

Research paper

Making ‘Good’ Spaces for the 99% – Feminist Spatial Practices in Slovakia and Czechia

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how spatial practitioners in Slovakia and Czechia offer valuable insights into making the field of feminist spatial practice more inclusive and accessible. Whereas feminist discourse in architecture and planning has become increasingly exclusive and Western-oriented, local spatial practitioners in Slovakia and Czechia engage in feminist spatial work through widely accessible, pragmatic tools. They often do this by strategically using the ‘master’s tools’ – mainstream methods and approaches – to create ‘good’ spaces for marginalised groups. By analysing the practices of 21 organisations, this research identifies five interrelated components of space – physical, educational, representational, participatory, and community-based – that collectively create ‘good’ spaces for marginalised groups. Thinking along these five components offers an analytical tool both for existing spaces and, more importantly, for practice, a guide for designing ‘good’ spaces. These practices offer an alternative to neoliberal, gendered, and racialised approaches to urban planning by prioritising care, empowerment, and self-efficacy over profit-driven development. The study shows that looking beyond dominant Western feminist discourse can provide valuable insights for a more accessible feminist spatial practice, one that is adaptable to different socio-political contexts and capable of influencing mainstream urban planning.

Keywords: feminist spatial practice, spatial justice, care, post-socialist, architecture

Most of the built environment fails to provide good space for the lives of many humans and more-than-humans, as it is continually designed for the privileged 1%. This is brought to the fore by many local and global protest movements (e.g. Extinction Rebellion; Deutsche Wohnen & Co enteignen) and is also evidenced by research on the exclusionary nature of neoliberal planning (Moulaert et al., 2005). Although neoliberal planning creates spaces for disadvantaged groups, like social housing, playgrounds, and national parks, these are often inadequate and are frequently structured in ways that limit the autonomy and agency of their occupants, thereby reinforcing the exclusions highlighted by activist struggles and critical urban research (Wacquant, 2008). Good spaces for the 99%, drawing on the discourse of spatial justice (Harvey, 2009; Soja, 2010), are those that empower, nurture, and build agency for all. The question of how to build such ‘good’ spaces continues to occupy socially aware architects and planners (Davidoff, 1965; Sandercock, 1998; Innes, 2010; Angotti, 2020). Among these debates, feminist spatial practice contributes a perspective that integrates feminist politics – closely tied to spatial justice – with concerns over how space is materially produced (Petrescu, 2007; Rendell et al., 2009;

Brown, 2011; Schalk et al., 2017; Frichot et al., 2018; Lange et al., 2021). Yet feminist spatial practice remains a niche within the socially aware architectural and planning circles addressing the exclusions produced by neoliberal planning. Drawing on literature and our own experiences, we frame this marginality through the following obstacles, which we consequently address in this paper: the persistent focus on gender, which narrows its scope, and the limited accessibility of its theory-laden methods.

The still prevalent understanding of feminism as a primarily gendered cause, in architecture understood narrowly as creating spaces for women or promoting women's work, rather than as a matter of value-oriented politics, arguably discourages many people of all genders from engaging with feminist spatial practice. Yet feminist discourse has already expanded beyond gender issues, while recognising that these remain an important, unresolved dimension, to also encompass broader questions of equity and justice (Arruzza et al., 2019). This paper, like our previous work (Grešáková, 2025; Tabačková, 2022), contributes to such an expanded understanding to demonstrate its relevance to all those striving for spatial justice. Additionally, the paper aims to address another, less explored, yet frequently named issue: the difficult accessibility of feminist spatial methods to architects and planners who are not familiar with the feminist discourse. To clarify: the belief that architecture must break away from 'the master's tools' (Lange et al., 2021) – a term borrowed from Lorde (1984) – has led to new spatial methods, often embedded in specific situations and theory-laden terminologies (see, e.g., Frichot, 2016). This intentional distancing from mainstream architecture and planning methods makes their adaptation back into mainstream practice challenging, a difficulty that is seen sometimes as an obstacle to be overcome, while other times as a necessary boundary to preserve the radical force of feminist spatial practice (Frichot, 2016; Petrescu, 2007; Schalk et al., 2017). In this text, we focus on the former, while remaining cautious of the latter.

The paper investigates spatial practices in Slovakia and Czechia, where the discourse of feminist spatial practice, or socially engaged architecture more generally, is largely absent, as visible in the lack of contributions from this region in the literature outlined above. Yet, as we show, there are practitioners who engage in spatial justice work aligned with feminist principles. Drawing on our long-term involvement in the field as members of the non-profit studio Spolka, we analyse the practices of 21 organisations working with people without shelter, urban bikers, abandoned historical buildings, or pollinators. We argue here and elsewhere (Grešáková, 2025; Tabačková, 2022) that their work constitutes feminist spatial practice, understood as situated, interdisciplinary, multi-scalar, and oriented towards care and empowerment, without them necessarily subscribing to global feminist theoretical frameworks. Examining these practices, which operate outside the discourse of feminist spatial practice yet embody its values, provides a fresh perspective on how feminist spatial practice can create 'good' spaces in more accessible ways. Our analysis reveals important lessons. These practitioners succeed in creating 'good' spaces while using 'the master's tools' – widely accessible, often mainstream methods associated with neoliberal planning. They do this rather than relying on newly invented feminist tools, which enables them to collaborate with a wide range of actors familiar with mainstream methods in a context where specialised expertise is scarce. Moreover, by considering organisations' overall practices rather than isolated projects, we show that the 'good' spaces they create combine multiple spatial components – physical, representational, pedagogical, participatory, and communal. Building on feminist spatial theory outlined in the first part of the paper, we offer a framework that structures these components, clarifying their interrelations and making this practice more legible and transferable. In doing so, we contribute both an analytical and a practical tool aimed at expanding the accessibility of feminist spatial practice and bridging the gap between theory and everyday spatial justice work.

FEMINIST SPATIAL PRACTICE AS A DISCOURSE

Feminist spatial practice aims to transform urban environments to be more inclusive and equitable by challenging the patriarchal structures embedded in architecture and urban planning. In other terms, they aim to create 'good' spaces for the 99%. In this section, we outline how the literature, written largely by the practitioners themselves, presents this undertaking. Rooted in feminist theory, feminist spatial practice originates in a critique of how urban space has historically been shaped for the needs of a privileged minority, while marginalising women and others (Weisman, 1992; Coleman et al., 1996). The legacy of Le Corbusier's 'Modulor Man' – an able-bodied, economically secure male, exemplifies how spatial design has prioritised the needs and values of some over others. In conversation with the evolving broader feminist discourse, feminist spatial practices continuously expand the notion of who these 'others' are, shifting from focusing on white middle-class women to addressing the diverse needs of the 99% (Arruzza et al., 2019). The 'good' spaces they create range from more traditional architectural typologies like housing, schools, and community centres to cooperative housing initiatives, experimental educational summer schools, and community memorial projects (Feminist Spatial Practices, 2023). What makes these spaces 'good' is not only their physical design but the values underpinning their creation, including intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Angeles, 2023), situatedness (Haraway, 1988), and care

ethics (Fisher & Tronto, 1990; de la Bellacasa, 2017; Fitz & Krasny, 2019). Feminist spatial practices can thus be understood as an entanglement of politics and design praxis, each informing and challenging the other in a continuous, iterative process.

Emerging from everyday realities, specific struggles, and lived experiences of intersecting oppressions, while connected to the broader struggles for justice, feminist spatial practices are always situated, as well as entangled with wider conversations about social transformations, care, and the making of space. The embeddedness in the local and the particular means that feminist spatial practices are best understood through case studies – stories of resistance, care, and transformation in specific contexts. The situatedness of each case is also what makes it difficult to translate practices across contexts and arguably impedes their accessibility. Nevertheless, as discussed below, a shared objective to create ‘good’ spaces and certain common spatial strategies can be traced. These case studies, often autobiographical, form the core of feminist spatial discourse, which tends to be documented in compendia rather than single-author monographs (Petrescu, 2007; Rendell et al., 2009; Schalk et al., 2017; Frichot et al., 2018). In describing these practices, authors frequently draw on feminist theorists from outside architecture and planning – thinkers like bell hooks, Sara Ahmed, Donna Haraway, María Puig de la Bellacasa, and Kimberlé Crenshaw – whose work provides the conceptual tools to interrogate power, care, and positionality and connects the individual cases to the larger feminist discourse and political struggle. While these theories offer a valuable critical lens through which projects can be both evaluated and generated, many of these case studies remain inaccessible to practitioners outside of academic and institutional contexts due to an increasingly theoretical and specialised language (Rendell, 2006; Petrescu, 2007; Frichot, 2016; Schalk et al., 2017; Frichot, 2019). In the following, we zoom in on the technicalities of creating these ‘good’ spaces through feminist spatial practices, outlining the processes and the expanded understanding of space they necessitate – one equally framed in complex theoretical language and thus difficult to grasp for those outside the discourse.

Values and methods of feminist spatial practice

To understand how feminist spatial practices make ‘good’ spaces, it is necessary to first clarify what makes a space ‘good’ for the 99%. While this depends on the specific communities involved, there are shared characteristics. ‘Good’ life and ‘good’ spaces are in feminist discourse often articulated in contrast and resistance to what is currently available to marginalised groups – spaces shaped by market-driven extractivism privileging the interests of the so-called 1% (Ahmed, 2017; Arruzza et al., 2019). In opposition to this, ‘good’ spaces are those that support community, foster care without paternalism, empower communities, and nurture collective agency (Petrescu & Trogal, 2017). These spaces respond to the evolving needs of those who inhabit them, allowing communities not just to survive but to thrive. Feminist spatial discourse is, in this regard, intertwined with the concept of spatial justice, as developed by thinkers like Edward Soja (2010), Henri Lefebvre (1996), and David Harvey (2009), who have all critiqued the unequal distribution of power, resources, and access within urban environments. Feminist scholars expand this foundation by introducing intersectionality to emphasise how these inequalities are further shaped by gender, race, class, and other intersecting forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality, a key feminist framework, shows how different systems of domination reinforce spatial exclusion in complex ways. Moreover, feminist spatial practitioners challenge the anthropocentric assumptions of urban design and planning, advancing a notion of spatial justice that recognises more-than-human actors – ecosystems, other animals, and natural processes – as vital participants in the co-creation of space and as equally deserving of ‘good’ spaces (Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2013; Haraway, 2016). Through these theories, feminist discourse also expands its own narrow focus from the needs of white middle-class women to those of the 99%.

In the creation of ‘good’ spaces, feminist spatial practitioners often reject the conventional tools and methods of architecture and planning, such as standardised design typologies and user models, glossy renderings, or profit-driven processes. Drawing on Lorde’s (1984, p. 112) assertion that ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’, these tools are understood not as neutral but as instruments that maintain the very systems of oppression – neoliberalism, sexism, racism – that architecture, as a discipline, has historically served. As explored in ‘The Social (Re) Production of Architecture and Architecture and Feminisms’ (Petrescu & Trogal, 2017), power imbalances are not just present in space but are produced and reproduced through design methods. This parallels Haraway’s insistence that ‘it matters what matters we use to think other matters with’ (2016, p. 12), or, here, to design with. Feminist spatial practitioners instead seek to practise and to do architecture ‘otherwise’ (Awan et al., 2011; Petrescu, 2007; Schalk et al., 2017). To signal a break from institutional authority and to affirm that space-making is not the exclusive domain of credentialed professionals, the term *spatial practice* is preferred over architecture – particularly capital-A Architecture. It invites broader participation, expands who is recognised as an expert, and thus also empowers marginalised communities to shape their own environments.

Zooming in further onto the concrete feminist spatial methods, there is a resonance with the above-highlighted attentiveness to specific contexts and diverse needs, as well as scepticism of the spatial methods

associated with the canon of Architecture and planning. They are therefore typically situated, multi-scalar, and interdisciplinary and often draw on artistic or performative practices. The inventiveness of spatial methods is legible in the literature. Here are a few documented in the volume *Feminist Futures of Spatial Practice*: 'silent protest, sharing-counteracting-connecting, commoning, navigating through intersectionality, carnivalesque intervention, re-doing heritage, urban caring, and instructing conversation' (Schalk et al., 2017, p. 15). Such experimentation, although highly relevant for the creation of 'good' spaces, inevitably makes many feminist methods difficult to translate into the routines of mainstream practice.

Yet despite this complexity and situatedness, a closer look at these specialised, situated methods reveals recurring strategies: participation (Awan et al., 2011; Petrescu & Trogal, 2017), pedagogical practices (Schalk et al., 2017), community- and commons-building (Petrescu, 2007), material practices of maintenance and repair (Frichot et al., 2018), artistic and performative interventions (Rendell, 2006; Frichot, 2016), speculative design (Frichot, 2016; Frichot et al., 2018), advocacy work (Kern, 2020), and visibility work (Ahmed, 2012; D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020). Importantly, these strategies are not exclusive to feminist spatial practice: mainstream architecture and planning mobilise them as well, sometimes to create 'good' spaces, but also to reinforce neoliberal or exclusionary agendas (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Ahmed, 2012; Tronto, 2013). With these parallels, we aim to highlight the already existing translations and co-options of feminist methods into the routines of mainstream practice, while also underlining that it is the values, rather than specialised methods, that ultimately shape the creation of 'good' spaces.

Furthermore, there are also examples of more accessible methodologies that embody feminist values but do not have the feminist tag. The book *Critical Care* (Fitz & Krasny, 2019) demonstrates this by presenting architectural projects that may appear 'normal' in typological terms but are reframed by accompanying theoretical essays to highlight how feminist values of care, interdependence, and responsibility towards the planet underpin them. In doing so, the publication makes visible how deployment of feminist values can enable the production of 'good' spaces even through existing architectural tools – a strategy also employed by the practitioners in Slovakia and Czechia, as we will see later.

As feminist spatial practices intervene not only in the built form but also in relationships, narratives, and everyday practices, they require an expanded understanding of space. Feminist spatial discourse consistently challenges the idea of space as a neutral backdrop or empty container, instead describing it as relational, dynamic, and always in the making. Doreen Massey (2005), often cited in the discourse, captures this by defining space as the product of interrelations and as a sphere of multiplicity that is never fixed but always under construction. Scholars drawing on assemblage theory (Frichot & Loo, 2013; Frichot et al., 2016; Jobst & Frichot, 2021) have furthermore emphasised how spaces come together through heterogeneous elements – people, materials, stories, ecologies – that form temporary constellations rather than stable wholes. Posthumanist feminist thinkers such as Bennett (2010) extend this argument by highlighting that materials and more-than-human actors are not passive but active participants in shaping environments. Taken together, these perspectives point to a conception of space as an assemblage of material and social relations always in becoming, resonating with Haraway's concept of 'worlding' (2016). Such an understanding of space enables the feminist spatial practitioners to build worlds not only materially but also through narrations, enactment, and perception. The theoretical concepts of space outlined above are foundational to this understanding of space. However, many practitioners employ it intuitively by questioning the established paradigms, without necessarily naming or engaging with these theories (Frichot, 2019; Rendell, 2006). As a few scholars note, this highly theorised and complex understanding of space can present a challenge for practitioners outside the discourse, who often perceive space primarily in physical terms (Petrescu, 2007; Schalk et al., 2017). This paper takes up this challenge: drawing on both literature and our own fieldwork, we propose a framework of an expanded understanding of space that makes the concept more operational for those within as well as outside of the discourse.

FIELD DESCRIPTION AND METHOD OF ENQUIRY

Slovakia and Czechia grapple with similar neoliberal developments as the countries in the West: privatisation, commercial development, and the weakening of public housing shape cities in ways that often disregard social equity (Hirt, 2012; Chelcea & Druță, 2016; Ferencuhová & Gentile, 2016). Although actors countering these processes exist, they are not coherently described in the literature. Lokšová's thesis (2023) highlights the significant role of NGOs in initiating participatory approaches and safeguarding public interests in planning, especially during and after the transition to the market economy, a reality confirmed by our study. Feminist discourse equally only began to take shape in the 1990s (Cviková & Juránová, 2009), although the role of women in society and in architecture was also a topic during state socialism (Ryndová et al., 2003; Lišková, 2018; Bucur & Daskalova, 2020; Brühová & Huber-Doudová, 2024). Feminist spatial practices aligned with Western discourse appeared only recently, with a new generation, including us, the authors of this paper. The practice is

strongly understood as architecture and planning for women, although there is a shift towards values. There are two initiatives, both platforms, that are in the mainstream linked to this field: Women Public Space Prague (WPS) (2015–2020) and Architektky (2020–today). Their differences illustrate the shift well. Whereas WPS primarily focused on promoting women in the profession and is no longer active, Architektky addresses broader issues, such as the precarity of students in architectural employment, expanding beyond women's issues. This shift aligns with the wider field of feminist spatial practice discussed above. A significant milestone was the 2023 exhibition *Liberated Space: Care – Architecture – Feminism* (2023) in Bratislava, which presented a historical overview of the two countries alongside works by contemporary practitioners. To highlight the cultural enmeshment of the two countries, it is worth mentioning that the exhibition was curated by a Czech artist, the group Architektky is run by Czech architects, but WPS Prague was founded by a Slovak architect. The installation by Architektky at the mentioned exhibition provides valuable insight into feminist spatial practices, featuring responses from members of the Facebook group Architektky to what feminist architecture is. These responses highlight values like inclusivity, empathy, care, community, and equity, which extend beyond gender issues, despite being articulated solely by women. With our research presented in this paper, alongside our curatorial project, the exhibition *Beyond Architecture: Czech and Slovak Spatial Practices for the 99%* (2025) in Prague – which builds directly on this research – we aim to further shift and establish the discourse of feminist spatial practice in the two countries.

Leaning on the principles and attitudes of feminist spatial practice, we used the snowball method and sought out organisations that create 'good' spaces for marginalised groups in Slovakia and Czechia. As the objective of the research was to be a mobilising force, we focused on currently active organisations with established practices. To move beyond the identity politics of feminist spatial practice, we concentrated on organisations and their activities rather than on personal approaches of individuals, which tend to be more difficult to learn from, as they are tied to unique biographies and specific standpoints. Furthermore, examining the overall practice of organisations allows us to observe patterns, shifts, and, most importantly, the consolidation of certain approaches and methods in creating spaces for marginalised groups. By considering the whole practice of organisations, we were furthermore able to see connections between individual projects and how they interact as a whole in the creation of 'good' spaces. Such studies are largely absent in accounts of feminist spatial practices, and our contribution highlights their value.

Starting with our own contacts and acknowledging our position in the field, we gathered over 250 organisations that our informants identified as creating spaces for marginalised perspectives. We intentionally used the term 'perspectives' rather than people, community, or groups to encourage broader thinking, including more-than-human marginalised groups. From this pool, we selected 21 organisations using additional criteria, like geographical diversity, for a more detailed analysis, which involved conducting interviews with a representative from each organisation and reviewing relevant documents. Analysing these organisations together does not allow for an in-depth understanding of each but enables us to see trends and patterns. The selection aimed to represent a broad range of practices. The following categories emerged from the data. The selected organisations cover a case from each category. Detailing of these categories serves here also as an overview of the field:

1. Who the organisations are creating space for: The clients – diverse marginalised groups identified in our data – fall into five intersecting categories:
 - People in housing need: This includes individuals, families, women, and young people leaving children's homes, often from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, many of them Roma.
 - People moving on bikes or on foot: While biking infrastructure often prioritises able-bodied individuals, safe pedestrian pathways are crucial for children, women, and people with limited physical abilities.
 - Public space for the 99%: This refers to the interplay between physical spaces and the diverse groups who use them, emphasising the inclusion of marginalised voices in the planning and accessibility of public spaces.
 - Post-industrial and post-coal landscapes: This includes people, other animals, soil, economies, stories, buildings, and heritage – elements that shape landscapes exhausted by extraction and left to their own means.
 - More-than-human actors: These include pollinators such as bees, buildings with complex histories, forests, and rivers – elements rarely considered when envisioning the built environment.
2. What spatial practices they engage in: All selected organisations create physical spaces, ranging in scale from small objects to entire streets and city-wide cycling infrastructures. They rely on architectural and planning expertise, either by including professionals from these disciplines within their teams or through long-term collaborations. Besides architectural studios, all other organisations have diverse disciplines in their teams. All

organisations rely on a broad spectrum of knowledges, ranging from environmental studies, sociology, and communication studies to social work, education, and arts.

3. What the format of the organisations is: The majority are NGOs, some functioning as non-profit architectural studios. The selection includes informal and formal groups, for-profit studios, activist movements, institutions such as galleries, and groups linked to universities. Many can be categorised as activist or informal NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) groups.
4. Where they are active: Most organisations operate in capital cities, where many are also based, even if they engage in projects in peripheral regions. However, some organisations work in small towns and villages.

We conducted semi-structured interviews with representatives of each organisation during the COVID summer of 2021, mostly in person, allowing us to visit the spaces where they operate. This access enabled us to review materials on site, and we often left with physical documents, such as publications about their work. Our interviews explored their practices, motivations, and links with formal planning structures. Only at the end did we ask whether they identified their practice as feminist.

As embedded researchers in the field, we drew not only on formal interview data but also on informal, relationally produced knowledge, sometimes referred to as 'gossip'. In feminist research, such knowledge is recognised as a legitimate methodological strategy, enabling situated, context-sensitive, and reflexive interpretation (Haraway, 1988). This approach allowed us to attend to gaps or silences in the data. For instance, one organisation's interview did not provide much evidence of feminist spatial practice, yet we knew that another member (who was not interviewed) is engaged in such practices and might have responded differently. Our immersion in the field allowed us to critically reflect on our findings.

The interviews were transcribed and coded in Atlas.ti software, and the data was updated through document analysis in 2024. We reviewed materials collected during interviews, as well as public content from organisations' websites and social media for data triangulation. On this basis, we created short descriptions of each organisation for the *Beyond Architecture* (2025) exhibition. All descriptions were shared with the organisations for adjustment, which could thus see how they were positioned alongside others. As we received only minor corrections, this served as another valuable way to validate our interpretations of their spatial practice.

To identify patterns in spatial practices, we employed an iterative approach, reading, coding, and redefining categories through multiple cycles of analysis. This led to five components of space emerging from the data, shaped by the feminist spatial theory outlined above. Although informed by theory, these components arose directly from the data, aligning with feminist methodologies that emphasise complexity and situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988). These components, described below, allow an analytical look at the diverse spatial practices of creating 'good' spaces, which makes it easier to entangle the complex situated practices originating in unique standpoints and make them accessible to others as well as adaptable to other contexts.

MAKING 'GOOD' SPACES IN SLOVAKIA AND CZECHIA

The analysis section does two things simultaneously. Its central aim is to examine how spatial practitioners in Slovakia and Czechia are creating 'good' spaces. Through this analysis, we aim to uncover more concrete methods and spatial strategies that build on the theoretical discussion above in order to make the practice of creating 'good' spaces more accessible – especially to those outside of explicitly feminist discourse. At the same time, this section explores the connections between the feminist spatial practices described in the theory section and the work of practitioners in Slovakia and Czechia who do not explicitly identify as feminist spatial practitioners, but whose intentions and values closely align with that discourse. By drawing out these parallels and differences, we hope to bridge the two, strengthening the connection between theory and practice, which lies at the heart of feminist spatial practice.

Before proceeding, it is important to clarify why most of the selected practitioners can be described as feminist spatial practitioners, although the majority of interviewees do not label their organisations or themselves as feminist (Grešáková, 2025). They all create spaces for marginalised groups, as outlined above, and state in interviews that their practices are grounded in values such as care, empowerment, solidarity, social justice, equity, and cooperation, clearly resonating with the principles found in the feminist spatial practice discourse outlined above. Through their participation in the *Beyond Architecture* (2025) exhibition, which situated their work within this discourse, some of the organisations have also begun to recognise their practice in this framework, although the categorisation as 'feminist' originates from our analytical perspective.

Spaces for the 99%

Considering the spaces these organisations create, it becomes evident in the reception of their clients, which are diverse marginalised groups, that each of them contributes to the making of at least some 'good' spaces. For instance, the client base of DOM.ov (dom = house, domov = home), an organisation working with

disadvantaged Roma families in Eastern Slovakia, continues to grow with each completed housing project. The environmental NGO Arnika is regularly approached by residents in Prague when their neighbourhoods are threatened by urban development, signalling trust in and recognition of the organisation's advocacy work. AutoMat's Critical Mass rides consistently attract participants, showing that their efforts to reclaim public space resonate with the broader community. Some organisations also collect data that indicates their impact on the everyday lives of people they support. For example, DOM.ov reports that their clients, after completing their programme and having their own home, are more likely to keep employment and that children of their clients are more likely to remain in school – clear signs of increased stability and empowerment. The bookings for Čierne Diery's accommodation project in a restored historical mansion in the overlooked region of Gemer demonstrate a renewed public interest and local vitality in the region. These examples suggest that the spaces these organisations create are supporting the 'good' life of marginalised communities. They create spaces that foster belonging, care, and agency, enabling communities not just to survive but to thrive, making them recognisable as 'good' spaces in accordance with feminist spatial justice (Petrescu & Trogal, 2017).

These 'good' spaces are also situated – a further central aspect in the discourse – shaped by both the needs of marginalised groups and the specificities of the planning and legal context. This is evident in the evolution of the practices of the organisations described in more detail elsewhere (Tabačková, 2022). Some organisations began by experimenting with approaches imported from the West, like participatory practices that rely on municipal support, later adjusting them based on what works locally. Others developed organically from the ground up, shaped by the realities they encountered along the way. By tracing the longer-term trajectories of these organisations rather than analysing isolated case studies, we can see how their spatial strategies mature over time through trial, reflection, and ongoing dialogue with the communities they work with, as well as available knowledge and skills. Their practices shift and develop over time as they remain focused on what matters – the creation of spaces that empower and care for those excluded from the benefits of urban development. Some of these spaces are more similar than others. For instance, cycling advocacy in Prague and Bratislava shows many similarities, not only because both are capital cities with comparable urban forms and challenges, but also because the organisations in both cities learn from and collaborate with one another. In contrast, housing initiatives for Roma communities in a suburban housing estate in Czechia and rural Eastern Slovakia diverge significantly, shaped by differing settlement structures, histories, and legal frameworks. Through this situated, iterative approach, practitioners refine their own understanding of what a 'good' space can and should be in each context and how they could be created given the local situations.

Working with 'master's tools'

An initial view of the spatial methods these organisations employ reveals a surprising finding. Most of them make frequent use of the 'master's tools', such as social media, catalogue family houses, and tourist accommodations. Only a few organisations – mostly those led by architects versed in feminist and critical discourses – consciously experiment with new tools or aim to develop alternative methods in the spirit of 'doing architecture otherwise', such as performative mappings, discursive dinners, and listening sessions. While experimental and artistic methods require expert knowledge, mainstream tools allow wider participation of local practitioners who are generally knowledgeable of these tools. This makes it easier to create 'good' spaces, especially in contexts with limited availability of specialised experts. Using known tools also arguably makes the practices more accessible to their clients.

Take the example of DOM.ov, which assists families in building catalogue family houses on the edges of villages – spaces that feminist spatial theory has often critiqued for reinforcing patriarchal domestic roles and isolating women. But in this context, the same typology takes on a different meaning. The dominant approach of municipalities in Slovakia in providing housing for these communities is to demolish makeshift homes that are deemed hazardous and replace them with municipal rental housing, typically in the form of single-storey buildings or low-rise blocks. This strategy has repeatedly failed: over time, housing is neglected by both residents and municipalities, deteriorates, and is ultimately demolished again, serving to reinforce harmful stereotypes that these communities are incapable of sustaining a 'good' life. Rather than improving the situation, such interventions often reinforce marginalisation. In this context, DOM.ov's catalogue family houses on one's own plot of land represent stability, dignity, and the fulfilment of a long-held dream thought unachievable for members of this community. It becomes a tool for empowerment, a spatial form that enables a different future and supports the 'good' life of DOM.ov's clients, as outlined above. However, the house itself is not what constitutes the 'good' space alone.

Employing the spatial lens of feminist spatial theory outlined above, we can bring together other components of DOM.ov's practice to understand the 'good' spaces they create. The organisation's practice involves not just building houses but also a year-long education programme in home economics, a savings-based microloan system, regular visits from social workers, adjustments to land-use plans, support from neighbours and extended

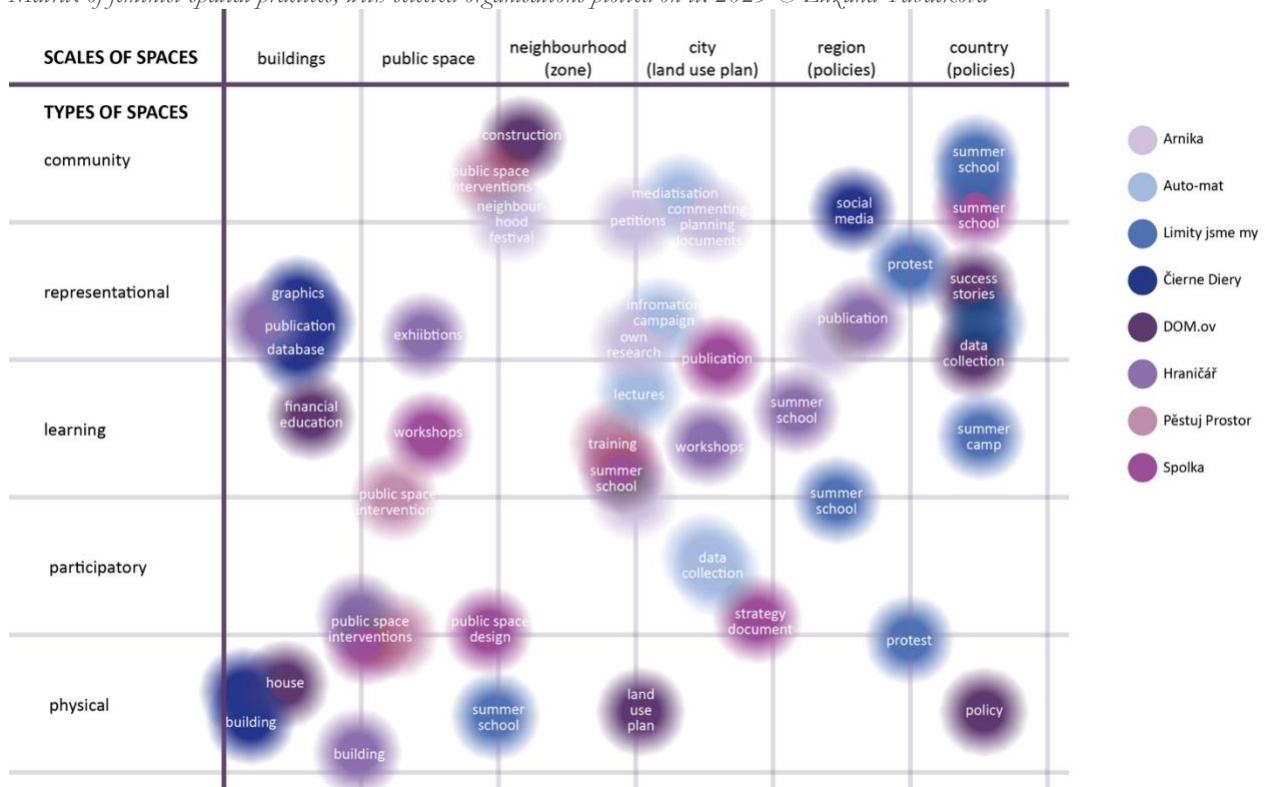
family during construction, national-level policy work, and social media storytelling that shares the success of participants. Each of these spatial practices addresses a different, interdependent aspect of the exclusion of this community from access to 'good' homes. It is all the individual spaces created through these practices that together amount to the 'good' space for this community. Such practice can be described in feminist terms as intersectional, as it addresses multiple issues of exclusion and caring by building the community's agency through a dynamic assemblage of physical, social, emotional, and institutional elements. All organisations we studied employ a similar intersection of diverse spatial practices/spaces to create 'good' spaces. It appears that this variety of intersecting spaces, rather than innovative spatial tools, is what enables the creation of 'good' spaces. In the following section, we present a framework of these spaces, tying them back to the feminist discourse outlined above.

FIVE INTERSECTING COMPONENTS OF SPACE

Our iterative analysis of the spatial practices of 21 organisations led to the emergence of five recurring, intersecting spatial components: physical, pedagogical, representational, participatory, and communal. When considered alongside the multi-scalarity of these spaces – from individual homes to broader policy environments – these components form a matrix with two intersecting axes, as shown in [Figure 1](#). Some practices appear in multiple areas of the matrix, reflecting their multifaceted nature, such as those that combine education with community-building efforts. Just as space and practice are deeply entangled, so are these spatial components. What follows is a detailed description of each component, supported by examples from our data. These examples show the variety of spatial tools and methods in use, as well as how each type of space is linked to others. Each category is also contextualised through relevant feminist spatial theories, highlighting how the strategies employed by organisations in Slovakia and Czechia resonate with feminist spatial discourse. Altogether, this framework offers a grounded understanding of what 'good' spaces consist of and how their components are necessarily interrelated and span multiple scales.

Figure 1

Matrix of feminist spatial practices, with selected organisations plotted on it. 2025 © Zuzana Tabačková



Representational spaces are created through photos, graphics, texts, databases, studies, and other forms of media. Representational spaces give visibility and legitimacy to marginalised groups and the worlds they inhabit, particularly when physical transformation is not yet possible due to a lack of resources. For example, Čierne Diery's graphics of abandoned historical buildings reframe these structures from neglected remnants to objects of desire, creating a shift in public perception. They, like many other organisations, also create databases of buildings that have been marginalised, for instance due to their links with an uncomfortable past – socialist,

Hungarian, or other. These databases act as both a record of and an invitation for care and attention. Similarly, DOM.ov uses social media to publish success stories about Roma families who have built their own homes, challenging dominant narratives of dysfunction and dependence. AutoMat collects and visualises cycling data in Prague, making visible what is already happening on the streets and using that data to lobby for safer infrastructures. As feminist theorists like bell hooks (1998) and D'Ignazio and Klein (2020) have pointed out, such representational work is a vital site for creating 'good' spaces. These are not merely support tools; they are where new imaginaries and worlds begin to take shape. Data, stories, and visual materials become interventions in themselves – tools for counter-narratives and for assembling new social-spatial realities, resonating with Haraway's notion of 'worldings' (2016). When physical transformation is constrained by structural inequalities, representational space becomes a crucial starting point. As the case studies show, representation can shift perspectives, reframe what matters, and prepare the ground for other forms of spatial intervention.

Pedagogical spaces empower individuals and communities through knowledge-sharing and capacity-building. One kind of these spaces operates on a 'help to self-help' model to foster long-term agency. Arnika, for example, offers pro-bono legal consultations to help communities resist exploitative urban developments, while Pěstuj Prostor runs open calls that provide both funding and architectural support to locals to improve public spaces they care for. Such initiatives often overlap with participatory and physical spaces. DOM.ov integrates a year-long financial literacy programme as part of its self-build housing model, ensuring that new homes are sustained by stable household management. These are pedagogical spaces that align with the emphasis of feminist spatial practices on education as empowerment (Petrescu, 2007; Schalk et al., 2017). They are also sites where situated knowledge (Haraway, 2016) – knowledge grounded in lived experience – is produced and shared. Other kinds of learning spaces are more traditional, focusing on spatial practitioners, those aligning with feminist values or not, like municipal workers, university students, and architects in practice. Summer schools, seminars, university courses, conferences, lectures, and qualification courses are all formats widely used to transform the mainstream practice and also to build communities of practitioners that can support each other in the creation of 'good' spaces.

Participatory spaces follow a broad spectrum, from informing residents of urban plans, consultation processes, participatory workshops, and co-design sessions to hands-on construction of public infrastructure – much like Western processes influenced by Arnstein's (1969) *Ladder of Citizen Participation*. These spaces are often intertwined with physical, pedagogical, and communal spaces; they are moments for relationship-building and collective knowledge production. They take the form of neighbourhood festivals, community dinners, or formal processes done in collaboration with municipalities. More than the form, it is the intention to redistribute power that makes them feminist (Petrescu, 2007; Arruzza et al., 2019; Angeles, 2023). These spaces allow for the recognition of multiple standpoints and lived realities, engaging communities not merely as stakeholders but as co-creators. Participatory processes can also be transformative: by engaging directly in shaping their environments, people often shift their understanding of themselves and of what is possible. These are spaces of becoming (Grosz, 2001), where individuals and collectives strengthen their agency and build confidence, voice, and a sense of ownership over the built environment.

Physical spaces are the built, material components of spatial practice, ranging from permanent housing to temporary interventions. They include DOM.ov's self-built homes, Čierne Diery's architectural renovations, and other organisations' festivals, summer schools, or street closures that temporarily alter the everyday experience of space. These physical spaces are often used tactically as a means of prefiguring alternative futures: a car-free street becomes a playground, a square becomes a commons, a ruin becomes a sought-after object. The climate camp of Limity Jsme My is both a physical and a relational prefigurative space – a temporary world built on principles of solidarity, non-hierarchy, and care for humans and more-than-humans – an act of feminist 'worlding' (Haraway, 2016). Very few examples involve the creation of entirely new physical spaces, which is likely connected to the resource-heavy nature of construction and especially the lack of financial means. Instead, much of the work focuses on the maintenance of and care for existing spaces (de la Bellacasa, 2017; Fitz & Krasny, 2019). For instance, Čierne Diery's tourist accommodation creates a new architectural object while preserving the layered interior of a historical building – not rewriting but maintaining and caring for it. Materiality plays an important role here. The insect house, by another of the researched cases, COLridor, for example, uses the natural properties of wood to expand and contract with humidity. Spolka, to cite another example, uses concrete gutters, originally designed to divert water from landscapes, and reimagines them as furniture in a new water retention garden. These practices work with what is already there, foregrounding care and reuse, as do feminist spatial theorists who centre maintenance, relationality, and ecological entanglements in design (Fitz & Krasny, 2019). We also include in this category the design of physical space through tools such as urban strategies or land-use plans, which, although abstract, ultimately shape material space and how it is experienced.

Communal spaces are created through the relationships that sustain and emerge from spatial practice. Čierne Diery's social media presence is a key example: it cultivates a network of (not only online) supporters who give cultural and symbolic value to the buildings they promote. Pěstuj Prostor's work depends on the strength of local communities to initiate and sustain public space projects. The peer-learning environments shared by practitioners themselves – workshops, networks, and informal collaborations – form a community of practice. They are vital for the maintenance of 'good' spaces over time, ensuring that interventions do not remain isolated events but become embedded in everyday life (Petrescu & Trogal, 2017).

A final insight that emerged during the analysis is the inherently complex and relational nature of many spatial practices. When attempting to map singular practices onto the matrix, it became clear that many of them produce more than one type of space simultaneously. This is why some practices appear in multiple places within the matrix. The simultaneous creation of multiple types of spaces often happens intuitively, especially for organisations working with limited resources. It's a practical and effective approach: one spatial method frequently gives rise to several types of space at once. Take, for example, a neighbourhood festival. While it may appear to be a simple, temporary physical intervention, it often generates multiple spaces. It creates a physical space where people gather, but it also reshapes how the space is understood and experienced. If the event includes an exhibition showcasing data on cycling patterns or stories from overlooked communities, it simultaneously becomes a representational space. A workshop or public discussion during the event turns it into a pedagogical space. If residents are involved in shaping the programme, sharing food, or voicing concerns, the event also becomes a participatory space. Add informal moments of connection – conversation, music, shared meals – and a communal space begins to form. All of this can happen within the span of an afternoon, through a single practice. However, not every event will create all five components, nor should it. The data shows that it is the overall spatial practice, not single projects or events, that together create 'good' spaces through the creation of the five intersecting components of space.

THE NECESSITY OF MULTIPLE SPACES

In this discussion, we reflect critically on the main insights from our analysis, situating them in relation to the feminist spatial practice discourse and to their implications for practice. Our analysis of 21 organisations in Slovakia and Czechia shows that, contrary to much of the feminist spatial discourse, 'master's tools' can contribute to the making of 'good' spaces. In other words, employing the same mechanisms as the dominant system – modifying land-use plans, designing catalogue houses, using mainstream social media – can support the creation of spaces that nurture care, agency, and justice. Employing mainstream rather than specialised tools makes the creation of 'good' spaces more accessible to practitioners, especially in places where expertise is scarce, such as the post-socialist context. Yet because these practices only become transformative when guided by feminist values, this finding is more relevant for those already positioned within feminist spatial discourse, for whom it broadens the repertoire of possible methods. For practitioners outside the discourse, the distinction may be confusing: if the role of values is not grasped, learning that feminist spatial practitioners often use the same tools as mainstream actors risks obscuring rather than clarifying what makes a practice feminist.

A second contribution of this paper is the framework of five interconnected components of space. This framework aims to provide an operational understanding of space as complex, dynamic, and multiple in ways that practitioners, especially those outside feminist circles, can meaningfully apply. Yet its simplicity poses challenges. By conflating practice and space in one, it mirrors the feminist understanding of space as always becoming, while at the same time translating it into more static, mainstream terminology to enhance legibility. The paper does not explore in depth how processes and spaces interlink, but instead only sketches this connection with examples. Our previous work offers a deeper exploration of participatory spaces (Tabačková & Mravčáková, 2024), but this complexity can remain difficult to grasp, particularly for those outside of feminist discourse. Moreover, the framework's accessibility is double-edged: while it may make the expanded concept of space more tangible, it also risks being co-opted by neoliberal agendas. As mainstream actors also use these components, the framework could be mobilised to produce compelling but exclusionary spaces. The framework thus offers insights into feminist spatial practices and the expanded concept of space, but its transformative potential depends on the political values attached to its use.

All of the above promotes and encourages feminist spatial practice to open up, to embrace accessible, even mainstream methods, tools, and language, while being aware of the risks of co-option by neoliberal frameworks. However, the organisations we examined already operate within this tension (Grešáková, 2025). In addition to using the 'master's tools', these practitioners, for instance, often cooperate with the 'master' – not just to access resources but to directly co-create 'good' spaces. Our earlier paper shows how such close collaborations are, in fact, desired as a means of transforming the system of planning culture itself (Tabačková & Mravčáková, 2024). Another analysis by the author of this paper highlights how these groups create hybrid models to survive within

the post-socialist capitalist ruins, balancing institutional engagement with grassroots autonomy (Grešáková, 2025). Future research should explore how such practices sustain a feminist spatial agenda while existing in proximity to the very systems they seek to change, as well as responding to political shifts, changes in funding, and community needs.

This paper set out to bridge the theory of feminist spatial practice and the practices of organisations in Slovakia and Czechia that are creating ‘good’ spaces, outlining the contributions to theory from practice. We have thus far stated only implicitly what the theory contributes to those involved in the practice by using the discourse throughout the paper to describe the practices. This description is a contribution. Feminist spatial practices, with their attention to values as well as an expanded understanding of space and spatial practice, are uniquely suited to describing the practice of these organisations without leaving out important aspects. The studied organisations are, for now, a dispersed field of diverse practitioners, which makes it difficult to unite them under a common objective. Associating them collectively with the feminist spatial practice, as the exhibition *Beyond Architecture* (2025) attempts to do, could offer a common ground for further action and exchange. Moreover, just as feminism expanded beyond women’s issues towards broader debates on care, power, and justice and continues to evolve with new theories, so could the organisations benefit from an engagement with feminist theories to open reflections about unconscious reproductions for dominant power dynamics or uneven inclusions. However, the perception of feminism as primarily centred on women’s issues, rather than values, poses a significant obstacle in these undertakings. Yet rather than abandoning the term, as some suggest, the task is to continue building awareness of feminism as a value-oriented discourse, so that it can serve as a shared framework for building ‘good’ spaces.

TOWARDS AN ACCESSIBLE FEMINIST SPATIAL PRACTICE

This paper has demonstrated that feminist spatial practice provides a viable framework for creating ‘good’ spaces, even when practitioners do not explicitly identify with feminism. By analysing the practices of 21 organisations in Slovakia and Czechia, we have shown that spatial justice in this context is driven not by specialised feminist methodologies but rather by widely accessible tools. The contribution of these practitioners lies not in the uniqueness of their methods but in how they connect different spatial components – physical, representational, pedagogical, participatory, and communal. The five components presented in this study capture the complexity of ‘good’ spaces for groups deprived of adequate space in neoliberal society, showing how these spaces are more than physical interventions and are constructed through an intersection of multiple spaces and across multiple scales. Further research is needed into the applicability of this framework as an analytical and design tool, as well as into the individual components themselves, to better understand concrete tools that make them, while foregrounding feminist values.

The findings also offer a critical perspective on the global discourse of feminist spatial practice. Whereas much of this discourse remains highly theoretical, exclusive, and embedded in elite academic language, the realities observed in Slovakia and Czechia tell a different story. Due to the region’s historical trajectory, feminism arrived later, at a time when global feminist theory had already become increasingly complex and detached from mainstream practice. Yet in these post-socialist conditions, spatial practitioners have developed hybrid spatial strategies working with the ‘master’s tools’, often operating within capitalism rather than outside it. Their work challenges the assumption that feminist spatial practices should reject the neoliberal tools and environments. This hybridity presents a valuable insight for global feminist movements. The study highlights that feminist spatial practice should not be confined to exclusive discourse but should be made more accessible and actionable. If feminist spatial knowledge is to influence mainstream urban planning and architecture, it must be understandable and applicable beyond academic and activist circles. This research contributes to a broader rethinking of feminist spatial practice – not as a niche field but as a necessary and adaptable tool for creating ‘good’ spaces centred on care, empowerment, and inclusion.

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Ethical statement

This research is based on qualitative interviews, engagement with the *Beyond Architecture* (2025) exhibition, and long-term fieldwork. All participants gave informed consent. The research follows ethical standards for qualitative and feminist research, including reflexivity, care, and respect for communication partners. Formal IRB approval was not required according to the institutional guidelines of the authors' affiliations.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Author contributions

LG and ZT: Research conceptualisation; LG and ZT: Methodology; LG and ZT: Investigation; ZT: Analysis; ZT: Writing – original draft; LG and ZT: Writing – review & editing; ZT: Visualisation.

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are not publicly available due to the sensitive and relational nature of the research but are available from the authors upon reasonable request.

AI disclosure

Generative AI (ChatGPT, OpenAI) was used in a limited capacity for language editing and structuring of selected passages. All outputs were critically reviewed, revised, and integrated by the authors. No AI-generated content was adopted without substantial modification. The authors retain full responsibility for the content.

Biographical sketch

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