

Chapter 26

Case Study Theme 6: Youth and Urban Planning – Nepal and Kenya

Box 26.1 SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

Targets: 11.1 Housing and basic services; 11.2 Transport for all; 11.3 Inclusive and sustainable urbanisation through integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management; 11.7 Safe, inclusive and accessible green and public spaces

Issue: Lack of youth inputs to urban planning

Strategy: Minecraft for youth involvement in urban planning

26.1 Introduction

Young people are often marginalised in urban planning. This means that their needs – in terms of housing, basic services and public spaces – are not considered in urban planning policy and implementation. UN Habitat's Youth Unit ensures creative, fun ways for young people to get involved in urban planning and influence youth-friendly urban design. Citizen participation is important for city governments to consider the needs, interests and knowledge of different stakeholders, something requiring collaborative design and participatory decision-making processes.¹

This case study is set against SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities and particularly focuses on its targets on inclusive and sustainable urbanisation and safe, inclusive public spaces.

26.2 Minecraft – introduction

UN Habitat piloted an approach to inclusive urban design and governance which targeted young people and incorporated information and communication technologies (ICTs) through the popular computer game of Minecraft as a tool for community participation. The initiative builds on the theory that ICT can be more effectively used to 'increase levels of participation, efficiency and accountability in public urban

policies ... and [its] use by youth can have a direct impact on increasing civic engagement, giving them new avenues through which to become informed, shape opinions, get organised, collaborate and take action.²

Young people informing the design of public spaces is critical in a context where such involvement 'promotes social inclusion and diversity, improves urban safety, provides a space for democracy, improves health, creates a positive environment and provides more space to businesses and markets'.³

With UN Habitat's projection that the world's population living in urban areas will move from 10 per cent (in the early 2000s) to 50 per cent by 2030,⁴ the approach integrates youth participation and technology into urban planning processes to tackle the inequalities and stratification which exist within urban centres,⁵ to particularly benefit the growing youth population who are constantly excluded.

The game is one of the most popular in the world and provides a virtual space for players to interact and build their virtual environment and cities in a 3D space. Using available resources such as images, Google Maps and community maps, UN Habitat creates a basic model of the actual targeted space before organising training for community members on using Minecraft.

In the process of engagement, an inclusive community participation workshop is held to provide training on creating models, and to encourage collaboration and 'idea-storming' among a diverse group of young people from the community. It is essential to bring as many different voices to the table to ensure that the final design of the space meets a variety of needs. The community members work in groups of two to four to collaborate and visualise the various design elements, and bring their ideas to life.

26.3 Minecraft – Nepal

UN Habitat was able to bring together the local municipality, a local development NGO and local communities to work together to improve public spaces, so that it could better meet the needs of the public in this setting in a Nepali city in 2015.

Public spaces in Nepal, as anywhere else, play a culturally significant role in providing a space for community members to not only interact recreationally, but carry out their daily activities. The Minecraft workshop brought together 37 young people to design proposals. From the impact evaluations conducted in Nepal, the strategy was recognised as being one of a very limited set of opportunities young people have had to participate in urban planning and engage with experts and officials.

Most young people were also attracted to the project because of their interest in video games, which highlights the importance of integrating fun and youth-friendly ways of working with young people to engage them productively in public decision making spaces.

26.4 Minecraft – Kenya

UN Habitat's work with young people in urban planning in Kenya was initiated in 2012. This work focused on a location called Kiberia, the largest informal settlement in Kenya's capital, Nairobi. It houses around 200,000 to 300,000 people, who live in congested conditions and with few public spaces, a critical requirement for young people's leisure, recreation and sense of freedom.

The primary contest in the restructuring of spaces and facilities for these communities was between a group of 14- to 22-year-olds and a group of elderly women on the reshaping of functions for the Silange Sports Field, one of the few proper public spaces available for young people.

The use of Minecraft enabled these groups to resolve their disagreements over the use of the area. It was used as a tool for dialogue in working with young people to ensure that their play space was not compromised in the new design for the community. This was particularly in relation to ensuring that a new access road that cut across the market did not result in a major loss of play space.

'When we introduced *Minecraft* in these workshops it was like a light had been lifted', says Pontus Westerberg, of the United Nations Human Settlements Program. 'You could see and feel a different atmosphere.'⁶

Table 26.1 Youth and urban planning: enablers and disablers

Enablers/disablers	Elaboration
Societal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attitude that young people can influence urban planning positively
Structural – macro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None identified
Structural – meso	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governance structures enabled multistakeholder engagement, including youth engagement
Organisational – structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff capacity to integrate youth as experts through their lived experience in urban planning
Organisational – process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people involved in planning through visual, youth-friendly methods
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth-friendly urban spaces as a result of youth participation in urban planning

The partners in this case study were the Nairobi City County Government, Undugu Society of Kenya, the Kilimanjaro Initiative, Project for Public Spaces and Kounkey Design Initiative, which initiated a comprehensive community engagement process to identify public space improvements.

26.5 Implications what enablers/disablers influenced the process?

Considering the Youth Mainstreaming Enablers Framework in Chapter 4, the societal, structural, organisational and impact factors set out in Table 26.1 help us understand successes and challenges of such programmes.

Notes

- 1 Von Heland et al. 2015, 2.
- 2 Ben-Attar and Campbell 2012, 34.
- 3 Crecente 2014.
- 4 UN Habitat 2015, 24.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Crecente 2014.

References

- Ben-Attar, D and T Campbell (2012), *ICT, Urban Governance and Youth*, UN-Habitat, Nairobi.
- Crecente, B (2014), *How Minecraft Is Helping the United Nations Improve the World*, available at: <http://www.polygon.com/2014/4/22/5641044/minecraft-block-by-block-united-nations-project>

von Heland, F, P Wesberg and M Nyberg (2015), *Using Minecraft as a Citizen Participation Tool in Urban Design and Decision-Making*, Ericsson Research, Stockholm.

UN Habitat (2015), *Using Minecraft for Youth Participation in Urban Design and Governance*, UN Habitat, available at: <http://unhabitat.org/books/using-minecraft-for-youth-participation-in-urban-design-and-governance/#>

