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Special Human Settlements Programme for the Palestinian People
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Utilizing Minecraft as a tool for community participation: Supporting the development of public spaces in East Jerusalem



East Jerusalem, July 19th, 2016 – UN-Habitat in partnership with Bimkom -Planners for Planning Rights, Al Enaya Community Center, and the Green Mosque Group are creating an inclusive public space in Wadi Al Joz neighborhood in East Jerusalem in order to improve the urban environment and the living conditions of residents, in particular children and youth. The initiative is pioneering the use of the popular Minecraft video game for the first time in the State of Palestine as a tool to engage the community in the design process of the public space, and builds on UN Habitat's previous public space intervention in Sur Baher neighborhood.

40 community members, mainly youth, participated in the 3 day workshop that included discussions on good public space design, the importance of community participation, and how to use Minecraft as a tool for the design process. Youth were divided into teams and built their visions of the public space within the virtual environment of Minecraft. On the last day, the participants presented their designs and a group discussion was held to agree on the proposed facilities and services. Afterwards a final model that combines the agreed upon ideas was developed which will be the base that the landscape architect will develop the final public space design upon. "In the past, we did not get a chance to be involved in deciding what our community needs. Today, we are creating a design for our public space as a team, and I cannot wait to see it come true," said Ro'a, one of the participants.

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Pontus Westerberg, Digital Projects Officer at UN-Habitat's noted that "UN Habitat and Mojag – the creator of Minecraft – have a global partnership called "Block by Block", which aims to involve youth in the planning process in urban areas by giving them the opportunity to show planners and decision makers how they would like to see their cities in the future. We are pleased to see this initiative rolled out in the State of Palestine and I look forward to seeing the final public space based on the ideas generated in this workshop."



The importance of utilizing Minecraft rests on its ability to engage community members, especially youth from both genders, in a highly visual and intuitive manner that allows the expression of their needs and opinions. Minecraft is a critical tool for democratizing public space and broader spatial planning processes in a cost-effective and highly interactive manner. "The youth involved have developed key skills not only in ICT, but also in problem solving, consensus building, and teamwork which will benefit them in the future" said Joe Hooper, Head of UN Habitat office in the State of Palestine.