



25th SESSION OF THE
GOVERNING COUNCIL
17 - 23 APRIL 2015 ♦ NAIROBI

Wednesday, 22 April 2015 – Venue: Conference Room 9
Time: 2:00 p.m. - 2:45 p.m.
Nairobi, Kenya

SIDE EVENT

Using ICT for youth participation in the design of public space projects

MOJANG

Background

As cities grow and densify, access to well-designed and pleasant public spaces are becoming increasingly important. This is particularly true for those citizens – for example single mothers, the elderly and young people with low income – whose living circumstances are lacking in quality and comfort, or who are in special need of decent road infrastructure and communal spaces for health, recreation and socialization. Improving access to public spaces on the part of vulnerable urban residents is a powerful tool to improve equity in the city.

ICT in the hands of youth can improve urban development, governance and livelihood opportunities, including by addressing issues of public space. Mobile phones with access to social media allow young people to engage local government on their own terms, expressing voice and engaging in community life. Building on existing social networks to extend into areas of governance can help improve local services and transparency and fight corruption. User generated data through social media and data-gathering apps can be used to promote opportunities which help local governments understand preferences of citizens, as well as to monitor service delivery and provide feedback to government. ICT provides a range of avenues for participatory planning that can improve urban public spaces.

Minecraft is a ‘sandbox’ computer game developed by Mojang and launched in 2011. The game has sold over 60 million copies worldwide, making it one of the world’s best-selling computer games. The gameplay is perhaps best imagined as a complex ‘digital Lego’. The creative aspects of Minecraft allow players to build structures out of textured cubes in a three-dimensional generated world, thus creating buildings similar to those produced by complex 3D modelling software.

Minecraft has been shown to be a useful tool in engaging young people in the design of urban public space projects. As part of the public space implementation process, participatory planning workshops are held with local youth in which they provide input into the design and eventual implementation and management of spaces. By using Minecraft in this way, young

people are given the confidence to make urban professionals and policy makers listen to their ideas for improving the city.

Community participation workshops with youth and Minecraft have been held in Kenya, Haiti, Mexico, Nigeria, Somalia, Peru, Nepal, Philippines and Bangladesh. The projects implemented so far show that using Minecraft adds value to community participation processes. Power relationships are changed, communities are engaged in new ways and the process presents great opportunities to engage hard-to-reach groups, particularly young people.

Considering the proposed Urban Sustainable Development Goal 11, this event will address young people's ability to utilize urban public space for accessing education, knowledge, employment as well as leisure activities. It will look at opportunities this goal presents for an enhanced focus on urban public spaces while debating how young people can take active part in implementing, monitoring and reporting on this goal with a particular focus on public space.

The event will also present the methodology of using Minecraft as a community participation tool and showcase case studies from around the world as successful examples of ICT's potential in creating local ownership and engagement.

Purpose

At the 23rd Governing Council of UN-Habitat, Member States mandated UN-Habitat to address the issue of public spaces and their contribution to sustainable urban development and improved quality of life (Resolution 23/4 on Sustainable Urban Development through Access to Public Spaces). They requested UN-Habitat:

- To advance the agenda on public space in a way that will consolidate local and international approaches to creating inclusive cities, enhance the knowledge of UN-Habitat partners and local authorities about place-making, public spaces and the quality of urban life, and facilitate and implement exchange, cooperation and research between partners working in this field;
- To develop a policy approach on the role that public spaces can play in meeting the challenges of our rapidly urbanizing world, to disseminate that policy and its results widely, and to develop a plan for ensuring its application internationally;
- To assist UN-Habitat partners to disseminate knowledge to existing sustainable urban development processes at all government levels.

In July 2014, the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals published its report, recommending member states to adopt 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 11 concerns sustainable urbanisation: "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable". Each goal is supported by a number of targets and Goal 11 includes a target on public space: "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".

By its resolution 24/11, the Governing Council noted with appreciation the renewed emphasis of UN-Habitat, as reflected in its Strategic Plan 2014-2019, on the urban economy and the role of urban planning, innovative financing and the economic empowerment of youth and women in the creation of sustainable cities. Public spaces are critical not only to youth's economic empowerment, but can also be used to enhance social cohesion and engagement of young people in society in general. UN-Habitat has supported youth to address these issues in cities globally through the Urban Youth Fund, something which has led to successful youth-led projects that use ICT in mapping, communicating and advocating for safe, accessible, free and innovative public space.

Partners

Global Network on Public Space, UN-Habitat Youth Advisory Board, Nairobi City County

Organizer

Mojang is a Microsoft owned game developer company, famous for developing the game Minecraft.