

Conference Report

International Symposium “Infrastructure for Everyday Life, Social Well-being and New Metrics for Public Decision-Making”

Murcia, Spain, 11–12 June 2026

The International Symposium “Infrastructure for Everyday Life, Social Well-being and New Metrics for Public Decision-Making” brought together researchers, policy experts and practitioners to discuss how infrastructure can be redefined, measured and governed as a foundation of everyday well-being, gender equality and social sustainability. Organised by the University of Murcia within the framework of the international EuWIGeN network, the symposium created a space for dialogue between academic research and public policy, with particular attention to the Well-being and Infrastructure from a Gender Perspective Index (WIGI).

The central premise of the symposium was that infrastructure should not be understood only as roads, energy systems, transport corridors or large-scale economic assets. Rather, it should also include the everyday systems that enable people to live with dignity: healthcare, education, care services, public transport, lighting, green spaces, digital infrastructure, cultural spaces and community facilities. These infrastructures shape access to employment, education, health, safety, care, leisure, social relationships and participation. They therefore have direct consequences for subjective well-being, social cohesion and gender equality.

A key contribution of the symposium was the presentation and discussion of new metrics that can support more inclusive public decision-making. The WIGI approach was presented as an innovative tool for measuring how infrastructure affects well-being through the strengthening of capabilities. The discussions challenged the assumption that infrastructure is gender-neutral, showing instead that women and men often use, need and benefit from infrastructure differently because of unequal care responsibilities, mobility patterns, safety concerns, income inequalities and access to time.

The first group of papers focused on the construction and application of the WIGI index in Spain. The paper on the construction of a Well-being and Infrastructure Index for Spain from a gender perspective presented a nationally representative survey of 1,502 individuals. It showed that, while access to infrastructure may appear broadly similar between women and men, the benefits derived from improved infrastructure are not identical. Women were found to obtain a higher well-being benefit from infrastructure improvements, particularly in certain age groups and medium-sized localities. This finding is important for public policy because it demonstrates that equal access does not automatically mean equal impact. Infrastructure investment can therefore become a powerful tool for reducing gender inequalities if it is designed and assessed through a gender-sensitive lens.

A second paper explored the relationship between infrastructure access, subjective well-being and the capability approach. It argued that infrastructure affects people's lives not only by providing services, but by expanding their real opportunities to achieve what they value. From this perspective, infrastructure operates as an institutional conversion factor: it transforms resources into capabilities such as health, mobility, care, education, social relationships, employment and emotional well-being. The paper's empirical findings supported the hypothesis that infrastructure improves subjective well-being through the development of capabilities, and that this relationship is gendered.

The symposium also addressed the role of infrastructure in relation to gender-based violence. One paper examined infrastructure as a structural determinant shaping perceptions of violence against women in Spain. It highlighted the importance of healthcare, childcare, public lighting and transport infrastructure for safety, autonomy and the prevention of violence. The paper showed that women, people with higher educational attainment and those who attach greater importance to infrastructure are more likely to perceive infrastructure as relevant to preventing gender-based violence. This contribution broadened the debate by showing that infrastructure is not only about access or service delivery, but also about freedom of movement, safety, dignity and the right to use public space without fear.

Another contribution examined physical and mental health at the intersection of capabilities and subjective well-being. Rather than treating health as a purely medical outcome, the paper analysed it as both a capability in itself and a condition enabling other capabilities. The findings showed that satisfaction with physical and mental health is strongly influenced by relational and emotional capabilities, particularly satisfaction with close relationships and emotional expression. Material conditions, education, public transport and time devoted to care also mattered, though to a lesser degree. The gender dimension was again significant: women reported slightly lower health satisfaction and showed stronger dependence on emotional, relational and material-access factors. This finding reinforced the symposium's wider message that well-being cannot be measured only through income or service availability; it must also include the social and emotional conditions that sustain everyday life.

The second group of papers focused more explicitly on access gaps and territorial inequalities. A paper on everyday life infrastructure, access gaps and subjective well-being in Spain used structural equation modelling to examine whether better access to infrastructure, or reduced access gaps, increases life satisfaction. The results showed that both access to infrastructure and the reduction of access gaps are positively associated with life satisfaction. Although this particular analysis did not find strong gender differences, it confirmed the broader relevance of everyday infrastructure for well-being and demonstrated the usefulness of measuring infrastructure through citizens' lived experiences.

The paper on gendered transport inequalities and adaptive preferences in rural Spain added an important territorial dimension. It showed that public transport is not merely a technical mobility service, but a care infrastructure that enables access to work, health, education, social participation and community life. The findings showed a dual disconnection affecting rural women, particularly in regions with high poverty or social

exclusion. First, rural residence itself is associated with lower access to public transport. Second, women in more vulnerable regions may report lower valuation of public transport, not because they need it less, but because prolonged underinvestment lowers expectations and narrows perceived possibilities. This concept of adaptive preferences is highly relevant for policy: relying only on expressed demand can reproduce inequality, because the most underserved groups may have stopped expecting better services. The paper therefore called for minimum mobility standards, care-oriented transport planning, affordability measures and participatory design with rural women.

Within this broader discussion, Dr. Marija Risteska presented the Transport study of GBWN and the paper “Rethinking Long-Term Care Systems in Albania and Macedonia: Using Gender-Responsive Budgeting to Improve the Policy Response.” The presentation extended the symposium’s infrastructure debate to long-term care, arguing that care systems should be understood as social and economic infrastructure. Just as roads, energy grids and water systems enable economic activity, care systems enable labour-market participation, protect human capabilities, reduce preventable health and social costs, and sustain intergenerational solidarity.

The presentation focused on Albania and Macedonia, where long-term care remains largely organised around the assumption that families, and in practice women, will absorb the costs of ageing. This produces a policy paradox: care is economically indispensable but fiscally invisible; socially necessary but institutionally underdeveloped. The paper argued that long-term care should no longer be treated as a residual social-assistance function activated only when families fail, but as a productive social investment essential for sustainable ageing societies.

The presentation linked long-term care to three structural pressures: demographic ageing, low fertility and emigration. In both Albania and Macedonia, the number of older people requiring care is increasing, while the number of working-age people and potential family caregivers is decreasing. Emigration further reduces the availability of both informal family carers and formal care professionals. This means that the traditional family-based care model is becoming demographically unsustainable.

From a gender-responsive budgeting perspective, the key question is not only how much care costs, but who pays when the state does not invest. When public budgets underinvest in care, the costs do not disappear. They are shifted to households, and especially to women, through unpaid labour, reduced working hours, interrupted careers, lower earnings and weaker pension rights. This has direct implications for gender equality, but also for fiscal sustainability. Lower female labour-force participation reduces tax revenue and social insurance contributions, while ageing increases demand for pensions, health services and social protection.

The paper therefore called for a shift from seeing care as consumption expenditure to recognising care as social investment. Investment in accessible, professional and community-based long-term care systems can generate a triple dividend: improving the dignity and well-being of older people, advancing women’s economic equality, and strengthening the long-term sustainability of public finances. The presentation also

emphasised the need for regulation, quality standards, trained care workers, community-based services, and budgets that make the hidden costs of unpaid care visible.

Across the symposium, several common conclusions emerged. First, infrastructure is not neutral. Its design, location, affordability, accessibility and safety shape who can participate in society and under what conditions. Second, well-being must be measured through multidimensional approaches that combine material access, capabilities and subjective experiences. Third, gender-sensitive infrastructure policy requires better data, including sex-disaggregated, territorial and care-sensitive indicators. Fourth, public investment decisions should assess not only economic returns, but also effects on time use, safety, autonomy, health, care, social participation and equality.

The symposium also demonstrated that new metrics such as WIGI can help bridge the gap between research and decision-making. By showing how infrastructure affects capabilities and well-being, such tools can support more inclusive budgeting, planning and evaluation. They can also help public institutions identify where infrastructure gaps are not only technical deficits, but drivers of inequality.

The discussions in Murcia confirmed the need to expand the meaning of infrastructure in public policy. Everyday life depends not only on highways, ports and energy grids, but also on childcare centres, care homes, public transport, health services, lighting, sidewalks, parks and community spaces. These are the infrastructures that sustain life, make work possible, reduce inequalities and support social well-being.

The symposium therefore made an important contribution to current debates on feminist economics, social sustainability and public decision-making. It showed that investing in everyday infrastructure is not a secondary or soft policy issue. It is central to building fairer, more resilient and more sustainable societies.