

# Analysis Of Urban Planning Instruments in Comala, Colima, Mexico (1997-2009) from a Gender Perspective — A Secondary Publication

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**Abstract:** This work is carried out based on the analysis of urban planning instruments, taking the gender perspective as a foundation. It arises from the inclusion of women in the participation of urban development, through an analysis of the gender gaps that have marked the history of women, the inequalities serve as a basis for carrying out this study. It highlights the challenges we face today as a society in the process of building citizen participation, where we must all be recognized and have equal opportunities within the territory in which we live. This article analyzes the extent to which the Municipal Urban Development Programs of the Mexican municipality of Comala, Colima, Mexico, consider the recommendations on gender and urbanism, established since the 1990s by international entities and applied transversally to urban planning policies. Considerable differences are found between women and men in terms of empowerment and participation in urban territorial planning instruments, mainly in the oldest instrument (1997). Significant progress is observed in the most recent document and is currently in force in the municipality of Comala (2009).

**Keywords:** Planning instruments; Gender perspective; Urban planning

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## 1. Introduction

Gender perspective is understood as “the set of ideas, beliefs, and attributions assigned to men and women according to the specific historical and cultural moment that determines the relations between them” <sup>[1]</sup>. Similarly, it is through the gender perspective that men and women distinguish their differences. The concept of gender is appreciated from the social construction, independent and above the biological concept of sex. According to Páramo (2010), gender relations and their interconnection occur according to: the identification of differences in the recognition of individuals based on gender within the territory in which they develop, the division between public and private in the roles played, considered as feminine and masculine, the planning of the urban territory.

Since 2006, the Global Gender Gap Index has been introduced, which measures the differences between men and women in four sub-indices: economic participation and opportunities, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. The index manages a score ranging from 0 to 100, establishing that the gender gap is closed when 100% is reached <sup>[2]</sup>.

In the year 2022, the World Economic Forum (WEF) published the results of the Global Gender Gap Index, in which the Mexican Institute for Competitiveness (IMCO) participated as a spokesperson. In that year, the global gender gap had closed by 68%, which suggests that it will take the world 132 years to reach 100%. Gender inequalities persist in all countries, limiting the contribution of women in various social, economic, political, and technological areas of communities. This, in turn, results in slow economic growth and social development <sup>[2]</sup>.

Through the political-electoral reform of gender parity, favorable advances have been made in Mexico's performance. The representation of women in Mexican politics has a positive impact on the political empowerment sub-index and contributes to the equal participation of both women and men in all aspects of society. Globally, Mexico ranks 31st out of 146 countries, with a score of 76.4% out of 100. In 2022, Mexico advanced three positions, reaching fourth place in the gender gap in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region compared to the previous year (2021). It ranked on par with Barbados (76.4%) and only behind Costa Rica (79.6) and Nicaragua (81%). The biggest challenge for women in Mexico is equal opportunities and economic participation, mainly due to inequality in wage income, as for every 100 pesos a man earns, a woman receives approximately 86 pesos <sup>[2]</sup>. Despite advances in education and health, challenges persist in the economic and political spheres of the country.

Motivation and support from the public and private sectors are required to increase the number of women in the formal economic sector, while at the same time ensuring adequate and equitable employment conditions. In this way, Mexico could reduce the estimated time to close the gender gap between men and women.

Gender equity is one of the fundamental bases for building a sustainable, prosperous, and peaceful world, as mentioned in SDG 5, which promotes gender equality and the empowerment of women, girls, and adolescents, one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda <sup>[3]</sup>.

However, progress has been observed in the last decades, where we find women in positions in parliament and command and leadership positions. At the same time, many laws are aligning with the 2030 Agenda, promoting equality and the use of the gender perspective as a tool for analysis and work to achieve parity. In 2022, the gender gap in political empowerment advanced to 48.9%, an improvement of more than 35.5 percentage points over 2006. In relation to the gender gap in economic participation and opportunities, 59.7% is observed, showing an improvement of 8.7 percentage points with respect to 2006 <sup>[4]</sup>.

The entity in charge of promoting sustainable and inclusive territorial development in Mexico is the Ministry of Agrarian, Territorial, and Urban Development (SEDATU). This secretariat is in charge of managing and implementing public policies related to land use planning, agrarian development, urban development, and adequate housing. These policies are designed with a cross-cutting perspective and are integrated in an articulated manner with the National Development Plan of the current Government of the Mexican Republic <sup>[5]</sup>.

In addition, SEDATU is the government entity responsible for updating and/or preparing municipal urban development plans and programs in collaboration with the municipalities. These planning instruments are fundamental for the territorial management of municipal governments. In particular, the Municipal Urban Development Program (PMDU) is the only legal urban planning instrument available to the State and, in particular, to the municipalities. This document provides guidelines on how to invest public resources in infrastructure, housing, equipment, and other aspects <sup>[6]</sup>.

Within SEDATU's workforce, 51% are women and 49% are men. When analyzing by position and income levels, it is possible to recognize that the largest gender gaps are found in senior management positions. The percentage of female representation in unit heads and general directorates in 2022 is 33%, and similarly, in area directorates, there is 43% female representation <sup>[4]</sup>. In comparison, the highest proportion of women in SEDATU is found at the head of liaison levels, with 54%, and in department heads, with 50%, which are the last levels in the salary tabulator and the hierarchy of positions <sup>[4]</sup>. According to Hernández-Rejón and Treviño-Hernández <sup>[7]</sup>, there is still scarce research regarding the participation of women in the planning and management of territory and cities. Although it is a topic that is on the discussion table, there is inadequate information at the federal, state, and municipal levels. The territorial issue with a gender perspective is a topic that is becoming more relevant every day, and there are significant advances in comparison with past decades, but there is little research that offers us a vision of the current challenges. Data and figures show that it is in the municipalities where women have greater participation, but contradictorily, it is where they exercise less power and leadership positions <sup>[8]</sup>. Adjustments to the structure made in the 1980s through public policies encouraged women to become involved in community programs, where they stood out in management activities before municipal governments and where it was complicated to observe women in positions of power <sup>[9]</sup>. One of the goals of Mexican democracy is to increase women's participation in municipal and local governments, as protagonists of the success and consolidation of gender equality.

The political division of the United Mexican States (Mexico) is made up of thirty-two federative entities (states), and each entity is made up of municipalities, of which there are a total of 2,471 in the country. Colima is one of the 32 entities that make up Mexico; the state of Colima, in turn, is made up of ten municipalities, and one of them is the municipality of Comala, from which the information presented by CONEVAL was obtained and which is the area of study of this research.

Within the state of Colima, Mexico, is the municipality of Comala, which stands out nationally and internationally for offering cultural, artistic, and natural attractions. It is known worldwide for its Mexican cuisine and has several areas of cultural heritage, one of them being the downtown area of the municipality and the center of the community of Nogueras. Within its historical heritage is the area of pre-Hispanic monuments known as Huachimontones, as well as farms in its historic center. According to Fernández <sup>[10]</sup>, it also has other designations and decrees related to protected heritage, such as the Decree of Las Huertas de Comala as ecological and environmental heritage, the Colima Volcano National Park, the Sierra de Manantlán Biosphere Reserve and El Jabalí, which is a natural protection area.

The municipality also has a federal decree declaring a historic monument zone in the town of Comala, Colima. This decree protects an area of 0.76 square kilometers and was published in the *Diario Oficial de la Federación* (DOF) on October 31, 1977. Its objective is to preserve the historical heritage of this area without altering its urban harmony, since the town's buildings, the configuration of its spaces, and its urban structure have a great patrimonial value for the social, ecological, political, and cultural history of the Mexican State. Therefore, it is vital to consider the protection, conservation, and restoration of the urban and architectural complex as part of the historical and cultural heritage of the municipality <sup>[11]</sup>.

According to the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL) <sup>[12]</sup>, through municipal progress data and the web platform known as DataMun, we can learn about the situation of municipalities in Mexico in terms of public services, poverty, economic inequality, gender inequality, and migration.

In the category of gender in the municipality of Comala, we present information derived from the indicator of Conformation of the Municipal Administration by sex, as well as the situation of women and men in the

labor sphere, unpaid work, and participation in titular positions in the municipal public administration. Each category mentions the Sustainable Development Goal to which it contributes, this being the case of Goal 5, which is based on Gender Equality.

The National Census of Municipal Governments and Territorial Districts of Mexico City 2019 aims to relate the public administration of municipalities to the processes of design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of public entities to contribute to national priority issues. According to the set of data obtained from the areas of Planning and Territorial Management in the section of Human Resources and Territorial Training of 2018, we note that the workforce for the municipality of Comala is composed of 3 service providers, which are only men, representing 100% of the staff of the male gender. This evidences a completely open gap in terms of the participation of women in positions related to urban planning, execution of urban development, and territorial management.

According to Hernández-Rejón and Treviño-Hernández <sup>[7]</sup>, urban studies must deepen in the search for innovative proposals to contribute to the improvement of quality of life, sustainability, and gender approach in the reality of communities. The gender perspective must be translated into concrete actions to define a sustainable model that allows us to anticipate future challenges in terms of natural resources, consumption patterns, waste management, and the general health of the population.

This year, the municipality of Comala was selected as the starting point for the preparation of the Municipal Urban Development Program. The SEDATU Colima Delegation is coordinating the preparation of this territorial planning instrument in collaboration with the Municipality of Comala and the Academia del Tecnológico Nacional de México Campus Colima. Its main focus is to guarantee human rights and the inclusion of vulnerable groups in the municipality, including women, and special attention is given to the gender and age perspective in planning.

Urban planning in Comala became especially relevant in 1984, when the Urban Development Scheme of Comala was developed jointly by the Comala City Council and the former SEDUE. In 1988, the Scheme became an Urban Development Plan of the Population Center, which updated some urban aspects of the town, although it never had full legal-administrative validity and instrumentation, it did have some technical applicability <sup>[13]</sup>.

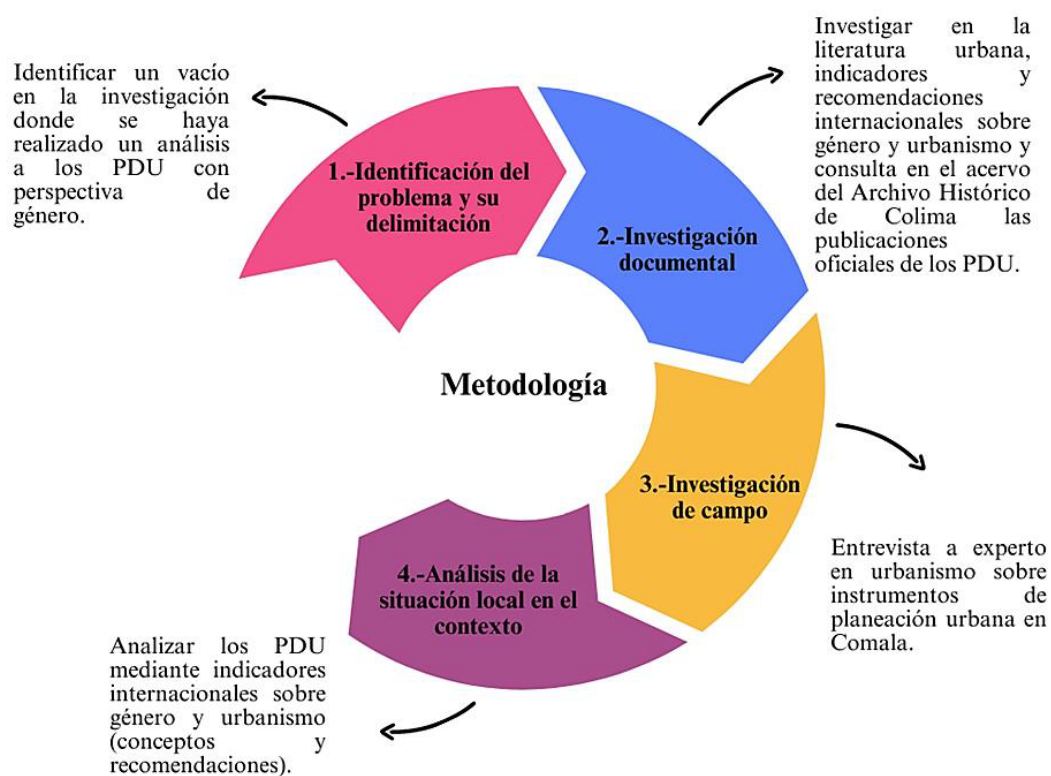
On September 18, 1997, the Urban Development Program of the municipality of Comala was approved, which was the first local planning instrument that complied with the formalities of urban legislation and was published in the Official Newspaper of the State of Colima <sup>[14]</sup>. The second urban development program was approved on April 23, 2009, being the current planning instrument for the population center of Comala, and was published on September 5, 2009 in the Official Newspaper of the State of Colima <sup>[13]</sup>. The purpose of this article is to present an analysis of the content of the urban planning instruments of the municipality from a gender perspective. Specifically, it analyzes the Urban Development Programs of the Population Center of Comala, Colima, corresponding to the years 1997 and 2009. For this purpose, qualitative information derived from the normative planning instruments at the municipal level was compiled and reviewed. An analysis of terms and references from a gender perspective and a quantitative analysis of the actors involved in the process of elaboration of the programs were carried out. The analysis of the Urban Development Programs of Comala corresponding to the years 1997 and 2009 was proposed because they are the only documents with legal recognition and validity. Both were reviewed and authorized by the municipal council and the state governor, in addition to being published in the official newspaper of the state of Colima.

## 2. Methods

The methodology used for the elaboration of this work is mixed, since it is integrated by two approaches: qualitative and quantitative. In the first method (qualitative), an analysis of the content of the Urban Development Programs of Comala corresponding to the years 1997 and 2009 was carried out, using as indicators the inclusion of the gender perspective and the main recommendations of international organizations. These recommendations were grouped and synthesized as much as possible. To this end, two actions were carried out, the following concepts were first searched in the text of the documents: gender, equality, women, conciliation, and participation.

Subsequently, the content of the documents was analyzed to observe whether they made reference, even if only in a positive way, to the proposed recommendations <sup>[15]</sup>. It is important to mention that the five proposed recommendations on urbanism and gender are the following: women's participation in the design of the city, equality in access to housing, the need for safety for the use of public space, promotion of the improvement of public facilities and transportation, increased training in equality and visibilization of women.

Regarding the quantitative approach, the analysis conducted by the Mexican Institute for Competitiveness in 2021 was taken as a reference, where a methodology was developed to observe and analyze the gender gaps in the institutions of the federal public administration, identifying the positions they hold and the income they receive. For the purposes of this study, an analysis of the gender gaps that existed in the approval and publication process of the Urban Development Programs of 1997 and 2009 was carried out by identifying the gender of the actors involved. This was done to observe if there was gender parity in the actors involved, based on the agreements published in the Official Gazette of the Constitutional Government "El Estado de Colima" dated July 18, 1998 and September 5, 2009 <sup>[4]</sup>. **Figure 1** shows a diagram of the aforementioned methodology.



**Figure 1.** Graph of the methodological process used

### **3. Results**

#### **3.1. Urban Development Program of Comala, Colima 1997**

In the 1997 Urban Development Program of Comala, Colima, there is not a single word such as “women,” “gender,” “equality,” or “conciliation.” The word “participation” is mentioned on three occasions, but it refers to the participation of authorities from Mexico’s three levels of government and institutional participation. The program also contains some references to the responsibility of municipal authorities, specifically in terms of “assuming responsibility” in promoting urban development, executing public works and carrying out conservation, improvement and growth actions in the population centers located in the municipal territory.

On the other hand, among the five recommendations mentioned on gender and urbanism, there is no reference to “participation” or “training/visibilization” of women. The program considers the recommendations related to “access to housing,” but does not start from the concept of equal opportunities for women and men, but simply mentions the government’s efforts to provide necessary housing in a planned manner. Regarding the “safety” of women in the use of public space, it mentions the provision of planning and urban design conditions for the adequate development of families in terms of social identification, security, tranquility, and emotional stability of individuals. Lastly, in relation to the “promotion of the improvement of equipment and public transportation,” reference is only made to measures to satisfy the demands of the population in terms of urban equipment.

Regarding the review of the recommendations, in general terms, the program raises the need to provide housing, security, and equipment to citizens, often in the form of statements about their accessibility for the general population, without making reference to the inclusion of vulnerable groups such as women, girls, and adolescents.

According to the quantitative analysis, it was observed that in Comala’s 1997 Urban Development Program, 100% of the actors involved in the approval, ruling, and publication of the urban planning instrument are men. The political actors involved range from the Constitutional Governor of the Free and Sovereign State of Colima at that time, who grants the power to publish the Program promoted by the city council, followed by the Secretary of Urban Development of the State Government, who rules on its congruence; then the Secretary of the City Council, in charge of certifying the approval of the instrument in the town council session of the municipality of Comala, and finally the Secretary General of Government, who validates and consents to its publication. The signatures were issued by the Constitutional Governor of the State, the Secretary General of Government, and the Secretary of Urban Development of the State of Colima.

#### **3.2. Urban Development Program of the Population Center of Comala, Colima 2009**

In the 2009 Urban Development Program of the Population Center of Comala, Colima, there is no word such as “gender” or “conciliation,” but the words “women,” “participation,” and “equality” are already included. The term “women” is mentioned in relation to a consultation with the citizens through a survey in which the population expresses its opinion on the problems, priority works, and opportunities of the population center, highlighting the importance of the participation of all sectors of the population, including women. The term “participation” is mentioned in reference to the participation of the authorities of the three levels of government, institutional participation, and social participation as part of community development through neighborhood committees and as a tool to foresee the conditions of urban planning and design for the adequate development of families. The term “equality” is mentioned in the background and refers to the planning framework on which the program is based, taking the National Urban Development and Land Use Planning Program 2001–2006 as the first planning instrument, where increasing equity and equal opportunities is one of the guiding objectives of both programs.

On the other hand, among the five recommendations on gender and urban planning, there is no mention of “participation” or “training/visibilization of women” (Table 1). The current program takes into account the recommendations related to “access to housing,” indicating the promotion of the expansion and improvement of housing within the territorial reserves that are opened for their use. Regarding “security for the use of public space,” it mentions the provision of security, tranquility, and stability for families through urban planning and design.

Lastly, in the “improvement of public facilities and transportation,” the objectives are extended to provide the population with the different facilities it requires, describing each of the areas into which they are divided, such as education, health and sports, and also establishes criteria and strategies to provide solutions in matters of public transportation. It is concluded that the current urban development program shows significant progress in the strategies to promote the development of basic urbanization works, together with the construction of territorial reserves, thus contributing to the adequate development of families.

**Table 1.** The inclusion of recommendations on urban planning and gender in the Urban Development Programs of Comala, Colima

Recommendations on urban planning and gender	Urban Development Program of Comala, Colima, 1997	Urban Development Program for the Comala, Colima Population Center, 2009
1. Participation of women in the design of the city.		
2. Equal access to housing.	X	X
3. Requirement for security in the use of public space.	X	X
4. Promoting the improvement of public facilities and transportation.	X	X
5. Increasing training in equality and making women more visible.		

From the data obtained in the quantitative analysis, it was observed that in the 2009 Urban Development Program for the Comala Population Center, there were already women among the actors involved in the approval, ruling, and publication of the urban planning instrument, with a representation of 17%. In a period of 12 years, there was progress in closing the gender gap in terms of participation and empowerment of 83%, with women representatives in positions of power and leadership, such as the Secretary General of Government of the State of Colima, an important figure in decision-making for sustainable urban development of the federal and municipal entity.

The analysis revealed a series of considerations and objectives in which citizen participation is becoming more relevant and important in decision making. Part of this strategy seeks to promote “social participation reflected in the content of the planning instruments,” since there is an alignment with the Human Settlements Law of the State of Colima of 1994, which points out “the obligation to promote such participation,” as well as the participation of all social groups of the citizenry. In relation to the concept of equality, an advance is highlighted in the planning instruments, where the relevance of introducing equity and equality of all members of the population in the framework of territorial planning is manifested.

## 4. Conclusion

From the qualitative analysis of terms in the 1997 Urban Development Program of Comala, it is concluded that

only the participation of the authorities of the three levels of government is mentioned, without reference to citizen participation, much less women, in their analysis, criteria, conclusions, recommendations or proposals for the planning, programming, and regulation of the ecological and urban development of the municipality of Comala. This reflects an important democratization process, where citizen power becomes the main actor in the participation and control of the ordering and development of their community. In the quantitative analysis, it is highlighted that female representation is null in middle- and high-command positions, evidencing a completely open gender gap in terms of gender equality.

The current Urban Development Program (2009) shows progress in closing the gender gap, with the presence of women in senior management positions, which is a great achievement in building fair and equal citizenship.

At the end of 2022, the new Law of Human Settlements, Land Management and Urban Development of the State of Colima was approved and published, an important event for the entity, since significant advances in gender and equity issues are observed, highlighting the importance of women and the gender perspective in territorial and urban planning. Therefore, there is a state legal basis that lays the foundations for the new planning instruments of the municipalities of the state of Colima.

This work serves as a basis for observing the challenges faced by the municipality of Comala in gender issues, taking the analysis carried out in the first and current urban development planning instrument as a reference. However, the analysis presented can be replicated in urban planning instruments of any municipality in the state and the country.

It is important to highlight that within the work team in charge of preparing the new Municipal Urban Development Program for the municipality of Comala, which is expected to be finalized and published in the coming months, women actively participate in leadership positions both within SEDATU and in the Academy. This becomes a national benchmark of good practices in urban issues. Therefore, it is suggested to carry out an analysis with the methodology presented in this article, both in the discourse and in the content of the new program, to evidence a significant advance in the inclusion of women and terms related to the gender perspective. However, it is important to point out that participation with a gender perspective should not only begin with the elaboration of the Planning Instruments but also with the incorporation of society in the solutions proposed for urban development problems.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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