Creating Great Public Spaces in Three African Cities

Niamey Project

[Children on a swing]

Report prepared by: Peaceful Roads

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Introduction

In Africa - like in many other places in the world – public spaces are used for public life, commerce and interaction. However, lack of funds, planning, and maintenance, as well as priority for motorized vehicles, has turned many public spaces into unsafe, unforgiving and unconnected places. In addition, many public spaces are difficult to access, especially for those living in vulnerable situations. This is especially the case for the city of Niamey. There is a significant lack of formal public spaces in Niamey, particularly in the outlying areas where the slum settlements are located. Of those spaces that do exist, they are degraded, of poor quality, and under constant threat of being developed into other purposes. So, despite the rapid growth of the population of Niamey, there are only seven (7) parks (cf. “The availability and the quality of parks in Niamey, 2016). And of those seven, only two are operational while the others are under rehabilitation.

In order to begin addressing the critical issue of public spaces we began working on a project, in collaboration with HealthBridge and funded by UN-Habitat, that would implement a pilot project intended to test innovative solutions for:

• Conducting a community engagement process that ensures a people-centred approach to the design of the space;
• Engaging women, children, and the differently abled in the design of the parks;
• Including multiple uses that meet community needs;
• Improving access to the public spaces;
• Developing community-based maintenance;
• Formalizing the process of citizen engagement into city policies;
• Raising awareness among the public and decision-makers regarding the importance of public spaces;
• Strengthen local and national policies that protect, preserve, and enhance public spaces.

For this project we used 5 strategies:
1. Awareness Raising
2. Community Engagement
3. Capacity Building
4. Policy
5. Infrastructure Changes

These 5 strategies ensured we took a comprehensive approach to the pilot project.

**Awareness Raising**

Public space is a growing issue in Niger but not one that had received much government attention in the past. So, a key component of our program was to raise awareness among government officials. We started the implementation of our project by organizing one-to-one meetings with government officials where we shared the following documents we developed for them:

- An information sheet explaining the project (100 copies);
- A flyer of the study we conducted called “The Availability and Quality of Parks in Niamey” (100 copies);
- “Public Spaces: a Key Tool to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals” of HealthBridge (50 copies);
- “Cities play an important role in implementing the SDGs” of HealthBridge (100 copies);
- “Financial resources to the cities for SDGs” of French Development Agency (AFD) (100 copies).

All these documents can be found in the following link: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/7ttty92aecxfw02/AABpc-fVRUGfMUGCx0rWS46Ga?dl=0

The Government officials were really interested in the documents shared with them because, according to them, they provided a comprehensive view of public spaces and their role in providing these spaces for their citizens. They suggested at these meetings that it was really important for them to commit to promote public spaces in Niger. They agreed to send government representatives to the Minecraft workshop in order to better understand the community engagement process and to learn more about developing public spaces.
Picture 1: Meeting with officials from the Ministry of the City including the Head of services

Picture 2: Meeting with the Minister of the City, UN-Habitat and Peaceful Roads
Picture 3: Meeting with the Minister of the City

Picture 4: Meeting with the Minister of Public Health and two parliamentarians
In addition, our local residents in the media are also generally unaware of the importance of public spaces. We have so few spaces in Niger and those that do exist offer few opportunities for local residents. We therefore, in the context of our awareness-raising activities, gave interviews to the media in order to make people and governments
officials more aware of the importance of public spaces and the necessity, especially for the government’s officials, to engage in their promotion.

Picture 7: Director of Peaceful Roads giving interviews to the Media

Picture 8: Director of Peaceful Roads giving interviews to media
### Activity, Result, and Outcome Table:

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<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meetings with government officials</td>
<td>- Developed an information sheet about the project&lt;br&gt;- Prepared &amp; printed information materials about importance of public spaces (100 information sheet of our project, 100 flyers of our study on parks in Niamey, 50 copies of “The public spaces” of HealthBridge, 100 copies of HealthBridge advocacy document “Cities and SDGs” and 100 copies of “Financial resources to the cities for SDGs”).&lt;br&gt;- Meetings were organized with 27 participants from the Ministry of the City and Urban Sanitation, the High office for Niamey nice “Niamey Nyala”, Town Hall and the 5 municipalities of Niamey</td>
<td>The government officials expressed interest in the documents shared with them and they promised to commit to promoting public spaces. 10 government officials agreed to participate in the Minecraft workshop. The Government is currently creating public spaces in Niamey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducted meetings with journalists</td>
<td>3 meetings with 10 journalists participating and 5 media events</td>
<td>The journalists are engaged in the promotion of public spaces and have produced 12 of newspaper articles and 7 of television reports.</td>
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Community Engagement

After the awareness raising of the government officials and the exchanges with the mayor of the municipality 1 of Niamey (in which the site was selected for the construction of the park) and in the presence of the chief of the suburb of Yantala (suburb in which the park site is located), we started meetings with local neighborhood groups to (i) raising awareness on the importance of public spaces and (ii) recruit participants of the community to attend the Minecraft workshop. Our community engagement strategy was a priority in order to ensure the participation of the community in the project. It should be noted in passing that, in view of the pressure on the government officials (Ministry of Domains and Housing in particular) to convert public spaces in Niamey for development, the communities of Yantala had set up a site monitoring committee. They protected the site because there were several attempts to sell it to the economic operators. In front of the site, there are two fuel sales stations (TOTAL & OILYBIA) whose sites were previously places reserved for public spaces.

In the preparation of the meetings with the community and the workshops with government officials, we developed and printed the following documents:

- The translation of the “the Manual of using Minecraft for community participation” (30 copies);
- Some examples of parks and park elements provided by HealthBridge.

These documents can be consulted on the following link: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/d4sz6vjzsf6hi7/AACzEzUrqiF5i4t7SX2WKrQ4fa?dl=0

Also, we requested the services of two (2) artists (a musician and a comedian) and the Chief of the suburb of Yantala to accompany us in delivering the messages to the community.

Five (5) meetings were organized with 378 participants (238 children and 140 adults including 241 males and 137 females). The importance of public spaces, the identification of the site in their suburb, and the Minecraft workshop were discussed. The main outcome was the increasing of the community commitment through their interest in our approach and their acceptance to attend the Minecraft workshop.
The Director of Peaceful Roads explaining the importance of public spaces at a community meeting

The community designated 15 members of the community to attend the Minecraft workshop, including youth, men and women in addition to the government representatives.

Picture 11: The artists organized by Peaceful Roads explaining the importance of public spaces
Unfortunately, due to technology problems, the Minecraft workshop was delayed until September. As a result, our project was delayed approximately 2 months. Finally, on September 6 and 7, 2017, the Minecraft workshop was held at the House of Media with UN-Habitat Minecraft facilitator Christelle LAHOUD.
Mieux-être des Nigériens

L’ONU Habitat finance un parc public à Niamey

L’ONG PeaceFul Roads a organisé du 25 au 28 juillet 2017 à la Maison de la presse de Niamey, un atelier qui doit aboutir à la conception d’un parc urbain public à Niamey. Cet atelier financé par l’ONU Habitat, a fait suite à un processus laborieux qui a permis cet organisme de sélectionner trois projets à réaliser dans trois capitales africaines. Il s’agit notamment de Kampala, Accra et Niamey. L’importance placée par l’ONU Habitat à financer cet atelier à mériter les remerciements du représentant du ministère de la Ville et de la Salubrité urbaine qui par la même occasion a tenu à féliciter et encourager l’ONG PeaceFul Roads pour la perspicacité dont elle a fait montre dans l’élaboration de ce projet d’appui à l’aménagement d’un parc public urbain à Niamey.

Ainsi, le développement urbain est au cœur des préoccupations des plus hautes autorités du Niger et ceux depuis l’avènement de la 7ème république qui a créé un ministère de la ville et de la salubrité urbaine à cet effet. Dans leur conception tout comme dans leur aménagement, les villes possèdent des espaces publics au cœur ou en limite du tissu urbain. Parmi lesquels les parcs. Ces derniers jouent plusieurs fonctions dans les villes dont production d’oxygène, qui permet aux parcs de constituer les « poumons verts » des villes.

Le Monde d’Aujourd’hui Hebdomadaire nigérien d’informations générales et d’analyse N°251 du mercredi 02 Août 2017
Picture 15: Explaining the use of the keyboard to a group at the second workshop

Picture 16: Participants working with Minecraft
By the end of the workshop, Christelle Lahoud prepared the report and we shared it with all the participants as well as those from the ministries, the municipalities and Yantala.
As will be discussed in the infrastructure section, we were required to move sites. We, therefore also organized additional meetings with the populations and the municipality officials in order to secure there permission and input on the designs of the new site.

Picture 19: At a meeting with residents of the new site and municipality officials
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| A community engagement process for the design of the park was established using informal meetings, the Minecraft workshop, to mobilize and create the active participation of children, youth, women and the community at large in the project. | - Preparation and printing of 9 examples of public spaces  
- 5 meetings with local men, women and youth & distribution of the examples of public spaces (378 participants (238 children and 140 adults, 241 males and 137 females)  
- Selection of 12 Minecraft participants including 2 youth, 5 women, 5 men | Results included:  
- Community engagement in the creation of public space is a new approach in Niger: the community was very excited by our participative and inclusive process and they agreed to attend the Minecraft workshop;  
- The mayor of the municipality 1 of Niamey decided to contribute to the budget of the project (this was not realized once the site changed);  
- The youth of Yantala has decided to contribute to the project by offering their time. |

The overall objective was to increase community participation in the creation and maintenance of the park.

The importance of public spaces, the identification of the site in their suburb, the participation to the Minecraft workshop, the maintenance of the park was discussed.
Organized and facilitated a 4-day workshop hosted at the House of Media, involving multiple stakeholders to discuss and design the park with the aid of Minecraft software.

15 community members participated ranging between ages of 15 and 65. Participants included:
- Ministry of the City (2)
- Ministry of Housing (1)
- Ministry of Environment (1)
- Municipalities of Niamey (6)
- Peaceful Roads (2)
- Populations of Yantala (15)

- Increased interest and participation from the community.
- 12 volunteers worked with the team for a total of approximately 180 hours on the project.

With community input, develop a process for park maintenance, identify, who, what, where, when and how.

During the activities of awareness raising, Peaceful Roads has talked about the mechanisms of park maintenance.

The populations in the neighborhood who are part of the community of Muslims who pray in the Mosque located at the park has decided to ensure its maintenance. The municipality 1 and Peaceful Roads will support them if necessary.

A five-member management committee (3 from the community, one from the municipality 1 and one from Peaceful Roads) was set up to manage the park.

### Capacity Building

Capacity building is an important component of our project. It is part of the logical follow-up of the awareness-raising actions of the government officials and the residents in the neighborhood of the park. In order to achieve these outcomes, Peaceful Roads organized workshops focused on:

- The basics and the importance of public spaces;
- The use of Minecraft for community participation in the design of a public space;
- The importance of community engagement in the maintenance of a park.
The first workshop on the basics and the importance of public spaces recorded 22 participants from the government and the municipalities of Niamey. It allowed us to share with them the basics and the importance of public spaces through two Powerpoint presentations adapted from the presentations of UN-Habitat at the Minecraft workshop. Exciting exchanges followed the presentations mainly on the means and the ways of promoting public spaces in Niger. At the workshops, the participants agreed on the need for the Ministry of the City to set up a Technical Committee on updating and / or harmonizing national policies and strategies for the promotion of public spaces and the importance for the Ministry of the City and Urban Sanitation to coordinate the actions.

Picture 20: The opening ceremony of the workshop #1
Picture 21: The Director of Peaceful Roads presenting at the workshop #1

Picture 22: Participants at the workshop #1
The second workshop was the Minecraft workshop with 27 registered participants from Government, municipalities and the community. It was organized in two phases because of technical problem with our computers and under the facilitation of Pontus Westerberg and Christelle Lahoud. The workshop allowed us to demonstrate how Minecraft could be used as a tool for community involvement in the design of public spaces. As we said before, this approach is a new one in Niger because the populations in the neighborhood of the public spaces have never been consulted before the construction of community spaces. Consequently, participants has discovered Minecraft as a relevant and exciting tool of public space design. This workshop was already reported above in the community engagement section. However, the Minecraft also acted as a key capacity building tool in order to demonstrate the ways in which community could be engaged, which is why we had a large number of government officials participate along with community members.

The third workshop was focused on park maintenance and registered 25 participants, mostly from the community. This workshop allowed us to exchange with the community about the maintenance of the park. The municipality officials and the Director of Peaceful Roads took the opportunity to explain extensively again the importance of public spaces and the involvement of people in the neighborhood in their maintenance. The park is yours, it’s not for the municipality, it’s not for Peaceful Roads, was a key message.
A municipality official at the workshop on park maintenance

The Director of Peaceful Roads at the workshop on park maintenance
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| Workshops with government and municipal officials. | 3 workshops (1 previously reported above)  
39 decision-makers included:  
- Ministry of the City (18)  
- Ministry of Housing (3)  
- Ministry of Environment (2)  
- Municipalities of Niamey (16)  
39 decision-makers have increased their understanding of the importance of parks  
39 decision-makers indicated their capacity has increased  
12 decision-makers participated in public meetings | Government officials are committed to work on policy by including the promotion of public spaces in the new National strategy of urban development. Also, before that, they promised to rehabilitate the current parks and create others parks and they are respecting their promise. |
| Trainings with local citizens regarding park | 2 trainings  
18 participants | The people in the neighborhood of the park |
18 citizens have indicated their capacity has increased and have really appreciated their involvement in the development of the park.

**Infrastructure Changes**

After the Minecraft training we identified an architect to create the technical drawings and organized several meetings with him. The result of his work was shared with Kristie Daniel during her stay in Niamey as part of the workshop on the policy aspects of the promotion of public spaces. She then made relevant observations on the drawings and the architect integrated those comments into the design.

Unfortunately, while we were preparing to start the construction of the park, a new Mayor of Niamey was appointed and he informed us that the President of the Republic had ordered for our site to be used to build an esplanade as part of the beautification work of Niamey to host the 2019 African Union Summit. For more details, see the section on the difficulties encountered.

But, after fruitful exchanges with Kristie Daniel and permission from UN-Habitat, we identified a new site in Yantala (200 meters from the former site) and our architect produced new drawings.

![Picture 27: Site before intervention](image)
Picture 28: Site before intervention

Picture 29: Site before intervention
We then organized additional meetings with the local residents in the neighborhood to explain to them the current situation, the project and to request their thoughts and permissions to improve the site. After approval from the community to move forward, we submitted our drawings to UN-Habitat for comments and approval. Several design changes were made and integrated into the overall design.
After several meetings with the municipal officials in the presence of some members of the community in the neighborhood of the site, we decided the construction of the park was best put under the responsibility of the municipal officials of the relevant services: Environment, Civil Engineering and Local development. Peaceful Roads was in charge of monitoring of the activities.
The following main infrastructures changes were made:

- **Delimitation of the site**: the site is in a residential area. First, we had to delimit it with the support of local authorities and municipal officials. To this end, we used tires colored with the colors of the Niger flag.

  - Image 34: Preparation of the tires to be used to delimit the site
- **Leveling of the site**: the site of the park was a little degraded. We have had to backfill it before proceeding with the construction of the infrastructures.
- **Construction of toilets**: the site did not have clean toilets despite the existence of a Mosque. After exchanges with the communities, particularly with the users of the Mosque, we proceeded with the construction of two toilets.

![Picture 37: One of the toilets of the park](image)

- **Construction of sheds and planting of trees**: Niger being a country where it is very hot, we considered it important to realize 4 sheds to promote the availability of shade for the various social strata (women, youth, elders and the caretaker of the site). In this context, we also proceeded to plant 25 trees.

![Picture 38: The shed for youth with some trees](image)
Picture 39: Newly planted tree

Picture 40: Newly planted tree
- **Construction of a football ground and a petanque ground:** before our project, the site of the park is used by the local residents to play petanque and football. That's why we decided to build these two fields to formalize these games in the park.

Picture 41: Petanque Ground
- **Construction of a playground for children**: before our project, the site is also used by children to play especially in the afternoons and week-ends. However there was no structure or activities specifically for them. That’s why we decided to build a playground for children. Following our exchanges with them, they said they are really interested in the football ground and some swings.
- **Water Supply:** During the advocacy meetings with the local residents of the site, two residents have decided to ensure the water supply of the site during the construction of infrastructures. Peaceful Roads and Niamey municipality 1 are working to connect the park to the national drinking water network. Until that time, we have installed water points on the site that will be supplied by the fountains near the park. This will allow visitors to have water to wash their hands and the mosque users to have water for ablutions.

- **Waste Disposal:** Peaceful Roads has created 3 disposal points on site (one for the elders, the second for the women and the last one for the youth). The municipality 1 of Niamey will regularly proceed with the removal of waste.

Finally, we organized a park opening ceremony to explain the park to participants.
Image 45: A match of petanque after the opening ceremony

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<td>Park improvements such as ground levelling, construction of infrastructures of sheds, toilets, football and petanque grounds and children playground and water supply.</td>
<td>9 park improvements</td>
<td>- 20 Muslim women are now using the space for study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- 4 sheds</td>
<td>- 32 children are regularly using the space for play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- 2 toilets</td>
<td>Since the development of the park, we have more and more players of football and petanque including among the children (mainly school children after school). Also, the vendors in the surrounding of the park have more customers. And the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- 2 grounds (football &amp; petanque)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- 1 children’s playground</td>
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The overall objective of the infrastructure improvements was to create a space specifically designed for public use for recreation.
Park opening ceremony to illustrate the different components of the park.
The park opening ceremony was organized by the community (petanque players and the group of Muslim women).

**Participants:**
- Municipality: 5
- Petanque players: 12
- Group of Muslims women: 42
- National federation of petanque: 3
- Community: 74

Toilets are contributing in the promotion of hygiene among the community.

**Policy**

In Niger, in the policy documents on urban development, public spaces are not a priority. The National Strategy of Urban Development adopted in 2004 lacks priority about public spaces. So, in order to begin to tackle this situation, we organized a workshop on the policy aspects of public spaces promotion under the facilitation of Kristie Daniel. It recorded 15 participants mainly from the ministries of the City and Housing. Thus, after recalling SDG 11 and its target 11.7, Kristie Daniel informed participants that public spaces contribute to several SDGs, including SDGs 3, 5, 8 and 13. So, in order for public spaces to meet national objectives, we need to have a national policy for streets, markets and parks. To this end, national policy should address the following aspects: location, design, management and funding. She shared several examples on all these aspects.
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meetings with decision makers</td>
<td>1 workshop</td>
<td>The ministry in charge of public spaces promotion committed to include it the new National Strategy of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The overall objective of the policy advocacy components</td>
<td>11 decision-makers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 public statements from government officials about their commitment to develop</td>
<td></td>
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is to mobilize the government officials in the improvement of the policy aspects of the promotion of public spaces.

### Progress Towards Ultimate Outcome

The ultimate outcome for which our project was “Improved local policies, plans and designs for safe, inclusive and accessible public spaces for all which supports more compact, integrated and connected, socially inclusive cities and neighbourhoods in partner cities.” Indicators that we are moving towards achieving the ultimate outcome include:

- The favorable commitment of the government and municipal officials in promoting public spaces in Niger. Despite the designation of a new Minister in charge of urban development after our project began, the technical committee that formed to integrate public spaces in the new National Urban Strategy will still established as part of the agenda of the Ministry for 2019. Also, seven municipalities outside of Niamey are really interested in promoting public spaces. Currently, the government has undertaken the rehabilitation and/or construction of parks in Niamey.

- The group of Muslim women in the neighborhood of the park have become our partner in advocating for participative and inclusive parks in Niamey.

- The petanque ground has become a place where the national federation of petanque can organize competitions.

- The local children began using the park before construction was completed, which speaks to the need for such a space in this area and others.

- A little over 12 volunteers have contributed their time to the development of the park and the community has agreed to support the maintenance.
Lessons Learned

The implementation of our project was an obstacle course. The beginning was easy with the cooperation of the mayor of Niamey. For him, our project was a blessing as he always had a vision for the site we selected. From the development of the project to the second phase of the Minecraft workshop, the Mayor of Niamey was our biggest support because he already had the idea of building a park on the Gadafawa site but was unable to realize this vision due to lack of financial resources.

However, the dismissal of the mayors of Niamey by the President of the Republic significantly complicated our work. After the Minecraft workshop, which was an inclusive community process and while our architect was developing the plans so that we could move on to implementation, the President of the Republic issued a decree revoking all the mayors of Niamey. It is at the last moment (second half of December) that the new Mayor told us that he no longer would allow us to build our park as the site was designated to become an esplanade on our site as part of the a Presidential Order in preparation for the 33\textsuperscript{th} Summit of the African Union to be held in Niamey in 2019.

This was a very disheartening outcome and we were ready to abandon the implementation of the project. We were completely disappointed because of all the sacrifices we had made from April 2017 to this date. However, discussions with HealthBridge and UN-Habitat demonstrated continued interest in ensuring that there would be a place space for the community members and we were able to carry on with the project at a new location. However, this resulted in several months delayed implementation.

In addition, we experienced several months of delay mainly due to the technical problems related to the Minecraft workshop. UN-Habitat was able to re-arrange their schedule and provide computers for the program, but were unable to complete the workshop until September, which was many months behind schedule. In addition, the multiple meetings with the government and municipal officials and the realization of the technical drawings of the infrastructures took much more time then we originally anticipated.

Consequently, the slow administrative procedures, the institutional instability and the lack of a formal paper allowing the implementation of the project were the main obstacles we faced.
Next Steps and Conclusion

The five-member management committee (3 from the community, one from the municipality 1 and one from Peaceful Roads) will work to connect the park to the national drinking water network. In addition, we believe there are continued improvements that can be made in the park and therefore the management committee will also undertake activities to improve the infrastructures of the park.

The foundations for a sustainable park have been laid. The community has been encouraged to take ownership of the park, through constant dialogue and participation. The management committee is now in charge of all the major decisions regarding the park. Peaceful Roads is also committed to leading advocacy and lobbying with policy makers on public space in Niger.