

Co-founder and director of Agile City Partners, Andrea San Gil León was named one of Latin America's most important female figures working in the transport sector by the Inter-American Development Bank in celebration of International Day of Women and Girls in Science 2021. Andrea is passionate about reducing social vulnerability and increasing quality of life through city design and sustainable solutions, which makes her a great feminist leader.

Andrea San Gil León

FOUNDER OF THE CENTER FOR
URBAN SUSTAINABILITY IN COSTA
RICA, CO-FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR
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COSTA RICA

In your view, what is a feminist transport system?

It is a transport system that leaves no one behind. It dignifies and satisfies travel needs for everyone, especially for those from historically excluded and marginalized populations (women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, BIPOC, LGBTQI+ people). It involves them in planning, design, and decision-making. A feminist transport system is safe and accessible with a diversity of options depending on people's mobility needs. It prioritizes active and public transport and connects all areas of the city that people need to access. It cares about people, is flexible, and is constantly improving and adapting based on the user experience.

How does the experience of women and girls in Costa Rica influence your work?

Feeling scared, unsafe, and vulnerable just by walking out the door that influences the gender perspective of my work. Walking, cycling, public transport: these are all unsafe for women. If the only safe option to navigate the city for women is to purchase a car (which not everyone can do), we are creating inequity and exclusion by design. A sustainable transport system or city will never be realized if 50% of the population doesn't feel safe when moving around, if they are not part of planning and decision-making, and if the transport system doesn't cater to their needs. I decided that if I was going to work in cities and transport, gender perspectives and a feminist approach were always

going to be elements I would incorporate in the way I plan, design, gather data, make decisions, and measure the success of projects.

How do you use your professional and personal channels to promote more inclusive transport systems?

From the very beginning, after founding the Center for Urban Sustainability in 2014, we have had a department on Gender and the City (now Gender and Inclusive Cities). The gender component is always included in lectures, conferences, events, and communications. Personally, I share a lot of content focused on social justice, gender inclusion, LGBTQI+ rights, etc., and do a lot of interviews and lectures with an inclusion component. As a professor of an Introduction to Urban Sustainability course for the University for Peace (UPEACE) I also include a module Inequality in Cities to raise awareness of all the inequities generated in cities today linked to age, race, ethnicity, gender, disabilities, etc.

Who is your feminist role model?

I have always admired women like Mónica Araya and Melania Guerra. They are strong women in male-dominated fields. They use their platforms to raise awareness about important issues, speak out, and take strong stands for what they believe in. Most importantly, they are always willing to support other women, like me. I feel very lucky to be able to learn from them and call them my friends.





Have you had a transformative experience that has guided your work?

From 2018 to 2019, I had the opportunity to work for Costa Rica's government in transport and city planning as a Presidential Advisor, alongside the formidable Claudia Dobles, Costa Rica's then First Lady. That experience gave me a broad perspective on the difficulties linked to politics, decision-making, multi-level governance, the importance of partnerships, and articulating ideas across different sectors. I learned about the importance of leading fearlessly, standing your ground, and defending your vision, but also being able to negotiate and listen to different stakeholders' needs with empathy and compassion.

I also learned how stressful and violent the political world can be, how being a young woman in transport means not being listened to or believed, being criticized, bypassed, bullied, ridiculed, etc. It motivated me to keep building technical and emotional skills with a community of like-minded people to help cope with these challenges and continue my work. Transforming systemic problems is a marathon and not a sprint. You need all the tools, energy, and help to make that long run without losing yourself.

How do you stay motivated?

Through the tiny victories. A prominent publication about inequities for women in Costa Rica's transport system in the newspaper. More projects including gender and inclusion components, small changes in legislation and policy. Seeing more institutions, companies, media, influencers, politicians, etc. talking about these topics. And of course, seeing other women – especially young activists – getting involved, being fearless and amazing. But also, by taking care of myself and finding comfort, enjoyment, inspiration in other things. If I'm ok, I'll be strong enough to keep on fighting.