USING NEW TECHNOLOGIES FOR CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC SPACE PLANNING AND DESIGN

In recent years, the role of digital technologies has become increasingly important for cities. Digital participation tools, sensor networks, big data analytics as well as data accessibility, privacy and accountability are regularly used in urban management and urban planning and design. New technology is resulting in radical transformation of cities in many areas, and innovations such as autonomous vehicles and drones will soon have a great impact on the way cites need to be planned and designed. Increasingly, cities that make use of new technologies and digital data for urban planning and management are termed 'smart cities'.

For UN-Habitat, the use of digital tools in cities must contribute to sustainable urban development, helping citizens make environmentally-friendly choices, promoting inclusive economic growth and ensuring civic participation by all. However, in many parts of the world there are persistent digital divides across gender, geography, age, and income dimensions. The New Urban Agenda, while calling for digital platforms be used to improve long-term integrated urban and territorial planning and design, also requires efforts to be made to make ICT more accessible to everyone, including women and girls, children and youth, older persons and disable people.

Recognizing that ICTs can offer new opportunities for citizens, particularly children and youth, to take part in decision making and governance processes, UN-Habitat in 2012 entered into a partnership with Mojang, the company that makes Minecraft. Through this partnership, which has been called 'Block by Block', UN-Habitat uses Minecraft as a tool to ensure the participation and inclusion of citizens in our public space work. Through five-day participatory design workshops, UN-Habitat and partners bring people together to visualize their urban design ideas in Minecraft, and present these to city authorities and local government officials. The Minecraft designs are then used as part of the process of implementing real public space improvement projects.