



Global Public Space Toolkit

From Global Principles to
Local Policies and Practice

UN HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

Global Public Space Toolkit: From Global Principles to Local Policies and Practice
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Contents

FOREWORD iv

PREFACE vi

GLOSSARY viii

INTRODUCTION 3

 Quality of Urban Life through Public Space 4

 Using Urban Planning and Design to Deliver Public Space 4

 The Transformative Power of Urbanization: The New Urban Agenda 6

 Policy Directions and Main References on Public Space 6

 Methodology 9

THE CASE FOR PUBLIC SPACE 13

 Public Space as the Banner of Urban Civility 15

 Public Spaces as our Urban Commons 15

 Public Spaces as Generators of Income, Investment and Wealth Creation 16

 Public Spaces as Producers of Environmental Sustainability 17

 Public Space Increases Transportation Efficiency 17

 Public Space Improves Public Health 18

 Public Space Enhances Safety 18

 Public Spaces as Promoters of Equity and Social Inclusion 19

 Public Spaces as Tools for Women and Age-Friendly Cities 20

 Public Spaces as Opportunities for Generating Citizen Involvement 21

 Public Spaces as Generators of Great Cities 21

GOALS AND CONSTRAINTS 25

 Definitions Come First 26

 Types of Public Spaces 27

 The Goal: Improving Public Space Supply, Quality and Distribution 30

 Constraints to the Creation, Management and Enjoyment of Good Public Spaces 30

 Public Space in Different Urban Contexts 31

PRINCIPLES AND POLICIES	35
General Policies.	36
<i>POLICY TOOL 1: Knowing Where We Are to Know Where to Go – City-wide</i>	
<i>Public Space Surveys</i>	36
<i>POLICY TOOL 2: Measuring the Quality of Public Space.</i>	37
<i>POLICY TOOL 3: Securing Political Commitment</i>	41
<i>POLICY TOOL 4: Legislation and Public Space.</i>	41
<i>POLICY TOOL 5: Anchoring Public Space in National Urban Policies and Seeking</i>	
<i>Synergies Within Government</i>	43
<i>POLICY TOOL 6: Street-led Approach to City-wide Slum Upgrading</i>	44
<i>POLICY TOOL 7: Planning Public Space as a System</i>	45
<i>POLICY TOOL 8: Using Public Space to Lead Development Strategies</i>	46
<i>POLICY TOOL 9: Participation as if it were a Public Space – Openness, Access, Sharing .</i>	47
<i>POLICY TOOL 10: Leveraging Public Space as Resource Multiplier</i>	48
Context-Specific Policies	49
<i>Public Spaces for Rapidly Growing and Resource-Poor Cities</i>	49
<i>Public Spaces for Rapidly Growing, Economically Vibrant Cities</i>	51
<i>Public Spaces for Consolidated Cities</i>	51
<i>Public Spaces and Shrinking Cities.</i>	53
TURNING GOOD PRINCIPLES INTO ACTION	55
General Principles	57
Creation of Public Space	69
Design of Public Space	77
Management of Public Space	96
Enjoyment of Public Space	114
CONCLUSIONS	123
ANNEXES.	127
Annex 1: Charter of Public Space	127
Annex 2: The Sustainable Development Goals	132
Annex 3: What Makes a Great Place	133
INDEX OF CASE STUDIES	134
END NOTES	136
BIBLIOGRAPHY	137

Foreword



Public spaces contribute to defining the cultural, social, economic and political functions of cities. They continue to be the first element to mark the status of a place from a chaotic and unplanned settlement to a well-established town or city.

The value of public spaces is often overlooked or underestimated by policy makers, leaders and developers. There are a number of reasons for this, such as the lack of resources, understanding or capacity to use the possibilities of public space as a complete, multi-functional urban system. Often the lack of appropriate enabling frameworks, weak political will and the absence of the means for public engagement compound the situation.

In recent years, however, we have observed a remarkable rise in the number of cities, particularly in the Global South, that have managed to use public space as a key lever for urban development. Cities have used public space to improve mobility and access to basic services, making their environment safer and crime-free, stimulating economic activity and investment, preserving historical and cultural

assets or facilitating urban renewal and inclusiveness.

We have had similar experiences at UN-Habitat, where we have promoted the use of public space for more than a decade as an implementation and delivery strategy for projects on urban planning, housing and slum upgrading, governance and urban safety, basic services and even post-conflict reconstruction. In 2011, UN-Habitat's Governing Council gave the Programme a clear opportunity and direction through Resolution 23/4 to consolidate our agency-wide work on public space. UN-Habitat's Member States have mandated the agency to develop an approach that promotes the role of public space in meeting the challenges of our rapidly-urbanizing world, to coordinate various global partners and experts on public space and to directly assist cities in their initiatives on public space.

Since then, UN-Habitat has actively promoted public space as an important component for prosperity in cities. We have intensively studied streets – the most common public space – in order to provide evidence showing

that prosperous cities are those that recognize the relevance of public spaces with proper layouts, and that allocate sufficient land to street development. We have also supported the development of the Charter on Public Space (an initiative led by our partner, the Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica, in Italy), which puts forward key principles that define the work in this field. We have also launched a Global Programme on Public Space that is dedicated to delivering normative and operational activities, with special emphasis on technical collaboration with cities.

The partnership with cities is at the core of UN-Habitat's efforts to work with public space in a systematic way across many levels. It is for this reason that this Toolkit on Public Space has been developed together with experts and our institutional partners. This has been produced with a special group of cities in mind – those with multi-faceted mandates but which face the reality of scarce or insufficient resources. The majority of our priority cities are either located in Least Developed or Middle Income countries, or those that have a high percentage of their population living in slums and in unprivileged

circumstances. The leaders of these cities have to be accountable to their constituency in delivering solutions to a myriad of practical issues, which are short-, medium and long-term. Public Space is a key tool to fulfill this accountability.

The aim of this toolkit is to guide policies and strategies at city level and to provide examples linking policies to practices. This volume of the Public Space Toolkit is a first step which will be complemented in future with additional material and tools. Using these guidelines, we hope cities will devise solutions that suit their specific conditions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joan Clos". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the bottom of the name.

Dr. Joan Clos
Under-Secretary-General, United Nations
Executive Director, UN-Habitat

Preface

Despite its importance in promoting sustainable urban development, public space has not been given the attention it deserves in literature and, more importantly, in the global policy arena. Yet there is a growing body of principles and sound policies for improving access to good public space in our cities, as well as a growing patrimony of good practices from different urban settings around the world. What was missing up to now was a compendium of some of the most relevant principles, policies and practices. For this reason, and in keeping with the mandate given by its governing body¹, UN-Habitat has decided to put together, in cooperation with the *Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica* (INU) and other partners, a toolkit – a user-friendly guide to provide cities, and particularly those with high rates of demographic growth and limited financial resources, with actionable ideas on how to improve the availability, quality and distribution of good public spaces.

The toolkit will be a practical reference for local governments to frame and implement principles, policy recommendations and

‘we’. This is to emphasize the fact that there is now a broad ‘public space community’ comprising international organizations such as UN-Habitat, professional organizations, local governments, central governments, permanent public-space fora, foundations, citizens groups, researchers and dedicated individuals who are all committed to work together to make our cities better places to live in through inclusive, safe and accessible public space. If anything, this toolkit intends to broaden this global partnership further.

As the partnership grows and continues to research and work, new and additional tools, issues and aspects will be highlighted. UN-Habitat remains committed to continue to document and support such developments. The toolkit is conceived as an open series of documents providing different levels of details and applicable options.

UN-Habitat’s Mandate to Work with Public

Space: For a long time, while UN-Habitat focused on shelter and basic services, public space and urban planning remained a neglected

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