

My favourite project

IBTASEM playground in Bar Elias, Lebanon by CatalyticAction

The project I chose to review is a playground called IBATSEM located in Bar Elias, Lebanon and made by CatalyticAction in 2015. The playground is meant for refugee children from Syria to have a place to go, play and be creative.

Starting off by taking a look from the contextual part, the war in Syria has destroyed and devastated many lives and in the middle of crisis, we sometimes forget about children. At this point of their lives, they are not able to make decisions for themselves, for example, what is the best thing to do or the best place to go, so they are influenced by their parents. I find that it is very important to pay attention to the refugee children, because, in my opinion, every one of them deserves a chance to spend their childhood playing and studying from the environment, despite the war surrounding them.

The concept of the project was to design a playground for the refugee children where there is not only able to play and be active, but also a place to evolve creatively or take their time off. To make it as best as they could, they involved the children themselves with the process.



When taking the artistic approach, I think they solved it as good as they could. When designing a playground for the children, it is important to attach them to the project as well, because they are the ones who know best, what makes them happy, what do they want to play with or what do they prefer the playground to look like. So that's what they did - they held participatory exercises where the aim was to involve the kids from the very beginning of the project to give them a sense of ownership that they actually were part of the making of this

project. Otherwise, it might have happened that they don't take it as their own, so this way the designers weren't people from the outside bringing something into them, but the kids were a part of imagining it, conceptualizing it and even bringing their own elements of play to the playground. In addition to the participatory exercises they did, the designers did a lot of research for themselves too about what kind of spaces they wanted to create in a relation to the act of play.



Continuing with the participatory part, besides the exercises with the children, they also involved people from the refugee camp to the building part. The first part of the workshop was building an easily assembled wooden structure from local materials and on site, what makes also the project environmentally very sustainable and low cost, as there is minimal transportation and building expenses. And the second part was to animate the playground with the children to create all the games that were designed on site too.

What I really liked about the project was that they did not only design a regular playground, but they managed to create an area with three kind of spaces. An active space, for all the physical part (for example basketball court), a private space, where children can feel relaxed and do stuff they want to do (like planting flowers, as it can be seen in the video) and an educational space, where the panels they installed in the playground, have all messages about subjects or concepts they decided put there to the playground.

What is transformative about this project, is that most of the children have just fled from the war and live in a refugee camps, where they are living in very harsh and restrictive environmental circumstances that doesn't allow them to 'be' children or express themselves that way. While doing the research, the designers found out, that before the playground was built, children fought a lot, because they had a lot of trapped energy that needed the outcome

where to express it. So with that project they managed not only to pay attention to the problem, but to solve it.



Also, why I think this is a good social project is, because of their success, these kind of projects usually end up in global media, so they raise awareness of people all over the world about the conditions in refugee camps and maybe encourage them to take action or support others who do that and mainly because children and parents in these kind of situations can not do much about themselves.

Therefore, when having talked about the project having social impact on people, I think it would be accurate to discuss, where the project would take place when mapping it according to the community art scheme. So firstly, when comparing, whether the project is auto-relational or allo-relational, I think the playground project fits strongly to the allo-relational category because the idea was created by designers, but the rest of the project was made with the children and locals from the refugee camp. So community work played very strong role in the project. Secondly, when analyzing the project from digestive or subversive side, I would categorize it somewhere in the middle and maybe a little more on the digestive side. The reason for this is because I think that, with the playground, designers approach was to make the current situation better, but not to subvert any system or institution. Of course, the project can be looked from a political/subversive side too, because this situation is caused by the war and it somehow wants to pay attention to what war does with children lives, but I find that the overall goal ranks more on the digestive side.

In conclusion, I think that this innovative playground is a very good and successful project that really helps children in refugee camp to recreate the opportunity for them to get their thoughts away from the war, get to communicate with each other more friendly and enjoy their childhood again.

Sources:

<http://www.catalyticaction.org/all-project-list/playground-syrian-refugees/>

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[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=229&v=KzgZv2J8c4E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=229&v=KzgZv2J8c4E)