

# GLOBAL PUBLIC SPACE PROGRAMME ANNUAL REPORT 2021



PUBLIC SPACE  
PROGRAMME

**UN HABITAT**  
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

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Cover photo: Redesigning open street markets in Hanoi, Vietnam © HealthBridge

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# GLOBAL PUBLIC SPACE PROGRAMME

## ANNUAL REPORT 2021



**UN HABITAT**  
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE



Young boys providing ideas in a participatory workshop in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan © PF Urban Initiatives

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## About UN-Habitat

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) is the United Nations programme working towards a better urban future. Our mission is to promote socially and environmentally sustainable human settlements development and the achievement of adequate shelter for all. We work with partners to build inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and communities and promote urbanization as a positive transformative force for people and communities, reducing inequality, discrimination, and poverty. UN-Habitat provides technical assistance, policy advice, knowledge and capacity building to national and local governments in over 90 countries.

UN-Habitat is coordinating the implementation of the UN System-Wide Strategy on Sustainable Urban Development and in close coordination with national and local governments, the agency leads the monitoring of Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG11) on sustainable cities and communities as well as the [New Urban Agenda](#).

## Global Public Space programme

Launched in 2012, UN-Habitat's Global Public Space Programme supports cities to take actions for safe, inclusive, and accessible public space for all. As a Programme, we promote the crucial role of green and quality public spaces in cities, acting as an enabler for social justice, prosperity, and environmental change. Streets, sidewalks and cycling lanes, squares, parks and waterfronts, gardens and community courtyards, are all part of what we define as public space. Trends of rapid urbanization are constantly increasing, and public spaces are too often sacrificed on account of uncontrolled urban development. We support national and local governments, private sector, and civil society to implement policies and strategies to protect and regenerate the public realm for a sustainable future.

The Global Public Space Programme adopts an [integrated and iterative approach](#) for sustainable public space development and management. Starting from city-wide and site-specific public space assessments, we promote evidence-based strategies and national policies for a more connected network of public



Neighbourhood community using the upgraded public space in Prizren, Kosovo © EC Ma Ndryshe

spaces. We use innovative methodologies such as Minecraft to co-design space with communities, boosting public participation in urban planning and design processes. We encourage co-governance and co-management of public space to secure longevity of projects and community empowerment. So far, we have completed 137 public space upgrading projects in 90 different cities, impacting the life of over 2.3 million people.

2021 has been a crucial year to rediscover the value of public spaces. Countries and cities have mobilised funding and have actioned recovery plans to cope with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Great effort has been put in developing new means of communication and interaction. However, new variants of the COVID-19 virus have emerged throughout the year, keeping public life in constant stand-by. The pandemic has exhausted several small businesses, which could not manage to recover between one wave and the other. The cultural industry is reinventing its business model, while coping with one of the biggest crises of the sector.

This year, more than ever, we have seen a great interest from cities in how to keep the momentum of participation going. We received several requests for trainings and workshops on urban participation and inclusion worldwide. Capacity building and development of normative products is at the core of the UN-Habitat mandate, and this year our efforts were addressed to deliver training packages and innovate our methodologies. While dealing with the crisis, we adopted an integrated approach to not forget cross-cutting challenges that are still threatening our cities and communities, such as gender inequality and climate change, which have been exacerbated during the pandemic.

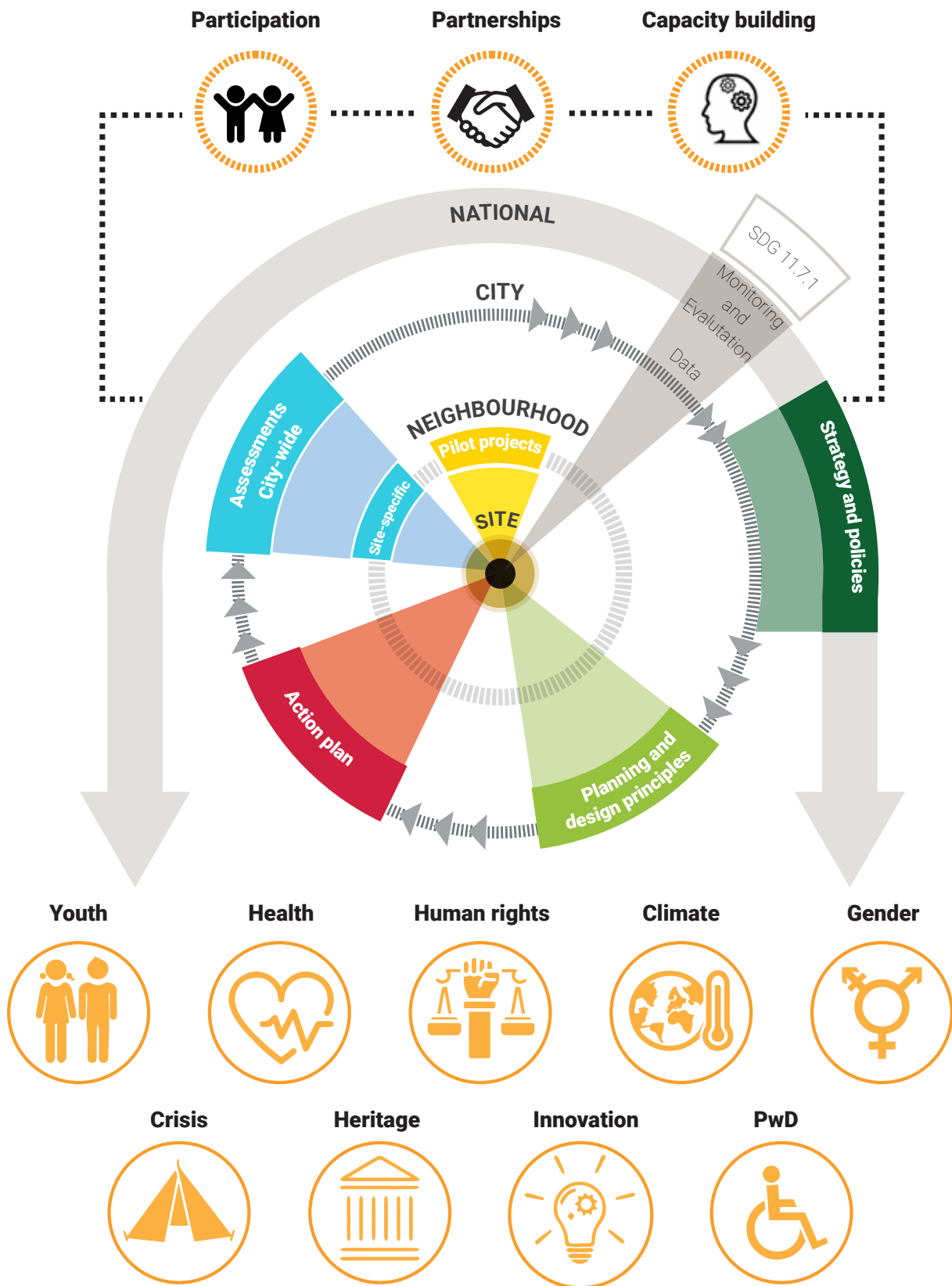
Public space has proved to improve the well-being and health of our communities, while boosting social interaction and livelihoods. Leveraging the renovated interest of countries and cities, we believe that COVID-19 could be a great opportunity for cities to redefine their agendas and develop a new strategic framework, putting public spaces as a key driver of change.

# 2.32 Million people

enjoy safe access to more than **137 public spaces** designed and upgraded through UN-Habitat's global public space programme operating in **90 cities**.



# HOW WE WORK





## 2021 HIGHLIGHTS



**Facilitated 31 Minecraft workshops**

from which **23** were **virtual**



**3 public spaces upgraded** in Nepal, Lebanon and Vietnam



**Conducted 16 site-specific assessments** and **3 city-wide assessments**



**630 people engaged** in Minecraft workshops from which **55%** were **women and girls**



**400 persons trained** on the use of Minecraft and UN-Habitat tools



**Reached 100,000 persons** during **70** online events, campaigns, publications



**2,000 people engaged** in **70** participatory workshops



**Supported 4 emergency responses** in Mozambique, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Venezuela



**Produced 25 Normative outputs** toolkits, policy papers, reports



Placemaking week 2021 in Nairobi, Kenya © UN-Habitat



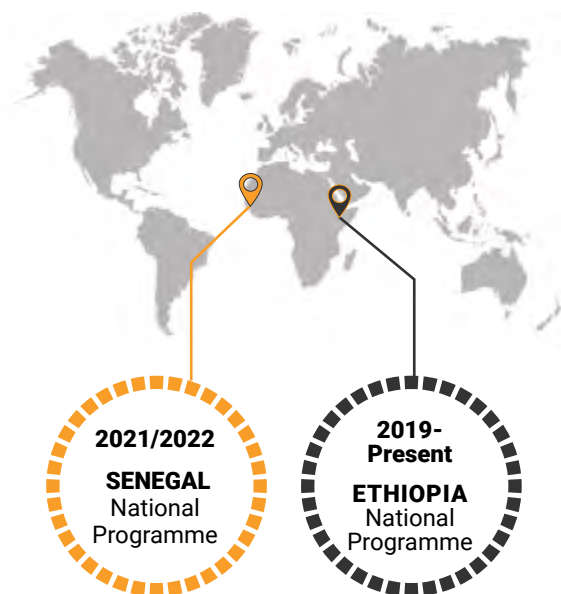
## Mainstreaming safe, inclusive, and accessible public spaces into National Urban Policies

### Strengthening legal frameworks to secure, regulate, and protect public spaces at the national level

Since the beginning of the 21st century, public spaces have been included in the national urban agendas. The National Urban Policy has been an effective tool to promote public space for cities' prosperity and overall national development. In most countries, the formulation of progressive National Urban Policies has created relevant frameworks and opportunities to foster inclusion of and assert the role of public spaces in urban development.

Planning, design, protection management, and the use of public spaces require adequate policy and legal frameworks, norms and practices, holistic and integrated approaches and a clear understanding on the roles and responsibilities of different government departments, public and private stakeholders. The National Urban Policy (NUP) offers an important coordination platform for rallying these actors towards a common public space vision and a clear communication of their roles.

Such coordination and dialogue help achieve a unified vision and improved response to public space challenges at city and national levels. By creating consensus across ministries and departments and defining roles and responsibilities for different actors, NUP strengthens the enabling environment for public space management.



#### Our methodology: National urban policies driving public space led development



The [national urban policies driving public space led urban development](#) is a quick thematic guide for mainstreaming safe, inclusive, and accessible public spaces into national urban policies.

## Residents leading the re-writing of the national policy in Ethiopia

Ethiopia was selected to be the first flagship project that focuses on advancing public space in National Urban Policies. We have supported the country in conducting several city assessments which helped us understand the challenges of public spaces at the city and national level. Our programme has been working closely with the national government to draft a new strategy and review existing policies. As we closed phase one in 2020, this year our focus was to co-prepare an action plan to implement the national strategy on public spaces.

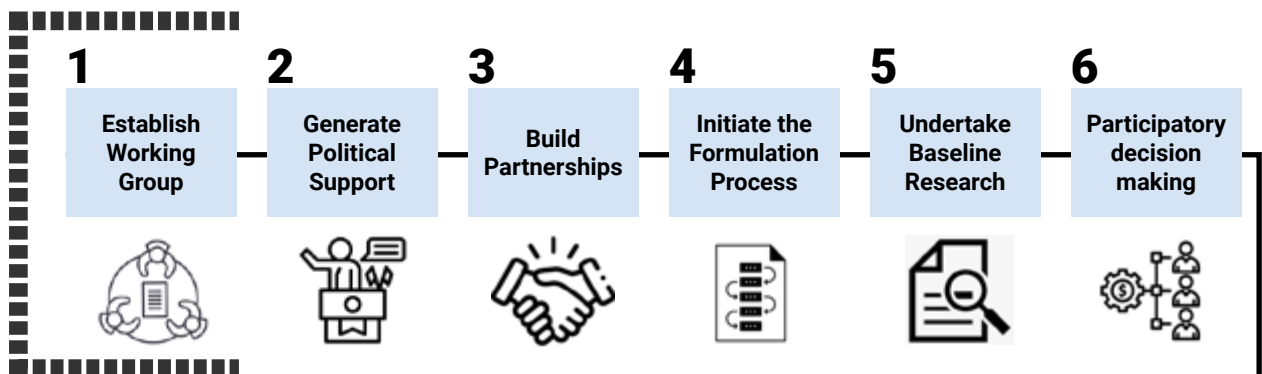
In 2021, several validation workshops took place allowing residents to give feedback on the city-wide public space assessments.

Results from these workshops highlighted the urgent need to include protection of public lands in urban policies as well as addressing accessibility for all. The findings were showcased during a weeklong event organised by the Ministry of Urban Development and Infrastructure.

A design guideline is being developed together with 30 urban designers, architects, civil society organisations and high-level decision-makers. This normative output will guide experts on how to deliver high-quality public spaces that are safe and inclusive, especially for persons with disabilities. Seven pilot sites have already been re-designed as part of this process.

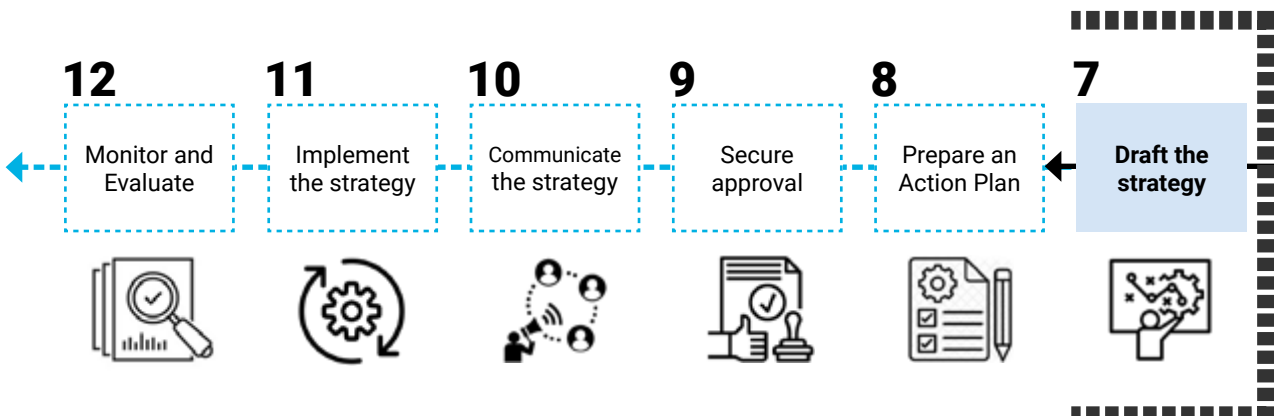
### PHASE I

Building on UN-Habitat's lessons learnt and experiences in assessing and formulating public space strategies, the following steps were adopted during the implementation of the first phase of the National Programme in Ethiopia:



### PHASE II

The following steps are to be considered during the implementation of the second phase which focuses on finalizing, endorsing, and implementing the strategy:



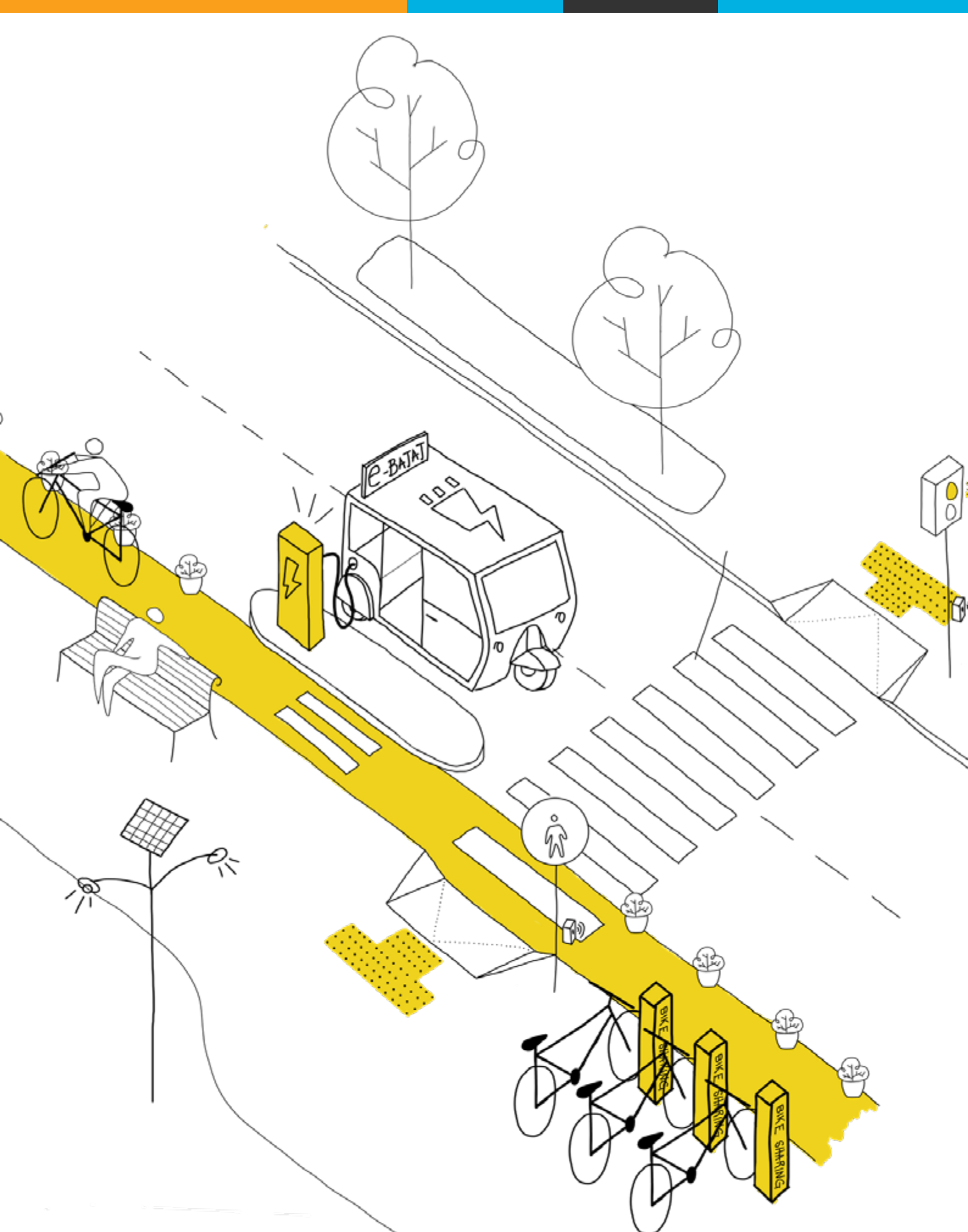


Illustration extracted from the *Design Guideline for Ethiopian cities* showing how cities can address accessibility issues in public spaces

## Reclaiming Nairobi River as a shared public good in Kenya

[Nairobi River Life project](#) is a joint flagship initiative of the Government of Kenya and UN-Habitat aimed at reclaiming Nairobi River as a shared public good that supports a better urban and environmental performance for a better quality of life in the city. The project is anticipated to improve access to clean water in the Nairobi and Athi River basins and support access to clean water downstream. The Nairobi Metropolitan Services (NMS) Director General emphasised that “delivery of safe and adequate sanitation services in Nairobi needs sustainable measures to protect the natural environment, including river corridors.”

The initial community-led projects around Nairobi River started in 2016 and in 2019 where UN-Habitat engaged with community-led and local non-governmental organisations. Today, this project is recognised at the national level as key pilot that will inspire other cities and towns in Kenya to rethink the relationship between the river, the city, and the people. President of the United Nations General Assembly describes the project as a “unique opportunity to kick-start citywide urban regeneration, transform informal settlements, create sustainable jobs, and build urban safety and security.”

In 2021, the Nairobi River Regeneration Initiative (NRRI) team developed innovative partnerships with local universities, civil society groups and other actors to advance the aspirations of the project. We are currently finalizing the Nairobi River Profile, a co-developed baseline review that is part of the corridor planning process and is anticipated to guide the development of a shared vision and a spatial strategy for the river.

As part of the co-production of the Nairobi River, we joined the [Placemaking Network Nairobi](#) to carry out a co-visioning exercise. We engaged with cyclists and pedestrians who stressed the need to invest in safer, continuous, and high-quality walkways and bike lanes along the river system as a means of easing congestion on city roads, improving physical and mental health and wellbeing, and reducing carbon emissions.

The co-visioning process is a fundamental part of the planning process and the beginning of a continuous process to collectively re-imagine, not only the Nairobi River corridor, but also the blue-green network in Kenya.



Mr. Volkan Bozki,  
President of the 75<sup>th</sup> United Nations General Assembly

“ The project is a unique opportunity to kick-start citywide urban regeneration, transform informal settlements, create sustainable jobs and build urban safety and security. ”





Cyclists using Nairobi streets during Placemaking week 2021 @ UN-Habitat



Data driven approach to improve public space network, accessibility and distribution in cities

## City-wide public space data are key for local governments to report on their progress towards achieving SDG11.7

Public spaces are generators of prosperous cities. They integrate the physical and natural environment and further define the cultural, social, economic, and political functions of cities. However, their value remains a neglected agenda by most urban policy makers. Some policy makers do not recognize the role of a good quality network of public spaces as a promoter of equity and prosperity and treat public spaces as residual areas open to speculation for private profit. Others lack the capacity to understand the status of their public lands, their distribution and how to improve the network.

The city-wide public space assessment is a tool that we have been using to support local governments to gather accurate data on the state of public spaces, identify areas to be secured for the creation of new public spaces, and develop future plans and strategies. The

tool helps to answer the question “Where are we?” in the realm of public space. Through the assessment process, we work directly with governments, research institutes and relevant partners to map and assess public spaces in cities.

The tool is an important first step to develop city-wide public space strategies. The tool is also key to achieving the New Urban Agenda and monitoring progress towards achieving SDG 11.7. Therefore, local governments have seen the importance of using this tool, not only to engage communities and key stakeholders, but also to report on the progress of goals’ implementation.



11.7: By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities

### Our methodology:

#### City-wide public space assessment toolkit



The [city-wide public space assessment toolkit](#) is participatory approach that allows communities to map and analyse their public spaces as well as to propose ideas for improvement.

#### Metadata on SDGs Indicator 11.7.1



The [Metadata on SDGs Indicator 11.7.1](#) assists cities in measuring and accounting for the available public space in cities.





Community members using public space as a flexible area for religious practices © CUS

## Improving public space networks in three cities in Latin America

The Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region is experiencing rapid and unplanned urban growth, resulting in an urban footprint of uncontrolled sprawl and low density. In this context, the quality of public spaces could be undermined, turning them into places where social segregation and lack of regulation for proper implementation and maintenance prevail. As this trend keeps growing quickly, it is important to evaluate the current state of development of public spaces in the region, to serve as a basis for the design of scalable and replicable public policy recommendations that have national and regional value.

The collaboration between the Global Public Spaces Programme and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) Cities Lab aims at promoting innovation, design, and experimentation for sustainable urban development in LAC. Its main objective is to evaluate the development of the public space networks in the region through the City-Wide Public Space Assessment (CWPSA) in 3 cities: Montevideo (Uruguay), Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic), and Monteria (Colombia). Although each of the selected urban systems are framed in different geographical and cultural contexts, they capture the varied context in the region and highlight common patterns and regional gaps.

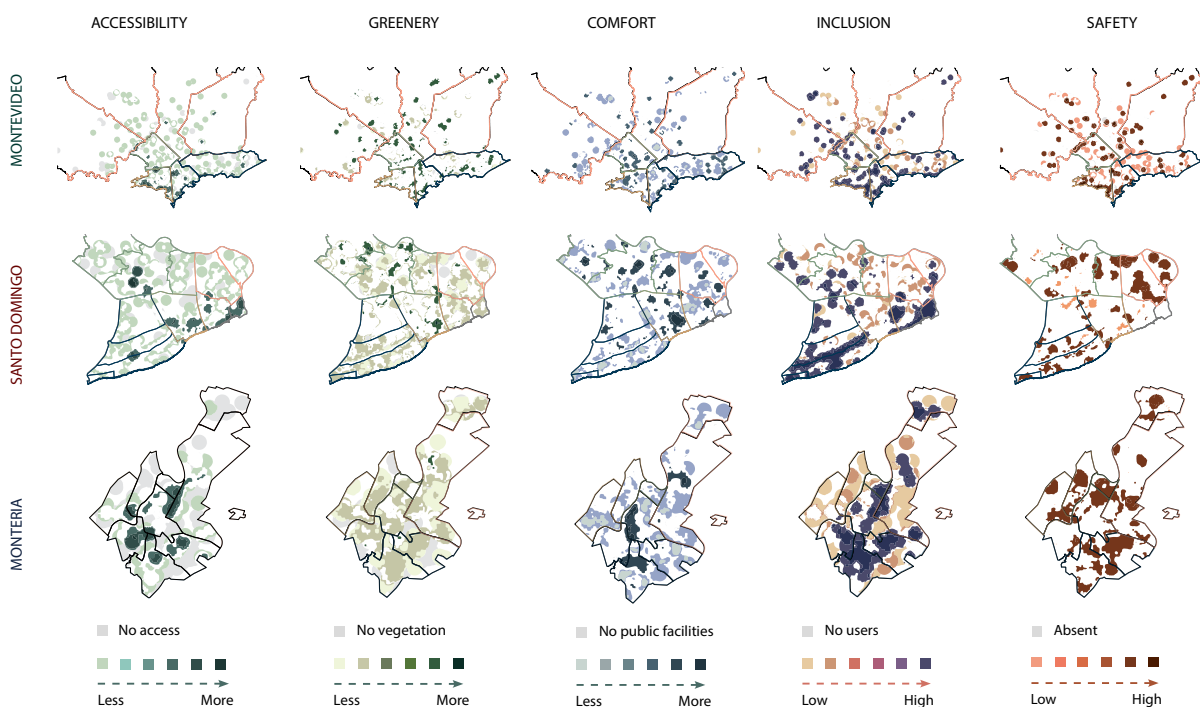
We started with understanding the

background and the governance structure of each territory, gathering data with [Kobo Collect](#) and engaging with a diverse group of stakeholders and community members. We interpreted the information collected with the GIS software, developing multi-scalar and cross-thematic maps.

The average share of the open public space built-up area of the three cities and the percentage of the population with access within a 5-minute walk distance is slightly higher than the global average. However, the assessments also revealed that the poorest groups have the least favoured access to public spaces. According to the results, the public space networks' challenges are mainly related to accessibility and security dimensions. Lack of investment in infrastructure and safe crossing reduces access for cyclists and people with limited vision and hearing.

The results are disaggregated considering the local governance structure to analyse the public space performance of each of the territorial management units. This enables one to identify territorial imbalances, formulate adequate public policy recommendations, and prioritize financial resources. To democratise network access, public space strategies should aim to decentralise investment in the smaller-scale units of governance.

### COMPARATIVE SYNTHESIS





Community members enjoying a multi-functional public space at night in Santo Domingo © National District City Council



Young women collecting data through Kobo collect application in Sharjah, UAE © SUPC



## Connecting with communities to build more inclusive and accessible public spaces

### Engaging communities in urban planning, design processes, and governance

Too often unsuccessful public spaces, that are underused or abandoned, hosting antisocial or criminal behaviours, are the result of a top-down process lacking minimum engagement of neighbouring communities. External companies or international organisations are called to deliver specific outputs, forgetting to consult the true experts of the space: the residents. Daily users hold vast knowledge of a public space based on spontaneous observations and direct experience, and too often its value is underrated.

Public participation and civic engagement unlock several benefits for the project and its actors. Public spaces developed in collaboration with the community are more likely to respond to the needs of a diverse audience, resulting in more benefits and use throughout the day and night. Conflict of interest is avoided and buy-in of the project is facilitated, ensuring inclusion and greater

longevity in the sense of ownership and custodianship. Participatory processes also generate medium-term cost benefits: daily users contribute to natural surveillance, certain degrees of care and spontaneous maintenance.

We promote participation at every stage of urban planning and design processes, from assessment to co-design and co-governance. The Global Public Space Programme has developed a series of tools and methodologies to ensure active participation of community members, such as the [City-wide](#) and [Site-specific Public Space Assessment](#), the [Block by Block Playbook](#), and [Her City Toolbox](#). We leverage the potential of open source and digital technologies to maximise participation and democratic processes. Smartphone applications, Google forms and crowdsourcing data platforms allow us to reach even marginalised communities in remote areas and in times of physical distancing.

#### Our methodologies:

##### Public Space Site-Specific Assessment

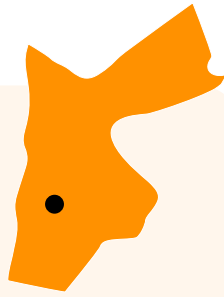


The [Public Space Site-specific Assessment](#) is a step-by-step methodology to evaluate the quality of public spaces. Guides the user on the right data to gather and how to improve the design quality.

##### Block by Block Playbook



The [Block by Block playbook](#) outlines UN-Habitat's approach to using Minecraft as an enabler to encourage community participation in urban design and governance.



**Country:** Jordan  
**City:** Ghor Al Safii  
**Donor:** Block by Block  
**Implementing partners:**  
Department of Palestinian  
Affairs, UN-Habitat Jordan  
**Duration:** Sept 2020 - Dec 2021



## 2 site assessments

were conducted in two refugee  
camps in Amman



## 13 Trainees

were trained on public space  
assessment and management  
tools



## 100+

residents

were engaged during the site-  
specific assessment activities

## ENHANCING THE SAFETY AND RESILIENCE OF PALESTINIAN REFUGEES THROUGH BETTER ACCESS TO WASH FACILITIES



Children observing the public space during the exploratory walk exercise © UN-Habitat

Following the pandemic, risks of infection and safety in refugee camps increased drastically. For that, we have initiated a project in 2021 that increases awareness and sanitation practices through the rehabilitation of WASH facilities in Palestinian camps in Jordan. UN-Habitat country office and the Department of Palestinian Affairs (DPA) identified two camps for intervention; al Souf and Al-Shahid Palestinian refugee camps.

For this project, we have adopted the “Public Space Site-Specific Assessment” tool which acts as a platform for exchange between local community representatives and authorities. Through the process, refugees and host community as well as experts measured the quality of the public spaces in the camps to identify gaps and needs, and to develop an integrated framework for urban inclusion and resilience.



Collecting data in Al Shahid through photography © UN-Habitat

Some of the engagement activities included an exploratory walk, digital surveys and two focus group discussions engaging with members of the camps service committees, the directors of the DPA offices, camps engineers and camps' residents. With a predominant presence of children and youth, it was crucial for us to engage with these groups to better understand their needs and aspirations.

The rehabilitation of toilet facilities and addition of ramps were highlighted as the highest priority in both public spaces. As a result, an inclusive design is being developed that ensures public spaces and their WASH facilities are accessible for all, especially for persons with disabilities. Following the request of camp residents, we have conducted a series of awareness campaigns that highlight the importance of public spaces and access to water and sanitation during the pandemic.

To ensure the scalability and sustainability of this project, we organised a capacity-building workshop with DPA representatives on inspiring practices and digital tools to assess and manage public spaces. While this project is expected to reach nearly 50,000 Palestinian refugees, the findings from the assessments enable key stakeholders to understand the quality of these public spaces while informing future projects and mobilising necessary resources into the camps.



Children engaged in gardening and greening the public space of Al-Shahid camp © UN-Habitat

# ENGAGING MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES WITH DIGITAL TOOLS TO IMPROVE PUBLIC SPACE QUALITY

Kamukunji Ground is an historical site in the centre of Nairobi, Kenya. Strategically located in the East side of the Central Business District, Kamukunji Ground attract hundreds of visitors every day. Following the efforts in restoring the ground, the Kamukunji Environment Conservation Champions (KECC) were awarded with the first prize during the Changing Faces Competition. The champions helped clean the dumping site, improved accessibility, installed furniture and organized activities.

As part of the Nairobi River Regeneration Initiative, and in collaboration with Inhabit Place and Safer Nairobi Initiative, we trained 8 members of KECC on how to digitally assess public spaces' quality using the Inhabit Place Toolkit. The audit focused on observing users' behaviour and engagement in the park to inform future improvement. The community-based organisation has then conducted four data gathering sessions at different times of the week and day to understand how they have impacted the site but also what is needed to make it better.

The data gathered by the surveyors were analysed and desseminated into four final finding reports which highlighted how vibrant the public space is due to its proximity to the market and its usage by vendors. However, further improvements are needed to make it more inclusive, especially for women, children and persons with disabilities. The results of the audit will inform the design for the ground's upgrading.



## OUR PARTNERS' METHODOLOGIES: INHABIT PLACE TOOLKIT



Inhabit place toolkit is an intuitive smartphone application with a user-friendly interface developed by an Australian company. Inhabit Place helps you plan, design and deliver safer, sustainable and, community-focused public spaces with the cost-effective and reliable collection and analysis of data

Visit the website: [inhabitplace.info](http://inhabitplace.info)



**Country:** Kenya  
**City:** Nairobi  
**Donor:** Booyoung  
**Implementing partners:** Inhabit Place, Kamukunji Environment Conservation Champions, Safer Nairobi Initiative  
**Duration:** May 2021 - July 2021



4

observations were conducted in the public space at different times







**Country:** Myanmar  
**City:** Yangon  
**Donor:** The Water Agency  
**Implementing partners:**  
City of Yangon  
**Duration:** July 2021

## YANGON RAINCRAFT: IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGEMENT DURING POLITICAL TURMOILS FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE



Minecraft workshop in Yangon, Myanmar © The Water Agency

***“In Minecraft, all of us could participate and contribute ideas for climate resilient practices for urban development without needing an urban-related degree or architect background. We are equals working together.”***

*-- Htet, Yangon Raincraft participant*

The Southeast Asian city of Yangon, Myanmar, suffers from widespread flooding during the monsoon season and battles with severe water shortages during the dry season. The pandemic of COVID-19 and the political unrest in Myanmar put cities and communities under an even more pressing threat. Public health, security and equality are major concerns, seeing many international organizations cutting aid and suspending or reducing operations in the country.

UN-Habitat, in partnership the city of Yangon, contributed to promote innovative participation, acting under the Yangon Htee Programme launched in 2019. The programme focused on community engagement and placemaking to design and build climate adaptation and resilience solutions for responsive neighbourhoods. In July 2021, the Yangon Raincraft initiative followed the Block by Block methodology, which used the video game Minecraft as a public participation tool to

co-design public spaces.

Working with local and international experts, 15 residents aged from 18 to 29 learnt about climate change issues and the linkages with public spaces at the city level, gaining knowledge on which are the remedial interventions against the effects of the monsoon, how to store rainwater for future use and to mitigate flooding effects. Participants were then able to turn concepts into design proposals, building digital models in Minecraft and developing a new master plan to tackle the urban rainwater management issues they face year-round. Experts and professionals will prioritise and translate the participants' digital designs into technical drawings for physical construction.

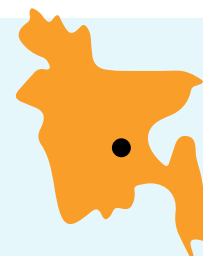
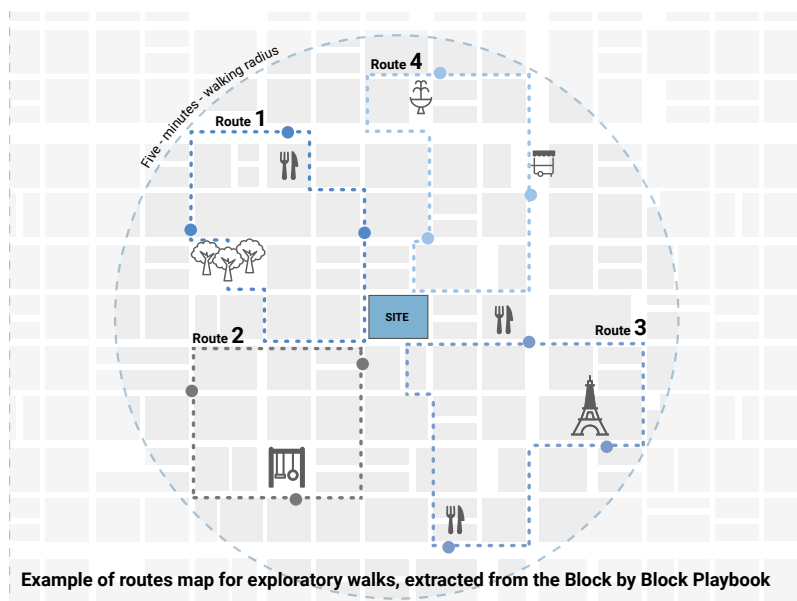
Participants took away a wealth of knowledge on climate change, shared among their peers to increase awareness on the risks of climate change and the role of public spaces to mitigate its effects.

# EXPERIENCE PUBLIC SPACES THROUGH THE LENS OF DAILY USERS: EXPLORATORY WALKS IN BEIRUT DHAKA AND JOHANNESBURG

The urbanist Jane Jacobs revolutionised urbanism in the 1960's, shifting back the focus of cities towards people. Using what are now called Jane's Walks or exploratory walks, Jacobs observed cities and its public space to understand people's behaviour and social patterns of interaction. Putting people first, Jacobs evaluated the quality of public spaces from the lens of the community.

Our methodology, "The Public Space Site-specific Assessment," uses different activities and tools to assess the quality of public spaces through a participatory process. We engage communities to integrate their perspective into public space design processes. We select a diverse group of stakeholders and give them tools to discuss and exchange ideas around the public spaces, identifying potential conflicts and common challenges. Together with the implementing partners, we define different routes and identify landmarks and stops to analyse during the exploratory walks, assigning each route to small groups. Each group evaluates the walk by answering a questionnaire that focuses on aspects such as accessibility, safety, environmental comfort, and overall conditions of the public space. We use Kobo Collect, a browser-based open-source digital tool, to design quick and user-friendly forms to collect public space data. Kobo Collect also works off-line in remote contexts out of internet network, enabling us to work with the most vulnerable and marginalised communities.

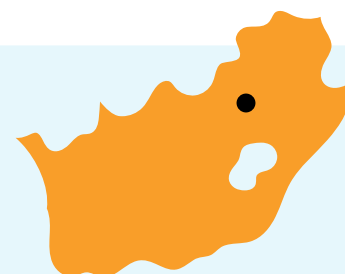
We have engaged over 110 people in 18 engagement activities in Dhaka, Beirut, and Johannesburg to assess the quality of 8 public spaces. Each public space addressed different issues, such as safety for women and girls, pedestrian accessibility, and public health.



**Country:** Bangladesh  
**City:** Dhaka  
**Donor:** Block by Block  
**Implementing partners:** Centre for Urban Studies, UN-Habitat  
**Duration:** June 2020 - Dec 2021



**Country:** Lebanon  
**City:** Beirut  
**Donor:** Block by Block  
**Implementing partners:** Catalytic Action, UN-Habitat Lebanon  
**Duration:** April 2021 - June 2022



**Country:** South Africa  
**City:** Johannesburg  
**Donor:** Block by Block  
**Implementing partners:** Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA), UN-Habitat  
**Duration:** July 2020 - Jan 2022

## Dhaka, Bangladesh

In Dhaka, heavy rains and hot weather influence the use of the public spaces, presence of people and patterns of movement, particularly when it comes to market areas and spaces hosting small informal businesses. We focused on three neighbourhood streets in the residential area of Mirpur and one footpath in Mohammadpur particularly affected by these climate conditions. The project caught the attention of the City's Mayor, who encouraged the private sector to make contributions.



Residents observing the public space during the walk © CUS

## Beirut, Lebanon

After the explosion in August 2020, UN-Habitat identified three public stairs in downtown Beirut for the Block by Block regeneration project. Exploratory walks with children were conducted, which highlighted challenges such as universal accessibility and safety. Only a few activities and shops face the stairs, limiting natural surveillance of the area during the day and the night. Several damages from the blast were still limiting accessibility and depriving the image of the area.



Boys reflecting on issues related to the space © Catalytic Actions

## Johannesburg, South Africa

Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) has identified one street in Diepsloot, one of the biggest informal settlements in Johannesburg. The project engaged a group of girls and young women, also persons with disabilities. Challenges around accessibility, safety and comfort were prioritised. Lack of adequate lighting, limited transport, lack of signage and zebra crossings reduced pedestrian safety during the day and night. Uncollected garbage and dust limited the pleasantness of pedestrian experiences in the space.



Girls filling the exploratory walk survey © JDA



Children co-designing a public space in Dondo, Mozambique © UN-Habitat



Placemaking and co-implementation to build just, safe, and universally accessible public spaces

## From placemaking towards co-implementation: Minecraft as an enabling tool for citizens to build public spaces

Since 2012, we have worked towards SDG 11.7, to achieve universal access to safe, inclusive, and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons, and persons with disabilities. Successful implementation comes from inclusive planning and design processes that take into consideration a diverse group of users, while following principles of inclusive and universal design.

Placemaking enables individuals to be active agents in their physical surroundings. It commits to strengthening the connection between people and the places they live in, shaping the public realm to maximise shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution.

Placemaking initiatives and tactical urbanism are a variety of small-scale interventions such as gardening, painting, cleaning, and organising activities in the space to generate a new identity of a space. We use Minecraft as a placemaking tool that provide a common language to share ideas, leading to implementation of more complex projects.

According to the type of intervention, we classify four types of placemaking: Standard Placemaking encompasses the traditional understanding of what placemaking is, seeking to create incremental changes that result in a long-term increased quality of life. Strategic Placemaking is goal-oriented

and often attracts high-talent workers to deliver high-quality interventions. Creative Placemaking institutionalizes the role of art and culture to achieve a lasting sense of place for a community. Finally, Tactical Placemaking focuses on high social impact with low-risk, low-cost, and short-term interventions.

Placemaking advocates equal representation of all individuals in the space, especially of the most marginalised groups. It triggers co-implementation and co-governance mechanisms, while implementing attractive and universally accessible design solutions. Activating community around a public space, it enables the sustainability of the project, while association, committee or formalised groups are shaped to co-manage and maintain naturally the space.

In 2021, we have completed public space upgrade projects in Lebanon and Vietnam, leveraging the enthusiasm and dedication of local communities and partners.

### Our methodology: Placemaking week 2016



[Nairobi Placemaking week 2016](#) describes the effort of UN-Habitat and its partners to promote safe, inclusive, and accessible public space development, through placemaking initiatives

# REHABILITATING HERITAGE OPEN SITES THROUGH A CO-PRESERVATION PROCESS

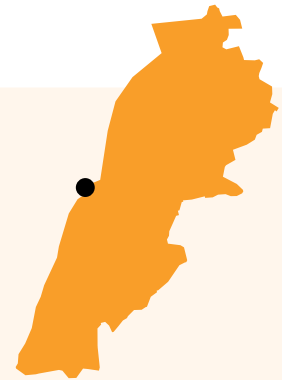


Historic heritage of our cities influences and sometimes defines the cultural identity of our communities. It generates a sense of pride and respect towards our cities. Too often heritage sites are privately managed and not accessible by everyone, reducing opportunities for marginalised groups to learn and appreciate their culture and relegating these spaces to an audience of only tourists. This often results in a lack of awareness about the social and civic value of heritage and a reduction in spontaneous forms of care.

Preserving and incentivising open heritage spaces in our cities boost the cultural identity of our communities and provide new opportunities for social interactions and livelihoods.

The historic core of Byblos is designated as an UNESCO world heritage site, managed and conserved by the Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA). The selected site is one of the major open public spaces in the Old Souk of Byblos. Although the site is open, many people today do not know about its hidden treasures, due to the limited accessibility of the area.

The project aimed at shedding light on a mosaic site, and successfully transformed a once forgotten heritage gem into a vibrant space for gathering in the core of the old Souks of Byblos.



**Country:** Lebanon

**City:** Byblos

**Donor:** Block by Block

**Implementing partners:**

Neopreneur

**Duration:** March 2019 -

November 2021



**25**

trainees

were trained in creative and design thinking as well as crafts workshopkop



**80**

participants

engaged in design workshops including Minecraft



**7,000**

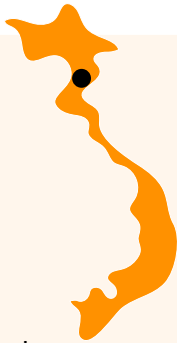
beneficiaries

have benefitted from an inclusive and upgraded public space



Rehabilitating an open heritage site in the old city of Byblos © Neopreneur

# RE-LAYOUTING INFORMAL MARKETS IN VIETNAM: DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR PANDEMIC RECOVERY



**Country:** Vietnam  
**City:** Hanoi  
**Donor:** Block by Block  
**Implementing partners:** Healthbridge, People's Committee of Tan Mai ward, Think Playgrounds, UN-Habitat  
**Duration:** Sept 2020 - Dec 2021



**10**

engagement workshop

were conducted to assess and co-design the market



**23**

participants were engaged during minecraft workshop



**2000+**

Beneficiaries between vendors and residents use the market daily



Users walking in the newly designed market in Hanoi, Vietnam @ Healthbridge

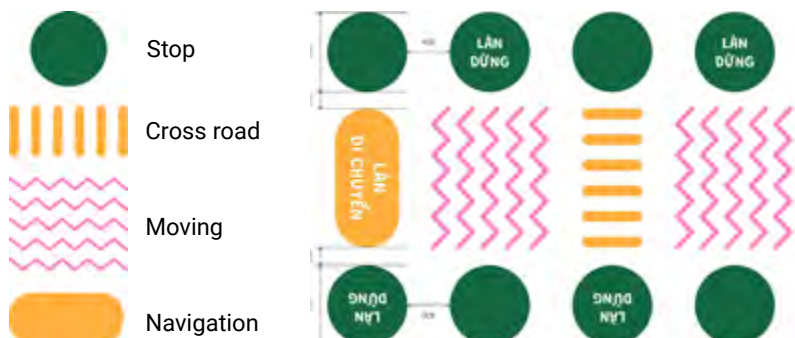
Local public markets have played an important role in Hanoi's communities for centuries and are a key public space. Unfortunately, in the Tan Mai ward of Hanoi, the only roofed market available for residents was rebuilt into a commercial centre with the market underground. This underground market proved to be unpopular with both customers and vendors, and now the residents buy their fresh foods at a street market. However, as with most street markets, it is badly organised, poorly managed and unhygienic.

In collaboration with HealthBridge, the People's Committee of Tan Mai ward, Think Playgrounds, vendors,

and the local community, we redesigned the open street market, generating an inviting public space for the community.

We started the project with a site-specific assessment, identifying problems that need to be solved, as well as the needs and expectations of vendors and residents. The results were then discussed with the ward authorities.

We organized a Minecraft workshop with 16 residents and 7 vendors over two days. The workshop outputs included six Minecraft models and a priority list of improvements, proposed by the participants. The project team based on these inputs developed a detailed design proposal and a workplan for the street market improvement.







Users cycling through the newly upgraded market in Hanoi, Vietnam @ Healthbridge

The desired improvements identified during the workshop included:

- Safe and accessible movement inside the market, painting coloured lines and marks to designate vending areas on the street, to organise traffic flows and to maintain physical distances between shoppers and buyers to prevent COVID-19 transmission.
- Improved visibility, including improved street market gates, signs and signage, and the

creation of a branding system for the market

- Improved stalls and roofs, developed with the vendors
- Improved supportive facilities: drainage system, lighting, fire prevention
- Improved waste management: trash bins, waste collection, organic waste treatment coordinated by local environmental NGOs
- Improved capacity of vendors to increase food hygiene and business through training on sustainable food system.

The implementation works are currently ongoing, and the project will be completed in February 2022. Designated vending areas and movement flows are now regulated by coloured marks and lines on the street. Customers and vendors seem to respect designated space, while accessibility and safety inside the market have drastically improved. The project has been positively welcomed by the broader community, and it has gained considerable attention from the media, counting 16 online articles and TV news.



Girls engaging in a Minecraft workshop at the GoDown Art Centre in Nairobi, Kenya © UN-Habitat



Building capacity and raise awareness on participatory and inclusive urban practices

## Enhancing scalability of urban initiatives through trainings and knowledge exchange to achieve the SDG 11.7

The COVID-19 pandemic has drained our cities and has highlighted the limited urban resilience in times of crises. Most cities lack tools and strategies to respond efficiently to the threat of the pandemic and to ensure adequate participation in urban planning and design processes. This year, more than ever, we have received inquiries both from developing and developed countries on how to keep the momentum going according to the current restrictions in place.

UN-Habitat's mandate focuses on developing guidelines to mainstream the implementation of safer, more accessible, and inclusive cities with participatory processes. We believe that normative and operational work delivers greater impact as it builds capacities locally, while testing innovative approaches to urban planning and design.

During 2021, we have conducted over 30 trainings in 22 countries, both virtually and in-person. 400 trainers have participated in our sessions, learning tools and methods on how to assess, co-design and implement vibrant public spaces, as well as monitor and report on progress to achieving SDG 11.

As we adapt our approach to the pandemic, we have developed an academic course and a Training of Trainers package for our partners, to implement locally the Block by Block methodology, the public space assessments and the Her City Toolbox. We have supported the Data and Analytics Section to develop an e-learning training modules for SDG 11.7.1, intended to support cities and organisations to collect data, compute indicators and measure progress towards safe, inclusive, and accessible public spaces.



**400+**

trained participants  
on UN-Habitat tools



**30**

conducted trainings  
in 20 countries



Training on the use of digital tools in Nairobi, Kenya © UN-Habitat

## LAUNCHING THE BLOCK BY BLOCK PLAYBOOK



Estimates indicate that young people between 15 and 24 years of age account for 15.5 per cent of the global population. Too often public spaces are not designed for this considerable amount of population and their needs and interests are left unheard. This happens because youth are poorly represented in urban planning and design processes, and municipalities lack tools and strategies for effective engagement.

As the world evolves, the role of technologies has increased substantially, and young generations have grown with it. Social media, for instance, has become a new way of communication and social interaction.

Building on these considerations, we have developed the [Block by Block Playbook](#), outlining UN-Habitat's approach to using Minecraft as an enabler to encourage community participation in urban design and governance. The Playbook describes a step-by-step methodology to plan, design, develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate public spaces with the community using the videogame.

Minecraft is a surprisingly effective way to visualize and re-shape the built environment. It provides a common language between professional and people without technical skills, to discuss ideas and design principles for public space design. The playbook emphasises how to do engagement processes using gaming, making the silent voices in the community heard.

This year we have launched the Block by Block Playbook, reaching over 200 attendees coming from academia, public and private sectors, and civil society. The publication has been downloaded over 450 times from our website and we have conducted several training sessions with civil society and academia, to mainstream the use of the tool globally.



**200+**

attendees during the  
launching event



**450+**

downloads since the  
launching event




**“ Minecraft is a voice to those who are not usually heard, but who are most impacted by the planning decisions. ”**

**UN-Habitat's Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif**

# HER CITY TOOLBOX: LET HER GUIDE YOU



**OUR METHODOLOGIES**



[Her City Guide](#)  
available also offline

Unplanned urbanisation widens gaps between urban centres and outskirts, as well as between different groups in society. Among the most vulnerable urban inhabitants are young women in socio-economically marginalised areas. Research shows that girls and women simply do not have access to the city to the same extent as boys or men. For example, up to 80% of public spaces in a city are likely to be dominated by boys and men. Up to 70% of girls and women express that they feel insecure and excluded in public spaces.

Her City is a joint urban development solution initiated by UN-Habitat and Global Utmaning. Its initial stage was financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and current stage by the Swedish Innovation Agency (Vinnova). The toolbox has been developed with contributions from a range of Swedish partners such as the Block by Block Foundation (Mojang/Minecraft), White Architects, Swedish Union of Tenants, and the small start-up Methodkit.

Her City is a digital and innovative platform that improves citizens' participation in planning processes, starting with girls. Developed in collaboration with Global Utmaning, the toolbox

provides users with best practices, digital tools, and a methodology to prioritise, plan, develop and implement public spaces for and with girls.

Her City toolbox supports urban actors within the regular planning processes but adding a strong participatory component. With a special focus on including vulnerable groups such as women, girls, and youth from socio-economically challenged communities, we rethink and codesign the sustainable city together using digital tools on an open-source online platform. The platform follows the planning process tree phases: assessment, design and implementation phases. The nine digital blocks include interactive activities, detailed steps to follow and an online database for the collection of data, as well as a collection of good practices.

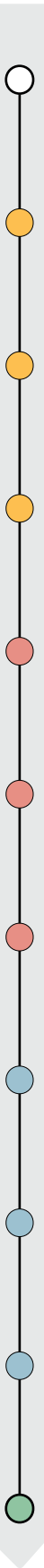
Since the launch of the [digital platform](#) in March 2021, Her City has over 700 registered users from 280 cities. 100 independent projects in 90 countries are registered to use the toolbox. We are currently implementing 10 flagship projects in partnership with cities and companies in the following countries: South Africa, Kenya, Lebanon, Sweden, Peru, Gaza and West Bank, and India.



ASSESSMENT

DESIGN

IMPLEMENTATION



Start

Block 1  
Stakeholder engagement



Primary stakeholders group © JDA

Block 2  
City wide assessment



Exploratory walks © GoDown

Block 3  
Site specific assessment

Block 4  
Analysis challenges

Block 5  
Designing ideas



MethodKit workshop © Global Utmaning

Block 6  
Recommendations

Block 7  
Action plans



Minecraft workshop © JDA

Block 8  
Sharing results



The Block by Block playbook  
Using Minecraft as a participatory design tool in urban design and governance

Block 9  
Implementation & follow-up



Prioritization workshop © JDA

Finish!



Minecraft workshop at GoDown Art Centre in Nairobi, Kenya © UN-Habitat





## HER STREETS | NAIROBI

promoting safer and more accessible public spaces



MethodKit workshop at GoDown Art Centre in Nairobi, Kenya © UN-Habitat

The image of a neighbourhood and its public spaces plays a crucial role in users' perception of safety, affecting the amount of time spent outdoors, the level of care spontaneously given by the residents and even the pedestrian patterns of movement.

The Industrial Area of Nairobi presents wide congested streets, monotonous facades, and limited space for pedestrians. Most of the building's functions take place during the day, leaving the area empty and lifeless during the night. Safety and accessibility are concerning issues, and too often girls and young women feel threatened walking across the streets.

Art and culture enable the regeneration of public space images, reinforcing community identity, social cohesion, and the sense of pride towards a neighbourhood, while boosting surrounding economies. The GoDown Art Centre is very aware of it. Founded in 2001 with a vision of a culturally confident, creative, and prosperous Kenya, the NGO established itself in an old warehouse complex in the Industrial area of Nairobi. The GoDown has worked over the last 12 years to create a strong network of actors to rehabilitate and free the potential of the neighbourhood, developing the new upcoming GoDown Cultural Arts Complex.

In partnership with Planning Systems, White Arkitekter, and UN-Habitat, The GoDown launched the HerCity#HerStreets project in 2021 as part of the [GoDown Transformation Project](#). The initiative aims to improve the streets around the upcoming complex, to make them safer and more inclusive, accommodating a diversity of activities and users.

Over 100 community members – some as young as 10 years old – have participated in data gathering sessions using Kobo Collect. We conducted workshops with MethodKit and Minecraft to develop a new design proposal for the Dunga and Dundori Road.

**Country:** Kenya

**City:** Nairobi

**Implementing partners:**

GoDown Art Centre, Block by Block, Planning Systems, White Arkitekter, Gaia Arkitekter, UN-Habitat

**Duration:** March 2021 - Feb 2022



**13**

engagement workshops



**153**

participants



**700+**

beneficiaries



Mural painting at GoDown Art Centre © UN-Habitat



Participants mapping challenges during the exploratory walk exercise in Beirut, Lebanon © Catalytic Action



## HER STAIRS | BEIRUT

reviving public stairs affected by the port explosion

**Country:** Lebanon

**City:** Beirut

**Donor:** Block by Block

**Implementing partners:**

Catalytic Action, UN-Habitat

**Duration:** April 2021 - July 2022



**2**

Training workshops



Minecraft workshop in Beirut, Lebanon. Catalytic Action © Catalytic Action



**46**

people engaged

The stairs of Mar Mikhael and Gemmayzeh were constructed during the French mandate (1923-43), allowing easy pedestrian mobility across the neighbourhood. Throughout the years they became important public spaces where people could rest, gather, and attend events. Their role was further strengthened in recent years as public spaces in Beirut have diminished due to increased developments in the building sector.



**750+**

reached

After surviving various crises and wars in addition to the chaotic expansion of the city, on the 4th of August 2020 the Beirut Port explosion put the city in shock, damaging several buildings and public stairs. The event has directly impacted the social dynamics linked to these spaces, while restricting access to the area and stopping all activities.

UN-Habitat, in collaboration with Catalytic Action and the municipality of Beirut, has initiated a Her City project to revive the public stairs through participatory design.



Minecraft model of Mar Mkhayel stairs in Beirut



Girls filling out a survey on site in Beirut © Catalytic Action

## MEDIA COVERAGE

### ARTICLES

[UN-Habitat is supporting cities to develop evidence-based public space policies and strategies through a community-led initiative](#)

[FAO and UN-Habitat promote African urban forests to improve the health and well-being of people and their environment](#)

[Promoting health and wellbeing through urban forests and green public spaces in Kenya and Ethiopia](#)

[UN HABITAT: City-wide public space assessment toolkit: A guide to community-led digital inventory and assessment of public spaces](#)

[Sharjah Principles for Child-Friendly Urban Planning' unveiled at Expo 2020 Dubai](#)

[Her City: hacer ciudades a la medida de las mujeres](#)

[Her City Toolbox, Elle Italia Deco](#)

### VIDEOS

[Her City Toolbox Podcast](#)

[Her City tutorial \(EN / FR\)](#)

[Her City training \(EN\)](#)

[Street Market renovation in Hanoi, Vietnam](#)



Archdaily, one of the most visited architecture weblog worldwide, has teamed up with UN-Habitat to bring weekly news, articles, and interviews that highlight the Global Public Space Programme's work, processes and methodologies, developed by Archdaily's editors.

1. [Her City: Digital Toolbox for Sustainable, Equal and Inclusive Cities](#)
2. [8 Initiatives that empower women in the architectural and urban fields](#)
3. [12 Key Principles for an effective urban response during COVID-19](#)
4. [Public Space and the challenges of COVID-19: UN-Habitat's small-scale urban responses in Vietnam, Bangladesh and India](#)
5. [Are our cities built for the Youth?](#)

**Hanoi Street Market renovation in VTC News, Bangladesh.**

# CITY SPACE ARCHITECTURE: THE JOURNAL OF PUBLIC SPACE

The [Journal of Public Space](#), launched at Habitat III in Quito, is a research project developed by City Space Architecture, a non-profit organization based in Italy, in partnership with UN-Habitat. The journal is the first international, inter-disciplinary, academic, open access journal entirely dedicated to public space, providing a platform for researchers, showcasing promising practices and informing discussion about issues related to public space.

Since 2016, The Journal of Public Space has published 17 editions, of which 8 are special issues, covering topics such as art and activism in public space, COVID-19 pandemic and limited access to public spaces, public health, and well-being in public open spaces through climate responsive urban planning and design, placemaking in Arab cities, architecture pedagogy, among others.

In 2021, three editions were released. “A year without public space under the COVID-19 pandemic” is the result of a series of webinars conducted during 2020-2021 in collaboration with the School of Architecture at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. “Art and Activism in Public Space” is the third number of the homonymous series, bringing light on the importance of culture in public spaces. Finally, “Re-visioning Places of Public Gathering in the Contemporary Arab Urbanisms” is a collection of articles discussing post-pandemic urban scenarios.

City Space Architecture has recently developed [Mastering Public Space](#), a web-aggregator of news and articles about public spaces today. Organized according to location and theme, web-users can easily access quality and updated information on public space issues around the world.

## [Re-visioning Places of Public Gathering in the Contemporary Arab Urbanism](#)



## [Art and Activism in Public Space](#)



## [A year without public space under the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)



## Donors

The Global Public Space Programme is funded by an innovative mix of traditional development aid funding, foundation finance and contributions by the private sector.

UN-Habitat would like to extend the deepest gratitude to our funders, partners and co-financiers who support us to grow the Global Public Space Programme's portfolio and improve the lives of millions of urban residents across the world.



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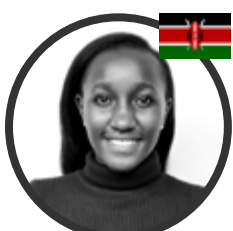
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