Towards child friendly public spaces in Sharjah, UAE

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About Sharjah

In May 2018, Sharjah was named a Child Friendly City by UNICEF in recognition of its outstanding efforts and accomplishments in the protection and promotion of children's rights.

Sharjah is the first city in the Middle East to receive the prestigious title, and the first in the world to win the title after successfully meeting the new international requirements and criteria launched by UNICEF’s global Child Friendly Cities initiative in May 2017.
Executive Summary

Sharjah Urban Planning Council is working on drafting a road map that aims to strengthen Sharjah’s position as a Child-Friendly City through creating and maintaining an environment that nurtures the development of the youth amongst the rapid growth and urbanization taking over Sharjah.

In collaboration with UNICEF, UN HABITAT, and Sharjah Child Friendly Office, Sharjah Urban Planning Council held a workshop with government and private sector agencies showcasing the best practices around the world and incorporate those lessons in the Child Friendly City initiative in Sharjah. In April 2019, Sharjah Urban Planning Council launched it’s initiative “URBAN PLANNING LAB” where it held a Minecraft workshop and a walk exploratory experience in September 2019.
Executive Summary

The partnering organizations focused efforts to meet the requirements set in the Sharjah Child Friendly City Project 2019-2021 action plan:

1. That they are valued, respected and treated equally within their communities and by local authorities;

2. they have their voice, needs and priorities heard and taken into account in public laws, policies, and decisions that affect them;

3. they have access to basic essential services;

4. they live in a safe, secure and clean environment;

5. they have opportunities to enjoy family life, play and leisure.
The objective is to turn the area into a vibrant and comfortable space that is child-friendly and inclusive using the following tools.

1. Block by Block methodology
2. Workshop and group discussions
3. Field survey – Site specific assessment, exploratory walks
4. Counting, observation and photography
Urban Planning Lab

Small hands can craft the blueprints of the city.
Block by Block Workshop

Participants
48 participants, 16 Groups

Age
9 – 11 years old

Gender
20 girls, 28 boys

Duration
2 days
Priority list of ideas

**SHARJAH PRIORITY LIST**

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**Additional Facilities**

- Water puits / Feed
- Sign Language learning
- ATM Machine
- Tennis
- Skateboard park
- Volleyball court
- Bicycle rental
- Air conditioned room
- Solar Panels
- Irrigation system
- Rubber floor
- Shades
- Market / Agriculture
- Security Station
- Arcade
Final Minecraft Model

- Fountain/waterscape
- Greenery/grass ground
- Trampoline
- Playground
- Flowers
- Trees
- Lights
- Benches
- Safe zebra-crossing
- Kiosk/Food concession/ café/stores
Final Minecraft Model: Connection with the Mosque
This is the most efficient public engagement we have had for city development Projects.

Amal Abdulla Alkhamis
Trainee

I learned how to be creative on Minecraft and how to better design public spaces. I can’t wait to see my ideas being implemented.

Ahmad Fouad
Participant

I had the chance to become an architect during this workshop and I designed many sports facilities.

Sarah Ahmed
Participant

We want to make sure universal design is considered in the planning of the park, especially for people with hearing and speech imparity.

Rida Ismael
Participant

I learned how to work in group and communicate with my teammates to improve our neighbourhood park.

Sarah Ahmed
Participant

I learned how to be creative on Minecraft and how to better design public spaces. I can’t wait to see my ideas being implemented.

Ahmad Fouad
Participant
Objective: To assess the context of the site through the eyes of the children in terms of comfort, accessibility and safety.

5 routes, 3 stops in each route

10+ children of age 8 - 18 years. Equal rep of gender.

2 facilitator for each group

Digital questionnaire filled for every stop
Voices from the kids

“There is nothing to do here, I would never come back!”
Female, 13

“I do not feel safe crossing”
Male, 9

“I don’t like the smell of this place”
Male, 12

“I like walking but not in this weather”
Female, 13

“I feel safe because there are many cameras”
Male, 8

“The place is very clean”
Male, 6

“When are you going to construct the park”
Female, 12
Based on the findings from the observation exercise, the exploratory walk, the block by block workshop and the digital survey, a half day workshop with the experts took place to rethink the design.

**Expert discussion on the design of the site**
Scaling Up: City-wide public space assessment

Objective: To assess 230 open public spaces in the city of Sharjah engaging over 40 data collectors

Identify Gaps:
- Accessibility
- Safety
- Inclusivity

Monitor and Report on the SDG 11.7 and the NUA
Chapter 1: Introduction
Why focus on planning public spaces for children in cities?
Benchmarking: Europe (Barcelona, Copenhagen) - Asia - Arab (Gulf area Abu Dhabi, Dubai)

Chapter 2: Principles for child-friendly public spaces

Chapter 3: Framework for Child-friendly public spaces

A. Engage to Change
   a. Governance - Having policies, participation of children, having representatives in local government that advocate for children...
   b. Document and Map for Change: where you are?
      a. Spatial distribution - How far should public spaces be allocated in cities for children
      b. Quantity - How much public space per person should there be for a child-friendly city
      c. Quality - indicators for (Comfort, Safety, Accessibility, Inclusivity) that are related to child-friendly public spaces
   c. How: observation, counting, journal keeping, interviews, surveys, photography, digital analysis, exploratory walks, block by block, focused group discussions, committee...
      Turkey Izmir: children municipality + participation
      Sharjah: Child parliament

B. Plan for Change
   a. Vision/Strategy: where do you want to go?
   b. Criteria for child-friendly open space: Block, streets, open spaces (setting the basis)
   c. Actions - Temporary to permanent Placemaking - Short - Medium - Long term

C. Sustain Change
   a. Frameworks - Management-Institutional - Legal (refine)
   b. Financing

Chapter 4: The case of Sharjah

   a. Findings from the site-specific assessment
   b. Lessons learnt
   c. Recommendations
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