that men and women would perceive different subjects and projects as important, depending on their gender. Another hypothesis is that gender is a determining factor that affects the individual's

prioritization process when it comes to public projects and specifically women's municipal needs, and that gender also dictates the practice one chooses to deploy to promote public projects. The aim of this study is to deepen the understanding of the gender impact on the shaping of perceptions of the importance of public issues with regard to this distinct group of members of the local government Finance Committees. This theme was chosen with the motivation to increase the awareness and importance of the influence of gender on addressing the needs of women at the municipal level.

## Methods

### Selection of method

The study seeks to examine the process of formulating the degree of importance for public issues and projects, as performed by the members of the Finance Committee in local authorities. Therefore, the chosen method of study is the qualitative method, in light of three main motives (1990, בן יהושע צבר). The first motive is that qualitative research is a descriptive study, drawing its data from the researchers themselves. The qualitative method emphasizes the subject's subjective interpretation of the socio-political and cultural reality and attempts to understand the nature of the behavior of the subjects and the manner in which they interpret their decisions and behavior and thus qualitative method is most suitable for this study. The second motive is that unlike a quantitative method that examines the outcomes of a process, a qualitative method examines the process throughout its occurrence, i.e., the process that members of the Finance Committee undergo when they are required to prioritize local issues and projects. The third and last motive is that the qualitative research emphasizes the researcher's inter-personal skills, which are expressed in communication with the subjects. A study aiming to analyze the subjective interpretation of the subjects is done by means of the subtext emerging from the data and is based on the form and manner in which the researcher interprets the verbal and physical expressions of the subjects; These three motives brought me to choose the qualitative method and to believe that it is best suited for this research.

### Analysis procedure

An analysis of the findings was done using a Grounded Theory Method (Strauss and Glaser, 2009). As a researcher approached the field of study with somewhat of a direction of thought, after studying the existing literature on gender, and gender influence on the various aspects of governance, especially in the local government field. After collecting the data and analyzing it, I marked phrases and thoughts that I found significant. I divided the phrases into central themes. I then returned to the existing literature with the themes I have exposed and found validations to my findings as well as innovations that emerged from the analysis, which led to the fine-tuning of the literary review. At the end of this process, I had meta-themes and derivative themes. Through the arrangement of the themes, I attempted to assemble a story that



portrays the dilemmas and processes that the members of the local government's Finance Committees face in their attempt to determine the importance of a particular local issue and promote the issues they deem important.

### The study population and participants

The focus of the Finance Committee was chosen in view of the fact that the Finance Committee is a statutory committee whose members usually hold additional positions in the municipality. In other words, I opted for the group of the potentially most active interviewees by reason of their significant involvement in the activities of the council and the municipality.

The study examined the subjective perception of women and men who served as members of the Local Government Council, especially those serving on the Finance Committees, about the process of determining the importance of a project or a public issue, and the process of prioritizing projects and public issues. In order to minimize the heterogeneity of the study group, I attempted to enlist men and women from different local authorities for the study in an attempt to represent wide geographical distribution as much as possible. The participants of the study are 10 men and 10 women, all of whom were council members at the time of the interview, as well as serving as members of the Finance Committee in their respective municipalities at some point in time: 17 were still active members, whereas 3 female interviewees were past members. One of the past members has been elected to the Israeli legislature and is now a Knesset member, one was on maternity leave at the time of the interview and the third left the position in her municipality in 2015. Interviewees were identified by official information presented in the websites of municipalities and in the public protocols. Interviewees were approached either by phone calls and email, or with the help of the network of classmates and colleagues.

### Data collection

Data was drawn from semi-structured interviews. In each interview the same questions were asked for both male and female interviewees. However, female interviewees were asked 3 additional questions. All interviewees were asked the following questions: Tell me about yourself and your background; Can you specify your duties in the Council; Did you want to be a member of the Finance Committee before being appointed; Can you tell me, from your

experience, about 3-4 topics or projects that you think were the most significant during your capacity; How do you decide which issue or project the council should approve; How do you prioritize issues and projects; Suppose you had an extra budget, which you can invest without any opposition from any party, what would you invested in and why; Could you share with me which project or topic you objected to and why; Can you mention one project that the Finance Committee approved or promoted and which you did not consider important and why; What makes a project or an issue important; Can you specify an important project that you or another council member promoted; Did your priorities change after you entered the Finance Committee, If so, why; From your professional and personal experience, do you think that different groups in the authority have different needs or preferences; Do you think you can represent the needs of groups you do not belong to; How do you examine a topic that comes up and how do you determine the importance of a project; what advice can you give to a new council member on how to determine the importance of a particular subject; Can you share your general insights on how to promote important issues.

Only female interviewees were asked the following questions: In your opinion, would I have received similar answers from male members of the Council to these questions; If the answers of men were indicated different, in what sense are they different; Do you think that the fact that you are a woman changes the way you behave as an elected public servant.

Twelve of the interviews were face to face, some in the interviewees' offices, some in their homes and some in public places (e.g. coffee shops). Eight were conducted over the phone, depending on the interviewees' convenience, schedule and abilities. Each interviewee received an explanatory email prior to the interview and signed a letter of consent for participating in the research (those who interviewed over the phone signed the letter digitally). The consent form for participation in the study was presented and signed at the beginning of each interview, whereas in some cases, especially when the interview was conducted by phone, the form was signed electronically and sent via email. The length of the interview had been set for an hour, but respondents often reported that their time shrunk. However, almost every interview took an hour or so.

### The recruitment strategy of the interviewees

At the outset, I chose the strategy of contacting all members of the Finance Committees of the local authorities in Israel. The information was available on the authorities' website, and so were the contact details of council members. Later on, after struggling to find suitable interviewees, I chose to work through a network of my classmates and colleagues who have been working in the various local authorities, as well as recruiting women interviewees through the interviewees themselves in the course of the interview.

### Conducting the interviews

The direct contact with the interviewees had been created by means of a telephone call followed by an email to which a letter of invitation to participate in the study was attached. The interviewees gave their informed consent to take part in the study and interview for it, and often referred the actual interview to administrative staff to assist with coordinating the interview. Since council members usually are extremely busy (most perform their duties voluntarily in addition to their careers), the interview was sometimes set a few weeks ahead and sometimes scheduled immediately, depending on the interviewee's workload. Several times interviews were postponed on short notice to another time, due to some urgent cases that arose in their work, something which had usually to do with an election campaign.

### Limitations of the Study

The study had several limitations. First, the recruitment of interviewees was the most challenging stage of the research. At the outset, I chose the modus operandi of contacting all members of the Finance Committees of the local authorities in Israel. The information was available on the authorities' website, and so were the contact details of council members, therefore I did not find it difficult to contact potential interviewees. However, given that the stage of collecting the findings was carried out during an election year, many respondents voiced their concern that I wanted to conduct the interview for reasons of "espionage" or disclose their interview to the press or their political adversaries. My request to hold the interview was also denied due to lack of time, and some interviewees expressed their reservations about holding an hour-long interview, which they perceived as too long a time to devote to an interview of this kind. Later on, after struggling to find suitable interviewees, I

chose to work through a network of my classmates and colleagues who have been working in the various local authorities, as well as recruiting women interviewees through the interviewees themselves in the course of the interview.

Due to the small size of the group of women members of the local government finance committees to begin with, I resorted to my personal network of acquaintances and managed eventually to gather a non-random research group (Erickson, 1979). However, it was not possible to sample the population differently.

Another limitation was the fact that I had to recruit participants during an election year – a grueling mission that proved difficult to carry out. This fact could have influenced what was said during the interview, partly because some interviewees feared that their statements would be published. They were also apprehensive lest I would not deem them worthy of election. However, their stories were very significant to the study, revealing much about how respondents chose to describe their perceptions of their importance to potential voters and their constituencies. Another limitation has to do with the fact that in some cases there was a substantial gap between the subjective feelings of the interviewee vis-à-vis his or her environment (as expressed in the media and by other interviewees).

Due to the nature of the demanding role they held, interviewees were often interrupted during the interviews by either urgent phone calls or text messages etc. Colleagues and residents also interfered with the interviews, bringing issues to the attention of the councilors while bringing forth their complaints and requests.

## Results

This chapter presents the interviews analysis and significant findings. The text in this section is presented in three main forms: underlined, bold and italic. There is a significance to the different forms of presentation: the underlined text stands for themes; The bold text stands for significant findings and italics stands for evidence. The themes are divided into two main section. The first section presents the findings point to the similarity between the subjective feelings of female and male council members. The following second section presents the findings that indicate the differences between the subjective feelings of female and male council members.

### Section I: Similarities Between the Subjective Feelings of Female and Male Council Members

#### 1. Council members Identify that different population groups have different needs and preferences

All interviewees in the study agreed with the statement that **different population groups have different needs and preferences**. However, no male interviewee identified women as a unique population group if not specifically asked in comparison with two women that did not identify women as a unique population group. interviewees that did not mention women as a unique population group were asked: “do you think that women have different needs than men?”. To that question seven men replied that **women do have unique needs as a population group**. One male interviewee nonetheless qualified his negative answer of “no” by saying “*wait a moment, women men I do not see but it may well be that there are issues that I simply do not experience myself.*” Other man answered that in his opinion, there is no difference between the needs of men versus those of women. Two female interviewees said there is no difference between men and women in terms of their needs, whereas other eight female interviewees replied that women do have unique needs different than those of men. This finding indicated that both men and women do not automatically identify women as a distinct population group with its own needs and preferences, but when compared to men as a population group, both men and women recognize that women and men do have different needs and preferences.

2. Female presence in executive and public positions increases public awareness of women's needs. Accordingly, Wide feminine representation in the local authority is perceived as indicative of the level of its gender awareness

Both men and women mentioned the issue of feminine presence and representation in key and executive roles in the local authority when questioned about women's needs. All interviewees argued that feminine presence in executive and representative roles attests to the level of awareness and satisfaction of women's needs when it comes to that specific local authority. Participant P describes the influence of women as counterbalancing the male characteristics of the actions taken by the financial committee in the local authority: *"I can tell you why I do not feel it is a masculine committee: all female councilors are included in it."* When asked about projects that further the needs of women, most interviewees (men and women alike) referred to women that hold different position in the local authority: *"we must not forget that we have five female councilors; we have fairly good representation of women councilors in the city council."*

Participant E credited his **enhanced ability to meet women's needs to the high percentage of women that hold different positions in his local authority**: *"we (the men) also have awareness but it helps that they (women) do (serve in different roles in the authority), not to mention that they hold some statutory roles, in our municipality 70% of the public servants are women. We have a female legal advisor, our city engineer is a woman, the head of our municipal Education Department is a woman, the head of the Welfare Department is a women. Most key positions are held by women."*

3. Council members regard the mayor as the final arbiter that has complete control over all decisions taken at the local authority

When asked how it is possible to promote projects or public issues, all interviewees chose to mention the power of the mayor. In that regard, both men and women perceived the meaning of the mayoral role in an identical manner. Participant A delineated the complete control of the mayor when it comes to the decisions taken at the local authority: *"as the final arbiter, the mayor is in charge, which is excellent when the mayor is a good, otherwise we're screwed."* Participant B referred to the **disparity between the power of the mayor vis-à-vis that of the councilors**: *"he (the councilor) has to persuade the mayor. The power to make decisions lies with him."*

Participant D spoke about the division of labor and roles within the local authority: *“at the end of the day, the mayor and the ones with whom he works closely on a regular basis do all the work.”* Participant Y referred to the metaphorical sphere where cardinal decisions are taken: *“the real decisions are taken in the mayor’s room.”* Participant P described how she perceived the role of the mayor as being disproportionately powerful: *“the local authority is a legal dictatorship.”* Participant R also mentioned the division of power within the local authority: *“power is willy-nilly vested primarily in the mayor: his power is unlimited, and is much more than that of a Knesset member or even a minister.”*

4. Council members recommend to focus and to learn deeply to be able to promote issues or projects

In that respect all interviewees, men and women alike, when asked “what would you advise a new council member that wishes to advance an issue or project?” recommended that councilors should choose the subjects that are of the utmost significance to them and focus solely on them. All participants testified that it is impossible to make an impact on all the issues with which the local authority deals mainly due to the amount of knowledge one needs to master if he/she wants to get a handle on all subjects. Councilors need to delve deeply into the issues they want to influence, including investigating the salient stakeholders germane to the policy (area) as well as its “politics.” All interviewees said it is a protracted learning process. Put differently, all interviewees submitted that one need to undergo a process of professionalization in a limited number of subjects. Participant B describes his approach: *“a councilor needs choose three or four topics that he deems the most important to him, assuming they have some budgetary significance.”*

Participant E also expressed a similar attitude: *“I suggest that the male councilor or female councilor determine for themselves what are the two or three goals that are the most important to them”*. Participant D portrayed the long process that came after choosing the issues: *“after you declare what is it which you wish to learn and focus on, you frequent committees, you go here..., called there..., to the committee of the legal counselor, the HR manager in charge of terms of employment and so forth, and you talk to them slowly until you figure out yourself what it is you want and what you do not want.”*

5. Relationships with professionals are essential to due and efficient management of the local authority

All interviewees, men and women alike, stated that professionals are crucial when it comes to the management of the local authority as well as decision-making processes and prioritization therein. Both men and women indicated that when professionals are mistrusted and there is doubt regarding their level of professionalism and objectivity, it makes it difficult to make decisions and prioritize topics. Participant B depicted **the role of the professional team in the local authority as dictating the course of action in a certain issue**: “*the city receives complaints, isn't it? The professional team renders its recommendations; it recommends starting at a certain point.*” Participant E stresses **the limits of his own knowledge vis-à-vis that of the professionals**: “*I am hardly an education professional, I am not a pedagogue, I do not purport to be one; I have the professional cadre for that.*” P delineated the **advantages of accepting information from the professional cadre**: “*the possibility to sit and get objective information from professional rather than from politicians that sit around the table.*”

6. Education is the project of the utmost importance

All interviewees (men and women) opined that education is the most important issue. Most interviewees (men and women) declared specifically that education was the most important topic in their opinion when questioned “what is the most important subject the Finance Committee approved during your capacity?” and/or “if you had additional budget you could spend on any issue without resistance, in which issue would you invest?” Participant M described the significance of education in his view: “*I have always thought, and I will probably always believe that education is paramount.*” Participant E related to projects in education along similar lines: “*education is always the most important thing.*” All interviewees were queried about the importance of education, but they were not asked about the size or portion of the budget allotted for that purpose. However, interviewees that were questioned about the importance of education in the local authority maintained that **the importance of education is evident in that most of the budget of the local authority goes to education**, in addition to the allocation from the central government. Participant E refers to the degree of importance of



education in the local authority by emphasizing the budgetary percentage that is spent on education: “ (*education is the area*) that gets almost 40% of the budget.” Participant S also stresses that education is of great significance in her local authority, a fact which is apparent in the budgetary allocation: “*education gets the largest portion of the local authority’s budget, about a third of the city’s budget goes to education.*” Participant B also mentioned the size of the budgetary portion allocated to education as attesting to the importance of education in the local authority: “*40% of our budget goes to education, by the way.*”

#### 7. Public involvement in education as a springboard to being elected to the city council

Involvement in education had served as a springboard for candidates, who were later on elected to the city council. Participant M described the topic of education as reverberating throughout the election (to the local authorities) period: “*during the elections, there is not even a single candidate that will not explain that education is the most important thing and that we ought to invest in education.*” Most interviewees testified that they were elected to the city council following their public activities in the schools where they children study.

Participant R stated that heads of parents’ association are highly likely to be elected to the councils of local authorities: “*what did I do before? I was the head of the parent’s association. Truth be told, already in 2008 all sorts of parties courted me and attempted to recruit me to their ranks.*” Participant S describes similar feelings following her activity in the parent’s association: “*ten years of activity wherever possible paved my way to the city council as many parents across schools got to know me, and they approached me, I did not think about it at all, and told me that I must nominate myself to the city council, why should I not try when I had proved myself so much in my previous roles and duties.*”

Participant M recounted how the first thing that had occupied his attention when he moved to the local authority where he was (currently) living was to take care of the education of his children: “*I was drawn into public activity here, first at the personal level of providing for my children, you know, whether it was a kindergarten or school, together with my wife and a few more friends we have set up a school combining religious (Zionists) and secular pupils. That introduced me into some sort of municipal work.*”

8. Education is the issue where one can wield the greatest influence and make a real difference

As mentioned afore, most interviewees headed municipal education committees. Participant E described why he was determined to lead the education committee in the local authority: *“in the end you say to yourself that education is the biggest (topic), and I can really make a difference there.”* That is, Participant E chose to preside over a committee where he had the greatest ability to exert his influence. Participant B also delineated how popular is education committee in the local authority and everybody wants to participate and occupy one of its seats: *“in order to hold a seat in the committee you need to put up a fight. I required membership in the committee, it was very important for me.”*

Participant S, who had been chosen in the wake of her activity in the parents association and received the education portfolio in the local authority, described her motivation for work: *“what leads me is the vision of how I see [the name of the local authority].”* Participant M also mentioned the great ability to influence in the field of education; he described that ability as evident in the **manifold tools at his disposal as the one in charge of the education portfolio**: *“I can further a lot of things in the area of education, I have the budgets designated for that purpose and the work vis-à-vis other bodies and professionals to promote issues that are important to me.”*

9. Investment in pedagogy enables one to leave a personal mark

Interviewees stated that they would rather invest in the pedagogic aspect of education in their local authority. Most interviewees also mentioned that infrastructure (renovation of existent establishments and setting up new ones) is a pressing need, but one which *“there is no choice”* but to handle it. In terms of pedagogy, on the other hand, elected officials can integrate their own educational stance into the area of education in the local authority and leave their personal mark in a meaningful manner. Participant Y stated he would have chosen to invest in **developing emotional intelligence** *“in education, for instance, I would have introduced emotional sides of the...taking care of pupils. Not in mathematics, but in (spurring) the motivation to learn math.”*

Participant S said she would have wanted to invest in **updating the curricula**: *“pedagogic renewal befitting the twenty-first century.”* Participant S recounted how she

inaugurated and promoted a project in her local authority **to instill awareness of reducing dropout rates**: “(special) curricula and some sort of policy of zero dropout rates we put forth in the current office term.” Participant S portrayed yet another project – one that had to do with **gender awareness education**: “(we worked) to raise awareness of gender equality among teenagers, both in the regular education system and the informal education.”

#### 10. Investment in education is worthwhile owing to positive spillover

All interviewees, men and women alike, were questioned directly about the importance of projects in education, namely, why do they think that such projects are important. Participant A referred to the overarching reason to invest in projects in education: “*the education of future generations is the smartest investment, and one that pays off.*” Participant A also stated he would have chosen to allocate extra budget to education, because **education provides infrastructure for good citizenship**: “*when a child is educated he will look after the pavement later on. But if I build a pavement, and there is no education and so on, there will be vandalism, and everything we built will break down.*” Participant K also portrayed education as underlying good citizenship: “*we need to make people good. The rest will fall into place by itself.*”

Participant A ascribed more importance to education than to other issues because education yields quantifiable, measurable results: “*because it all comes down to education.*” She added: “*if we need to allot money to education, where we have grades and outcomes and...it is more important to me than developing the soul.*” Participant M set forth the utility that his local authority’s initiative to render education services to preschoolers, stating that **projects in education are conducive to many population groups**: “*when children are provided for in a framework where they enjoy guidance and supervision, it helps their parents, and it also helps to their grandmothers and grandfather that in many occasions reside here, in the city.*” Participant E referred to education as a tool to improve the security of women in the local authority “*it addressed the issue of a safe public space*” that is, **the education project lays the groundwork for fulfilling the needs of additional population groups**.

#### 11. Education is a public issue that transcends conflicts or gaps among populations with different needs and preferences

All interviewees (both men and women) attested to their willingness and desire to fund issues pertaining to education even when it is for a population group they neither represent nor

belong to and even resist, as opposed to other subjects like culture, business, infrastructure, etc., where the needs and preferences of different population groups collide and there is no desire to finance subjects that are not in line with the preferences of the interviewees. Participant A described her feelings when it came to **budgeting education of disparate educational streams**: *“I am all for regular Spartan education, but there are parents for whose children other educational frameworks are more suitable, I respect that and willing to accept it. It was also a collision for which we allocated budgets.”*

Participant Y expressed his feelings regarding the budgeting of schools that belong to different religious factions *“[one tends to think] that the Ultra-orthodox Jews receive much of the funding disproportionately. But, when you take a walk in the city you see them study in dilapidated caravans, where I would not put my child there no matter what, and I did need the club, so giving their some land on which they can build (was of the essence).”* As the **one holding the education portfolio in a heterogenic local authority, Participant S spoke about prioritizing education projects**: *“education projects, which I need, whose budgetary management I must lead, all sorts of things, I never look on the new one, secular, religious, new, old, I never factor such considerations in my decisions.”* Participant K described an **education project in which she would have chosen to invest additional funds**: *“(when it comes to) revamping schools, I do not care whether it is a religious school, if it is a state (Mamlachti) school or not, whether it is secular or Ultra-orthodox. I simply could not care less.”* Participant E stated his approach toward due management of the education portfolio: *“it is neither sectarian nor ethnic, neither of these things, if someone is keen on education, it interests him across the board.”*

## Section II: Differences Between the Subjective Feelings of Female and Male Council Members

### 12. Men and women identify the needs of women differently

All Male interviewees struggled to identify women’s municipal needs: four male interviewees did not agree with the statement that women have different municipal needs. Six male interviewees agreed with the statement. Out of the six, three male interviewees did not identify women’s municipal needs though they had maintained that women do have needs that are different from those of men. Other three male interviewees testified that their local

authority answers women's needs by rendering assistance and promoting educational projects for preschoolers and young children. When asked directly whether these projects fulfill women's municipal needs, the interviewees qualified their reply and added that such projects answered the needs of the population group that consisted of parents and not only the needs of women, i.e., the project satisfied women's needs by reason of their belonging to a larger group – that which comprised parents.

Participant E testified that he had previously attempted to advance a feminist budget review at his local authority - a project for which a female member of his municipal faction had requested his support – but he had failed to rally more municipal councilors to support the project. When asked why the project was unsuccessful, E said: *“because it is difficult. That is, the question is what exactly a feminine need is.”* That is to say, E was willing to further a project his fellow councilor found meaningful and important, but he could not himself describe why a feminist budget was so important or what feminine necessity it was supposed to serve. E described his thought process whenever he had to determine whether a project fulfills a feminine need or not: *“do women walk on foot more and then you need....maybe more trees in public places. We can both agree that it will be much more pleasant for you to walk under a shadow, so, is it just something for women or not?”* Three male interviewees, one of whom stated that women do not have needs that are different from those of men, **depicted women's needs as having to do mainly with culture and education**: *“women like it better to get themselves involved in projects of culture and education and so forth.”* B referred to the needs of women that belong to the population group to which he represented in his opinion: *“most cultural events that are meant for the Ultra-orthodox segment of the population, are actually geared toward Ultra-orthodox women”*. Participant A described a project at his local authority that in his view meet typical women's needs: *“a city club that belongs to the municipality.”* B maintained that he cannot identify a certain need as a typical feminine need, but he wanted to stress that the local authority does handle feminine matters: *“after all, they have established here a women's forum.”*

On the other hand, female interviewees were able to identify various municipal needs of women and in a more accurate and relatable manner than their male counterparts. Female interviewees who were asked to portray women's needs or projects that satisfy typical needs

of women described projects in various subjects: Participant S told how she promoted a project that fulfilled typical women's needs and had to do with zoning and planning of public domains: *“and mothers with children of different ages can come and spend time in a single garden where they can be with all three children in the same garden without having to drag themselves to other places. It made a lot of sense.”* Participant K also describes a welfare project for underprivileged women: *“I invested a lot in programs for single mothers by way of enrichment, education, training....empowerment.”* Participant S also recounted who she engaged herself in advancing projects for the sake of strengthening the safety of women in the public sphere: *“when we look upon the public sphere we want it to be accessible, pleasant and not secure, but safe for girls to hang out in it.”* Participant E also identified safety in the public domain as a typical feminine issue. When it comes to work and welfare, E stated that it was harder nowadays to make a distinction between those things that had been previously typically ascribed to women alone, whereas at this day and age, in the area of co-parenting, meet the needs of both sexes. Participant E asserted that her claims are based on a specific cultural context, but *“there are places where parenthood is still not shared and then you can say it is more suitable for women.”*

### 13. Men and women use different practices to garner the support of the mayor

All interviewees were asked how one can advance a project or public issue. In that respect, all interviewees, men and women alike, thought that backing from the mayor is critical to set the project in motion. Put differently, the support of the mayor must be mobilized to propel the project forward. Interviewees specified different practices to enlist the support of the mayor, but throughout the study two major practices stood out: one, recruiting mayoral support in a political manner and by means of rhetoric, negotiation, stubbornness and also enlisting the support of council members. Another practice was a bottom-up approach of working on the ground to appeal to citizens at the grass roots while raising the mayor's awareness of the need, end even elicit public outcry if necessary.

All interviewees were requested to describe success stories, subjects or projects that they had managed to carry through as councilors. Later on, the participants were specifically asked to address the success story and questioned how they had managed to advance the project they chose to set forth. **In that regard, women stated they had chosen an aggressive and**

**protestive approach, whereas men had chosen an approach of diplomacy persuasion.**

Participant B delineated how he had used his ability to convince while acting on a political level to mobilize the mayor's support: "*I worked very hard, persuading all Ultra-orthodox factions to agree and bringing them all on board, although at first this one had been not so keen, and that one had been rather reluctant; I managed nonetheless to convince everybody and we all reached out to the mayor.*" Participant A also depicted his ability to persuade both the council members and mayor to back a certain issue: "*in the majority of instances, I do manage to persuade them.*"

Participant R on the other hand recounted how she employed a bottom-up approach to enlist the mayor's support in order to have the budget of one of the projects she was trying to promote increased: "*the more they saw that are slogan "Toshavim" with double "Vs" (a pun connoting equal residents or residency) gains currency, it must be said for the mayor that he did approve of the increment.*" Participant R recited yet another one of the projects she furthered by evoking a protest from fellow citizens after she had failed to secure the mayor's support by means of a political mode: "*and indeed today a community center has been set up following a joint struggle with the residents, as the (efforts of) councilors were insufficient.*" Participant A described how she managed to thwart a project in the field of education to which she objected by mobilizing the residents to take a stand and speak out against it: "*and I was quite a big nag; since I was the head of the parent association I knew what was going on and I use to quarrel with the city hall and I also instigated a strike in school.*"

As mentioned before, both men and women suggested that **one would have to act with a certain degree of assertiveness in order to promote important topics and the personal agenda.** Differently stated, some muscle, not to say belligerence, is needed to enlist mayoral support, be it by means of a political practice or a bottom-up approach. In that sense, women differed considerably from men. When they were asked to describe the practices they had used to promote important issues, female interviewees admitted that they had behaved aggressively, whereas men did acknowledge that assertiveness and belligerence were needed to advance issues, but they failed to admit that they had behaved like that in practice. In other words, **men present aggressive behavior as external to themselves, suggesting that others conduct themselves like that, but not them.**

**All female interviewees portrayed themselves as aggressive and belligerent in the way they comport themselves as council members;** they said that such practices are learned in the course of working with men in the local authority, so they aligned themselves to their male counterparts, whereas men did not testify that they literally behaved like that themselves; i.e., although identifying aggressiveness in others, they failed to recognize their own behavior as aggressive. Participant B recounted how he acted on a political level to convince and rally support, but he would not have consented to triggering a protest: *“I wish to confront no one.”* Participant Q nonetheless describes how she managed to stymie a budgetary allocation of which she disapproved: *“I am the only one that yells and threatens; with my shouts I have managed to save the residents of XXX two million NIS (New Israeli Shekels).”* Participant A describes her sentiments along similar lines: *“without igniting a few bonfires you cannot achieve anything.”* Participant P delineated how her comportment changed throughout her incumbency as a councilor: *“at first I was rather quiet, expressing my opinions politely, but then I figured that if I do not threaten violence and shout like a beast the same way men do, no one will hear me.”* Participant A narrated how she managed to balk allocations of budget to which she objected: *“when I was in charge of the environmental protection portfolio I approached the former mayor whom I was not member of his municipal faction, and I saw that he was transferring my budgets from here to there; I presided at a very assertive meeting where I put an end to it.”* She added that *“in the end, power dictates the rhythm. Power. The more aggressive you get, the more you can (accomplish).”* In light of her own experience as well as conversations she had had with other women councilors, Participant S acknowledged that women altered their behavior in the council and adjusted themselves to the belligerent and aggressive discourse of men: *“I have already heard these women talking about who they embraced new patterns of behavior that had been previously uncharacteristic of them. I refer to patterns of behavior, I am not speaking at the moment about (ways of) thought.”* Participant A depicted the lesson she had learned during her tenure as a council member: *“I have learned that you cannot play ping pong in a tennis court”*, meaning that she had to learn to “play rough” like her male colleagues. Participant S described the change she has undergone as a woman in a (city) council consisting mainly of men: *“embracing different methods and means, you adapt yourself to working and coping with these 14 men, most of whom are chauvinists. The majority of them are chauvinists that are not at all aware of that...”*



14. Women prefer not to declare overtly that they try to promote women's preferences and needs so as not to be perceived negatively

As mentioned before, most female interviewees did identify that as a population group, women do have unique needs and preferences. All female interviewees were asked whether they feel that they represent women's needs better than men do: they expressed different attitudes in regard to the representation of women's needs. Five women stated explicitly that they **advance needs and preferences that are unique to women**. Participant S testified that she "*definitely leads and promotes the all issue of gender and women*" in her local authority, that is, she led to raise **gender awareness** rather than answering women's needs alone. Participant F depicted one of the goals she set out for herself as a council member in the following manner: "*to introduce the all thing of different needs, raise awareness that women and men have different needs even budget-wise.*" In other words, women's needs ought to have a pecuniary or fiscal expression.

Four female interviewees disagreed with the statement that they furthered needs that were unique to women because promoting women's needs was related to their own perception of parenthood (which they utterly equate with womanhood). It follows that when they promote needs associated with parenthood, they represent both men and women and advance the needs of men and women alike, which mean that **meeting the needs of parents is perceived as subsuming the fulfillment of women's needs**. As an example of a need that can be deemed a feminine need, Participant E explained that subsidizing summer day camp for children met the needs of parents and not only women: "*in that respect I reckon that if I make the summer day camps cheaper, I perceive it as serving both parents, who enjoy it equally.*"

When questioned about a project she promoted in the public sphere, Participant R explained why in her view women's needs are essentially parental needs that are unrelated to gender: "*it is true that most people benefiting from it are women...but it is not considered as something especially feminine.*" One interviewee objected to the statement that she represented women and advanced their needs, and she asked to make it clear that in her opinion, **gender identity has no bearing on municipal needs**.

As stated before, half the female interviews refrained from stating that they are proactive in promoting the unique needs and preferences of women. Participant S, who explicitly declared that she advances women's needs, expressed later on in the interview the reason why, in her opinion, she succeeded to promote those needs: "*I have never grown up as someone who needed assistance or empowerment and I have always been around boys, it may be because of that...you know, I was some sort of a tomboy, I played football with them, climb trees. I have always led the way and been a leader.*" Put differently, participant S attributes her **success in promoting projects, especially those that are related to women's needs, to the fact that she was raised in a masculine environment.**

15. Communication is key: women feel that their male colleagues "have it easier" and that it is difficult to communicate with them, and that men have very little patience for their female counterparts

Participant B, who identified herself as a feminist – one that promotes a feminist agenda, delineated the **difficulty to advance topics that lay outside her area of expertise.** She commented that in order to advance women's needs and preferences, one needed to understand the technical intricacies, which circumscribed her ability to lead and promote such subjects: "*as a feminist I really wanted to step into unfeminine areas, but I saw that I could not understand what was going on there.*" Participant S also described difficulties she experiences when she tried to engage herself in areas with which she was less familiar. She described her hardships when she had to impart messages that had to do with financial issues in light of miscommunication with the municipal treasurer: "*At the beginning of my term in office I used to talk to him and try in vein to explain, but he did not understand.*"

Participant K described an instance where she was silenced after she had asked a lot of questions during a deliberation in an attempt to gain deeper understanding of the subject: "*the mayor told me at that meeting that they (i.e., the people present) could no longer hear my squeaky voice.*" Participant B described a similar case, where she was not allowed to ask questions to get better insight into the issue brought up for discussion: "*and I saw how I, as well as other women councilors, other members, as soon as I or one of them had started to speak, the men started to show signs of impatience. They need to get down to brass tacks: they wanted the bottom line.*"

Participant B recited yet another difficulty when it came to advancing women's needs, one that had to do with **social expectation** and a desire to align themselves with the masculine group (i.e. of male councilors) to which they belong: "*when you are part of the coalition you are expected to be nice, and you have no desire to be all the time in (conflict)...you are after all in the coalition, which means that the majority (of people with whom you are supposed to work) are men.*" It follows that women who try to oppose an issue or a project within the group because they align themselves with the feminist cause and values, may be socially outcast, and hence **there is reticence from undermining the decisions of the group.**

16. Men testify that they promote issues and projects that satisfy women's municipal needs

Most male interviewees, those who declared they identified women as a distinct population group that had unique preferences and needs and those who did not, also testified that they advanced topics and projects that meet the women's municipal needs and preferences. The subjects that men portrayed as answering women's municipal needs had mainly to do with cultural events, sports, and commissioning committees that discussed feminine issues. Participant B described a project he established in his municipality, and that in his opinion was fulfilling women's municipal needs in his local authority: "*for instance, I am the president of an Arab women's club, a city club that belongs to the city hall and which I had initiated.*" Participant E described a project that in his view answered women's municipal needs and which he attempted to promote in his municipality: "*there was this one time when there was a will, thinking about trying to couch the budget in feminist terms.*" The project did not gain traction, because according to Participant E, no council member was able to figure out the contribution or importance of such a move."

Participant B explained why in his eyes there was no real need to further feminine topics in his local authority: "*I do not live in this world where I feel that we need to empower women somehow, I do not feel that...I do not live among deprived women.*" Three male interviewees stated that there was complete gender equality in their local authority and therefore there were no projects or issues geared toward women alone. Participant C, one of those three interviewees, explained why he thought that there was sheer gender equality in his relatively young local authority: "*[the name of the municipality] is one of the most balanced places. We had the opportunity to set up (everything) anew here.*" Stated differently,

Participant C stated that in his local authority – one that had not been established on erstwhile (outmoded) traditions but was rather set up at an advanced stage (or age) where gender awareness was high when it came to culture and norms, and thus it was easier to set up a gender-aware municipality from scratch than alter deep-seated conventions. The three foregoing interviewees also declared that they could identify women’s needs as being related to parenthood and education, but that those needs derived from their familial status and age rather than gender, that is – they were the needs of parents and not only women.

Participant N, one of the three interviewees mentioned above, elucidated why he believed that there was no need to address women’s needs but only those of parents, making a project in the field of education that was meant for assisting single-parent families his case in point: *“for every single mother there is also a single father. A woman usually divorces a man.”* Participant M also described an education project that in his opinion met women’s needs because it strengthened the group of parents in the city: *“when kids have a place that provides supervision and guidance, it helps their parents, and it helps their grandmother and grandfather as well.”*

17. Women perceive fairness, morality and societal contribution as values that guide their activity as council members

All female interviewees attested that they were upright and moral. Some saw it as the driving force behind their decisions, courses of action taken or refraining from doing something. Participant K described how she declined a post offered to her, because she felt her moral precepts prevented her from accepting the position. She described how her probity militated against her in the public sphere: *“I grew up in a home that adhered to moral principles, again I say that it may well be that it is not a good thing for a (future) politician to grow up in such a home.”* Participant R, that has also been in the public arena for many years and directed a workshop that prompted women to enter politics, stated that women shun entering into the public arena if they cannot do the job in the best way possible, especially when it comes to a public office that entails total commitment: *“I cannot and do not want to do something if I don’t do it right.”*

Participant B depicted similar sentiments she experienced when she wanted to be a member of a certain committee but had chosen not to as she felt that she was lacking in

professional knowledge, and her insufficient knowledge would prevent her from performing the role optimally: *“I really wanted to be...to contribute to other areas, but it was a pity to lose my professionalism where I can contribute more.”* Participant K described her feelings regarding what in her opinion was misconduct of committees in her local authority, and she stated it hobbled her ability to function as a council member in the best way possible: *“I feel as if I am a moron that serves as nothing but a wall flower in a committee that does not have so much as a protocol.”* Participant S portrayed her vision for the local authority where she was an incumbent, one that would be based on values, moral principles and uprightness: *“a steadfast city with proper management and a well-balanced budget.”* Participant R described the human fabric in the council where she officiated and referred to council members that were not upright enough to serve as council members: *“there are people I would not have chosen even for a building committee. They were elected somehow by means of politics.”* Participant S delineated the sacrifice she needed to make at times in terms of her values and morals in order to obtain the results she aimed for in the public arena: *“unfortunately I say. I do not like this. I miss a lot because of it on a personal level. But, you learn to deport yourselves differently.”* Participant S described a deliberation session in which women from different local authorities shared their difficulties in their conduct with their male counterparts. She underlined the importance of female councilors taking part in such a discussion: *“they need to understand that they are not alone, and that others also experience similar difficulties in their respective councils.”*

Participant E recounted her experience from speaking in a public event where she was the only woman that was supposed to give a speech. As much as she was concerned, the fact that there was inadequate female representation at the event, a fact that she considered unfair and immoral, did not bother her male colleagues: *“I said to myself that only I noticed that I was the only woman, and it did not bother anyone of the organizers of the event? Yes, it did not bother anyone apparently.”*

18. “Simply by being a woman” – women do acknowledge that they bring something different to the table

As mentioned before, all female interviewees were asked whether their gender identity influenced the way they comport themselves as council members: most women stated it did.

Participant B claimed that her gender identity immanently shaped her perspective: *“simply by being a woman, I bring to the table a viewpoint that is different from that of men.”* Participant S revealed similar sentiments: *“if women were present the whole discourse would take a different direction, and I believe that in a city [with] more women, life will look differently.”*

Participant G also disclosed similar attitudes: *“women come from a different place, the driving force behind their actions is different, they do things differently, they see things, they see the public sphere in an utterly different way than men.”* When asked specifically what could have been different if there had been more women in the city council, Participant G replied: *“women see the community much better.”* The issue of communitarianism repeated extensively throughout the interviewees with female interviewees. Another female interviewee maintained that women act *“more from a place of...compassion, they relate to things, listen differently to the needs expressed.”* In other words, from the descriptions of the women that were interviewed it was evident that they thought that women saw the community and its needs better owing to their ability to relate to things and sympathize with people or communities, which was something that men (in their opinion) lacked.

19. Women look upon the comportment of men as different from theirs and as one that is motivated by power and ego

All the female interviewees were asked whether they thought that their gender identity affected their conduct as council members: most women thought it did. Participant A depicted the conduct of men in local government as she saw it: *“men, they are very aggressive.”* Participant A expressed similar sentiments when she described the motivation of men in local government to promote projects or else resist them as stemming from impertinent motives: *“due to wars of ego, and I have told you that from the outset, they will go all the way when it comes to a certain issue, why? Because a member of the opposition or coalition or their opponent wants something else, that’s why. Not because it is needed.”*

Participant B explained why she thought that it was easier for men to advance topics or public projects: *“not that all men understand in those things, but they immediately opt for the technical stuff”*, namely, Participant B described tracking in choosing subjects and projects to deal with, as men took upon themselves roles or duties that they did not necessarily know or understand but rather out of a certain nature and an affinity for subjects that have certain

characteristics, and which for the most part are related to technical rather than “soft” issues. Furthermore, Participant B portrays how women that were part of the opposition became more belligerent, because they had to assume a masculine behavior: *“those were usually women from the opposition that tried to be more masculine, more aggressive.”*

Participant S stated why she believed that women were better equipped than men when it came to lending an ear to the appeals of the public, especially those of female residents: *“they (women councilors) understand the need better than men that tend to downplay the issue, come on, give me a break, big deal...”* Participant A limned similar sentiments with respect to availability for listening to residents’ requests, both men and women, and believed that her ability to listen and understand had much to do with pride and the perception of the self: *“I look on things better, more in the right way than a man because I have no ego.”* Participant A recounted an instance where she had to give up her position and settle for a smaller role, because another (male) council member insisted on being her superior. She stated she had no reservations about surrendering her appointment to another for the sake of the success of her faction, something that evoked resentment among those close to her, especially her significant other: *“so my husband said at first, why are you giving up all of a sudden? I said what do I care? What difference does it make? It is more important that we do well in the elections and enlist (as many voters as possible).”*

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

The question that underlies this study is what public issues or projects are perceived as important by the members of the Finance Committee in local government and how the importance of a public issue or project is determined by them. Following the findings of the study as presented above, I will present a comparison between the existing literature in the field and the findings of the study. The insights presented herewith enable a broad-brush approach and a broad vantage point from which to gauge and analyze the research findings in order to reach macro conclusions about how the perceptions of importance take shape and how gender identity influences that shaping of the (degree of) importance of a public issue. Moreover, I present hereby targeted insights that derive directly from the conditions that enable the promotion of important issues and how committee members perceive themselves as public servants. Finally, I broach a number of possible policy implications based on the findings of the study.

### **Gauging the Findings in Light of the Existing Literature in a Comparative Perspective**

Some of the conclusions drawn from the findings of the present study are consistent with the conclusions of parallel studies in the existing literature: public representatives recognize that different population groups have different needs and preferences; male elected officials find it difficult to identify women's distinct needs and look upon women's needs as if they are primarily related to culture and education.

Another issue is that female presence in executive and public roles does raise awareness of the needs of women so it is hardly surprising that high female representation is perceived as evidence of the level of gender awareness in the local authority, which is implicitly regarded as attesting to sensitivity toward women and their needs. The current study nonetheless shows that high female representation does not guarantee that the feminist cause and ideas (let alone needs) are taken into account and catered for due to political constraints. That can also interact with personal impediments that have to do with the desire to put on a semblance of “masculine” toughness to match that of their counterparts in lieu of “soft” womanhood they deem inappropriate for political life. The women who interviewed for the study testified to having difficulties that accord with those presented in the existing literature: women feel that their male colleagues “have it easier” by being men; they find it difficult to promote issues that do



not belong to their field of expertise; they experience difficulties in interpersonal communication with men, and feel they need to meet social expectations and assume a veneer of toughness. However, the findings of the study lay bare a number of new insights that have not yet been studied: men indicate that they promote subjects and projects that fulfill the needs of women.

All the interviewees (men and women) testified that education was the most important issue in their opinion and that it is a public issue that transcends conflicts or gaps between populations with different needs and preferences, while in the literature available hitherto, education has been perceived as a subject that was the realm of women alone and therefore promoted solely by them. There are no previous case studies in the existent literature that probed into how councilors assign a degree of importance to public problems or projects and shape their preferences and prospective actions accordingly, not to mention the impact of gender identity among women members of the local government council who also serve in the Finance Committees in that regard.

Generally speaking, the findings on the public sector in Israel are profoundly at variance with findings on the public sector from elsewhere in a fundamental manner in light of the method of the local government in Israel, which is different in its modus operandi from other parts of the world and in terms of its characteristics and laws that regulate its activities.

For example, the conclusions of this study indicate that the council members perceive the role of the mayor as having total control over the decisions made in the local authority. Also, the work relationship with professionals in the local authorities is essential for the efficient and proper conduct of the authority. This finding is clearly lacking in the current literature, but this may stem from the different form of governance. An interesting topic for future research will be an examination of the differences between women in the Israeli public sector and women in the public sector elsewhere, in countries where the form of local government is different and to investigate whether the representation of women's needs is influenced by the structure of government, the manner in which it is ruled, financed and regulated and the style of governance therein and is not only the upshot gender characteristics and cultural norms.

## Insights

The conclusions of this study endeavor to show a number of meta-insights. First, the women interviewed for this study presented a number of paradigms that they believed existed in local government in Israel: the communication between men and women in local government was deficient, men had no patience for female presence and therefore women in local government had to be sharp and conclusive. Most women interviewees believed they represented a feminist agenda by reason of their sheer femininity but as a woman-politician it was inadvisable and imprudent for them to actively promote such an agenda because it was perceived negatively. In that respect, women distinguish between the ideological level and the practical level. Ideologically, women see women as a population group that has unique needs and preferences. However, when asked about projects and public issues that answer the municipal needs of women, the female interviewees designate the projects they promote as more inclusive and encompassing - such that cater to a broader population group such as parents.

One respondent did not agree with the statement that women had unique municipal needs, but at the same time noted various projects that existed in their local authority and were directed to the needs of women, such as activities for single mothers (and not single parents); she nevertheless pointed out that she did not actively promote this project. It seems that the women themselves embody the dissonance by self-proclaiming themselves to be somewhat feminist (and some do not), but this *soi-disant* feminism is *prima facie* and is evident mainly on the declaratory level. Some female councilors aspire to represent women whereas others do not; some identify women's needs while others fail to do so. In the course of the interviews they all nonetheless admitted that women do have special needs. On the other hand, most of the men interviewed for the study indicated that they promoted women's issues and needs and saw this as a point that indicates them as good public servants. However, in their description and perception of the needs of women on the municipal level, they identified needs that were related mainly to culture and sports, rather than concrete needs in less "soft" areas such as public transportation and urban planning.

The fundamental, inherent dissonance that emerges from these insights leads me to the first and perhaps most significant conclusion, which is that the findings of this study prove that

there is a real need to raise gender awareness among men who hold various positions in local government, as they feel more confident in promoting issues that fulfill the needs of women. Second, the aggressive and combative practices that women use to advance their agenda are predicated on, according to the interviewees' descriptions, imitation of the male practices and behavior they encounter during their tenure in local government. On the other hand, the male interviewees claimed that they themselves were not aggressive and combative, but then again that this was generally the case and that such behavior was the norm rather than the exception in local government. Hence, the conclusion in this context is that there is a need to raise awareness of gender stereotyping and mainstreaming among women in various positions in local government.

It is important to note that all of the interviewees testified that the mayor wielded the greatest influence and was almost the most important power in local government, and many respondents have indicated that women's issues and needs would be promoted only if the mayor was aware and dedicated to the matter. Therefore, my conclusion is that the most influential figure on gender equality at the local level is the mayor, which means that raising awareness among mayors of gender influences, preferences and needs, gender budgeting and gender tracking can improve the response to women's municipal needs.

The findings of the study indicate that education is a public issue that is a top priority among public servants, men and women alike. This finding is at variance with the findings mooted in the existing literature, which attribute the issue of education to women as a matter of female preference. In their interviews, male and female respondents indicated several interesting aspects in the context of education. All the interviewees expressed the notion that education was a tool for promoting good citizenship, as well as a means for leveraging other agendas such as engaging “high-quality” residents with high human and cultural capital that would follow a top-notch education system, not to mention the preservation of affluent, highly-educated residents. The idea is to cater and appeal to parents and improve their quality of life by offering their children first-rate education, thus attracting well-heeled parents to the municipality by means of furnishing their children with a top-grade educational framework.

All of the interviewees also expressed the view that education was an issue that transcended disagreements among populations and conflicts of preference, mainly with regard

to different streams of education according to religious affiliation or denomination. This fact is particularly interesting in light of the fact that other issues such as culture and welfare differ significantly within religious affiliation, and the interviewees expressed no willingness to budget welfare and cultural projects that clashed with the needs and preferences of the religious affiliation they belong to. For ethical and moral reasons, all the interviewees justified their willingness to budget schools in a sweeping manner without referring to the religious stream to which the school belonged to. Nineteen out of 20 interviewees were parents of children and unsurprisingly expressed their willingness to budget education projects because that was what they would like for their children as well.

The interviewees used their personal experience as parents of children who participated in the Israeli education system as a motivation to improve all aspects of the education system. My main conclusion in this respect is that the personal experiences of council members are cardinal to their willingness and ability to advance subjects and projects. It may well be and is hardly inconceivable that gender-related needs, especially women's municipal needs, are outside the consciousness of elected officials and are not promoted in view of their absence from the personal experience of these elected officials.

### Policy Implications

For the past several years various government strategy teams have been dealing with the issue of gender in local government. The main focus of these strategic teams has nonetheless been the absence of women from local government councils and senior positions in local government. A position paper issued by the Ministry of the Interior in 2014 stated that *“the absence of women from local government and decision-making processes is a market failure stemming from discrimination that is not based on economic considerations, but rather the justification for regulatory intervention in the field<sup>5</sup>.”* The Committee examined and recommended ways to promote the status of women in local government, at both the levels of elected officials and professionals employed by local authorities and municipal corporations. However, as the present study indicates, female presence does increase awareness and advancement of women's needs, and despite the piecemeal increase in the number of women

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<sup>5</sup> The Status of Women in the Local Authorities February 2014, Adli Economic Consulting Ltd. and Dr. Itai Beeri in the Ministry of the Interior, Local Government Administration, Senior Division of Municipal Administration, Research and Information Division.

participating in the local government system, the gap is still large and shrinking too slowly. In my humble opinion, there is a cardinal need for efforts to encourage gender-based initiatives by men serving in local government, not only in light of their numerical advantage, but also because of the political and cultural characteristics that enable them to promote these issues more readily.

Some of the policy implications of the findings of the present study have been mentioned in one way or another in the recommendations of previous committees, lending them greater validity: few of the recommendations are yet to be implemented, whereas others have yielded significant results. Assuming that the state seeks to promote the needs of women at the municipal level, it must look at macro perspectives on decision-making processes and prioritize in the local governments. The findings of the study prove that the existence of a high proportion of women in the local councils does encourage awareness of the needs of women, but female presence does not necessarily indicate a feminist agenda of a municipality or authority. Therefore, instead of merely looking at the number of women serving in local councils (be it in a political or professional capacity), where men enjoy the advantage of rarely having to leave the system for childbirth or maternity leave, is not indicative of the level of an individual's involvement in the municipality's work: the state must instill an output perspective into the municipality's performance regarding gender-related needs. Thus, instead of measuring local authorities according to the number of women serving in them, the authorities can be requested to bring forward firsthand proof of successful promotion of projects that address gender needs.

Another significant aspect is that participation in local government councils is on a voluntary basis and the financial compensation depends on the economic soundness of the authority. Assuming that the state wants to increase the female presence in local government councils, the state should reward the women serving in councils. Women serving as council members are doing so in addition to their careers and at the expense of family time and their spare time. Economically, volunteering for the City Council for women with young children bears significant financial costs. Employing a permanent babysitter, using afternoon facilities and arrangements for children and retaining permanent domestic help – all of these coping strategies bear considerable economic costs, which constitute a burden for women and prevent those who do not have sufficient wherewithal from serving in city councils as elected officials.

Assuming that the state wants to encourage women to take an active part in local government, it must provide a broad supportive infrastructure to enable more women access to afternoon high-quality education facilities and/ or arrangements for their children at a low cost and/ or some sort of financial incentive that will encourage women to participate in their local governments and become worthwhile.

The local government is the most effective environment for implementing policies that support the advancement and prioritization of women's municipal needs, as it is responsible for the daily lives and standard of living of Israeli residents and citizens. It should serve as an example for other systems in Israel regarding the promotion and representation of disadvantaged and underserved populations. In light of the difficulties that women experience on the political and diplomatic level when they seek to promote agendas and issues related to women and in general, there is a clear need to allocate budgets to women serving in the Council, so that they can promote issues related to the municipal needs of women without bogging down in the political stages.

To conclude the discussion and conclusions, appropriate representation of women is not only necessary by virtue of the Law, but also a public and moral imperative of the highest order. The experience and information garnered heretofore indicate that increasing the percentage of women who serve in local governments in a political capacity while representing the diverse populations of women living in the Israeli territory (Arab women, women of Mizrahi origin, women of Russian origin, women of Ethiopian origin, religious women, etc.) leads to positive change in local authorities.

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