

CITIES 4 WOMEN

महिला मैत्री शहर

Inclusive and Climate Resilient
Urbanization in Nepal

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS
3RD INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC
CONFERENCE ON PUBLIC OPEN SPACES

URBAN BOOTCAMP:
PUBLIC OPEN SPACES IN
CHILD FRIENDLY CITIES



8-9 January 2026, Kathmandu, Nepal



Implemented by  UNOPS



In collaboration with



Save the Children

CITIES 4 WOMEN

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Urbanization in Nepal



3rd International Academic Conference on Public Open Spaces Urban Bootcamp: Public Open Spaces in Child Friendly Cities © UNOPS

INTRODUCTION

The *Cities 4 Women: Inclusive and Climate-Resilient Urbanization in Nepal* project aims to address the challenges posed by rapid urban growth and increasing climate vulnerability by stimulating demand for gender-responsive, climate-resilient public open spaces, piloting public urban infrastructure, enhancing the urban planning and design capacity of municipalities, and recommending policy reforms. The project is co-funded by the European Union and the Government of Finland, and is being implemented through a partnership between UNOPS, UN-Habitat and Cities Alliance across seven selected municipalities and cities of Nepal, namely: Dhangadhi and Hetauda Sub-metropolitan Cities, Birendranagar, Chandragiri, Sunwal, Tansen and Tilottama Municipalities. The project is led by the Ministry of Urban Development. The project has successfully organized two previous International Academic Conferences Urban Bootcamps on the theme of public open spaces to provide intensive learning and knowledge-sharing opportunities for urban planners and designers, municipal engineers, and other stakeholders. This Urban Bootcamp, in collaboration with Save the Children, introduced and explored child-friendly approaches to the planning and design of public open spaces. The third edition of the Urban Bootcamp, in addition to government representatives, scholars and practitioners from Nepal, also included participants from Brazil, Costa Rica, Finland, Greece, Italy, India, Kenya, Serbia, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States. The conference was organized on 8-9 January 2026, both on-site in Kathmandu and online.

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Urban Bootcamp Opening Session



Komal Karki, Country Manager, United Nations Office for Project Services, Kathmandu, Nepal

“Children make up a significant proportion of Nepal’s urban population. Yet, their needs, their voices, and everyday experiences are rarely reflected in urban planning and design processes. Designing cities for children is not about creating separate or specialized spaces; it is about rethinking cities as shared environments that are safe, inclusive, playful, accessible, and resilient for everyone.”



Tara Chetry, Country Director, Save the Children International, Kathmandu, Nepal

“I want to acknowledge the greater opportunity that urban spaces can provide us. They can be hubs of innovation, decision-making, and investments that can be leveraged to transform them into places that are not only better for children but also better for everyone.”



Rosalba Tuseo, Programme Officer, European Union Delegation, Kathmandu, Nepal

“It is important to think of children in public open spaces. Children can give us different perspectives; listening to them, we get different lenses through which we see cities.”



Nava Raj Pyakurel, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Urban Development, Kathmandu, Nepal

“Even relatively small scale interventions in public open spaces can have meaningful impacts - improving safety, accessibility, social cohesion and environmental performance - when they are designed through participatory, gender-responsive and climate-sensitive approaches.”

Sara Alanen, Head of Cooperation, Embassy of Finland, Kathmandu, Nepal

“Children are not only the most vulnerable to climate impacts, but they can also be the most creative contributors to solutions. By listening to children's voices and involving them in the urban design processes, we can create spaces that foster play, learning, and well-being, while strengthening resilience against climate challenges. ”



Dr. Chudamani Joshi, Programme Management Specialist, United Nations Office for Project Services, Kathmandu, Nepal

“This Urban Bootcamp serves as a dynamic platform for knowledge exchange, collaborative learning, and innovative dialogue, advocating our shared vision of cities that are inclusive, safe, playful and resilient for children and communities alike.”



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KEY NOTE ADDRESS I: INTEGRATING CHILDREN'S VOICES INTO INCLUSIVE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Durga Prasad Chalise, Under-Secretary and
Section Chief | Ministry of Women, Children
and Senior Citizens, Kathmandu, Nepal

Abstract: Rapid urbanization presents both opportunities and challenges in creating sustainable cities and inclusive public spaces for children. Cities are not merely physical environments; they are complex ecosystems where children live, learn, play, and grow as the future human capital of society. Recognising children as active citizens rather than passive beneficiaries is central to the development of child-friendly cities. This perspective emphasizes the importance of designing urban spaces with children, ensuring their voices are meaningfully integrated into planning and decision-making processes. Despite growing awareness, children in urban areas continue to face significant challenges, including limited access to safe play spaces, exposure to air pollution, heightened risks of exploitation and violence, and social exclusion. These challenges disproportionately affect children from marginalized communities, children with disabilities, and those from low-income families. Addressing such risks requires integrated and child-centred urban planning approaches that prioritize children's needs at every stage of development. Investments in child-friendly infrastructure - such as parks, playgrounds, walkways, and inclusive public spaces - are essential not only for children's holistic development but also for fostering healthy, resilient, and sustainable communities. This underscores the need for collaborative action among government institutions, development

partners, and stakeholders to address both visible and hidden challenges faced by children in urban contexts. The Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens reaffirms a collective commitment to transforming cities into safe, inclusive, and empowering environments that uphold the rights, dignity, and wellbeing of every child.

Keywords: ecosystem; exploitation; violence against children; social inclusion empowerment

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Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens. (2025). *अपाङ्गता स्रोत पुस्तिका २०७८* [Disability resource book, 2078].

Biography: Durga Prasad Chalise is the under-secretary and section chief at the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens in Kathmandu, Nepal. He works on developing and implementing policies and programmes that promote the rights, well-being, and social

inclusion of women, children, and senior citizens. The ministry oversees national initiatives on women's empowerment, child protection, senior citizen welfare, and social inclusion, collaborating with government agencies and development partners to ensure that policies translate into meaningful improvements in the lives of vulnerable populations across Nepal.

KEY NOTE ADDRESS 2: CHILDREN ARE CENTRAL TO URBAN LIFE

Indradevi Dhakal, Member-Secretary |
National Child Right Council, Kathmandu,
Nepal

Abstract: Children are central to urban life and yet remain among the most overlooked users of cities and public open spaces. In Nepal, children constitute nearly one-third of the national population and represent a significant proportion of urban residents. Recognising this reality, the National Child Rights Council (NCRC), as the specialized government body mandated to protect and promote children's rights, emphasizes the need to place children at the core of urban development agendas. Children are not merely future beneficiaries of cities; they are active partners of today, whose insights, experiences, and voices are critical to shaping inclusive and responsive urban environments. Urbanization presents both opportunities and vulnerabilities for children, particularly those from low-income families, children with disabilities, street-connected children, and those exposed to child labour, exploitation, abuse, and violence. Despite being the largest users of urban facilities and public open spaces, children's needs are often inadequately addressed in urban infrastructure, with limited access to safe parks, playgrounds, and inclusive public spaces that support healthy

development. Addressing these gaps requires stronger coordination across government agencies, development partners, civil society, and urban practitioners, alongside meaningful engagement with children themselves. This abstract highlights the importance of investing in children as a high-return investment for society and calls for child-centred urban planning that prioritizes protection, participation, and inclusion. Drawing on ongoing national efforts to address street-connected children and eliminate child labour, it highlights the urgency of integrated approaches that respond to both visible and hidden risks associated with urbanization. The NCRC reaffirms its commitment to act on children's recommendations, strengthen collaboration with stakeholders, and advance collective action toward building child-friendly cities where all children are safe, heard, and able to thrive.

Keywords: National Child Rights Council; street-connected children; child labour

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Biography: Indradevi Dhakal is the Member Secretary of the National Child Rights Council in Kathmandu, Nepal, where she oversees coordination, policy advice, and implementation of national child rights and protection initiatives. The National Child Rights Council is the government's apex body responsible for safeguarding and promoting the rights and well-being of children, providing strategic guidance, advising all levels of government, and strengthening child protection systems and stakeholder capacity across the country.

KEY NOTE ADDRESS 3: A SUCCESS STORY FROM SUNWAL

Bimala Aryal, Mayor | Sunwal Municipality, Sunwal, Nepal

Abstract: Sunwal Municipality has emerged as a pioneering example of child-centred local governance in Nepal, earning recognition from UNICEF as the country's first "Child-Friendly Municipality." This title was granted after the municipality met the minimum index of child-friendly governance, which includes child protection, child development, child participation, child mortality, and organizational development. Achieving this milestone required a structured approach guided by the Child-Friendly Local Governance National Strategy (2068 BS) and a dedicated code of conduct, ensuring that policies and budgeting prioritized the needs and voices of children. The municipality has implemented

programmes that empower youth, engage them in decision-making, and direct resources toward initiatives that support their growth and well-being. Investments in children are seen not just as immediate welfare measures, but as long-term contributions to the community and the nation, shaping future leaders who give back to their hometowns. This case explores Sunwal's strategies, governance processes, and outcomes, highlighting how participatory decision-making, targeted resource allocation, and a commitment to child-friendly policies can serve as a model for inclusive and sustainable local governance in Nepal and beyond.

Keywords: child-friendly governance; municipality; participatory decision-making; resource allocation

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Biography: Bimala Aryal is the Mayor of Sunwal Municipality in Nepal, leading local governance in one of the rapidly growing municipalities in Nawalparasi District. As mayor, she has overseen initiatives to improve education, health services, and environmental quality, including community school support policies and plans for local health-care facilities. Under her leadership, Sunwal has also advanced its recognition as Nepal's first child-friendly municipality by prioritising child-centred governance and community engagement.

REFLECTING ON THE EXCHANGE BETWEEN CHILDREN AND MUNICIPAL ENGINEERS

Krishangi Aryal, Children Group Representative | Kathmandu, Nepal

Abstract: Engaging children in building inclusive cities is a cornerstone of sustainable urban development. Too often, modern cities disappoint children by prioritising adult needs over child-friendly infrastructure and leaving few places for play, learning, and social interaction. The Urban Bootcamp promotes hands-on participation, enabling participants to contribute through creative sessions, sketches, and layouts that help shape resilient communities that work for everyone. Authentic inclusion demands that children's ideas inform design choices such as green pathways, accessible playgrounds, and pedestrian-safe streets, to address issues such as traffic congestion, inequality, and pollution. Collaboration between governments, NGOs, and

local communities is essential, supported by training for urban planners on child rights. By including children in urban planning, cities can tackle genuine needs like secure paths to school and play spaces that encourage social bonds. Ultimately, even brief conversations with children can transform streets into welcoming places where everyone feels safe, at home, and alive. Involving them isn't optional; it strengthens equity and resilience in urban life.

Keywords: child participation; participatory urban design; municipal engineers; child-friendly infrastructure; co-design; inclusive mobility; urban resilience; playground accessibility

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<https://childrennepal.org.np/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Annual-Report-Eng.-2079-080-BS-2022-023.pdf>

Biography: Krishangi Aryal is an active member of the CZOP (Children as Zone of Peace) Child Advisory Board, where she advocates for key child rights issues. A 12th-grade student at Learning Realm International School, she balances her studies with leadership in child rights advocacy. She has participated in awareness-raising campaigns on the risks of drug abuse and campaigns to end child marriage, and advocates for progressive policies that make local governance more child-friendly and inclusive.

ENGAGING CHILDREN IN INCLUSIVE CITIES

Prabal Dahal | UN-Habitat, Kathmandu, Nepal

Abstract: In 2020, about 56 per cent of the global population, or 4.4 billion people, lived in urban areas, including an estimated 1.18 billion children (UNICEF, 2022). Globally, children under 18 make up nearly 27 per cent of the population, while in Nepal they account for 9.87 million people, or 33.84 per cent of the total population. These figures highlight the need to recognize children as active stakeholders in urban development. Guided by the New Urban Agenda Transformative Commitment 34, this presentation examines the importance of engaging children in building inclusive, equitable, and sustainable cities. Children experience cities on a daily basis through streets, schools, parks, and transport systems that directly influence their safety, health, and well-being. They are often the first to identify risks

and gaps, such as unsafe crossings, damaged sidewalks, lack of play spaces, inaccessible infrastructure, and environmental hazards. Urban environments that respond to children's needs tend to be safer, healthier, and more accessible for all residents. Meaningful participation also strengthens children's confidence and civic awareness, reinforcing the understanding that children are citizens today, not only future adults. The presentation draws on UN-Habitat Nepal's experience, with a focus on the Cities 4 Women project in Lamkichuha Municipality. The initiative recognized the importance of child participation and engaged children through structured consultations and co-design processes. Children's priorities and aspirations were documented and reflected in urban design interventions. Additional

initiatives supported by the European Union, GEF, Fukuoka City, the SDG Fund, and other partners include urban farming with schoolchildren to improve food security, child art competitions addressing urban environmental protection, and activities promoting disability inclusion. The presentation ends with the key message that a child-friendly city prioritizes safety, equity, and rights; promotes active mobility and clean air; encourages inclusive planning for informal settlements; and ensures children's voices shape climate-resilient and disaster-ready urban futures.

Keywords: New Urban Agenda Transformative Commitment 34; participation; inclusion; climate-resilient; disaster-ready

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Biography: Prabal Dahal is an architect and urban planner from Kathmandu currently working as an urban planner at UN-Habitat Nepal. His work focuses on advancing inclusive, resilient, and sustainable urban development through policy support, spatial planning, and multi-stakeholder engagement at national and local levels. He holds a Bachelor of Architecture and a Master of Science in Urban Planning from Tribhuvan University, where his academic training strengthened his interest in urban governance, urban data, and inclusive and climate-responsive planning in the context of Nepal's rapidly urbanising cities. Prabal's professional interests include fostering people-centred, climate-resilient, and inclusive urban landscapes, and building collaborative partnerships that support long-term, sustainable urban transformation across Nepal.

CARE BLOCKS - A SHARING BASED ON THE CARE GIS

Priti Shrestha | UN Women, Kathmandu, Nepal

Abstract: Towards Caring Cities: A Geospatial Analysis in Nepal applies advanced geospatial methodologies to examine how urban environments influence the distribution, accessibility, and demand for care services across Nepal. The study, part of UN Women's

Research-in-Action Series on Caring Cities,, maps the supply and demand of care services - such as childcare, eldercare, and health facilities - and overlays them with land-use patterns and climate-risk data to expose spatial inequalities affecting women's mobility, labour-force

participation, and economic opportunities. Using Kathmandu Valley as a core study area, the report identifies rapidly growing urban zones where unmet care demand intersects with environmental vulnerabilities. These spatial disparities reinforce the demands for unpaid care work, predominantly carried by women and girls and limit their participation in employment and public life. The findings underscore that integrating care systems into urban planning is essential for building gender-responsive, climate-resilient, and inclusive cities. The report positions geospatial analysis as a transformative tool for informing municipal planning, resource allocation, and policy reforms that strengthen Nepal's emerging care economy. This research-in-action contributes to the UN Women's TransformCare Investment Initiative, which advances gender-responsive care systems across Asia and the Pacific

Keywords: care economy; geospatial analysis (GIS); caring cities; urban care systems; spatial inequalities; gender inequality; women's economic empowerment; unpaid care work; care infrastructure; climate-risk mapping; data feminism; evidence-informed policymaking; TransformCare Investment Initiative

PUBLIC OPEN SPACES FOR CHILDREN IN KATHMANDU

Arinita Maskey Shrestha | UNICEF, Kathmandu, Nepal

Abstract: Creating safe, inclusive, and child-responsive cities is fundamental to sustainable urban development and democratic governance. Guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), UNICEF has worked in Nepal for several decades to support the realization of children's rights through policy

Biography: Priti Shrestha leads the UN Women's pioneering work on the care economy, with multi-stakeholder partnerships that drive inclusive growth and expand opportunities for vulnerable women, as part of advancing gender equality and women's economic empowerment in Nepal.

Access full report here:

<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/ap-20250396957-26may2025-report-towards-caring-cities-a-geospatial-analysis-in-nepal-hi-res.pdf>

Report authors: Cecilia Tinonin (UN Women), Priti Shrestha (UN Women), Agustina Pérez Mirianco (DPA), Anna Spinardi (DPA). Their work focuses on gender equality, geospatial analysis, and the intersection of urban environments and care systems. The authors specialize in leveraging data-driven methodologies to examine structural inequalities, with a particular emphasis on how spatial patterns of care service provision shape women's economic empowerment, labour participation, and access to public services.

development, local governance, and community-based initiatives. The CRC obliges states to act in the best interests of the child, ensure survival and development, respect children's views, and provide special protection for children in vulnerable situations. Translating these commitments into local action has been a core

focus of UNICEF's work, particularly through the promotion of child-friendly cities and child-friendly local governance. Globally, UNICEF's Child Friendly Cities Initiative is based on the understanding that children's wellbeing is a key indicator of a healthy, inclusive, and democratic city. With more than 70 percent of the world's children expected to live in urban areas by 2050, it is increasingly important that cities provide environments where children can feel safe, access green and open spaces, play freely, and participate meaningfully in decisions that affect their lives. These efforts face growing challenges due to climate change. Worldwide, over one billion children are exposed to extreme climate risks, with South Asia among the most affected regions. In Nepal, more than 82 percent of children report feeling at risk from one or more climate hazards. In response, UNICEF has supported child-centred tools such as a climate risk index and child-led risk mapping initiatives. Through these processes, children identify risks in their communities and present evidence directly to local authorities, influencing disaster preparedness, infrastructure planning, and rehabilitation efforts, including in flood-prone areas. Over the past two to three decades, Nepal has made significant progress in advancing child-friendly local governance. National frameworks, indicators, and guidelines have supported municipalities in integrating children's rights into planning and budgeting. Mechanisms such as child clubs, school zones of peace, early childhood development centres, and child-friendly services have strengthened children's participation and access to essential services across the country. A concrete example of this approach is the transformation of Emukhel Children's Park, located in Lalitpur. Previously small, unsafe, and poorly maintained, the park was redesigned through a participatory process involving children, youth, mothers' groups, local authorities, and private sector partners. The rehabilitated park now functions as a multifunctional public space, combining play areas and green space with

accessible pathways, seating, an amphitheatre-style gathering area, and a child-, gender-, and disability-friendly public toilet with handwashing facilities, drinking water, and rainwater harvesting. Importantly, the park also serves as an emergency assembly point in the event of disasters such as earthquakes. This experience highlights that child-friendly spaces are not only physical infrastructure but social and emotional environments that foster safety, learning, and community connection. While financial resources may exist at the local level, technical guidance, collaboration, and long-term stewardship are essential. Child-friendly cities require sustained commitment and shared ownership to ensure that urban spaces continue to serve children, families, and communities over time.

Keywords: Convention on the Rights of the Child; Child Friendly Cities Initiative; Emukhel Children's Park

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Biography: Arinita Maskey Shrestha is a WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) Specialist with UNICEF Nepal and leads WASH, climate change and environmental sustainability works. She also co-leads National WASH Cluster supporting Government of Nepal of WASH emergency preparedness and response. She works to improve water and sanitation services in communities and institutions, strengthen emergency preparedness,

and address the impacts of climate change on WASH systems and services. Through her role, Arinita contributes to UNICEF's broader mission in Nepal to ensure that all children have access to essential services, including safe water, sanitation, and hygiene, while building resilient communities that can respond effectively to emergencies and environmental challenges.

CHILD-FRIENDLY PUBLIC SPACES: EVIDENCE AND INSIGHTS FROM CITIES

Dr. Anupama Nillari | Save the Children,
Bangalore, India

Abstract: Child-friendly public open spaces are increasingly recognized as critical components of equitable, healthy, and resilient urban environments. Emerging research demonstrates that access to well-designed open and green spaces contributes significantly to children's health and well-being, while also enhancing community cohesion and environmental quality. However, children's diverse needs, shaped by age, gender, disability, socioeconomic context, and patterns of independent mobility, remain insufficiently addressed in mainstream urban planning and policy. This presentation examines the design principles, governance mechanisms, and implementation pathways that enable cities to create inclusive public open spaces responsive to the lived experiences of babies, toddlers, school-aged children, adolescents, girls, and children with disabilities. It highlights the importance of neighbourhood-level accessibility, safety, amenities for caregivers, nature-based play, gender-sensitive design, and universal accessibility

features. The analysis underscores that while metropolitan destination parks serve a broad public function, localized everyday spaces, particularly in low-income or underserved neighbourhoods, are essential for groups with restricted mobility and higher exposure to environmental and social risks. Through comparative insights from successful city-wide child-friendly public space initiatives in Milan, Barcelona, and London, I show how institutional commitment, cross-sectoral coordination, and strategic alignment with broader urban agendas, such as climate resilience, road safety, feminist urbanism, and public health, can expand and democratize access to high-quality public space. Examples include tactical urbanism interventions that rapidly convert streets and squares into people-friendly spaces, city-wide play strategies grounded in participatory planning and data, and long-term regeneration initiatives that embed child-friendly design standards within housing, mobility, and landscape systems. The conclusion identifies key levers for child-centred urban action: integrating children's rights into planning frameworks, investing in disaggregated neighbourhood data, cultivating political and

technical champions, piloting and scaling context-relevant innovations, and engaging children and communities meaningfully in urban decision-making.

Keywords: neighbourhood accessibility; nature-based play; independent mobility; tactical urbanism; urban health; equitable public space; inclusive design

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<https://ceh.unicef.org/events-and-resources/knowledge-library/guide-creating-urban-public-spaces-children>

Biography: Anupama Nallari is the Senior Urban Research and Learning Advisor at Save the Children International. She also supports knowledge and content development for the Global Alliance – Cities 4 Children. She has over 15 years of experience as a designer and research consultant. She has worked with global children's organizations like UNICEF and has held research and teaching posts in New York and Singapore. Her past work includes exploratory research on common space in informal settlements in India, facilitating child-focused participatory planning and design workshops, developing child-friendly community indicators, developing neighbourhood and housing -level Quality of Life indicators and supporting the development of global guidance and principles for public spaces for children in both formal and informal contexts. She received her doctorate in Environmental Psychology at the Graduate Center, City University of New York.

CHILD-FRIENDLY CITIES IN ASIA-PACIFIC, REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Prof. Dr. Bharat Dahiya | Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand

Abstract: Rapid urbanization across the Asia-Pacific region is reshaping cities at

unprecedented speed, with profound implications for children, equity, and long-term urban sustainability. This research offers a regional perspective on child-friendly cities,

situating local practice within broader demographic, spatial, and governance trends across the Asia-Pacific region. Drawing on comparative urban analysis, the research highlights how accelerating urban growth, widening inequalities, environmental stress, and inadequate public space provision disproportionately affect children and women. It emphasises that child-friendly cities are not a niche or sectoral concern, but a strategic entry point for addressing urban inequality, climate resilience, and social cohesion at scale. The research paper argues that cities that prioritise children's needs, such as safe mobility, access to nature, inclusive public spaces, and opportunities for play and social interaction, are better equipped to serve all residents across generations. This research served as a reminder that children's aspirations for cities are often clear, practical, and deeply aligned with principles of sustainable and inclusive urbanism. By juxtaposing regional urbanization trends with a child's voice, the research reinforces a central message of the Urban Bootcamp: meaningful listening to children must inform urban policy, planning, and design. Embedding children's perspectives is not only a moral imperative, but a pragmatic pathway toward safer, healthier, and more resilient cities across the Asia-Pacific region.

Keywords: child-friendly cities; Asia-Pacific urbanization; urban inequality; children's participation; inclusive and resilient urban planning

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<https://unhabitat.org/crisis-resilient-urban-futures-the-future-of-asian-pacific-cities-2023>

Biography: Professor Dr. Bharat Dahiya is an esteemed expert in sustainable urban development, with a wealth of experience in leadership roles within international organizations and academic institutions. Over his career, he has provided strategic guidance, policy development, and technical support to ministers, mayors, and governments worldwide. Dr. Dahiya has conducted influential applied research, including contributing to the United Nations inaugural report on *The State of Asian Cities*. Currently, he serves as the Director of the Research Center for Sustainable Development and Innovation at Thammasat University in Thailand. Dr. Dahiya has a strong academic presence, with numerous publications and experience organizing international conferences. He has also taught extensively at the postgraduate level. His areas of expertise include sustainable urbanization, climate change, urban innovation, cultural landscapes, urban planning, and community-led development. As an editor for Springer's *Advances in 21st Century Human Settlements* book series, Dr. Dahiya further contributes to advancing research and practices in these fields. His work has had a significant

impact on urban policy and development, making him a recognised authority in the domain of sustainable urban futures.



Co-design process as part of the *Cities 4 Women: Inclusive and Climate Resilient Urbanization in Nepal* project in Chandragiri Municipality © UNOPS

PLACEMAKING THROUGH PLAY

Niharika Mathema | Digo Bikas Institute,
Kathmandu, Nepal

Abstract: Hadigaun, one of the oldest urban settlements in Kathmandu, holds immense cultural and historical value but has, over time, faded into a forgotten neighbourhood, coming alive only during *jatras*. To revitalize this neighbourhood, Digo Bikas Institute (DBI), in collaboration with Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) and

ENPHO, launched Carfree Saturday on 22 September 2023, reclaiming streets from cars and creating vibrant spaces for heritage, play, creativity, and connection. Unlike mainstream urban development projects, this initiative is deeply community-rooted and largely led by local residents, sustained through the now officially

registered Jiwanta Hadigaun Abhiyaan Campaign. Central to this initiative was the participation of children as co-creators, whose honesty offered simple yet profound solutions to complex urban problems. Through multiple consultations and creative workshops, children mapped problems, identified strengths, and envisioned their “Ideal Hadigaun.” Their insights revealed deep emotional attachment to the place, called for safer play areas, greener spaces, and more pedestrian-friendly streets. These ideas came alive on World Carfree Day 2023 through Playbourhood - an initiative transforming streets into shared spaces of play and community. Games like hopscotch, *dandibiyo*, wheel races, and life-sized Snakes and Ladders brought joy back to the streets. The traditional Bagh-Chaal was reimaged as Cars and Pedestrians, a powerful metaphor demonstrating that communities can reclaim and reshape their spaces when people come together. Extending this vision, Carfree Creative Saturdays turn Hadigaun into a weekly canvas for creativity and connection, where the “imagination experts” draw on themes like “My Ideal Neighbourhood” and “My Dream City,” reminding us that cities are not just about buildings but living stories woven by people, where love, friendship, kindness, and compassion shape everyday experiences. Hadigaun thus serves as a successful model of child-friendly, participatory placemaking, where play and creativity are central to urban revitalization.

Keywords: placemaking; Playbourhood; Hadigaun; carfree; creativity

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Biography: Niharika Mathema is an architect, placemaker and urban rejuvenator, specialising in sustainable development with a passion for people and places. She strives to enrich people’s everyday experiences in the city by focusing on the spaces in between buildings. She holds a Master’s degree in Energy for Sustainable Social Development from Tribhuvan University - Institute of Engineering, Pulchowk - and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim, Norway, as well as a specialized course in Urban Studies: Placemaking from the University of Amsterdam (UvA). Mathema is working for the Livable Cities Programme at Digo Bikas Institute (DBI), a national-level research and advocacy organization. She is a sustaining member of the Market Cities Network, an initiative of Project for Public Spaces, and serves on the core team of the Carfree Cities Alliance (CCA). She is the initiator of Placemaking Nepal, a self-organized

collective of placemakers dedicated to "Creating Meaningful Places for Memorable Experiences." She has been leading the placemaking conversation in Nepal and working towards a

better urban future, driving transformative change in communities in unique ways, with a special focus on the public realm.

UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLEXITY OF PLAY SPACES OF CORE AREA OF PATAN, NEPAL

Sadichhha Shrestha & Rojita Sharma | Lets Play, Kathmandu, Nepal

Abstract: The research examines the complexity of play in the historic urban core of Patan, Nepal, where urbanization and shifting social dynamics have reduced children's access to safe and inclusive play spaces. Recognising play as a fundamental right and a driver of child development and community well-being, the study applies the Playful Cities Toolkit, developed by the Real Play Coalition (including the LEGO Foundation, UNICEF, ARUP, and others). The toolkit provides frameworks and diagnostic tools to embed play in urban environments by assessing facilitation, time and choice, and spaces for play across different scales. This research focuses specifically on the neighbourhood level, where courtyards, streets, and communal spaces serve as critical play environments. Key stakeholders - caregivers, teachers, community members, and city authorities - are engaged through participatory methods such as interviews and focus group discussions to understand perceptions, barriers, and opportunities for play. Using a mixed-method approach, the study aims to map existing play practices, identify socio-spatial constraints, and propose context-sensitive strategies for revitalizing neighbourhood spaces. Expected outcomes include a typology of play in Patan, insights into how traditional urban forms influence play, and

actionable recommendations for creating inclusive, resilient, and child-friendly neighbourhoods in heritage cities.

Keywords: urbanization, Playful Cities Toolkit, socio-spatial constraints, context-sensitive strategies

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Biography: Sadichchha Shrestha, born in Kathmandu, Nepal, in 1993, received a B.Arch. from Kathmandu Engineering College, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, in 2016. She received an MSc in Geo-information and Earth Observation, specialising in Urban Planning and Management, from the Faculty of ITC, University of Twente, the Netherlands. From 2016 to 2019, she practised architecture in private firms and government projects. Since 2021, she has been a lecturer in the Department of Architecture at Himalaya College of Engineering (HCOE), Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. She is also a community support specialist at Let's Play Initiative Nepal (LPIN), which specializes in revitalizing public open spaces with traditional games and

serious game designs for participatory planning and climate resilience themes. She is currently the correspondent for the 2023-2026 term of the International Union of Architects (UIA) Public Spaces Work Programme. She has keen research interests in nature-based solutions, participatory planning, disaster risk resilience, public space, and serious games.

Rojita Sharma, born in Bhaktapur, Nepal, in 1993, holds a B.Arch. from Kathmandu Engineering College, Tribhuvan University (2016), and an MSc in Energy for Sustainable Social Development, with a specialisation in Energy-Integrated Sustainable Rural and Urban Reconstruction, from Pulchowk Campus, Tribhuvan University (2021). From 2016 to 2023, she practised architecture in private firms and worked on reconstruction projects. Since 2023, she has been a lecturer in the Department of Architecture at Kantipur International College (KIC), Purbanchal University, Lalitpur. She is also a community support specialist at Let's Play Initiative Nepal (LPIN), focusing on revitalizing public open spaces through traditional games and serious game designs that promote participatory planning and climate resilience. Actively engaged in community-based initiatives, she advocates for walkable cities using place-based games, cycling, storytelling, and poetry. Her research interests include walkable cities, nature-based solutions, participatory planning, disaster risk resilience, public spaces, and serious games.

INCLUSIVE OPEN SPACES, HAPPY FACES: PROMOTION OF CHILDREN AS ZONES OF PEACE IN NEPAL

Raju Ghimire & Abhishek Tiwari | CZOP,
Kathmandu, Nepal

Abstract: Inclusive open spaces are important for making child-friendly cities. Open spaces such as parks, school playgrounds, and community spaces play an important role in promoting the children's happiness, development, well-being, and participation. The Government of Nepal has started an initiative for child-friendly cities. However, there is a lack of inclusive open spaces for children, including children with disabilities and children from marginalized communities, and many face risks related to violence, limited safe play spaces, and barriers to participation in community life. The presentation explores how the concept of Children as Zones of Peace (CZOP) can be strengthened by ensuring that public and institutional spaces respect children's rights and provide a safe, protective environment for holistic development. CZOP and its members promote inclusive open spaces to support children's protection and well-being. CZOP is a national alliance of 107 civil society organizations and advocates for policy implementation with federal, provincial, and local governments, including the Local Government Act 2074 and the Child Friendly Local Governance Guideline 2079. The member organizations of CZOP work with local governments, schools, and communities to design and promote inclusive open spaces for children. The members of CZOP collaborate with schools, communities, and local authorities to advocate and maintain inclusive open spaces for all children, including children with disabilities and

children from marginalized communities. The initiatives of CZOP members have been meaningful, especially at the local level, where local governments and schools have made plans and prepared open spaces for learning, play, peace, and social interaction. These initiatives have strengthened children's interpersonal communication, creative thinking, cooperation, and social confidence. This work also supports local governments to plan for, and implement, measures that protect and promote children's well-being. Integrating inclusive open spaces within broader child-friendly city frameworks can sustain long-term impact.

Keywords: child-friendly; child protection; inclusive; open spaces; Zones of Peace

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Biography: Raju Ghimire is the General Secretary of the Children as Zones of Peace (CZOP) National Campaign and the Deputy Director of Voice of Children Nepal. Mr. Ghimire has more than two decades of experience in child rights and protection. He has worked for the protection and reintegration of family-separated children, and has advocated for schools as zones of peace in Nepal in collaboration with government child protection agencies. He has received national and international training in child safeguarding/protection, child participation, alternative care of children, case management, and monitoring and evaluation, and has facilitated

numerous workshops on these areas. He has coordinated research on foster care, sexual abuse and exploitation, and online child protection. He has also participated in professional visits and training/workshops across Asia, Africa, and Europe.

Abhishek Tiwari serves as the Programme Officer of the Children as Zones of Peace (CZOP) National Campaign. With over five years of professional experience in the fields of child rights, youth engagement, and governance advocacy, Mr. Tiwari has played an active role in advocating for the child rights and protection and youth participation in governance in Nepal. He previously held the position of President of the Federal Youth Club Network under the National Youth Council, where he contributed to strengthening youth participation structures at the federal and local levels. In addition to his advocacy role, Mr. Tiwari is a facilitator of the Mock Youth Parliament model and has successfully moderated parliamentary simulations in more than ten local governments, from the local to the federal level, supporting participatory governance learning and youth participation in policy-making process.

PRESERVING CHILD FRIENDLY URBANISM: THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL NEWARI OPEN SPACES IN CONTEMPORARY NEPAL

Bhawana Bhandari & Bandana Sharma |
Kathmandu, Nepal

Abstract: In the context of today's rapid urbanization in cities, this paper examines how some traditional Newari public open spaces continue to support children's play, safety, and

social interaction in Nepal. Drawing on three case studies of Mul Chowk in Bhaktapur Durbar Square, Ta Bahal in Patan, and the pedestrianized main street of Bandipur, the study explores the

relationship between spatial form, cultural practices, and children's everyday use of spaces. Traditional Newari settlements, with their layered system of private courtyards, *bahals*, *dabalis*, and pedestrian streets, have historically created flexible, open-ended play environments within highly dense urban fabrics, enabling children to actively shape spaces for imaginative exploration and peer interaction. However, due to the introduction of motorized traffic, very few streets remain usable for play today. Using spatial mapping, direct observation, and informal conversations with residents, the study finds that these historic spaces remain safe and meaningful for families, particularly when protected from motorized vehicles, allowing both children and parents to feel secure and fostering strong emotional attachment and social cohesion. Furthermore, insights from Bandipur's successful pedestrianisation demonstrate that careful street design, traffic calming measures and prioritization of public life can enhance safety, encourage social engagement, and revitalize traditional urban spaces. Thanks to their cultural and heritage significance, these spaces have largely remained intact, continuing to foster autonomy, exploration, and social cohesion among children. The paper highlights that integrating heritage spatial patterns with modern urban planning strategies is crucial for sustaining child-friendly environments in rapidly changing Nepalese cities. These findings suggest that urban policymakers and planners can draw on traditional settlement patterns to create inclusive, safe, and socially engaging public spaces, thereby reconciling heritage preservation with the demands of contemporary urban life.

Keywords: children; play; Newari architecture; child-friendly urban spaces

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Biography: Bhawana Bhandari is a Nepalese architect and researcher passionate about sustainable, inclusive, and community-oriented urbanism, placemaking, and affordable housing. She graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Architecture from Kathmandu University and has professional experience in architectural design, urban research, heritage documentation, and BIM. Bhawana has contributed to multiple design projects in Nepal and abroad, authored 13 articles for *Rethinking The Future* on topics such as adaptive reuse, urban resilience, and vernacular architecture, and worked with the Car-Free Cities Alliance on strategic expansion and activity planning for pedestrianized streets in Hadigaun. She has actively engaged in international design competitions, including winning the Innovation in Humanitarian Habitat Award for resilient shelters with the Shelter Research Unit in collaboration with the Luxembourg Red Cross, and being shortlisted among the top three Nepalese entries

in the ARCASIA Future-Ready Communities competition. She also won a national competition for designing an EV charging station. Her research explores how traditional spatial patterns and cultural practices can inform child-friendly and socially engaging urban spaces while integrating heritage conservation with modern planning strategies. Bhawana is committed to advancing climate-responsive, inclusive, and resilient cities that prioritize safety, social interaction, and public life in rapidly urbanizing contexts like Nepal.

Bandana Sharma is a Nepalese architect and emerging researcher with a Bachelor's degree in Architecture from Kathmandu University. Her work focuses on sustainable design, material innovation, and the socio-spatial factors that shape human behaviour. She has contributed to projects spanning heritage conservation, public space design, and social inclusivity. Notably, she has

collaborated with the local government of Hariharpur Gaupalika, Sindhuli on conservation initiatives and open space planning, gaining hands-on experience in participatory design processes and community-centred urban development. Her proposal on revitalizing informal settlements in Kathmandu was shortlisted among the top three entries from Nepal in the ARCASIA Future-Ready Communities competition, and she has also won a national design competition for the design of an electric vehicle (EV) charging station. Bandana's research examines how spatial configuration, materiality, and environmental quality influence human well-being. Through both practice and research, she seeks to create architecture that is socially meaningful, environmentally responsible, and responsive to the diverse needs of communities.

CHILD PLAY AREAS IN KATHMANDU: WHAT SHOULD THEY BE?

Ruchi Khakurel | Kathmandu, Nepal

Abstract: The fast-changing urban landscape of Kathmandu is making it increasingly difficult for children to find safe and inclusive areas for outdoor play. Many traditional open areas, such as community courtyards, temple grounds, and neighbourhood squares, have been lost to construction, parking, or neglect. At the same time, existing parks are few, poorly maintained, and rarely designed with children's developmental needs in mind. This research provides a conceptual framework for what child play areas in Kathmandu should look like today and how they can be created within the city's current limitations. Using global research in child-friendly

urban design, environmental psychology, and public space planning, this study proposes a conceptual framework that fits Kathmandu's cultural and spatial context. Rather than focusing only on large parks, it argues for smaller, well-distributed play spaces across the city, such as pocket parks, safe corners near schools, revitalized temple courtyards, and even playful features along streets. These spaces can facilitate children's closer access to play areas as they will be located near or within the places where they live, walk, and spend their time daily. Nonetheless, such places will only be relevant if they are also inclusive: they must be designed to

accommodate children's different age groups, genders, and abilities. Good design includes safety from traffic, visibility, places to rest, and freedom to explore and play creatively. Furthermore, the integration of natural features such as trees, native vegetation, water, and loose materials can improve thermal comfort, stimulate sensory learning, and support environmental resilience in the face of heat, pollution, and declining green cover. Child play areas must be supported by urban policies that prioritize open space, mandate minimum provision in residential development, and protect existing communal areas from encroachment. Municipal authorities should embed child-responsive planning within city strategies, allocate land and budget for play infrastructure, and promote participatory planning processes that involve children, caregivers, and local communities in shaping spaces. Without sustained investment and maintenance, even well-designed play areas risk becoming underused or neglected. Ultimately, this research argues that child play areas are a vital part of urban infrastructure. For Kathmandu to become more inclusive, resilient, and liveable, it must intentionally make space for children, not just physically, but within its policies and priorities. A city that supports children's right to play builds a stronger foundation for health, equity, and shared belonging for all.

Keywords: community courtyards; temple grounds; neighbourhood squares; environmental psychology; residential development

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Biography: Ruchi Khakurel is an architect and urbanism enthusiast with a keen interest in urban development and inclusive design. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Architecture and engages in projects that emphasise sustainable design and environmental resilience. Beyond her professional role, she has actively participated in urban regeneration initiatives and design competitions that envision vibrant spaces for communities. Her work spans architectural design, research and development, reflecting her dedication to shaping liveable and sustainable environments.

TRANSFORMING URBAN SPACE – SUPERBLOCKS AS A TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

Anna Koskinen | Tampere University,
Tampere, Finland

Abstract: Cities worldwide are facing escalating pressures linked to climate change, densification, social inequality, and mobility constraints, requiring new approaches to urban transformation. Emerging urban development models increasingly emphasize ecological sustainability, community wellbeing, and human-centred design. This presentation investigates the superblock as a strategic instrument for addressing these intersecting challenges and for reshaping urban environments toward more sustainable, inclusive, and socially vibrant futures. The Nordic Superblock model, developed within the NSDC project (2023–2025), introduces a carbon-neutral planning framework that integrates ecological performance, digital tools, participatory processes, and shared resource systems. By reorganizing urban blocks into cohesive, interdependent ecosystems - combining local energy production, shared indoor-outdoor spaces, and collective amenities - the model aims to reduce emissions while enhancing everyday social interaction. The framework operates across multiple spatial scales, enabling implementation at both block and district levels. Barcelona's long-standing superblock programme provides a complementary reference for understanding superblocks as everyday public environments and mobility systems. Qualitative fieldwork conducted in 2025 in Poblenou and Superblock Germanetes demonstrates how reallocating street space from cars to people significantly reshapes behaviour, supporting a wide range of activities such as play, gathering, lingering,

and active mobility. Observed use patterns were closely linked to surrounding services, amenities, demographic composition, and temporal rhythms. Barcelona's progression from tactical pilot interventions to a citywide network of green axes and public squares illustrates both the transformative potential of superblocks and the challenges associated with public acceptance, gentrification pressures, and implementation. Across both contexts, superblocks emerge as flexible, socially productive, intergenerational environments capable of supporting community initiatives, temporary events, and both structured and unstructured play. The findings underscore the need to treat superblocks as holistic urban ecosystems requiring coordinated mobility restructuring, co-design processes, and long-term monitoring. The presentation concludes with key recommendations focused on community building, social equity, child-friendly design, integrated urban greenery, all-season comfort, and human-centred mobility.

Keywords: community engagement; mobility; public space; shared resources; superblock; tactical urbanism; urban ecology

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Biography: Anna Koskinen is an architect, urbanist, and researcher specialising in participatory planning methods and resilient, future-proof living environments. She works as a researcher in the Urban Planning Research Group at Tampere University and serves as a producer for TURNS (Tampere Urban Research Network for Sustainability). She is also an active member of ACAN Finland (Architects' Climate Action Network), contributing to collective efforts

PHASE II: MAKING PATAN DURBAR SQUARE “A PEDESTRIAN AND CYCLE FRIENDLY ZONE” TRIAL IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT

Rubin Singh Maharjan, Som Raj Rana, Chandani Shakya, Rija Joshi, Sagar Onta, Era Shrestha, Vibek Gupta, & Amit Shakya | Nepal Cycle Society, Kathmandu, Nepal

Abstract: For generations, the narrow stone lanes of Patan Durbar Square were places of everyday life. Children played freely, elders rested and talked on falchas, and neighbours met through shared routines, stories, and rituals. Over time, rapid urban growth, rising vehicle use, and unmanaged parking slowly pushed these moments aside. Streets that were once shaped for people began to feel crowded, noisy, and unsafe, losing their role as social and cultural spaces. To respond to this change, Lalitpur Metropolitan City (LMC), with technical support from Nepal Cycle Society (NCS), launched the action research initiative

toward a more climate-responsible built environment. Anna coordinates the IFHP Urban Planning and Design Summer School in Finland, one of the longest-running international summer programmes in the field. In addition, she is the Assistant Programme Coordinator for the Aalto WiT Programme, where she supports interdisciplinary collaboration and cultivates an engaging, student-centred learning experience. Her research and professional interests lie at the intersection of ecological sustainability, inclusive public space design, and circular economy principles, with a commitment to advancing more just and regenerative urban futures.

“Making Patan Durbar Square a Pedestrian and Cycle Friendly Zone” under the theme “पाटन पाइलै पाइलामा (Patan on Foot)”. The project aims to gently bring people back to the streets and explore how historic areas can function better when walking and cycling are prioritised. The initiative builds on a six-month research phase conducted in 2024 around the Krishna Mandir area, which looked closely at traffic movement, pedestrian behaviour, and community experiences. Based on this groundwork, Phase II introduced a vehicle-free street trial within the Patan Durbar Square heritage core. Both Phase I and Phase II were carried out in the same interconnected network of historic streets, including Kwalkhu Chowk, Swotha Narayan Temple, Bhimsen Mandir, Patko Chowk, Wolkhu Chowk, Mamaru Galli, Mangal Bazar Chowk, Chakra Bahil Chowk, and Tichu Galli.

While the first phase focused on introducing the idea of vehicle-free streets and basic traffic arrangements, the second phase strengthened the approach through improved routing, closer collaboration with the community, and a richer programme of street-based activities. During fixed vehicle-free hours twice a week for two months,

streets were opened up for people while still allowing access for residents, emergency services, and essential needs through careful planning. Heritage walks, storytelling sessions, traditional children's games, intergenerational art activities, urban sketching, sensory walks, and creative programmes for children helped bring the streets to life again. These activities were not just events, but moments that encouraged people of all ages to reconnect with Patan's living heritage and with one another. More than a traffic experiment, "पाटन पाइलै पाइलामा" is an ongoing effort to reclaim streets as shared public spaces, places to walk, pause, meet, and belong. The project shows how people-centred mobility, grounded in local culture and community participation, can support heritage conservation while making everyday urban life more liveable in historic city centres.

Keywords: pedestrian-friendly streets; living heritage; community engagement; active mobility; tactical urbanism; Patan Durbar Square

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Jason, L. A., & Glenwick, D. S. (Eds.) (2016). *Handbook of methodological approaches to community-based research*. Oxford University Press.

Biographies: Rubin Singh Maharjan is an advocate for sustainable urban mobility, specialising in walking and cycling. He holds a Master's degree in Development Studies from Kathmandu University and serves as Secretary and Lead Researcher at the Nepal Cycle Society. Since 2019, he has been involved in research, policy

advocacy, and youth mobilization, contributing to initiatives such as the Cycle Lane Master Plan, City Pride Projects, cycle-sharing programmes, and pedestrian-friendly developments in Lalitpur. His work focuses on cycling advocacy, tactical urbanism, and promoting social acceptance of cycling. He recently completed an international short course on Sustainable Mobility in Dresden, Germany.

Som Raj Rana is a practising architect and urban designer working on making cities sustainable through active modes of transport. As the President of the Nepal Cycle Society (NCS), he leads efforts to enhance cycling infrastructure and culture. His expertise encompasses non-motorised transport, bicycle urbanism, transit-oriented development, sustainable architecture, and the creation of sustainable cities. Mr. Rana is committed to transforming urban spaces in Nepal into more liveable and environmentally friendly areas by promoting active modes of transport.

Chandani Shakya is an urban designer and architect focused on sustainable and accessible cities. An ADB scholar, she holds a Master's degree in Urban Design from the The University of Hong Kong and a degree in Architecture from Pulchowk Campus, IOE, TU. As an executive member and design coordinator at the Nepal Cycle Society, she has contributed to cycle-sharing, Cycle to Work, and pedestrian-friendly initiatives in Patan Durbar Square. Her work emphasizes inclusive, user-friendly urban spaces and sustainable infrastructure.

Rija Joshi is a civil engineer and urban planner with more than 10 years' experience in urban development, working with NGOs, private firms, and government agencies. She currently serves as the Executive Director at the Centre for Integrated Urban Development (CIUD). Her work

focuses on municipal and regional planning, environmental conservation, sustainable mobility, and cycle-friendly infrastructure. An Executive Member of the Nepal Cycle Society, she also actively advocates for heritage conservation and is a founding member of Baakhan Nyane Waa, promoting heritage preservation and storytelling initiatives.

Sagar Onta is an urban mobility engineer and planner with more than 20 years' experience in transportation engineering. He holds a Master's in Transportation Engineering from Purdue University, and has led major projects including the Denver Bikeway Design Manual and the Downtown Complete Street Plan in Frisco, CO, as well as designing bicycle lanes in multiple U.S. cities. He also contributed to the Comprehensive Mass Transit Study for Kathmandu Valley and currently serves as an advisor to the Kathmandu Valley Public Transport Authority.

Era Shrestha is an architect and urban designer specialising in sustainable neighbourhood planning and heritage conservation. She is a visiting faculty member at Himalaya College of Engineering, where she has coordinated Neighbourhood Planning and Conservation Studios for five years. Holding a Master's degree in Urban Design and Conservation, her research focuses on walkability and active mobility in Patan's historic core. She advocates for pedestrian-friendly spaces, sustainable mobility, and heritage preservation,

and currently serves as an advisor to the Nepal Cycle Society.

Vibek Gupta has more than 14 years' experience in urban transport, mobility, infrastructure, and road safety. He has worked as a transportation engineer and technical director, contributing to transport master plans and management plans for various municipalities. He has also served as a Transport Specialist for major investment and PPP projects in Nepal and is currently involved in the Sustainable Urban E-Mobility Project in Pokhara. A strong advocate for safe and sustainable transport, he is the founding co-chair and current Chairman of Safe and Sustainable Travel Nepal and actively supports initiatives led by Nepal Cycle Society and other professional organizations.

Amit Shakya is a development professional specialising in education, community engagement, and youth programs in Nepal. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Social Work from Tribhuvan University and is pursuing a Master's degree in Crisis Management. Since 2017, he has worked with various organizations supporting school and community initiatives, research, local government coordination, and project management. He has led workshops, supervised field teams, and contributed to studies on inclusive urban spaces and livelihoods. He is passionate about youth participation, access to education, and sustainable community development.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PARK IN ALAJUELITA, SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA

Silvia Elena Guzmán Sierra & Andrea González Rodríguez | UNOPS, San Jose, Costa Rica

Abstract: The Human Development Park of Alajuelita in San José, Costa Rica, was established through Executive Decree No. 400082-C as a programme of the Ministry of Culture and Youth aimed at fostering social coexistence, cultural participation, recreation, and human development. Conceived as an innovative response to the severe shortage of public green spaces in the canton, the project integrates new recreational, cultural, and sports infrastructure to expand well-being opportunities in one of the country's most vulnerable urban areas. The decree provides the institutional framework for the park's operation and assigns responsibility for its administration to an inter-institutional governance arrangement. Beyond the formal structure, the long-term success of the initiative depended on the adoption of sustainable management practices capable of promoting shared responsibility, social activation, and community ownership of the space. In May 2020, the Minister of Culture and Youth requested support from the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) for the management and construction of the park. In its execution role, UNOPS incorporated a strong social management approach grounded in gender, diversity and inclusion (GDI) principles and participatory methodologies. This approach was reflected not only in the design of inclusive infrastructure, but also in the recommendation of a participatory and sustainable governance model. The proposed model emphasized community involvement, the integration of civil society into decision-making

processes, and the development of partnerships with multiple stakeholders, including the private sector, to support long-term sustainability, resource mobilization, and collective stewardship. However, the initial operational phase revealed gaps between the proposed management model and its implementation, a challenge highly relevant to the Urban Bootcamp 2026 focus on inclusive and resilient urban governance. The absence of shared governance mechanisms limited opportunities for community empowerment and delayed the development of a sense of collective ownership. As a result, operational responsibilities remained concentrated within local government institutions, while limited early social activation contributed to challenges such as vandalism shortly after the park's opening. These lessons underscore that physical infrastructure alone is insufficient to ensure the sustainability of public-space interventions. Effective urban transformation requires sustained investment in governance, social management, and participatory frameworks that enable communities to actively protect and activate shared urban spaces. The Alajuelita experience offers valuable insights for cities seeking to strengthen social sustainability and long-term resilience in inclusive urban development projects.

Keywords: inclusive public space; participatory governance; urban governance; vulnerable urban contexts; universal accessibility; social

management; community ownership; gender identity and inclusion (GDI)

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Biographies: Silvia Elena Guzmán Sierra is a professional in International Relations with a Master's degree in Human Rights and Peace Education, and has more than eight years of experience in the design, implementation, and accompaniment of socio-educational, community-based, and inclusive governance processes in urban contexts and socially vulnerable territories. She currently serves as the Gender, Diversity, and Inclusion Officer at

UNOPS Costa Rica, where she integrates human rights, gender equality, community participation, and social sustainability approaches into infrastructure and urban development projects. She has worked as a consultant, adviser, and researcher for several United Nations system agencies, including UNFPA, UNDP, UNHCR, and UNOPS, leading inter-institutional coordination processes, local capacity-building initiatives, and the design of participatory models with a focus on youth, women, migrants, refugees, and communities in situations of vulnerability. Her professional trajectory combines applied research, university-level teaching, and the facilitation of participatory methodologies aimed at peacebuilding, violence prevention, and community empowerment. Her work is characterized by a feminist, intersectional, and Latin American perspective, with a strong interest in inclusive urban governance, the social activation of public spaces, and the construction of more just, resilient, and people-centred cities.

Andrea González Rodríguez is a Civil Engineer from Costa Rica with more than fifteen years of professional experience in the management of public infrastructure projects. She holds a Master's degree in Road Engineering and is certified as a PRINCE2® Practitioner, combining a solid technical background with advanced project management competencies. Her professional trajectory includes leading high-impact initiatives with the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), such as the Circunvalación Norte highway, the Human Development Park of Alajuelita, and, most recently, the Emergency Program for Sustainable and Resilient Reconstruction of Infrastructure (PROERI). Across these projects, Andrea has played a key role in embedding inclusive design principles, community-oriented social management, and sustainability measures into infrastructure delivery, particularly in complex and vulnerable urban contexts. Andrea's work consistently integrates

sustainability, climate resilience, gender, diversity, and inclusion considerations into infrastructure planning and implementation, aligning her professional practice with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. She has also contributed to national efforts related to resilient reconstruction, the adoption of low-emission

construction materials, and the integration of green infrastructure into public investment portfolios. Her professional approach is characterized by technical rigor, strategic vision, and a strong emphasis on community well-being, contributing to infrastructure solutions that enhance urban resilience and improve quality of life.

CHILDREN AS CLIMATE CO-DESIGNERS: PARTICIPATORY PATHWAYS FOR RESILIENT PLAY SPACES

Arnav Prakash | Urbanist, New York, USA

Abstract: By 2050, nearly 70% of the world's population will live in urban areas, and children, already comprising 22% of the US population, will face unprecedented climate risks in these environments (UNICEF, 2018; Rakhimova et al., 2025). Extreme heat, flooding, and air pollution are no longer future threats; three in five parents report experiencing at least one extreme weather event in the past two years, directly limiting outdoor play opportunities (Early Learning Nation, 2025). These disruptions compromise not only physical activity but also cognitive and social development, underscoring the urgency of climate-adaptive design for child-friendly cities. This paper argues for children as active co-designers in shaping climate-resilient play spaces. Moving beyond tokenistic consultation, we propose participatory frameworks that integrate gamified mapping, storytelling, and nature-based solutions to capture children's lived experiences and aspirations. Evidence from participatory projects demonstrates that when children contribute to design, outcomes exhibit higher social acceptance and ecological performance (Sweco Group, 2023; Kavouras et al., 2025). Furthermore, nature-based interventions, such as

shaded green canopies and permeable play surfaces, reduce surface temperatures by up to 11°C, mitigating heat stress while fostering biodiversity (National League of Cities, 2025). Our approach combines quantitative climate data (e.g., heat index projections, stormwater modelling) with qualitative child-led narratives, ensuring that resilience strategies are both scientifically robust and socially inclusive. By embedding children's voices into climate adaptation, cities can transform playgrounds into micro-resilience hubs, advancing Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 3, 11) and cultivating future environmental stewards.

Keywords: child-friendly cities; participatory design; climate resilience; gamified mapping; nature-based solutions.

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Biography: Arnav Prakash is an urbanist committed to transforming lived experiences into systemic change for inclusive and resilient cities. His journey began in India, where his undergraduate research on the social life of public spaces, focusing on paanwallahs in

Ahmedabad, led to the creation of Decoding Everyday, a platform developed with Everyday City Lab to amplify street-level narratives often excluded from planning processes. His advocacy extended to education equity through his article 'Could Workplaces Give Space to Schools?', proposing the adaptive reuse of vacant office spaces as temporary classrooms for underserved neighbourhoods; a zero-cost, scalable model leveraging corporate social responsibility. Arnav's work with the Global Resilience Partnership and the United Nations placed him at the intersection of climate vulnerability and urban equity, contributing to global forums such as COP26. After earning a Master's in City and Regional Planning in the United States, he brings a cross-continental perspective to urban challenges, reframing cities as spaces of innovation rather than deficit. Today, Arnav focuses on participatory design, legibility, and inclusion in hybrid urban environments, advocating for frameworks that embed equity and resilience into the core of city-making.

HEALTHBRIDGE'S WORK ON CREATING INCLUSIVE PUBLIC OPEN SPACES

Phaeba Abraham | HealthBridge, Kerala, India

Abstract: The limited integration of inclusive design, accessibility standards, and universal design principles in urban planning restrict the usability of public open spaces for many groups, particularly persons with disabilities. Although awareness of universal design is increasing, most public spaces remain inaccessible due to design barriers and gaps in policy implementation. In India, HealthBridge partnered with ESAF Foundation and municipal authorities across

various cities to redesign public spaces using universal design elements, with a focus on making parks, beaches, streets, and markets more accessible for children. In Nagpur, this collaboration supported the transformation of a park adjacent to a primary school for children with disabilities. The redesign process incorporated participatory methods involving children, teachers, parents, and municipal staff, ensuring that community needs shaped the final

design. This success has informed ongoing advocacy to integrate universal design principles across 182 parks. Since 2015, ESAF Foundation has also contributed significantly to accessible tourism in Kerala by identifying accessibility gaps across 25 major beaches and launching 'Beach for All' campaigns to sensitize policymakers. The Foundation provided technical support to District Tourism Promotion Councils (DTPCs) to implement the Government of Kerala's Barrier-Free Tourism Project, resulting in accessible walkways, ramps, toilets, inclusive play spaces, and assistive information systems. This model was later replicated across all districts and received international recognition, including the UNWTO 'Accessible Tourism Destination – Special Mention' in 2019. In 2020, ESAF developed the barrier-free handbook for the Department of Tourism, now widely used as a reference for constructing accessible public spaces. Our ongoing efforts continue to advocate for the systematic integration of universal design into the development of streets, markets, and other public spaces. Our experience shows that continuous advocacy, technical support, and policy adoption are essential for institutionalizing universal design across urban public spaces.

Keywords: municipal partnerships / local government collaboration; disability inclusion; policy advocacy; barrier-free tourism; inclusive parks and play spaces; universal design; capacity building

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Biography: Phaeba Abraham is a development practitioner and advocate for liveable cities, promoting urban design interventions that reclaim and strengthen public spaces - including markets, parks, and streets across South Asia. With 17 years of experience in public health, she has supported local organizations in more than 14 cities to build capacity in health-focused urban planning and the built environment. She currently serves as the Regional Manager for South Asia at the HealthBridge Foundation of Canada, an international NGO advancing health and equity through research, policy, and action. Based in Kerala, India, Phaeba provides technical assistance to partner organizations in program planning, implementation, and monitoring. She holds a Master's degree in Social Work from Raipur University and a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics.

THE INCLUSIVE BLUEPRINT: CO-DESIGNING PUBLIC SPACES WITH WOMEN, YOUTH, AND CHILDREN

Jose Chong | UN-Habitat, Nairobi, Kenya

Abstract: Cities are in a unique predicament: while almost 4 billion of the world's population are urban residents, where one-third of whom are children, only 45% of city dwellers have convenient access to public spaces. This does not fulfill the child's right to rest, leisure and play, as set out in Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Furthermore, around 60% of women feel unsafe in public spaces, demonstrating the urgent need for inclusive public space design. UN-Habitat employs innovative methods to address these gaps. The "Block by Block" methodology enables children and youth to use Minecraft to create a 3D design of their environments, fostering collaboration between residents and municipal authorities. The Her City Toolbox, by contrast, is a digital framework that enables girls to participate in urban planning processes, operating on the principle that a city designed for a girl is a city that works for everyone. The joint UN-Habitat, UNICEF and WHO publication *Guide to creating urban public SPACES for children* outlines six guiding principles - safety and protection, play and development, access where need is greatest, child health and well-being, equity and inclusion, and sustainability and resilience - that should inform the creation of safe and environmentally sustainable public space for children. Case studies from cities such as Bungamati, Sharjah, Hanoi and Wuhan illustrate how these participatory tools and methodologies are applied across different urban contexts. Overall, the aim is to advance SDG Target 11.7: universal access to safe, inclusive, accessible, green and public spaces.

Keywords: child-friendly cities; inclusive public spaces; participatory urban design; gender-responsive planning; digital tools for urban governance; digital participation / civic tech; Minecraft (as participatory tool)

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Biography: José Chong coordinates the Public Space and Urban Regeneration team within the Planning and Economy Section of UN-Habitat (United Nations Human Settlements Programme). The Public Space and Urban Regeneration Team promotes inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable urban environments by advancing the social, economic, and environmental transformation of underserved areas and key urban locations. Through integrated planning, technical support, and policy guidance, the team works with local and national

governments and partners to address spatial inequalities, reduce poverty, and create socially inclusive, connected, environmentally sustainable, and safe public spaces. Its efforts aim to foster vibrant, diverse, and well-functioning neighbourhoods that enhance quality of life for all urban residents, particularly the most vulnerable, while strengthening social cohesion, supporting local economies, and contributing to more equitable and climate-resilient cities. With over 25 years of professional experience, José brings deep expertise and a broad perspective from the private sector (construction and architectural design), non-profit organizations (project implementation), and various levels of

government (policy development). His expertise also extends to academia, where he has lectured in architecture & urban design, human settlements, and bioclimatic urbanism. José is a licensed architect from Ricardo Palma University (Peru). He pursued further studies through Master's programmes in renewable energies, sustainable architecture, and urbanism at Universidad Internacional de Andalucía (Spain); International Cooperation and Urban Development at the Technical University of Darmstadt (Germany); and Sustainable Emergency Architecture at Universitat Internacional de Catalunya (Spain).

NON-FORMAL SPACES OF EDUCATION. RECLAIMING THE SCHOOL AS A SPACE OF COMMONS

Fabiano Micocci | University of Thessaly, Volos, Greece

Abstract: At a time when pedagogies are being reshaped by new societal, economic, and technological conditions, schools are being called upon more than ever to play a crucial role in shaping future generations. Yet, even as new programmes are introduced into daily school routines, many educational spaces remain based on typological models shaped by rigid pedagogical schemes. Rethinking education means addressing issues of inclusivity and accessibility for all, the full integration of diverse social groups, programmes that support learning disorders, active community participation, shared knowledge, mutual care and assistance, and the role of play in creating alternative and informal modes of learning and appropriation. But how

can we imagine new inclusive spaces that foster synergies among learning processes, community empowerment, well-being, democratic participation, and environmental sustainability?

In October 2024, the Department of Architecture at the University of Thessaly organized an Erasmus+ BIP Blended Intensive Programme entitled “Spaces of Non-Formal Education: Reimagining the School as a Space for Commons.” The project aimed to investigate new educational spaces by exploring themes related to inclusion, universal accessibility, community participation in educational activities, community care, and play. It responded to the call to bring education back into the streets through a series of mixed formal and non-formal

activities - including lectures, visits, workshops with pupils, games, and round-table discussions - in which university students and professors, primary school teachers and pupils, and non-profit organizations took part. The outcomes of the workshop highlighted how educational spaces are produced through collective processes and require continuous reconfiguration. They also demonstrated how these practices can extend into the urban environment, helping to reshape the school's role as a collaborative public institution - one that builds bridges between the school and the city through non-formal educational activities.

Keywords: non-formal education; educational commons; commoning practices; co-design with children; inclusive learning environments; school-city integration; proximity urbanism; community participation; school as commons

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Biography: Fabiano Micocci (Dip. UniRomaTre, PhD UniFirenze) is Assistant Professor in Architecture and Urban Design at the Department of Architecture of the University of Thessaly, Greece, where he also teaches on the Postgraduate Programme, "Reuse of Buildings and Complexes." He is a founding member of the Urban Design Lab at the same institution. He has published numerous articles and three books, among them *Athens by Collage. The Image of the Metropolis between Realism, Intervention and Autonomy* (Anteferma, 2021) and *Designing for a Symbiotic Future: Lessons from the 2023 Thessalian Flood* (Futura, 2025). He has been involved in two EU-ESF projects on adaptive reuse, accessibility and mobility, as well as an Erasmus+ KA220-HED, a DUT Driving Urban Transition Partnership, and a COST Action, all focused on the reactivation of abandoned spaces and citizens participation. He is the principal investigator (PI) of AGRITHES. *Rural Heritage and The Architecture of Food Production: The Case of the Thessalian Plain* (HFRI, 2024-26), which focuses on the reactivation of rural heritage buildings through citizen involvement.

SHAPING URBAN SPACES THROUGH CHILDREN'S VOICES: PARTICIPATORY DESIGN FOR CHILD-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract: Play is a fundamental need and an essential component of children's lives, fostering social skills, supporting learning processes and strengthening problem-solving abilities. Despite its importance, recent years have witnessed a significant decline in both the time children dedicate to play and the time they spend outdoors. Increasing car traffic, the scarcity of accessible play areas, and heightened concerns about safety and crime have contributed to limiting children's opportunities for free play and independent mobility within urban environments. Urban design and planning therefore have the potential to play a decisive role in addressing these challenges, not only by improving children's everyday experiences but also by enhancing the overall resilience and sustainability of urban areas. Before planning decisions are made, however, it is crucial to incorporate the perspectives of those most directly affected: children themselves. Participatory design offers an effective pathway, providing a framework through which children can express their needs, values, and priorities. At the same time, participatory processes can support children's personal development by broadening their horizons, cultivating a sense of responsibility, and strengthening identity formation. When applied thoughtfully, participatory design with children takes many forms and methodological approaches, each contributing to a deeper and

more accurate understanding of children's viewpoints and expectations.

This presentation highlights a range of participatory methods and practices commonly used in child-centred design workshops, alongside international examples that demonstrate their application in urban planning. It also introduces research conducted in the municipality of Kalamaria, Thessaloniki, Greece. The study focuses on participatory processes involving both children and parents, aiming to redesign a neighbourhood as a child-friendly area that supports safe, autonomous, and meaningful play. The findings underscore existing shortcomings in the design of playgrounds and neighbourhood public spaces, while also demonstrating how participatory methods can enhance urban resilience and contribute to more inclusive and sustainable urban environments.

Keywords: child-friendly cities; inclusive play spaces; playground design; co-design methods; child-centred planning; play and independent mobility; participatory urban design; children's participation

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Biographies: Tafidou Kyriaki is an architect and a PhD Candidate in the Department of Spatial Planning and Development, School of Engineering, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She holds a degree in Architecture from Democritus University of Thrace and a Master's diploma from the postgraduate programme *Spatial Planning for Sustainable and Resilient Development*. Throughout her studies, she focused on the restoration and adaptive reuse of the built environment, as well as urban and spatial planning methodologies. At postgraduate level, her interests expanded to urban resilience, participatory approaches, and human-centred design, with particular emphasis on child-friendly cities and public spaces.

This line of inquiry led to her Master's thesis, "Designing for urban childhoods: The case of Byzantio in Kalamaria", which examined the design of a child-friendly neighbourhood by incorporating children's views and wishes through structured participatory processes. Her doctoral research follows a similar direction, examining participatory frameworks and design strategies that promote inclusive, child-friendly, and nature-based environments in contemporary urban settings.

Dr. Garyfallia (Fyllo) Katsavounidou is an Associate Professor of Urban Design and Planning in the School of Spatial Planning and Development, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH). She holds a diploma of Architect Engineer (ATh), an SMArchS in Architecture and Urbanism (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), and a PhD in Architecture (University of Thessaly). She has written the books: *Child, City and Design: The Spielraum* (Kritiki 2023), *The City at Human Scale* (Kallipos Hellenic Academic Open Textbooks, 2023), and *Invisible Parentheses: 27 cities in Thessaloniki* (Patakis, 2004). She has also translated and edited (with P. Tarani) Jan Gehl's *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space* (University Press of Thessaly, 2013).

Her research and teaching focus on human-centred urbanism, social and psychological approaches to architecture and space, urban history, child-friendly cities, and bioclimatic design of open space.

MULTI-SCALE APPROACH IN CO-DESIGNING CHILDREN- AND FAMILY-FRIENDLY OPEN PUBLIC SPACE IN SERBIAN CITIES

Dr Branislav Antonić, Nikola Mitrović & Ana
Šabanović | University of Belgrade, Belgrade,
Serbia

Abstract: As in many eastern European countries, Serbia is facing depopulation and rapid population ageing. In such a situation, children and families with children are vital assets. This is especially important for medium-sized and small cities in Serbia, as most of them are demographically shrinking despite the recent rise in living standards. Put simply, economic benefits are not enough to keep people from emigrating – a key element is improving the quality of urban life. The national level has recently launched several campaigns and projects to cope with this challenging demographic trend. One of them is the project “Људи чине граде / People Make City”, led by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Serbia, in collaboration with the Ministry of Family Care and Demography. One component of this project addresses the design of open public space in Serbian cities to make it more children- and family-friendly, strategically organized in three steps or levels: national, urban, and local. The national level, completed in late 2024, focused on creating a national handbook on children- and family-friendly co-design process for open public space in Serbian cities. The issue was that there was no real policy relating to this topic – including how to plan, design and maintain open public spaces, such as children’s playgrounds in residential areas, school and kindergarten yards,

or urban green and pedestrianized spaces. The handbook was developed to address these issues by promoting “positive” measures drawn from such urban places, including design guidelines for young-age-related urban furniture, which were also missing at national level. The handbook development was carried out in parallel with an intensive participatory process involving different stakeholders in Čačak, western Serbia, as a pilot city (i.e., the urban-level pilot. Participants in the co-creation process included local policymakers and experts, teachers, families, and, finally, children. The result of this step is the first urban study on children- and family-friendly open public space, completed in 2025. In line with the inputs from the national handbook, the study examines all open public places in Čačak and proposes adequate measures for each of them, as well as for the general development of the urban territory. Finally, the study sets priorities for future development. One of these places will be co-designed with local children and implemented in the third step of the project, planned for 2026.

Keywords: open public space; child-friendly design; co-design; depopulation; Serbia

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as an external expert for UNDP Serbia and URBACT. As the coordinator or member of a working team, he has also been involved in the creation of 35 urban plans, urban design and architectural projects, spatial plans, urban studies, and urban mobility plans. He is active in international and domestic professional associations in urbanism, territorial planning, and housing. ORCID: 0000-0002-2675-9264.

Nikola Mitrović is an architect and a PhD candidate with a multidisciplinary approach to his professional, pedagogical, and scientific work. He is engaged as a Research Assistant at UrbanLAB: Laboratory for Urban Regeneration and Design of Open Public Spaces, Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade. His research interests are in the fields of urban design, urban planning, and cognitive psychology, focusing on pedestrian urban patterns and user experience, particularly within the post-socialist context. He is active in international and national conferences, participating in scientific and professional exhibitions and publishing monograph chapters, research papers, studies, and reports. Over the past four years, Nikola has actively participated in several international projects funded by the European Commission (INTERREG and Creative Europe) and UNDP, involving exchanges of knowledge and expertise in the fields of public transport and cultural heritage. He also has experience in various international workshops, both as a participant and as a tutor. ORCID: 0000-0002-3721-8842.

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resilience, and citizen participation in decision-making processes. She is actively engaged in international and national projects addressing sustainability, climate adaptation, and participatory urban governance. Over the past decade, Ana has contributed to several projects funded by the Council of Europe and United Nations agencies, fostering multicultural, interdisciplinary, and multisectoral collaboration and exchange of knowledge. Her academic work

aims to bridge research and practice through the development of innovative approaches in urban planning and governance that support urban transformation towards more sustainable and resilient cities. Ana regularly participates in international scientific conferences, workshops, and research networks dedicated to sustainable urban development and climate governance. ORCID: 0000-0002-3711-0567.

CO-CREATION OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE - ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN WITHIN THE NONA - NEW GOVERNANCE FOR NEW SPACES PROJECT

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Administration of Šabac, Belgrade and Šabac, Serbia

Abstract: In Serbia, urban planning regulations do not specify methods for including children in decision-making, resulting in a low level of participation in practice. This abstract presents a practical example that demonstrates possibilities for greater children's involvement in identifying needs in the local urban environment, implemented within the project "NONA – New Governance for New Spaces" (Interreg Danube Region, DRP0200519, co-funded by the EU) which aims to enhance green investments in sustainable and integrated urban development. The project is implemented at the pilot location of Letnjikovac in Šabac - a green open public

space of approximately 9 ha - in which the following public facilities are located: a Science Centre with an exhibition area, a Centre for Professional Development, a primary school, three kindergartens, a health centre, a local community office, a Centre for Intergenerational Solidarity for Older People, and a sports field. The rest of the space (about 90%) is forested, and needs to be supplemented with attractive content for users. The space is used daily by about 1000 children, so most of the proposed interventions and initiated actions were oriented towards them, to improve and adapt the space to their needs and wishes. The NONA project

was carried out through an artistic competition and participatory workshops (May 2025), and an online survey with a project idea proposal (November 2025), both focused on identifying children's needs on the site. A visual and literary competition on the topic "Letnjikovac of the Future: What I Want for All of Us" was accompanied by an exhibition and co-creative workshops dedicated to biodiversity and nature protection, including making terrariums and birdhouses. The chance to express ideas through questionnaires was complemented by guided design activities, in the form of drawings and mock-ups. With the assistance of urban planners, the children expressed the need for creative playgrounds, educational spaces (a botanical garden and a mini laboratory - a greenhouse for seedlings), a space for outdoor classes, birthday celebrations, and teenagers. All collected ideas provide the basis for the development of project studies and for requests to the city administration, as well as applying for funds from foundations and socially responsible sponsors.

Keywords: green open public space; children; co-creation; workshops; design; exhibition; questionnaire

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Dr Borjan Brankov is a Research Associate at the Institute of Architecture and Urban & Spatial Planning of Serbia (IAUS). He has research and practical experience in urban and spatial planning, the creation of urban open public spaces, and conducting and moderating workshops.

Dr Nataša Čolić Marković is an urban planner and Senior Research Associate at the Institute of Architecture and Urban & Spatial Planning of Serbia (IAUS). Her research focuses on sustainable and integrated urban development, urban governance, and participatory approaches to planning, with particular attention to stakeholder engagement and gender perspectives.

Dr Nataša Danilović Hristić is a Principal Research Fellow at the Institute of Architecture and Urban & Spatial Planning of Serbia (IAUS). She has extensive research and practical experience in urban and spatial planning, open public spaces, urban safety and gender issues, and the role of participation in the decision-making process.

Dejan Vujić is a spatial planner in the City Administration of Šabac. He has many years of experience in spatial planning and the creation of GIS databases for public spaces under the jurisdiction of the City Administrative of Šabac.

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Miljković, dr Marina Nenковиć-Riznić, dr Milena Milinković, dr Jasna Petrić, dr Marija Lalošević,

Jasmina Krunić, Maja Hristov, Branislava Simić, Olivera Radoičić, Danijela Srnić, Lazar Tomović, Iva Lokas.

FROM A TO PLAY: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF EVERYDAY PLAY IN SHAPING COMMUNITY MOBILITY

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Abstract: This dissertation explores how play interventions in the public realm can influence mobility, community interaction, and physical activity, particularly in children. The research addresses the exclusion of children in urban design, acknowledging their current role within society and as future shapers of society. With physical inactivity and mental health concerns rising among children, this research investigated how playful design elements, particularly 'play-on-the-way' interventions, can catalyse movement, interaction, and social cohesion across generations. A case study based methodology was utilized, incorporating observational studies and spatial analysis across three UK-based locations: Murrain Road (Hackney), Northstowe (Cambridge), and Essex Road (Walthamstow). The case studies represent a wide range of play interventions, from informal incidental play to equipped spaces. The qualitative research assesses how different demographics interact with play interventions along primary routes in residential areas. The findings suggest that play interventions, particularly along key movement corridors, can significantly increase children's independent mobility, encourage physical activity, and create opportunities for intergenerational interaction. Moreover, playful public spaces can improve inclusivity, community wellbeing, and foster a

stronger sense of place. Despite these benefits, current UK planning policy does not prioritize play, highlighting the need for more research into the area, and for community-led, sustainable design approaches. This research contributes to the emerging understanding of playful urbanism by offering evidence-based recommendations for integrating play into the public realm, not only for children, but for the wider community.

Keywords: playful urbanism; play-on-the-way interventions; evidence-based planning; physical activity and wellbeing; community social cohesion; intergenerational interaction; active travel corridors; children's independent mobility

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Biography: Grace Allman is a landscape architect working for Braintree District Council, Essex, England. She received an undergraduate degree in Landscape and Garden Design from Writtle University College and has recently completed a Master's in Urban Design at the University of Westminster. Working within a local authority creates the opportunity to work on a variety of schemes and at a range of scales, all focused around public realm improvement. In her time at Braintree District Council, Grace has been involved in the implementation of new play areas, public open spaces, community gardens, town centre regeneration, public art schemes, and town park improvements. A childhood spent outdoors with the Scouts, gardening, and hiking, developed a fascination with outdoor spaces.

SOFTENER: REIMAGINING PUBLIC SPACE THROUGH PLAY AND CARE

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Abstract: Child-friendly urban design often limits itself to playgrounds, yet children are not the only ones who use these designated spaces. They traverse streets, plazas, and parks alongside their caregivers. A child's freedom to play, rest and explore is directly tied to whether their caregiver, most often women, feels safe, comfortable, and at ease in the same environment. If caregivers experience exclusion, threat or discomfort, children's access to public space is also restricted. While this framing

Visiting historic gardens further ingrained a desire to design and build beautiful gardens that the public can enjoy. Grace enjoys researching and visiting new public spaces alone, with friends, her nieces and nephews, her partner, or her two dogs, and uses this time to consider what works well for different audiences. In her undergraduate degree, Grace deepened her interest in historic gardens and exploring new spaces by designing adaptive heritage spaces to improve the sense of place and community cohesion in a historic market town in Buckinghamshire. Grace's interests have evolved to consider how play can also catalyse community cohesion and aid wayfinding; Her interest in play was explored through her postgraduate studies and professional career. Throughout her career, Grace has steered her work towards creating fun and engaging spaces for the whole community, seeking to bring play into the design of all elements of the public realm.

highlights the interdependence between children and their caregivers, it also reveals a broader condition: many groups, particularly women and queer communities, encounter barriers to experiencing joy and ease in the city. If public space does not work for them, it cannot fully work for children either. This research therefore expands the concept of child-friendly design into a wider politics of belonging, grounded in softness and care. Developed through my thesis *City at Play: Gender, Space and Politics of Joy in*

Urban Space, the study positions play and care as interconnected conditions of the city. It argues that reimagining urban life through softness and care expands the scope of "child-friendly" design into a broader politics of belonging. Through my thesis, I explored how women and queer communities navigate exclusion in London's everyday environments. Using sensory mapping, walking interviews, and participatory experiments in Acton, the study traced sonic, visual and emotional registers of public space. This process generated the PlayCare Metric, a reflective tool for planners and urban practitioners to recognize overlooked conditions like pause points, shading, safety, and the freedom to play or rest without consumption. The practice-based component included a participatory zine with a viewfinder, designed to invite residents to reframe familiar streets and imagine softer, more joyful urban spaces. These interventions highlighted that infrastructures of care and play are not marginal additions, but essential to creating equitable and liveable urban spaces. By centering play and care as everyday practices, this research proposes that child-friendly cities must also be women- and queer-inclusive. In doing so, it redefines inclusivity as the collective right to joy, safety, and softness in public life.

Keywords: play and care in public space; gender-inclusive urbanism; queer-inclusive public space; politics of joy and right to joy; care infrastructure; belonging and safety; sensory mapping and walking interviews; PlayCare Metric; soft urbanism

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Biography: Aarohi Dalvi is a spatial practitioner and urban researcher based in London. She trained as an architect in India, where she completed a five-year Bachelor of Architecture and worked with architecture and landscape practices in Mumbai for more than three years. In these roles, she coordinated multi-stakeholder projects, managed site execution, and engaged with design processes that spanned from planning to construction. She recently completed the MA Cities at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London, where her research explored the intersections of gender, queerness, and the politics of play and care in urban space. Her work is grounded in feminist and queer theory and investigates how cities can become softer, more inclusive, and more responsive to everyday forms of joy, rest, and belonging. She employs methods such as sensory mapping, walking practices, and participatory experiments that foreground lived experience as a tool for spatial analysis. Her current research interests include inclusive urban policy, public space design, and experimental methods that connect cultural practice with planning. She seeks to bridge academic research, community engagement, and policymaking in order to reimagine cities as equitable environments where play and care are recognized as essential conditions of urban life.

CO-DESIGNING INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SPACES IN LEBANON

Joana Dabaj | Catalytic Action, London, UK

Abstract: CatalyticAction is an international non-profit organization that leverages design and architecture to empower children, adolescents, and local communities through participatory urban projects. In Lebanon, a country facing overlapping crises, including the ongoing impacts of the Syrian war, economic collapse, the 2020 Beirut port explosion, and recurring social unrest, urban environments are often unsafe, inaccessible, and unequal, particularly for marginalized groups and young people. CatalyticAction's work integrates design, research, and community participation to transform public spaces into safe, inclusive, and engaging environments that address local needs while fostering social cohesion and resilience. Central to CatalyticAction's approach is participatory co-design, ensuring that children and adolescents are active partners in shaping their urban environment. Projects are structured around consultation, co-design, technical planning, and construction, with children and community members engaged at every stage. This methodology ensures that public spaces reflect the lived realities, priorities, and aspirations of local populations. As one child participating in a playground project remarked, "I am here to build a playground with you, so when I go back to Syria, I can build one myself." Several projects by CatalyticAction illustrate the value of a participatory approach for communities. The Karantina Public Park Rehabilitation and the Kan Ya Makan programme (2020 - ongoing) involved children, adolescents, and families in co-designing public green spaces in a neighbourhood heavily

affected by urban displacement, pollution, and social tensions. Similarly, the Beirut Public Stairs

Rehabilitation and Social Activation project (Mar Mikhael, 2022-2023) enhanced accessibility, safety, and inclusivity of urban stairways, integrating community-led artistic interventions, seating, and activity zones. Another initiative, Safe Spaces for Adolescent Girls in Karantina (2023-2024), addressed gender-specific barriers to public space access. In Lebanon, gender norms often restrict girls' mobility and participation in public spaces. Through co-design sessions with girls, boys, and parents, CatalyticAction developed public interventions tailored to girls' safety, accessibility, and comfort, empowering them to participate meaningfully in shaping their environment. The project emphasized gender-sensitive consultation, technical planning, and construction, creating spaces that are inclusive for both girls and boys. In Tripoli, the Placemaking for Peacekeeping project (Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen, 2024-2025) applied a similar participatory methodology to foster social cohesion in conflict-affected neighbourhoods. Across all projects, such interventions have demonstrated how child-centred urban design can promote wellbeing, reduce inequalities, and enhance resilience in vulnerable communities. Engaging children in design processes not only meets immediate community needs but also cultivates long-term skills, agency, and stewardship, ensuring sustainable, inclusive, and child-friendly cities.

Keywords: Karantina Public Park Rehabilitation; Kan Ya Makan programme; Beirut public stairs rehabilitation and social activation project (Mar Mikhael); Placemaking for Peacekeeping project

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Biography: Joana Dabaj is the co-founder and principal coordinator of CatalyticAction, a not-for-profit design studio based in London. She holds a BSc degree in Architecture from the American University of Beirut and an MSc in Building and Urban Design in Development from University College London. She has gained experience in architecture, sustainable development, cultural heritage, migration, and human rights across several contexts in Lebanon, the United Kingdom, Syria, Iraq, Greece, Cambodia, Brazil, Colombia and Thailand. Her recent practice revolves around working closely with communities, following a bottom-up design approach, with a particular focus on the refugee crisis and migration in the Middle East and Europe.

LANDSCAPE AND WALKABILITY IN SCHOOL SURROUNDINGS: BUILDING CHILD-FRIENDLY CITIES

Natália Teixeira Lopes da Costa & Dr. Euler Sandeville Jr. | University of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil

Abstract: The accelerated urban growth, combined with sprawling expansion and a car-oriented logic, intensifies socio-spatial inequalities, impacting mobility, access to services, and the experience of public spaces, while also contributing to environmental and climate crises. Studies show that in São Paulo,

although motorized mobility predominates, walking remains relevant, especially among low-income families and in trips related to education, often with children accompanied by mothers or relatives. These journeys reveal the “mobility of care,” characterized by multiple trips and transport constraints, often carried out

under unsafe conditions. Children represent a particularly vulnerable group, as they are frequently victims of traffic accidents, a risk aggravated by physical, cognitive, and behavioural factors still under development. The study, conducted at EMEF Paulo Prado in a peripheral area of São Paulo, Brazil, is based on the hypothesis that the urban landscape in the surrounding area influences children's perception, movement, and learning, and that promoting walkability contributes to safety, pollution reduction, and socio-environmental awareness. The adopted methodology, grounded in participatory research, integrated questionnaires with parents and guardians, workshops with children, field observation, guided walks, and the application of the Gender-Sensitive Walkability Technical Index developed by the Instituto Caminhabilidade, organized into diagnosis, proposals, and feedback. Results highlight that damaged sidewalks, a lack of pedestrian crossings, and poor lighting limit children's autonomy. The workshops enabled children to record routes, identify obstacles, and propose improvements, including safe crossings, urban furniture, greenery, and accessible sidewalks. Children's participation, combined with technical analysis, generated more context-sensitive urban solutions, strengthening perception, belonging, and critical awareness. The study concludes that children not only experience the city but can also act as agents of transformation. Integrating landscape, education, and walkability contributes to more inclusive, humane, and sustainable cities, promoting social justice, safety, and the development of conscious and engaged citizens.

Keywords: walkability; urban landscape; child-friendly cities; school surroundings; participatory research

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Biographies: Natália Teixeira Lopes da Costa is an architect and urban planner from Brazil. She holds a Master's degree in Landscape and Environment from the School of Architecture and Urbanism at the University of São Paulo (USP), where her research focused on methodologies for urban analysis with a strong emphasis on children's safety and pedestrian-friendly environments around schools. She also completed a residency in Urban Planning and Management at the School of Architecture and a specialisation in Urban Planning and Management at the Polytechnic School, both at USP. Natália's work highlights children as one of the most vulnerable groups in cities and uses their perspective as a key reference for designing safer, more inclusive, and more sustainable urban spaces. She believes that planning cities through the lens of children's

needs not only protects them but also improves the quality of life for all pedestrians. Since 2023, she has collaborated with the Walkability Institute (Instituto Caminhabilidade) as a volunteer researcher and Project Analyst. Her professional experience includes projects on road signage, bike lanes, and accessibility, always guided by the goal of ensuring safety and autonomy for children and pedestrians. She also contributes to research on public policies and international practices that promote walkability and child-centred urban mobility.

Prof. Dr. Euler Sandeville Junior is an architect and urban planner, who graduated in Architecture and Urbanism from the Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas (1981), with a postdoctoral degree in Arts Education from the Faculdade de Belas Artes (1984). He also completed postgraduate studies in Ecology (USTJ, 1996), a Master's degree (1993), a PhD (1999), and a postdoctoral degree (2011) in Architecture and Urbanism at the University of

São Paulo (FAU-USP). His trajectory is grounded in the Spiral of Sensibility and Knowledge and the concept of landscapes as shared experiences and socio-environmental construction, focusing on collaborative learning, social participation, and the cultural history of landscapes in Brazil. He has worked at São Paulo City Hall, in museums, in private practice, and in teaching at different levels. Currently a Senior Associate Professor at the University of São Paulo (since 2023), he was faculty at the Department of Design (2021-2022). He has advised in the Graduate Program in Architecture and Urbanism – Landscape and Environment (since 2002), coordinated the Landscape Studies Center (USP, since 2003), and joined the Landscape Archaeology group (USP, 2023-present). He coordinated graduate programmes at FAU-USP and PROCAM-USP and currently leads the project *Urbanization Processes and Landscape Configurations in the Midwest of São Paulo State* (CNPq, 2023-present).

SAFE AND SOUND CITIES

Andrea Betancourt | S²Cities Programme, Basel, Switzerland

Abstract: This presentation, delivered within the framework of the Urban Bootcamp under the *Cities for Women* project, introduced the Safe and Sound Cities (S² Cities) programme implemented by the Global Infrastructure Basel Foundation (GIB). Operating since 2021, S² Cities targets young people aged 15–24 (with local adaptations up to 29 or 30) in secondary cities of the Global South. The programme is currently implemented in cities across Colombia, Ecuador, the Philippines, and Indonesia, with a new phase starting in Basel, Switzerland.

Embedded within GIB's "Infrastructure and the Next Generation" pillar, S² Cities aims to strengthen both youth capacities and local

government systems to co-create safer urban environments. The presentation outlined the programme's five-step theory of change: understanding the urban safety system through multi-stakeholder engagement; capacity strengthening for youth and local governments; catalysing youth-led innovation; collaboratively selecting initiatives for local implementation; and identifying pathways for scaling or replication. Key outputs include the establishment of Youth

Innovation Hubs and the implementation of 28 youth-led initiatives supported through seed funding. City-level examples illustrated the diversity of interventions, ranging from environmental education and alternative sports spaces in Envigado, Colombia, to placemaking projects in Ambato, Ecuador, where artistic and spatial interventions significantly increased public space use and reduced perceived unsafety. Additional initiatives addressed post-COVID social isolation, access to green spaces, and illegal use of public areas. The programme has engaged over 1,750 young people in intensive capacity-building and more than 8,000 through broader outreach activities. Survey data demonstrate clear improvements in perceived safety - up to 90% of users reporting feeling safer in intervention spaces, alongside increased community ownership and local government co-ownership. The presentation concluded by emphasising safety as a function of active use, collective care, and long-term community engagement in public space.

Keywords: youth participation; urban safety; placemaking interventions; secondary cities; co-creation with local governments

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Biography: Andrea Betancourt is an urban development specialist with extensive experience in advancing inclusive, youth-centred approaches to urban safety and infrastructure planning. She currently serves as Senior Programme Manager at the Global Infrastructure Basel Foundation (GIB) in Basel, Switzerland, where she leads the *Safe and Sound Cities (S² Cities)* programme - a global initiative that empowers young people to meaningfully participate in shaping safer, more equitable urban environments. Under her leadership, S² Cities has supported youth engagement and co-creation processes in secondary cities across Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Europe, helping to strengthen collaborations between young people, local governments, civil society, and the private sector. Andrea's work focuses on bridging knowledge, policy, and practice by developing participatory methodologies that enhance local capacities for urban safety planning and foster long-term community ownership of public spaces. She has contributed to global learning networks, programmatic reports, and peer-reviewed publications on youth participation and urban governance. Her expertise spans stakeholder engagement, multi-sector partnerships, and the design of innovative frameworks that support civic leadership among youth in complex urban systems. Andrea holds advanced degrees in urban studies and international development, and regularly speaks at international forums on inclusive urban futures and sustainable infrastructure.

URBAN BOOTCAMP: ADVANCING GENDER-RESPONSIVE URBANIZATION AS A CITIES 4 WOMEN LEGACY

Ilija Gubić | UNOPS, Kathmandu, Nepal

Abstract: The Cities 4 Women: Inclusive and Climate Resilient Urbanization project has demonstrated how gender-responsive approaches can be effectively embedded within urban planning, public space design, and local governance systems in rapidly urbanising contexts. Implemented in partnership with national and local governments, the project has generated practical tools, methodologies, and policy insights aimed at addressing structural gender inequalities in cities, particularly in relation to safety, access, participation, and climate resilience. The Urban Bootcamp International Conference is conceived as a key legacy of the Cities 4 Women project, serving both as a knowledge consolidation platform and as an expert group meeting to critically review, validate, and refine the project's emerging guidelines and tools. Bringing together municipal practitioners, national policymakers, international experts, academia, civil society, and development partners, the conference creates a structured space for peer learning, evidence-based reflection, and cross-city exchange. The Urban Bootcamp provides an opportunity to assess the applicability, scalability, and institutional readiness of the Cities 4 Women methodology across diverse urban contexts. Particular attention is given to aligning the guidelines with existing national frameworks, municipal processes, and global agendas such as the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 11. By positioning the Urban Bootcamp as both a capstone and a forward-looking platform, the conference ensures that Cities 4 Women moves beyond pilot interventions toward

sustained policy influence and implementation. It reinforces a community of practice committed to advancing inclusive, safe, and resilient cities, while strengthening the evidence base and practical guidance needed to scale gender-responsive urban transformation. It also serves as a monitoring and evaluation tool for the project. After project closure, the conference will be organized annually by academia.

Keywords: gender-responsive urban planning; inclusive and climate-resilient cities; Cities 4 Women; urban policy guidelines; expert group meeting

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Biography: Ilija Gubić is an architect, urban planner, and designer with over 15 years of professional experience, largely within the United Nations system. He has led urban planning, design, and policy initiatives across the Asia-Pacific, Africa, Europe, and the Americas, working at the intersection of spatial planning, governance, and social inclusion. Gubić holds both a Master's and a Bachelor's degree in Architecture and Urbanism from the University of Novi Sad, Serbia, and has conducted academic research at Politecnico di Milano and Columbia University, New York, where he served as a visiting scholar. His career with UN-Habitat focused on urban recovery and reconstruction in post-disaster contexts, including projects in

Myanmar, the Philippines, and South Asia. As part of the UN Secretariat, he contributed to the preparation of the New Urban Agenda, adopted in 2016 as a global framework for sustainable urbanization. In Rwanda, Gubić was embedded within the Ministry of Infrastructure. In parallel with his professional practice, Gubić has curated exhibitions, including contributions to Novi Sad's European Capital of Culture 2022 programme. He currently manages the *Cities 4 Women: Inclusive and Climate Resilient Urbanization in Nepal* project, jointly implemented by UNOPS, UN-Habitat, and Cities Alliance, with support from the European Union and the Government of Finland, led by the Ministry of Urban Development.



Co-design process as part of the *Cities 4 Women: Inclusive and Climate Resilient Urbanization in Nepal* project in Chandragiri Municipality © UNOPS



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