

REBUILDING COMMUNITIES THROUGH PUBLIC SPACE INTERVENTIONS

Co-learning from Beirut's reconstruction
after the 2020 port blast



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CORE TEAM

This research project is a partnership between the Bartlett Development Planning Unit (DPU) at University College London (UCL) and the CatalyticAction charity. This project is led by Principal Investigator Prof Andrea Rigon (DPU) with the CatalyticAction charity team: Joana Dabaj, Riccardo Luca Conti, Sara Maassarani and with the support of Giulia Galli, Ghina Kanawati, Jacopo Donato and Jana Al-Said.

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INTRODUCTION

The participatory analysis of public space projects in Beirut is a research project implemented between October 2022 and May 2023 to map the different public space interventions that took place in Beirut following the port blast in 2020 and co-learn from the different actors involved to enhance future public space interventions in Lebanon. The research is documented in this guide, which synthesises the main learnings.

This research project builds on previous related research and in particular the DeCID handbook on co-designing built projects with children affected by displacement (Rigon, Conti, Dabaj, 2021). The DeCID handbook is the key output of the GCRF-funded research implemented as a partnership by the Bartlett DPU and CatalyticAction, involving UNICEF and UN-Habitat; it collected evidence on the different dimensions of the impact of co-designed built projects. Additionally, as part of another GCRF funded project, “Assessing Vulnerabilities for urban recovery solutions in Beirut Post-Explosion” (Pietrostefani, et al., 2021), CatalyticAction with PROCOL Lebanon (previously RELIEF centre) investigated the role that public spaces play in addressing vulnerabilities in the neighbourhood of Karantina in Beirut post explosion. CatalyticAction also worked with UNDP Lebanon to research streets as public spaces in Karantina.

The latter two research projects were implemented following a participatory approach that recruited and trained citizen scientists from the neighbourhood. These research projects highlighted a need to better understand the impact of the public space built projects completed as a response to the Beirut blast. Furthermore, CatalyticAction led the implementation of 11 public space projects in Beirut post explosion, and during various coordination meetings, local authorities and key stakeholders highlighted the need for a coordinated response that takes into account contextual specificities and residents’ needs.



Key objectives

This research project aims to learn from public space projects that were implemented in Beirut after the blast and that consisted of a physical and lasting component. The project also aims to inform better co-designed public spaces in order to improve social cohesion in the context of multiple social tensions in Beirut; this was achieved by shared learning among participants. The key objectives of this research were:

- Facilitating a co-learning process on the reconstruction efforts in Beirut post blast, in particular in relation to public spaces in the city through a participatory assessment of both physical outputs as well as the processes (participatory or not) that led to their implementation.
- Expanding co-designed built projects in Lebanon as opportunities to empower vulnerable communities, improve social cohesion and prevent conflict.
- Strengthening coordination between different stakeholders who worked/are currently working on public space projects.
- Improving the understanding of how co-designed public spaces generate positive impacts.
- Promoting co-design processes in Beirut building upon findings from the DeCID research project.

Context

Beirut is a city with high density and a predominantly urban landscape that lacks adequate public spaces. With only “21 public parks and gardens, a seaside Corniche, and a few publicly accessible coastal sites...[t]he total area of parks and gardens amounts to less than 1 sq.m. per resident” (Harb and Mazraani, 2020). Open spaces that were once inclusive of all residents of Beirut have lost this quality with time, excluding many residents for different reasons. This decline in public space can be attributed to “the self-interest of politicians, the legislation catered towards the real estate and development sector, and the prioritisation of an internationally attractive cosmopolitan image [that] has transformed Beirut’s built environment into privatised space” (Karizat, 2019, p. 36).

In the absence of green space, public life is “experienced through its [Beirut’s] streets and markets, but also through...alleys, staircases, building entrances, vacant

lots, and other random sites” (Harb and Mazraani, 2020). These sites are gaining importance to users as they turn to them to compensate for their inability to access parks and gardens that have lately been officially closed to the public. With the backdrop of COVID-19 and the more recent and devastating Beirut blast, it is clear that the city needs to reactivate old – and create new – safe and well-designed public spaces. Furthermore, these spaces need to foster inclusivity and encourage a sense of common ownership. Rehabilitation efforts to rebuild damaged areas of the city in the aftermath of the Beirut blast provide the opportunity to get this right.

On 4 August 2020, a devastating explosion hit the port of Beirut, resulting in at least 117 deaths and injuring over 6,000 people, of whom at least 150 acquired a physical disability. The blast caused untold psychological harm, and damaged 77,000 apartments, displacing over 300,000 people. There was extensive damage to infrastructure, including transport, energy, water supply and sanitation, and municipal services totalling US\$390-475 million in losses and an estimated \$3.8-4.6 billion in material damage (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

National and international organisations quickly responded to this crisis, providing support for the affected neighbourhoods. Although a handful of public space projects were initiated as an immediate response to the blast, the majority of public spaces were only later recognised as important assets to rehabilitate, as they offered a sorely needed breathing space for many vulnerable individuals, and children in particular (Green, 2020). In addition, as the blast occurred in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were closed, and many children were spending most of their day in public parks or simply playing on the streets, which led to more rehabilitation efforts being channelled towards public facilities, such as schools, parks, streets, etc.

The considerable level of available funds and the high number of rehabilitation projects happening simultaneously have put unprecedented pressure on local authorities to review and approve a high volume of projects. Similar projects – often happening in the same neighbourhood – required coordination, albeit they did not always produce harmonised visions in line with residents’ needs. In many cases, rehabilitation projects generated a positive impact and were well received by residents. In others, residents rejected projects, demanding to be consulted on the design of their public spaces.

METHODOLOGY

This project produced a participatory assessment of the reconstruction efforts following the Beirut explosion, in particular in relation to public spaces. The analytical framework builds upon the co-design of built projects with children affected by displacement (DeCID handbook), which was adapted to consider the specificities of the post-blast context. Data was gathered and analysed through a series of interviews followed by a participatory workshop, bringing together all the different stakeholders working on public spaces in Beirut to co-learn and exchange knowledge with the aim of identifying shared standards among the actors operating in the city on public space projects. This was complemented by a temporary and participatory public art installation produced in collaboration with residents of the Karantina neighbourhood. The outcome of this analysis, including a database of projects, is published in this guide.



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Public space projects mapping

The research started by mapping public space projects that were implemented in Beirut after the blast. The criteria of selection for the projects were:

- Accessible to the public, even if for a limited time of the day
- Built after August 2020
- Completed or with at least a significant component already built (by the time the research project started in October 2022)
- Including a physical and lasting component
- Implemented in Beirut and its suburbs with funding stemming from the blast crisis

The mapping of “Beirut’s Public Life and Community projects” (BUL, 2022) done by the Beirut Urban Lab (BUL) was useful for this phase of the project as it included a valuable database of projects that were proposed, ongoing and abandoned, led by NGOs and INGOs in neighbourhoods affected by the blast. The research team identified 53 public space projects that fit the selection criteria. The list included a diverse range of public space projects: public parks, stairs, streets, community centres, libraries, art installations, street lighting and murals.

The database of public space projects was sourced via online desktop research and from field observations, then information about each project was sent to the relevant actors who were involved to be verified and approved. The database of public space projects was a work in progress throughout all the phases of the research, as the research team welcomed input from practitioners to shape the final results. For each public space project, the following information was identified and included in the database:

- Location
- Implementing actor
- Project partners
- Funding actors
- Description of the project
- Project start and end
- Budget
- Ownership of the space
- How was the project initiated?
- What was the role of the residents?
- Relevant links and information resources



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Key stakeholders interviews

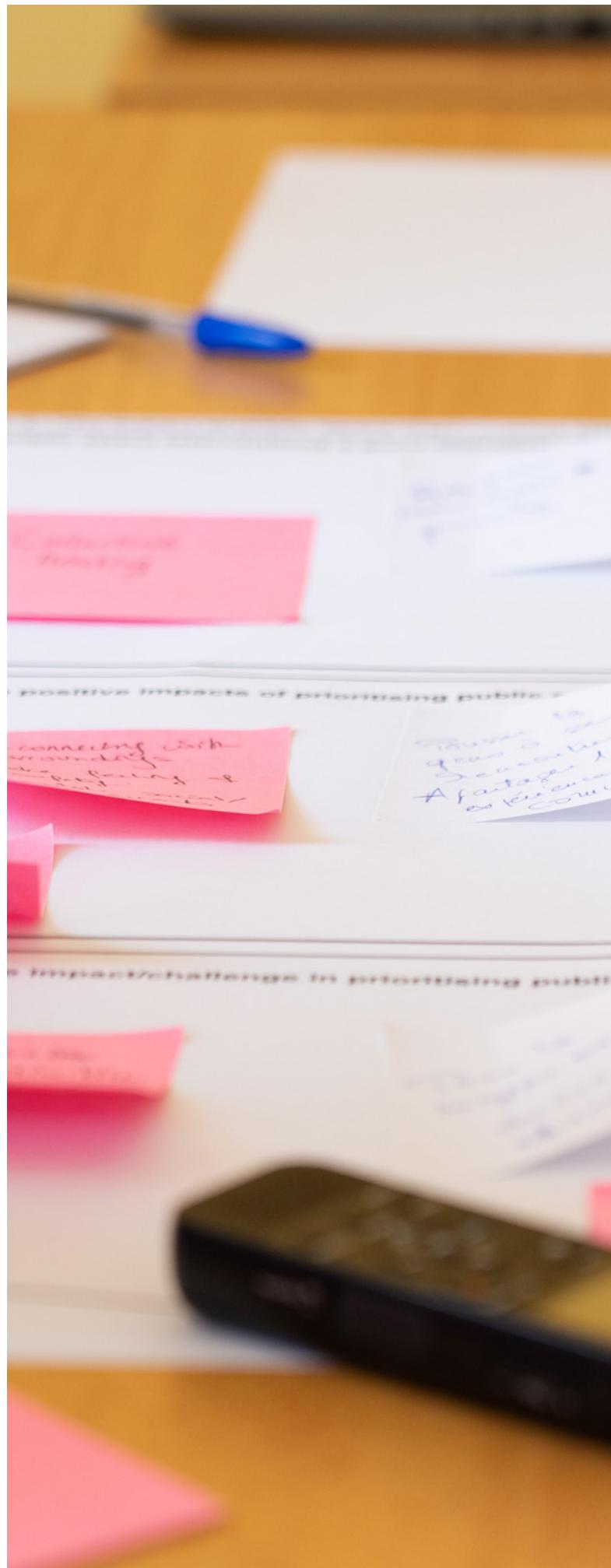
Key stakeholders working on public spaces in Beirut were identified to be interviewed for the research, representing a diverse range of actors: municipalities, NGOs, INGOs, implementing actors, donors, artists, researchers and academics. The research team interviewed 17 key stakeholders in January 2023, discussing 38 public space projects (see Appendix 1 for more information). The interviews focused on learning from the key stakeholders' experiences and were structured around the following key themes: working post-blast in Beirut, project(s) initiation, community participation, technical design, procurement and building, post-building and sustainability, and lastly key learnings and challenges. The interviews were analysed and the findings represented the basis for the participatory learning workshop.

Participatory learning workshop

A key activity of the research process was a one-day participatory learning workshop that brought together key stakeholders working on public spaces in Beirut in order to exchange learnings and develop practical insights. The workshop was also geared towards sharing our initial findings from interviews with key stakeholders, and creating a closer network of practitioners working on public space. The workshop concluded with a tour of the Karantina neighbourhood to further the conversation. The neighbourhood tour was led by a young female resident who has worked with CatalyticAction as a citizen scientist and community outreach officer. She shared her experience of engaging in several public space projects and how this impacted her life and her role in the community. Thirteen practitioners participated in the workshop, representing a diverse range of actors: NGOs, INGOs, implementing actors, donors, researchers and academics (see Appendix 3 for more information).

The workshop took place in a community centre in Karantina that was rehabilitated by CatalyticAction in partnership with Terre des Hommes Italy Lebanon and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) in response to the Beirut port explosion. This community centre is mapped as part of the database developed for this project. The research team elected to host the workshop in the community centre to demonstrate the importance of public space projects implemented following the blast and show how practitioners can seek opportunities to keep on improving these community spaces after their implementation. By hosting the workshop in the community centre, we were able to provide a projector screen that remains available to use for any community activity taking place in the centre.

Workshop participants engaged in participatory activities that covered the main themes that emerged from the analysis of the database and interviews with key stakeholders. The activities and their aims are further explained below:





Mapping:

In this activity participants got to closely inspect the map with the locations of public space projects that were listed in the database. Participants located projects they worked on while learning about the distribution of the public space projects in Beirut that were implemented during the same period of time. The discussions around the mapping allowed participants to elaborate on their projects, ask other participants about their projects, and add more public space projects to the map. The mapping was discussed during the presentation to highlight the criteria of project selection and discuss the distribution of public space projects in Beirut in relation to the neighbourhoods affected by the blast. The information acquired in the course of this activity was used to update the database of projects produced by this research.

The impact of public space projects after a disaster:

Participants discussed the impact of public space projects to form a better understanding of the value of such projects following a disaster. Individual observations and experiences were discussed reflecting on the following questions:

- Are public space projects a good approach for disaster recovery? Why? Why not?
- What are the positive impacts of prioritising public space projects following a disaster?
- Are there any negative impacts/challenges in prioritising public space projects following a disaster?
- How can the planning of public space projects maximise benefits for the residents?
- What does it mean to build back “better” or “differently” in the context of Beirut?
- How can we measure the impact of public space projects post blast?

The role of local communities in public space:

Participants reflected on community involvement in public space projects in depth, taking into consideration different roles and levels of involvement that local communities can take in public space projects, identifying advantages, disadvantages, constraints and methods for each level of involvement. The activity was guided by a set of questions directing participants to fill out a table about the role of the community in public spaces. Two groups developed a table that identified five levels of community engagement based on the different project phases, and then compared the outcome in a discussion.

Photo by Youssef Itani © CatalyticAction

KEY LEARNINGS

Through interviews and the workshop, practitioners shared their experience and reflections regarding their work on the rehabilitation of public spaces after the blast. This section presents these learnings in the hope that they can inform future public space projects.



Photo by Youssef Itani © CatalyticAction

The impact of public space reconstruction after a disaster

In times of disaster, people look for ways to cope and restore a sense of normalcy to their lives. Community members come together, and overcome barriers of diversity. This positively contributes to the mental wellbeing of the whole community" (Participatory learning workshop participant, 2023).

Following the Beirut blast, public space projects provided an opportunity for residents to cope, heal and socialise. This is a common observation shared by practitioners as they reflected on the impact of public space projects. Eleven out of 17 interviewed practitioners explained that their organisations initially directed recovery efforts towards removing rubble and restoring homes. However, they soon recognised that public spaces had the potential to rekindle hope and stimulate a sustainable recovery of the city.

In some cases, practitioners highlighted that the recovery process could not have been completed without rehabilitating public spaces. For example, one organisation directed its effort towards rehabilitation of public spaces after a substantial number of buildings in the Gemmayze neighbourhood were rehabilitated, but the streets were still damaged. Residents whose houses had been rehabilitated did not consider their neighbourhood properly rebuilt in light of the remaining damage on the streets, as the latter hindered their mobility and negatively affected their wellbeing. "Every time I leave my home to go to work, there is still considerable damage to the streets, constantly reminding me of the explosion which made me really sad" (Participatory learning workshop participant, 2023). The neighbourhood only recovered its vitality following the public space rehabilitation projects and with the reopening of more businesses, such as coffee shops and restaurants.

The rehabilitation of public spaces created collective and lasting positive impacts beyond the physical intervention of a communal meeting place. Rehabilitated public spaces provided a venue to address multiple needs of various community groups, for instance distribution points for food parcels and medicines as in the case of Karantina Public Park, or an incentive to open new businesses and generate livelihood income as with the Vendome stairs. Moreover, public space projects that adopted a context-specific participatory approach created a safe space that fostered social inclusion and cohesion. For example,

during the rehabilitation of the Karantina Public Park, social tensions between the Lebanese and Syrian residents were escalating as a result of the uncoordinated shelter rehabilitation, so the implementing actor CatalyticAction adopted a context-sensitive participatory approach that initiated with children and youth to begin to tackle these social tensions as the diverse communities get together to rehabilitate the park and use it equally.

Practitioners pointed out that in the context of a dysfunctional state, rehabilitation of public spaces presented an opportunity to restore people's right to access them. Residents of Beirut had been deprived of their right to use these public spaces prior to the blast (El Samra, 2020). One by one, the public space projects have restored residents' right to the city. This was mainly highlighted in the rehabilitation of Beirut's public parks, which were previously closed off and not accessible. Residents were able to regain access and use these parks once again after organisations rehabilitated the spaces and launched community activities such as Himaya NGO's children's activities in Kaskas and Karm El Arees public parks. The municipality of Beirut gave permission to open these public parks to be used by the residents when such organisations were present, as a way of delegating the full responsibility for opening the parks to organisations in charge.

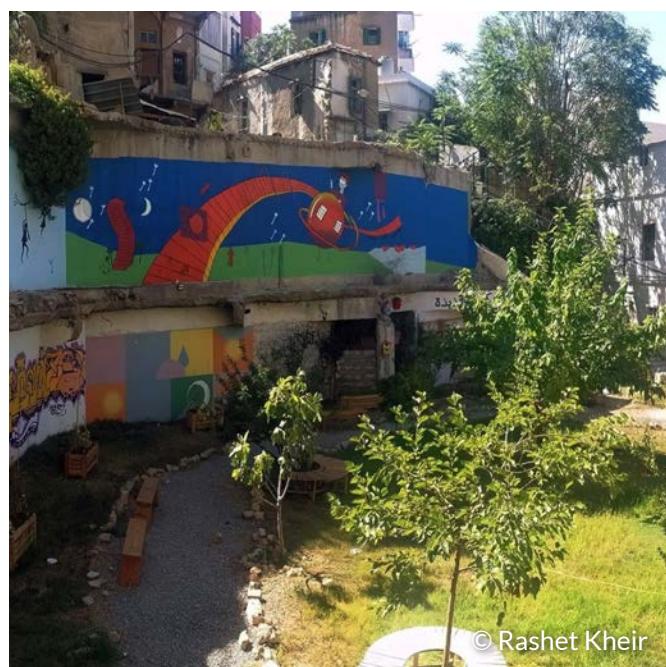
However, following the devastating disaster of the Beirut port blast, some practitioners questioned if public spaces were considered a priority, with many of the funding opportunities being redirected elsewhere, leaving many public spaces in need of rehabilitation. It was agreed among practitioners that public space rehabilitation projects must be part of a comprehensive approach for Beirut's recovery. UNDP Lebanon adopted this comprehensive approach, engaging the community to research and understand their needs to direct their recovery efforts.

Repairing individual houses or spaces takes time, but a public space intervention can have a multiplier effect, serving and impacting more people simultaneously. It also positively impacts vulnerable groups: for example, when a public space project is successful, it can provide the space for a child to seek refuge following episodes of domestic violence, which tend to increase in the aftermath of disasters. One practitioner shared the feedback of a young girl attending their activities in the park after the explosion, who said that she was happy and grateful that the blast had happened as it gave her the opportunity to leave her house to engage in activities with other children and have fun.

Positive impacts of prioritising public space projects

Practitioners considered that public spaces provide a much-needed environment in which to offer support to the affected communities. It was easier to reach residents by being stationed at a public park in comparison to door-to-door targeted outreach. With the lack of a coordinated response, false promises and the rising security threats during the harsh economic depression, residents did not feel safe or comfortable to engage with “strangers”, especially to discuss private matters. “There is less stigma around accepting mental health support when it is given in a public space. People are more willing to come to a public space and talk about the stresses of life, or engage in an activity when it is delivered in a public space where everyone participates” (Participatory learning workshop participant, 2023).

In a dense city like Beirut, public spaces provide a breathing space for the community, especially in times of compounded crises, and therefore they should be a priority for people’s wellbeing. The Beirut port explosion happened during COVID-19 lockdowns at a time when children could not go to school; children needed to regain a sense of routine, which was provided by the various programs taking place in public parks such as the Kan Ya Makan program run by CatalyticAction in the Karantina Public Park.



The liquidity crisis in Lebanon drastically affected residents’ livelihoods, altering many people’s lifestyles by making it harder to go out, as recreational activities in Lebanon are mostly paid for (El Samra, 2020). Public spaces were the only places many could afford. In addition, electricity outages made it unbearable to stay at home during the hottest days of summer, and rehabilitated public spaces became the go-to places.

Moreover, improving the quality of public spaces in collaboration with local communities can create job opportunities. For example, ILO’s employment-intensive infrastructure programme (EIIP) in Karantina upgraded the sidewalks network through the provision of short- and medium-term employment to Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese people from the neighbourhood.

Enhancing public spaces can incentivise businesses to reopen, as noted by an Internal Security Force official who commented on the impact of street lighting projects by Rebirth Beirut. The official explained that the crime rate in one of the newly lit streets of the Gemmayze neighbourhood dropped significantly after the completion of the project, attracting more people and encouraging more businesses to open. Such enhancements benefit the entire community, especially vulnerable groups, who may not have access to quality private spaces and can instead find a range of their needs met in public spaces.

Prioritising the rehabilitation of public spaces can provide access to inclusive, social and communal events. The setting of such events within public spaces offers diverse residents a chance to share a common experience. These shared spaces and events promote social cohesion and a collective sense of neighbourhood belonging by providing opportunities for new relationships and friendships across different groups of residents. For example, the construction of Arcenciel’s Snoubar skatepark encouraged skaters to give skating lessons for different groups of children. Furthermore, when communities use public spaces, this allows practitioners to better understand these communities and their relationship to these shared spaces, and ultimately to inform future interventions.

For the rehabilitation of public spaces, practitioners aimed at following design standards that ensured accessibility and inclusivity, following the concept of “building back better”. By improving the accessibility of public spaces for everyone, access to services provided following the disaster are also improved. Since some organisations relied on providing their services in public spaces, it was essential to ensure these spaces are accessible to all.

For example, Himaya provided psychosocial support for children in different parks of Beirut. Rehabilitating these parks allowed the organisation to reach more children in the surrounding neighbourhoods.

Working in the same neighbourhood offered practitioners an opportunity for collaborations, while opening channels of communication between different stakeholders and the community. One example of such collaborations was ILO's project in Karantina. The aim of the project was to create improved infrastructure for pedestrians, and this required coordination with the different actors working on a similar scope of work like BUL, CatalyticAction and UNDP. The communication with these organisations gave ILO valuable insight into the community's needs through the well-established networks of these organisations. Also, the coordination allowed the built interventions to be complementary, rather than duplicating efforts and wasting resources.

Public space can improve the mental health of residents. In Lebanon, communities can often still be reticent in talking about mental health. Public spaces represent a coping mechanism for the whole community, which is much needed after a disaster. "People go to public spaces when they are feeling bad, especially children who find it very difficult to express their feelings and caregivers who otherwise feel stigmatised," highlighted a workshop participant when discussing Himaya's and TDH Italy's experience in providing psychosocial support activities for children and their caregivers.



Challenges of prioritising public space projects

While enumerating the benefits of prioritising public space projects following a disaster, practitioners shared some challenges encountered throughout the different phases of their projects. One major challenge was rejection by residents of the idea of prioritising work on public spaces while the community was struggling to fulfil basic needs. It was difficult to engage the community in assessing their needs regarding public space when residents prioritised basic needs like shelter, food and medicine. On the other hand, some residents perceive public space projects as having positive impacts on the built environment rather than on people, because the link is less straightforward. In order to gain community support, practitioners highlighted the importance of packaging public space projects together with plans to address other priorities. In one case, disregarding other priorities of the community led to the rejection of a public space project.

In addition, negative impacts of public space projects resulted from lack of coordination among different stakeholders working in the same neighbourhood. Excessive pressure on the municipality to manage the overwhelming flow of projects prevented it from assuming its coordinating role. Practitioners agreed that public space projects needed a common vision or masterplan to allow for better coordination. This coordination would also be important to ensure equal spatial distribution of interventions across Beirut. Additionally, some organisations either followed a top-down approach or worked on public space projects without doing an assessment or engaging all stakeholders, leading to problematic projects that were not sufficiently informed by local context and were ultimately rejected by residents.

Public parks were the first public spaces to be targeted with rehabilitation efforts. However, the management of the public parks was sometimes difficult because the spaces were kept closed by the municipality of Beirut. Therefore, significant negotiations with the municipality were needed in order to reopen these parks. Paradoxically, in spite of the valuable improvements to the infrastructure of these rehabilitated public spaces, the municipality kept some of these spaces closed because they had limited resources for their maintenance. It became apparent from negotiations to reopen these rehabilitated public spaces that there is a prevalent mentality that vandalism in public spaces is rampant and unavoidable. "However, infrastructure normally needs maintenance and people

will learn that if something is broken, it can no longer be used, and may learn to take care. But if the community is excluded from these spaces, they would never feel the sense of ownership to protect their assets" (Participatory learning workshop participant, 2023). Practitioners stressed the importance of the awareness of the community about their role in managing public spaces.

While many spaces are public, some community members treat them as their own, opposing any improvements that they do not deem necessary and disregarding the needs of other groups in the community. In one project where the community was involved in the design process, some residents opposed an addition to the space that would make it more accessible to the elderly. The residents based their opposition on their personal needs and visions for the public space. Negotiations were not successful in highlighting the importance of this intervention for the vulnerable groups in the neighbourhood.

On the other hand, some spaces are privately owned but used as public spaces, which raises the question of whether owners would continue to allow public use of the space following rehabilitation. The question of ownership of spaces is particularly relevant in Karantina, where many of the spaces used by the community are privately owned. Many of the owners had left the country and did not oppose people using the spaces. However, upon further investigation, the owners refused to allow any kind of intervention or improvement to the spaces. This refusal to improve spaces for public use stems from the fear of losing ownership of the property in the long term.

When it came to design, one of the main challenges in public space projects was to focus on improving accessibility. The funds available were rarely enough to cover ameliorations to the main infrastructure while also allowing improvements to accessibility. In some projects, the pooling of multiple funding sources resulted in more comprehensive designs, while in other cases practitioners had to make the choice of what to prioritise. "The parks of Beirut were built in the 1960s, and they were not designed to be accessible. Many of them are in poor shape and need maintenance that is beyond any of our budgets. Karm El Arees park, for example, has a large area to begin with. At Himaya, we wanted to make it accessible, but its infrastructure needed maintenance as well. We did what we could with the funds we had, and we succeeded in directing other funds to complement our work for improved accessibility." (Participatory learning workshop participant, 2023)

In many cases, sustainability of public space projects becomes a challenge. In open public spaces, security, cleaning and maintenance of the space became the responsibility of the community in the absence of the municipality. With limited resources and many worries about their daily lives, the ability of the community to care for the space became a challenge and a burden. In one case, this was a factor taken into consideration by the implementing actor for a design decision. The residents clean a portion of the public space on a daily basis. When they heard about the project to rehabilitate the space, they requested that no design elements should be added to the space they clean because they didn't want more people using the area and increasing their work. In other cases, such as in parks, the sustainability of the projects became challenging when the security personnel of a park were not trained or prepared to deal with a community space open to all. Absent such training, the security personnel can become gatekeepers, preventing access of different residents.



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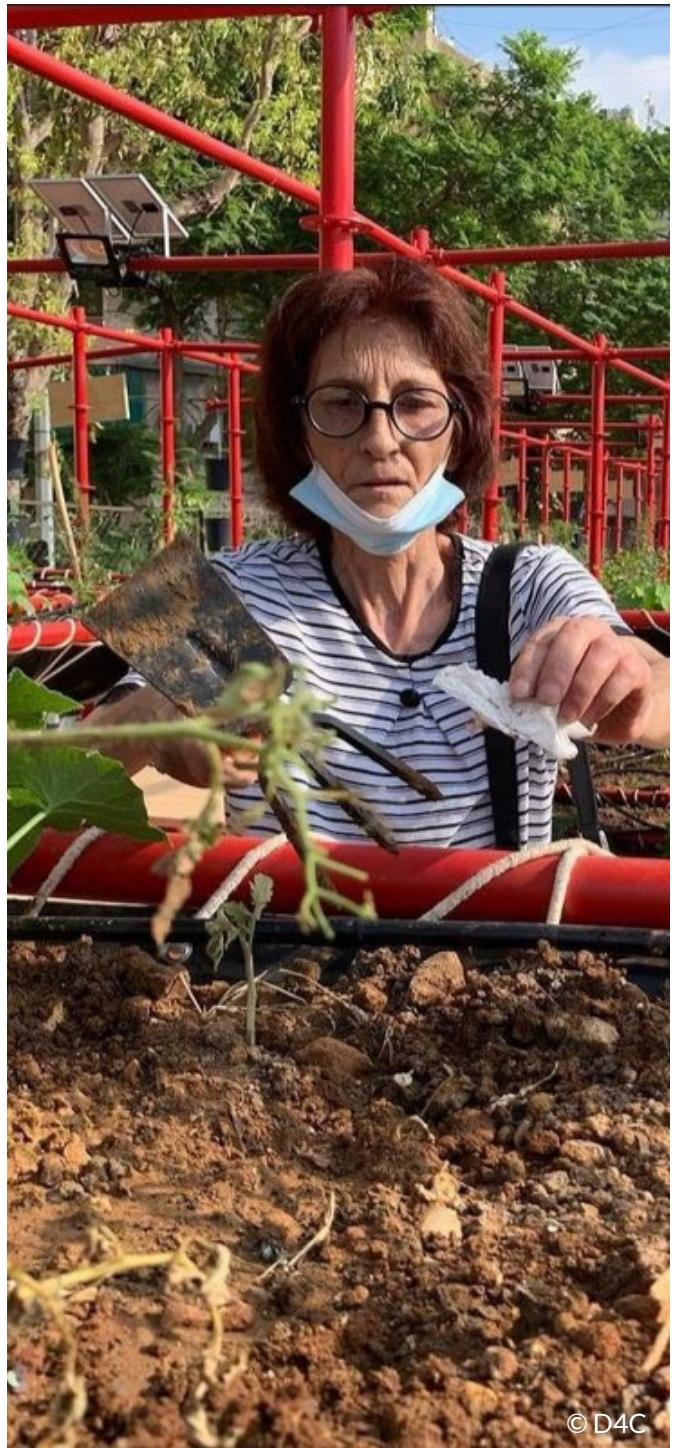
Maximising benefits for the residents through public space projects

Discussing the various approaches in public space projects highlighted some actions that can maximise benefits for the residents. A carefully planned approach that engages municipalities, residents, and other key stakeholders is useful for the sustainability of the project. “It is necessary to engage the authorities from the beginning to get their approval and communicate realistic plans and visions with the residents” (Participatory learning workshop participant, 2023). Residents who are engaged throughout the various steps of the project gain a sense of belonging and ownership of the rehabilitated spaces. When residents are meaningfully engaged throughout the project, the space is shaped to address their specific needs, and this motivates the community to take ownership of and look after the space.

A greater sense of belonging is achieved when residents’ engagement extends from the design to the construction phase: being hired as labourers and generating an income, or volunteering to join in shaping the space. One example of a project that succeeded in empowering residents to take ownership of the space is Laziza Park, where the community still takes care of the plants and makes use of the park through various community activities. Activating public spaces through social and cultural events with local communities demonstrates the potential of public spaces as social places for all. Such events contribute to an enhanced use of public space and also boost economic activities.

Public spaces adapted to the needs of the community become part of people’s daily routine, improving access to services in some cases. For example, the Karantina streetscape project was driven by the need to improve pedestrian access around the Beirut Governmental Hospital, the National HIV and TB Centre and the Karantina Public Park. Moreover, by prioritising safety, inclusivity and accessibility in the design values, the needs of diverse community groups can be met by the public space project. Additionally, working on the interconnectivity of public spaces to create a public space network within the neighbourhood can result in connected spaces that create a connected community.

Highlighting the positive results of a participatory process encourages other organisations and local authorities to adopt it. “Sharing individual and personal success stories can be very impactful for the recovery of Beirut. A woman told me how grateful she was for one project that improved the accessibility to a sidewalk that is on her daily route. She mentioned that it helped her mobility with a family member in a wheelchair who mostly stayed at home because of the difficulty of using a wheelchair in the city. This is one story that makes the whole intervention worthwhile.” (Participatory learning workshop participant, 2023).



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Measuring the impact of public space projects post blast

Another focus of the learning exchange was on the methods used by practitioners to measure the impact of these projects. One method was direct feedback from residents, which was done through in-person visits to the project sites and talking to the residents and visitors. Opening channels of communication between residents and practitioners through WhatsApp was key to being better able to understand the impact of a project on a daily basis, and not only during site visits. In other projects, the impact was measured through monitoring the number of users and their uses of the space pre- and post-rehabilitation.

Measuring attitudes and behaviour change towards a public space to understand the feeling of community ownership and buy-in was also an indicator of the impact of public space projects. Another indicator was the level of engagement of key stakeholders in the various phases of the project, and whether this resulted in a collaboration that guaranteed the sustainability of the space or not. On the other hand, efforts to update policies related to public spaces and their use by the community can also be linked to the impact of these projects and the awareness they raised within the community to assert their rights to access public spaces.

Another indicator of the impact of public spaces is the enhancement of the economic and social activities of the neighbourhood. These interventions contributed to more businesses being opened in the area and more houses rented out, making the neighbourhood more attractive for residents, with a vibrant social life. While it was not the focus of this learning exchange, as the projects analysed are recent, it is important to consider the potential gentrifying impacts of these spaces, especially when several interventions take place in the same neighbourhood, and the adverse impact they can have on the most vulnerable tenants. Measuring the positive economic impact that happens when people gain access to new shared spaces is another indicator of the impact of improved public spaces.

A comprehensive qualitative and quantitative assessment done as part of research projects proved to be the best way to measure the impact of public space projects, especially when coupled with a participatory approach before and after the project where residents are supported by experts to do the assessment.



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The role of local residents in public space projects

Local residents can be engaged in public space projects in different ways and in different phases of the project. The level of engagement varies from maximum engagement, where the local community has a role in choosing their priorities, location, design, building management, and maintenance, to the lowest level where residents are not part of the intervention. More often, resident engagement falls somewhere between these two poles. Budget and timeline constraints are the two main factors reducing the extent of residents' participation. Each level of community engagement comes with a set of advantages, disadvantages, methods and constraints that impact on the quality of the project.

When residents get to participate in choosing their priorities, identifying the location, developing the design, building the intervention, and overseeing management and maintenance, the project is more successful, leading to a sense of ownership and motivation to participate in creating and caring for the space. Involving the community in all these steps can turn community members into advocates for public space. Through a participatory approach that embeds intersectionality and diversity, residents get the chance to better understand the needs of different members of the community. The discussions allow for residents to understand design decisions and how they serve different needs. This allows for a better understanding of how the built environment impacts the experience of different users of the public space.



In the long run, the sustainability of the space is ensured when the community finds ways to take care of the space, while coordinating with other key stakeholders and the municipality. This also creates an opportunity for economic growth in the community, when community involvement in construction and maintenance generates new capacity among residents. The advantages of full participation extend to benefits to the mental health and wellbeing of the community.

However, participation can entail challenges, chief among these being the need for more time, budget and coordination to ensure fair representation of the community and key stakeholders. Also, coordination efforts need to address internal power relations in the community, empowering vulnerable individuals and groups to express their needs in regard to public spaces. Reaching the community becomes another challenge when they have relocated following a disaster while waiting for their homes to be renovated. In addition, engaging residents in understanding their needs might result in short-term priorities with the lack of a long-term vision. Developing such a shared vision requires skills from the practitioners, and additional training for community members, which can be time and budget consuming.

Comprehensive residents' participation in all the phases of the project can be challenging, because it is difficult to secure the commitment of residents in the context of the Lebanese economic crisis where residents need to focus on their livelihood. Another challenge is the question of negotiating multiple needs, points of view or priorities when residents do not reach a consensus.

When residents have a limited role in the phases of a project, the sense of ownership remains proportional to the level of involvement. The advantages of community engagement include capacity building, mentoring, social value, networking and career opportunities. Such engagement can benefit the livelihoods of residents who can actively participate in the construction and maintenance of the space.

Disadvantages of limited participation include negatively affecting residents' participation in the care and future maintenance of the project (which is a major concern given the limited resources of the municipality), leading to less impactful projects that may not be sustainable in the long term. The process of empowering residents to take responsibility for their space is time-consuming and costly. However, without it, there is a continuous dependence on the input of external actors which may be even more costly or unrealistic, particularly given the

limited timeframe of NGOs' projects. Moreover, limited resources for residents' participation (time and budget) can lead to discrimination, as only those more capable of quickly contributing input and voicing their perspectives are considered.

Simultaneously engaging residents and the local authority requires time and different approaches. Methods used by the Beirut projects analysed range from social behaviour change and capacity building of the local community to research. Other methods included participatory design and primary research, including exploring residents' memories and storytelling, stakeholders and power mapping, focus group discussions, surveys, training, information sessions, facilitation and negotiation with involvement of local service providers. Methods differed depending on community characteristics and resources available for the project, and included open design competitions, complementarity of partners, close collaboration with different stakeholders, and committee activation to improve communication with the community. Connecting the municipality to the public space and the community was found to be a condition for the sustainability of the project.

Limiting residents' participation to just one phase of the project helps with meeting tight project deadlines. However, this limited participation can lead to the failure of the project if residents' needs are not fully understood or if they feel they are not really involved in the process.

Residents may stand against the project and stop it, or in some cases resort to vandalism to express their rejection of the project. There is a risk of creating a project with low impact that will not be sustainable if the community rejects it. When residents are not involved in any phase of the project, risks may involve protests that impede implementation or stop the project altogether.

Overall, participatory approaches were challenging to apply in several projects, partly because there is political pressure to close public spaces and a lack of awareness of people's right to public space. The long process to get a permit was another challenge. Artists who made art installations in public spaces expressed the needs of the community and made a statement with their art; as a result, the artists did not interact much with the municipality. Rather, they worked directly with the people affected by the disaster to implement their projects.

The participatory component here makes projects successful but also exposes them to potential challenge from local authorities because they are often done without permits. It takes time to ease authorities into accepting the engagement of residents in public space projects, because the participatory approach encourages all kinds of people to meet who might potentially form a force that challenges existing political authorities. Successful participatory projects showed that the authorities can work hand in hand with residents to break the ice and overcome this fear of opening public spaces to the people.



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Building back better

After the significant destruction caused by the blast, practitioners found the rehabilitation efforts around the city provided a chance to build back better. A deeper exploration of what this means allowed practitioners to share different points of view on how their public space projects applied the notion of building back better. The chance to reclaim and improve the function of existing public spaces with updated equipment and environmentally friendly materials improved the quality of these spaces. The post-blast rehabilitations introduced new materials and designs to the parks to more effectively address people's current needs, such as creating inclusive play items and improving accessibility.

On the other hand, the complex social issues that come with public space projects need time to be discussed, and this time was provided in projects that followed a participatory approach. The rehabilitation efforts also presented opportunities for collaboration with different stakeholders: private, public, governmental, non-governmental institutions and residents. These collaborations can lead to a greater appreciation of the existing heritage, and ultimately the replication of existing building elements that are of contextual value to the intervention, while building on the collective memory and attitude of the residents. Furthermore, to build back better involves understanding how much the space is being used and who is using it, and gathering feedback from residents to create spaces that better serve their needs.

Art installation

To supplement the research, a temporary public art installation was designed and implemented in the neighbourhood of Karantina to reflect on the meaning of public space. The art installation was set up four days before the workshop to give workshop participants the chance to engage with the installation. The site selected for the installation is a private open space that is one of the most important publicly accessible spaces of the neighbourhood of Karantina. It is a large space with a soil surface used by diverse residents for a variety of uses such as walking, playing and resting, as long as no permanent structures are built there. The space is made of several private plots of land. Therefore the only intervention that the owners would accept there is of a temporary nature

that does not threaten the private ownership of the land. The art installation was made of colourful wooden boxes of various weights placed in the centre of the space. The installation was in the open 24/7 for one week. The aim was to experiment and analyse how people would interact with an open-ended structure that was left unattended, and how by altering its shape they would give different functions to this public space.

The art installation was approached by children who were curious about the setup as soon as the colourful wooden boxes were unloaded from the truck. They observed the process of setting up the boxes in a heart shape. As soon as the setup was complete, children approached and began to investigate the boxes. Footage of the interaction showed children sitting or lying down on the boxes, climbing them, jumping from one coloured box to the other, or running around chasing each other.

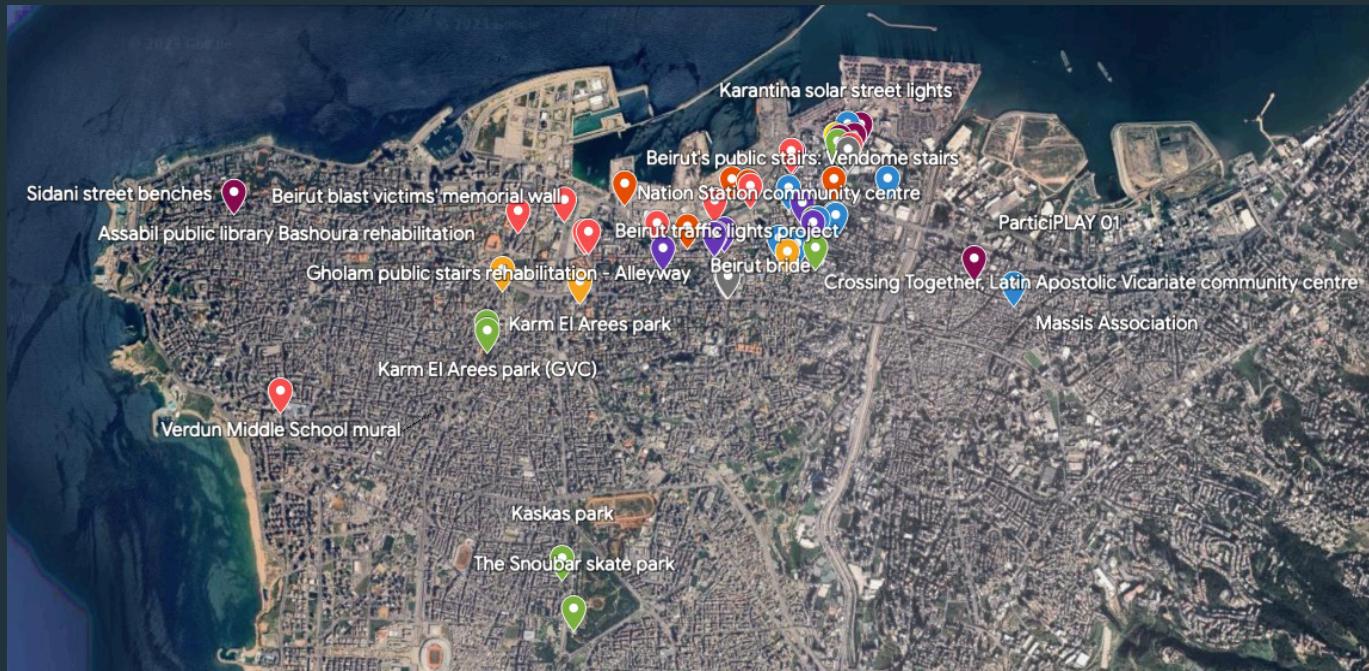
Children sat in groups and played around the boxes, bringing random things to support their play like cardboard boxes that they set up near the art installation, as if continuing to add to the main function of the boxes. The children experimented with the cardboard, trying to adapt the shape to their needs. At one point they placed the cardboard in the centre of the heart shape on the ground in order to have a "clean" inner space. Mothers approached their children to join in their fun as they interacted with the art installation.

The next day, the original setup of the boxes was altered, and the children realised that they could move the boxes. They started by trying to recreate the heart shape and then proceeded to explore different shapes based on their ability to move the heavy boxes around. At this point, the adults started moving the boxes to sit on them in their favourite spots around the site.

People's interactions with the art installation were documented using timelapse video footage. The research team put together a [brief video documentary](#) showing some of these interactions.

DATABASE OF PUBLIC SPACE PROJECTS

The database of public space projects mapped as part of this research project can be viewed in this section or by clicking on the interactive map below.



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The Snoubar skate park

Implementing actor: Make Life Skate Life (MLSL), Lebanese Skateboarding Association

Partners: CHPO Brand, Air France, Arcenciel, Just Childhood

Funding: Decathlon Foundation, crowdfunding campaign by MLSL

Description:

A skate park within Horsh Beirut which was the first public skate park in Lebanon that supported the growing popularity of the sport in Beirut.

Project start: September 2020

Project end: June 2021

Budget: 100,000 USD

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

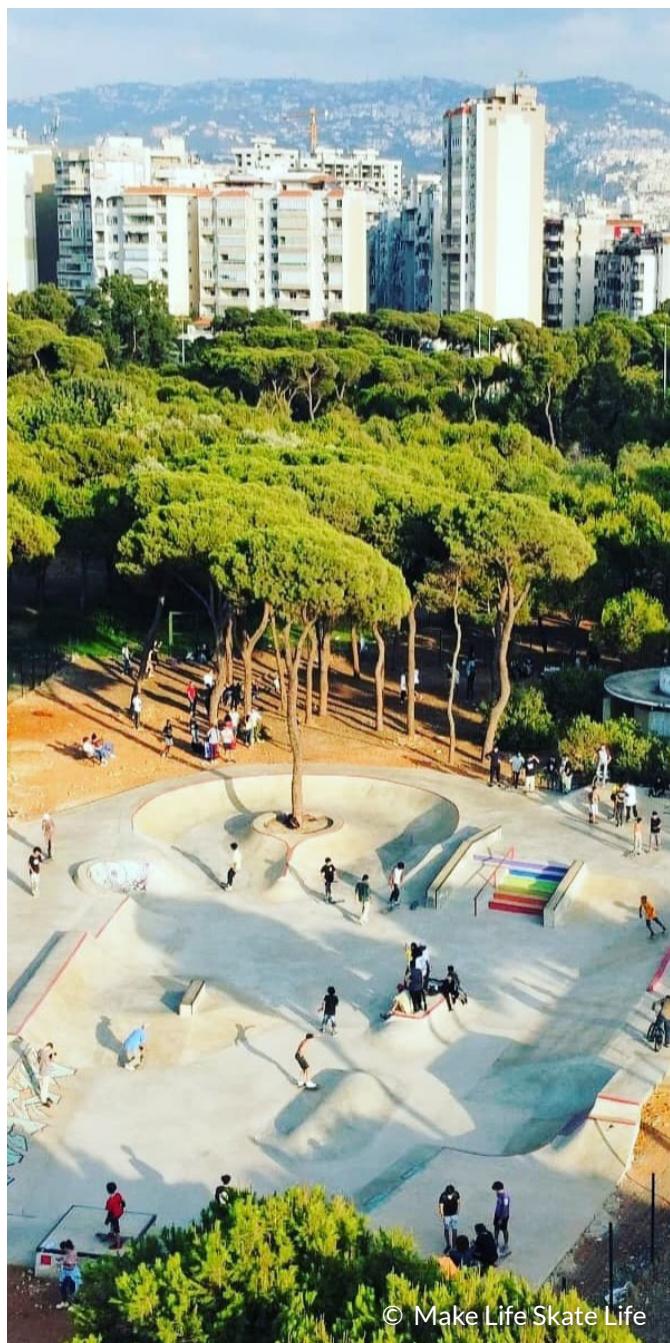
Make Life Skate Life (MLSL) started a crowdfunding campaign to fulfil their vision of a skate park in Beirut that would contribute to the reconstruction of the city and offer a space to release stress for children and youth.

What was the role of the residents?

Local and international volunteers came together to build the park. The skating community, and other local stakeholders offered skating lessons (free or paid) to ensure the sustainability of the park.

Relevant links:

- <https://beirut-today.com/2021/09/23/snoubar-skatepark-a-new-haven-for-skaters-and-more-in-lebanon/>
- <https://arcenciel.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Impact-report-2021.pdf>



© Make Life Skate Life



© Samantha Robison

Laziza park

Implementing actor: Rashed Kheir

Partners: UN-Habitat Lebanon

Funding: Embassy of Japan in Lebanon

Description:

The Laziza park was upgraded by adding street furniture and solar lighting, and included lighting the surrounding Laziza stairs.

Project start: January 2021

Project end: May 2022

Budget: 15,000 USD

Ownership: Private

How was the project initiated?

UN-Habitat Lebanon mapped public spaces within the area of Achrafieh and Rmeil and identified the Laziza park (established by GRO Beirut) and William Hawi public park for upgrading. UN-Habitat Lebanon launched a call for proposals to rehabilitate the Laziza park and William Hawi public park with funding from the Japanese embassy.

What was the role of the residents?

Residents living by the park, Rashed Kheir team and volunteers participated in the clean-up, construction, and planting. After the rehabilitation, residents and Rashed Kheir volunteers took care of the plants and activated the park in various community activities.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cag0ZzCsAcM/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>
- <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cea9p7tsl4B/>
- <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CjGpCkNDrbf/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>



© Rashed Kheir



© Rashed Kheir

William Hawi municipal garden

Implementing actor: Rashed Kheir

Partners: UN-Habitat Lebanon

Funding: Embassy of Japan in Lebanon

Description:

William Hawi park was upgraded by adding street furniture and solar lighting.

Project start: January 2021

Project end: May 2022

Budget: 20,000 USD

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

UN-Habitat Lebanon mapped public spaces within the area of Achrafieh and Rmeil and identified the Laziza park (established by GROW Beirut) and William Hawi public park for upgrading. UN-Habitat Lebanon launched a call for proposals to rehabilitate the Laziza park and William Hawi public park with funding from the Japanese embassy.

What was the role of the residents?

Residents living by the park, Rashed Kheir team and volunteers participated in the clean-up, construction, and planting. After the rehabilitation, residents and Rashed Kheir volunteers took care of the plants and activated the park in various community activities.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.instagram.com/p/CdwcoelV5b/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>



Rashet Kheir community garden

Implementing actor: Rashet Kheir

Partners: UNESCO

Funding: UNFPA

Description:

A gardening project in Rmeil that consisted of developing a community garden in a building's shared area where residents could grow their vegetables.

Project start: November 2020

Project end: May 2021

Budget: 1,500 USD

Ownership: Private

How was the project initiated?

The project was implemented as part of the UNFPA grant directed to youth, helping them cope with the blast through hands-on activities.

What was the role of the residents?

Residents attended multiple carpentry workshops, built the planters and planted vegetables. The residents shared the responsibility of using and maintaining the garden.

Relevant links:

Info not found



Karantina public park rehabilitation

Implementing actor: CatalyticAction

Partners: Terre Des Hommes Italy in Lebanon, AUB Neighbourhood Initiative, Nusaned, Municipality of Beirut

Funding: UNICEF Lebanon, Impact Lebanon

Description:

The rehabilitation of Karantina Public Park is a project implemented in response to the Beirut Port Blast. This project sought to rehabilitate the park and create a safe space for children to play and call their own. A participatory approach was adopted with children, adolescents and their caregivers to understand their needs and express their vision of the park. The damages caused by the blast were repaired, the park was rehabilitated (bathrooms, play items, landscaping, gate, windows, guards' room) and new elements were added such as a multipurpose indoor child-friendly space, an outdoor play house, new play items, multiple storage units and access paths.

Project start: August 2020

Project end: March 2021

Budget: 50,000 USD

Ownership: Public





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How was the project initiated?

CatalyticAction worked in the Karantina neighbourhood in 2016 to design and build the play items in the park following a participatory approach. Karantina was one of the neighbourhoods most impacted by the blast. CatalyticAction visited the neighbourhood to support the children and the families they worked with since 2016. As part of the participatory needs assessment carried out by CatalyticAction, they identified that children and young people needed a safe space to cope with the drastic changes, and needed to have agency in the recovery of their neighbourhood. CatalyticAction started working in the park voluntarily as they mobilised for partnerships and funding to carry out the rehabilitation. With the park rehabilitation, a three-year co-design program was initiated by CatalyticAction and it is still ongoing until today.

What was the role of the residents?

Children, adolescents and caregivers were key partners in this project as they participated in all the phases of the project from ideation to design, implementation and activation. Participatory design activities included drawing, painting, collages, storytelling, 'Let's be architects', model making and mapping. Caregivers were involved in design consultations, interviews and participatory observations. Workers from the area were hired as part of the construction works. Children also took part in the construction phase by creating a mosaic on top of one of the benches, painting and leaving their permanent mark on the space. The park's guards are residents from the neighbourhood who were also engaged in the participatory approach that rehabilitated and activated the park. After the rehabilitation was completed, residents of all age groups participated in the activation and upkeep of the park such as planting and gardening, community engaged theatre, street art parades and clean ups.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.catalyticaction.org/karantina-2/>
- <https://www.catalyticaction.org/karantina-park-rehabilitation-participatory-design/>
- <https://www.catalyticaction.org/kan-ya-makan-program/>

Kaskas park

Implementing actor: CatalyticAction

Partners: Himaya, Municipality of Beirut

Funding: UNICEF Lebanon

Description:

The project rehabilitated a neglected and unsafe public park into an inclusive, accessible and child friendly space that could be used by the local community for everyday use, activities and gatherings. To minimise waste, CatalyticAction rehabilitated the existing steel swing structures by aligning, adapting and joining them together to create one big play structure. To make the play space more inclusive and fun we also added new elements including a nest swing, a slide and a place to climb. The design maximised the use of park by all age groups by providing new seating areas, an amphitheatre, a long workshop table and paving most of the park flooring. This new layout allowed more activities to happen simultaneously in the space. The project also included the rehabilitation of the bathrooms, as well implementing a new accessible bathroom.

Project start: January 2021

Project end: July 2021

Budget: 90,000 USD (for two parks of Kaskas and Karm El Arees)

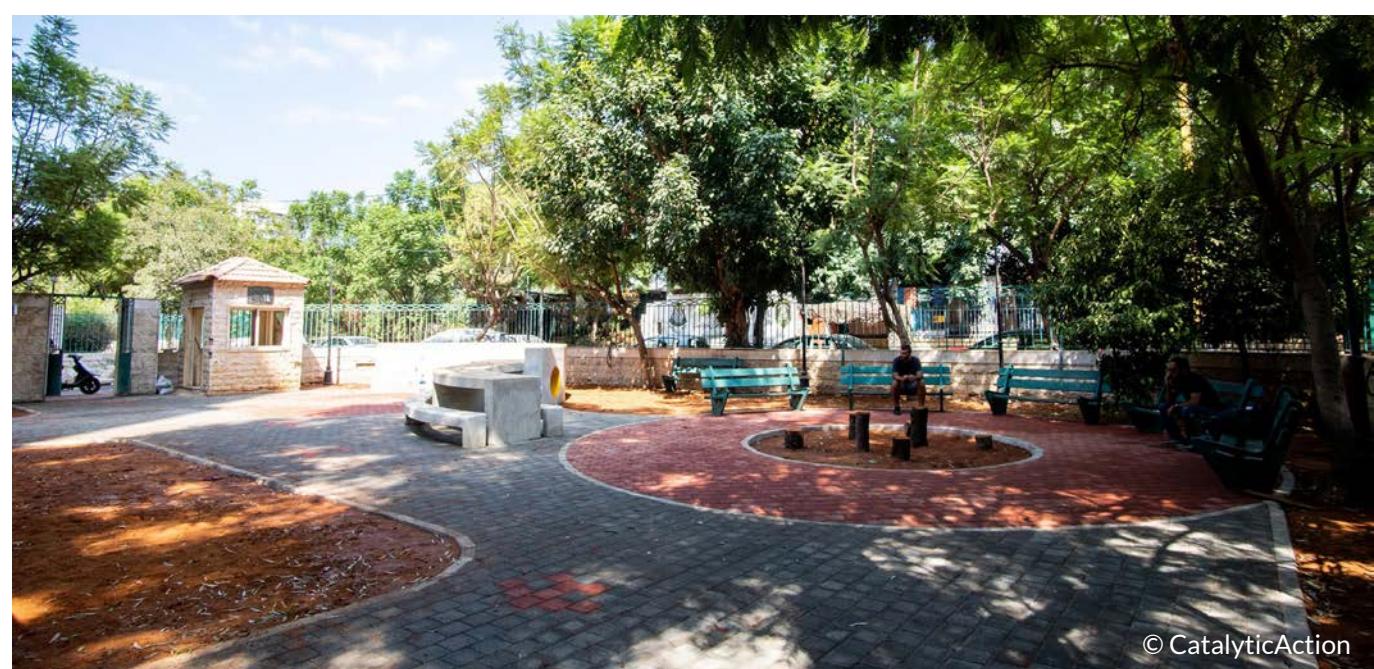
Ownership: Public



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How was the project initiated?

Before the blast, Himaya in direct coordination with the municipality of Beirut identified three public parks to create child-friendly spaces in the city of Beirut but did not start working on the project. After the blast, the need for these safe public spaces became greater. Himaya secured the funds from UNICEF Lebanon to rehabilitate two parks in Kaskas and Karm El Arees.

What was the role of the residents?

Himaya did an open call to hire and train youth animators to facilitate children's activities in the child-friendly parks. Children's activities started before the blast, then were adjusted after the blast to offer psycho-social support. CatalyticAction conducted online consultations with the youth animators because the COVID19 lockdown prevented activities in the park. CatalyticAction interviewed the municipality and gained insights about previously run activities in the park. CatalyticAction conducted interviews with residents and nearby businesses. Once rehabilitation was completed, children's activities were regularly conducted in the park by Himaya animators and Lebanese Spotlight volunteers.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.catalyticaction.org/kaskas-safe-public-park/>



Karm El Arees park

Implementing actor: CatalyticAction

Partners: Himaya, Municipality of Beirut

Funding: UNICEF Lebanon

Description:

The park was rehabilitated to become more inclusive, accessible and child friendly while being suitable for use by the local community for everyday use and gatherings. Divided into several levels, the park is naturally very green and the design developed by CatalyticAction sought to reflect this. To rehabilitate the play space for children, the damaged plastic play structures were removed and replaced with four tower-like play structures. Connected by an accessible path, these towers are cladded with wood to preserve the natural feeling of the trees. CatalyticAction designed a new workshop area with two tables and benches that can be used for activities with the community or people who want to gather there, including wheelchair users. To ensure full accessibility to the park two main access ramps were added, one at the entrance gate, and one from the entrance level to the first level – where the new inclusive play area can be found. The bathrooms were also rehabilitated and a new accessible bathroom was added.

Project start: January 2021

Project end: July 2021



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Budget: 90,000 USD (for two parks of Kaskas and Karm El Arees)

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

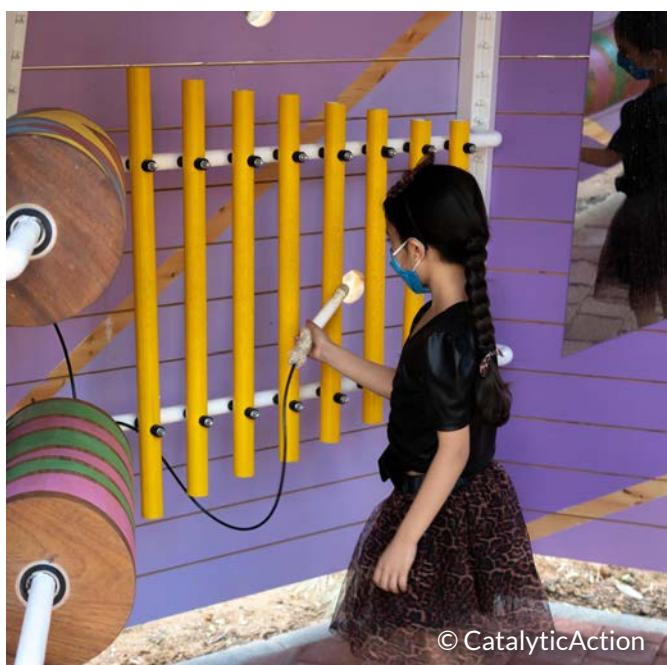
Before the blast, Himaya in direct coordination with the municipality of Beirut identified three public parks to create child-friendly spaces in the city of Beirut but did not start working on the project. After the blast, the need for these safe public spaces became greater. Himaya secured the funds from UNICEF Lebanon to rehabilitate two parks in Kaskas and Karm El Arees.

What was the role of the residents?

Himaya did an open call to hire and train youth animators to facilitate children's activities in the child-friendly parks. Children's activities started before the blast, then were adjusted after the blast to offer psycho-social support. CatalyticAction conducted online consultations with the youth animators because the COVID19 lockdown prevented activities in the park. CatalyticAction interviewed the municipality, and gained insights from AUB students who had previously run activities in the park. CatalyticAction conducted interviews with residents and nearby businesses. Once rehabilitation was completed, children's activities were regularly conducted in the park by Himaya animators and Lebanese Spotlight volunteers. The project partners also collaborated with theOtherDada to create two pocket forests in commemoration of the victims of the 2020 Beirut Blast and the Japanese botanist Dr Miyawaki, who died that year. The victims' families helped to plant these miniature forests, which will benefit children by adding a component of nature therapy to the park, as well as improving the biodiversity of the area.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.catalyticaction.org/karm-el-arees-safe-public-park/>



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Ghobeiry public park inclusive playscape

Implementing actor: CatalyticAction

Partners: Terre des Hommes Italy in Lebanon (TDH), Municipality of Ghobeiry

Funding: UNICEF Lebanon

Description:

This project involved the rehabilitation of the park. It focused on making the space more accessible for its multi-generational and varied users, including children from the schools nearby and caregivers for whom the park is a vital public space. The design built upon the existing features of the park, including an abundance of trees providing natural shade and an empty pavilion. It also focused on creating spaces which catered to its different users. To this end, the design involved the building of five new spaces. In the existing pavilion, CatalyticAction designed a space for resting and an open classroom which could be used for activities and workshops. The other three spaces were centred on play in newly built pavilions, with a variety of coloured walls each indicating a different type of play. The existing toilets and the guards' room were upgraded, and access ramps were added throughout the park to ensure that the different areas can be accessed through an interconnected pathway.

Project start: March 2021

Project end: September 2021





Budget: 33,000 USD

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

TDH Italy initiated the project after identifying the need for a safe space for children in the southern suburbs of Beirut. Ghobeiry public park was selected for the intervention being located in a high density and vulnerable neighbourhood, near Sabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camps, and within a close proximity to several schools in the area.

What was the role of the residents?

The design was informed by a participatory assessment involving interviews and FGDs with residents, key stakeholders and the municipality; as well as hands-on co-design workshops with children and youth. Children participated in drawing activities during which they drew the different kinds of birds – some realistic, some imaginary! These designs were then laser cut into woodcuttings which have been installed on the colourful pavilions throughout the park.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.catalyticaction.org/ghobeiry-park/>



Inclusive urban gardens

Implementing actor: Design for Communities (D4C)

Partners: Arcenciel, Ayuda Intercambio y Desarrollo (AIDA) Lebanon, Chiyah Municipality

Funding: Barcelona City Council

Description:

An urban garden that contributes to the vision for a sustainable and inclusive municipality, which also includes an increased access to healthy food among minority groups (vulnerable women, refugees and persons with disabilities).

Project start: January 2021

Project end: January 2022

Budget: 80,405 USD

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

Arcenciel applied for a grant launched by the Barcelona City Council in partnership with AIDA Lebanon with the aim of improving the Chiyah public garden.

What was the role of the residents?

Vulnerable women, refugees and persons with disabilities in the area were engaged in the activation phase of the urban garden (planting and harvesting). They also attended training sessions provided by an agronomist to support the implementation of organic farming techniques.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.instagram.com/p/CgCblwluELv/?igshid=NDk5N2NIZjQ=>
- <https://www.instagram.com/p/CiiP4sKsN1D/?igshid=NDk5N2NIZjQ=>
- <https://arcenciel.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Impact-report-2021.pdf>



Karm El Arees park (GVC)

Implementing actor: Gruppo di Volontariato Civile (GVC)

Partners: Info not found

Funding: Info not found

Description:

The intervention consisted of implementing an accessible ramp linking the first and second levels of the park and rehabilitating the electricity network of the park.

Project start: May 2021

Project end: August 2021

Budget: Info not found

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

GVC had funding available to do rehabilitation works in the park. They consulted with CatalyticAction and Himaya as they were already rehabilitating the park. CatalyticAction suggested adding a ramp to make the park more accessible.

What was the role of the residents?

No residents were engaged in the project.

Relevant links:

Info not found



Sahet Al Khodr community space rehabilitation

Implementing actor: Beirut Urban Lab (BUL) at the American University of Beirut

Partners: University College London (UCL), District D, ACTED, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)

Funding: UCL, International Development Research Centre (IDRC), ACTED, NRC

Description:

The project included upgrading Sahet Al Khodr as part of an open space network by adding solar-powered street lights and urban furniture from recycled debris. Canopies were installed above shops. Sidewalks and several speed bumps were added to facilitate the pedestrian flow. Citrus trees were planted. In addition, the project included the rehabilitation of building facades along the rehabilitated street.

Project start: April 2021

Project end: May 2022

Budget: 80,000 USD

Ownership: Public



© Beirut Urban Lab



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How was the project initiated?

BUL were working in Karantina on an urban recovery strategy and the project came as an outcome of the research. The intervention location was identified through field observations, interviews, community consultations and documentation of the socio-spatial practices in the area.

What was the role of the residents?

The project engaged citizen scientists and other community members in a participatory design approach through surveys, interviews, participation in community consultations. Residents participated in the design through multiple workshops. Citizen scientists were also involved as site supervisors during implementation; they were the link between BUL and the contractor. Residents were involved in the implementation as a skilled and unskilled labour force; (cleaning the site, painting, plastering, etc.)



Relevant links:

- <https://www.beiruturbanlab.com/en/Details/818/launching-of-the-rehabilitation-project-of-sahet-al-khodor-in-karantina>
- <https://www.beiruturbanlab.com/en/Details/895/a-spatial-intervention-in-al-khodor-sub-neighborhood>



Karantina neighbourhood intervention: Makani

Implementing actor: CatalyticAction

Partners: Terre des Hommes Italy in Lebanon (TDH), AUB Neighbourhood Initiative, Municipality of Beirut, RELIEF centre at University College London (UCL), Nusaned, Ghiath Al Robih (artist)

Funding: UNICEF Lebanon, Impact Lebanon

Description:

The Karantina neighbourhood intervention 'Makani' – my place – is a project developed to provide the area's residents with a safe, inclusive and playful public space. In Karantina, the availability of safe and accessible public space is highly lacking. By transforming an area of neglected and unused public land into a safe and child friendly public space, this project seeks to tackle this absence. To ensure the space accurately reflects both the needs and desires of its users, the project employed co-design methods that allowed the neighbourhood's diverse voices to be heard. The public space was designed to create a safe space that both enabled adults to gather with their friends, and children to have a fun and exciting place to play. It included a tiled surface, a colourful and playful bench, single seating, a mural, greenery, bicycle racks and rehabilitation of the immediate surrounding facades.

Project start: February 2021

Project end: June 2021

Budget: 25,000 USD

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

Throughout CatalyticAction's participatory approach with residents, the need for safe and accessible public space in Karantina was identified. With reconstruction efforts mainly focusing on shelter rehabilitation, the spaces in between residences where people meet and socialise, and where children often play nearby their houses, were highly lacking. Following the successful implementation of the Karantina public park rehabilitation between CatalyticAction and Terre Des Hommes Italy, the partners decided to secure funding for the implementation of this safe public space as an urban pocket, a space accessible to everyone.



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CatalyticAction with the support of AUB neighbourhood initiative mapped the public spaces in Karantina and identified this plot of land for intervention which was endorsed by the municipality.

What was the role of the residents?

To select the site of intervention, CatalyticAction used various selection methodologies including participatory observation, mapping, and interviewing local community members and key stakeholders to find plots of public land that would ensure accessibility to all. Once the site was identified, residents were recruited as citizen scientists, they were trained to work as social scientists and conduct research that accurately reflects their communities' needs. They studied the site of intervention as well as its surroundings to develop a clear understanding of the space. The researchers conducted this research by engaging the wider local community of various age groups including children, through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews and transect walks. Children and youth were also involved in clean-ups and co-design activities to envision the transformation of the space. A public design consultation invited residents to the site of intervention with the aim to collect feedback on the preliminary design in order to implement it in the final design. For the construction phase of the project workers from the area were hired to work on the construction site, and the project team negotiated with residents in the immediate surrounding to ensure that decisions around the construction worked for everyone. The citizen scientists were noting the engagement of the community as the work progressed. Once the spatial intervention was complete, residents were engaged in activation within several activities including painting the mural, skateboarding sessions, an open parade and an interactive theatre performance. The researchers monitored the impact of this intervention.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.catalyticaction.org/karantina-neighbourhood-intervention/>
- <https://www.catalyticaction.org/karantina-participatory-spatial-intervention/>
- <https://www.catalyticaction.org/makani-community-engagement/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JsuJA1HICqI>

Karantina streetscape

Implementing actor: CatalyticAction

Partners: UN-Habitat Lebanon, Municipality of Beirut

Funding: The Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), Fondation de France (FDF), CatalyticAction

Description:

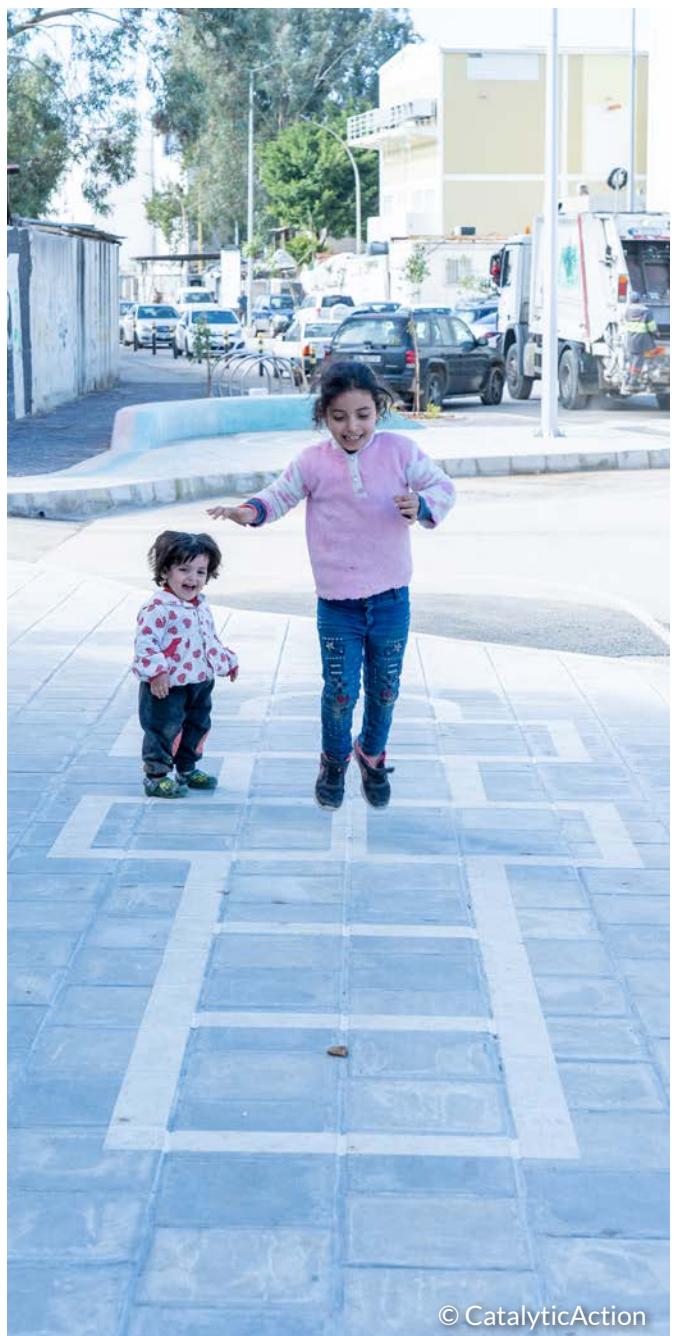
The project sought to upgrade the streets in the neighbourhood of Karantina, both around the Beirut Governmental Hospital, the National HIV and TB Centre and the Karantina Public Park. The design was underpinned by a participatory approach ensuring input from the local community around their needs, visions and aspirations for the space. The design centred on four key areas: making the area inclusive and pedestrian friendly, slowing the traffic, creating play opportunities for children and enhancing social activities.

Project start: June 2021

Project end: December 2021

Budget: 92,251 USD (UN-Habitat Lebanon: 45,000 USD; CatalyticAction: 11,761 USD; FDF: 35,490 USD)

Ownership: Public





How was the project initiated?

UN-Habitat Lebanon applied for a grant by SIDA to rehabilitate the HIV centre in Karantina and added the component of public spaces. UN-Habitat Lebanon launched a call for proposals that CatalyticAction applied for and won. CatalyticAction applied also for funding from FDF to create a more impactful project.

What was the role of the residents?

CatalyticAction implemented a range of participatory activities and interviews with children, young people and caregivers. Children and younger residents involved in these workshops were encouraged to view themselves as architects, they reflected on what they liked, disliked and thought could be improved around the site. Participatory tools included: Let's be architects, photovoice and participatory mapping. CatalyticAction also conducted informal interviews with regular users of the area including caregivers, business owners and military officers. For the construction phase, workers from the area were hired. Once the project was completed, residents were engaged in various activation events such as a street art parade, clean ups, and planting. Residents were engaged in the monitoring and evaluation post implementation.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.catalyticaction.org/karantina-streetscape/>
- <https://www.catalyticaction.org/karantina-streetscape-participatory-design/>
- <https://lebanon.un.org/en/174036-un-habitat-and-catalyticaction-rehabilitate-streets-and-sidewalks-karantina-%E2%80%93-making-key>

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Sidani street benches

Implementing actor: Development Inc.,
AUB Neighborhood Initiative

Partners: Info not found

Funding: Info not found

Description:

Benches with planters were made out of Development Inc.'s patented ROGP technology (Rejects of Glass & Plastic Technology) that recycled plastics and glass collected in Karantina from the debris of the Beirut port explosion and turned them into a durable material. The benches were placed on a sidewalk facing an art gallery where people used to play music and hang out. The sidewalk became an active social space.

Project start: Info not found

Project end: Info not found

Budget: Info not found

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

The project was done as part of the 'Rubble to Mountains' initiative that aimed at avoiding an environmental waste crisis following the Beirut blast by sorting and crushing the debris and using it to rebuild quarries and surrounding damaged mountainsides; additionally some of the recyclable glass and plastic were aimed at finding new life as outdoor urban furniture.

What was the role of the residents?

Info not found

Relevant links:

- <https://www.aub.edu.lb/communications/aub@work/Pages/explosion-rubble-glass-mountains-neighborhood-initiative-mona-hallak.aspx>
- <https://developmentinc.net/products#56880fd6-d274-49b8-b945-8b069b8e8ce1>



© Mona Hallak

ParticiPLAY 01

Implementing actor: Nusaned

Partners: Municipality of Bourj Hammoud, Chalmers University of Technology in Sweden by students Barne Haferkamp, Marie Middendorf, Karl Sandman and Amitis Fouladi, Cedars Environmental

Funding: Crowdfunding

Description:

The project created an inclusive play space that was designed and implemented using recycled materials. The intervention was implemented on the space of an existing single car parking on the street in Bourj Hammoud.

Project start: October 2020

Project end: June 2021

Budget: 8,000 USD

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

The project started as a proposal by students in Chalmers University of Technology in Sweden and evolved into a prototype that Nusaned aims to replicate in other areas.

What was the role of the residents?

The project engaged community members and students from the Armenian Evangelical School in Bourj Hammoud in a participatory design approach. The children used drawings to express their ideas that inspired the design.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.nusaned.org/en/participlay>
- <https://www.ovrlebanon.net/VirtualTours/ParticiPLAY01/>
- <https://youtu.be/Wkpj2UoCvoE>
- https://www.instagram.com/participlay_realitystudio/



Karantina Saydeh neighbourhood rehabilitation

Implementing actor: Offre Joie

Partners: Info not found

Funding: Info not found

Description:

Offre Joie rehabilitated the Karantina Saydet Al Najat church in Karantina, the Beirut fire brigade, houses and small businesses buildings in Karantina which also included fixing the buildings' entrances on the streets.

Project start: October 2020

Project end: Ongoing

Budget: Info not found

Ownership: Public and private

How was the project initiated?

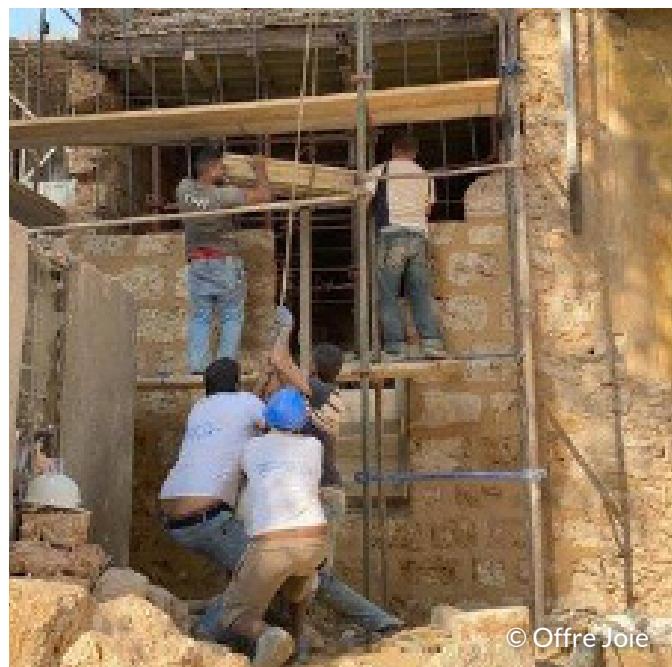
Info not found

What was the role of the residents?

Info not found

Relevant links:

- https://offrejoie.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/November2021_Offre-Joie_Impact-Report.pdf



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Gholam public stairs rehabilitation

Implementing actor: Beirut Heritage Initiative (BHI)

Partners: Together Li Beirut, The House of Christmas, Beirut Urban Lab (BUL) at the American University of Beirut, ACE, URBI, Francis Landscapes

Funding: The Ministries of Ecological Transition and Territorial Cohesion, Culture and Health and Prevention at the French Ministry of Culture

Description:

Gholam public stairs and their connecting alleyway were repaired and upgraded after the damage they sustained from the Beirut port explosion as part of the Gholam Cluster project by BHI.

Project start: October 2021

Project end: December 2021

Budget: 25,000 EUR

Ownership: Public noting that the alleyway is private with a public use

How was the project initiated?

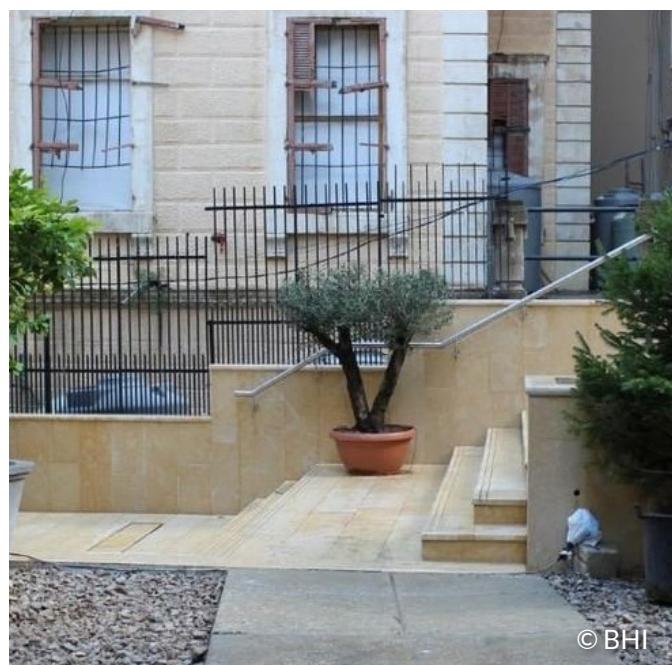
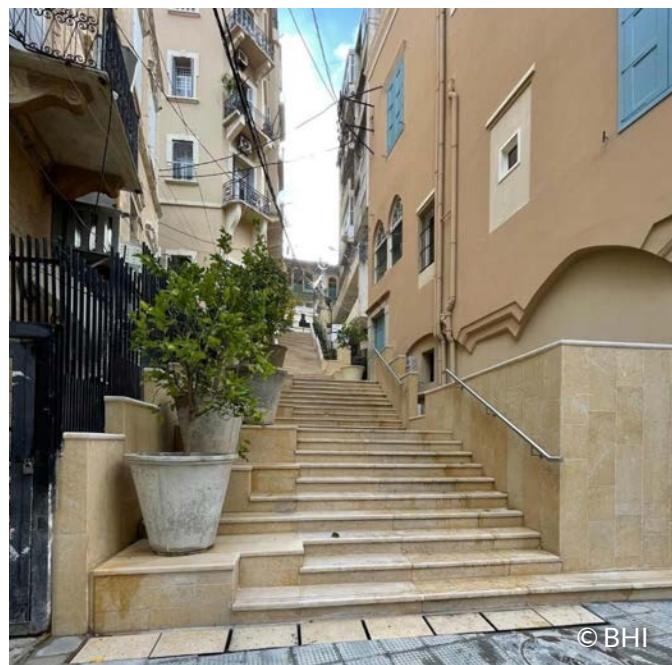
BHI were already working on the Gholam Cluster project and identified the need to work on the stairs and alleyway.

What was the role of the residents?

Residents were not directly engaged in the rehabilitation of the stairs and alleyway due to the limited timeline of the project.

Relevant links:

- <https://beirutheritageinitiative.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Beirut-Heritage-Initiative-Report-2020-2021.pdf>
- <https://beirutheritageinitiative.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Rmeil-722-Report.pdf>
- <https://beirutheritageinitiative.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Beirut-Heritage-Initiative-2021-2022-Annual-Report-Id2.pdf>
- <https://www.instagram.com/p/CaPpL16NytO/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>



Beirut's public stairs

Implementing actor: CatalyticAction

Partners: UN-Habitat Lebanon, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

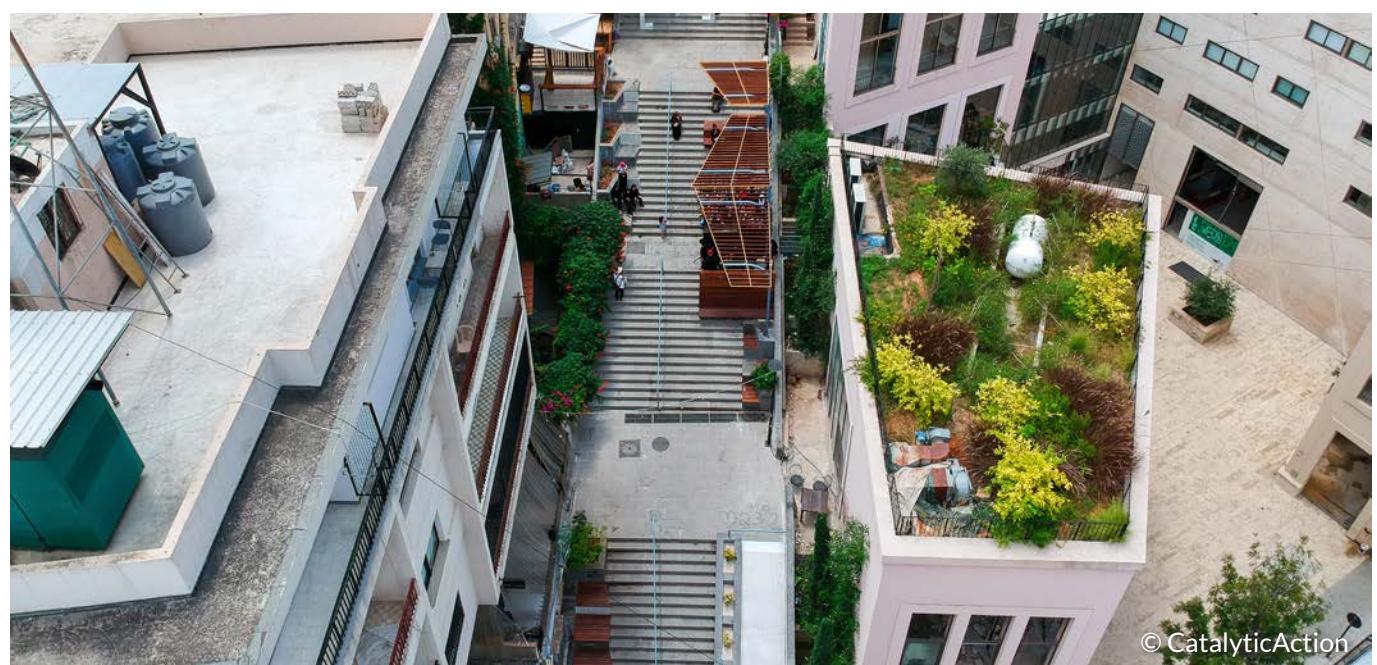
Funding: Block by Block, Austrian Embassy, CatalyticAction, Watanili

Description:

This project aimed to rehabilitate and enhance the social activities on the stairs of St. Nicholas, Vendome and Laziza in the neighbourhoods of Mar Mikhael and Gemmayzeh. The rehabilitation included fixing damages, adding urban furniture, increasing play opportunities and improving accessibility. The designs incorporated creative seating options spread along the stairs, in strategic locations, to enable the users to enjoy the social character of the stairs. A landmark shade structure and a stage were designed to facilitate social and cultural activities. To increase accessibility, especially for the elderly residents, handrails were added. To make the stairs more playful, interactive sensory play items such as speaking pipes, rolling spheres and a slide were incorporated. Coloured tiles were added to create playful spaces for gathering and to bring a variety of colour to the staircases.

Project start: August 2021

Project end: June 2022





Budget: 50,350 USD (UN-Habitat Lebanon: 46,000 USD; CatalyticAction: 2,750 USD; Watanili: 1,600 USD)

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

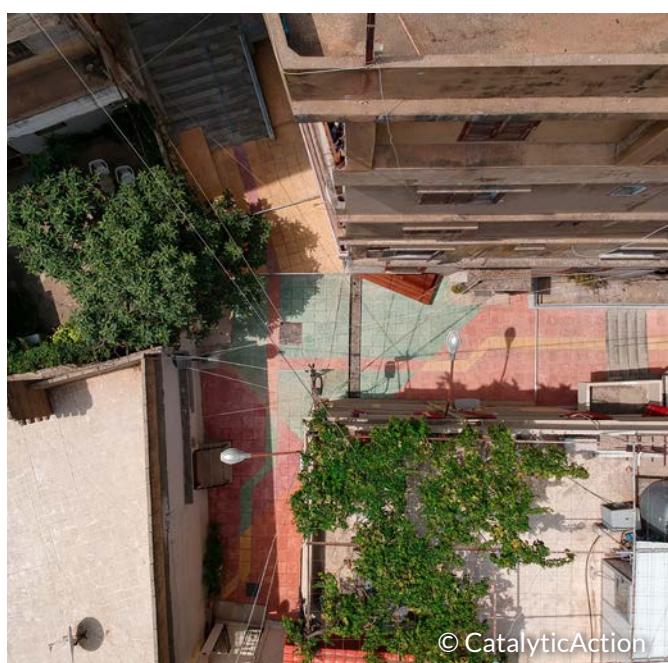
UN-Habitat Lebanon and CatalyticAction applied for a grant through Block by Block foundation to work on public spaces in Beirut. UN-Habitat Lebanon and CatalyticAction chose to work on stairs as public spaces for their importance in Beirut as crucial public spaces of the city that needed rehabilitation after the Beirut port blast. UN-Habitat Lebanon and CatalyticAction mapped Beirut's public stairs within the area affected by the blast and following a selection criteria they identified the sites for intervention: St. Nicholas, Vendome and Laziza stairs.

What was the role of the residents?

Through a series of participatory workshops with the stairs users, the design for this project involved direct engagement with residents of these neighbourhoods with a focus on using Minecraft to co-design with youth. Using the 'Let's be Architects' participatory design tool, youth participants visualised these ideas by drawing and annotating axonometric views of the stairs. Using Block By Block, participants built on these ideas to project their ideas onto virtual Minecraft models of the stairs. CatalyticAction also conducted interviews and focus group discussions with regular users, residents and businesses on the stairs. CatalyticAction engaged youth, residents and passersby in a few community engaged construction activities such as painting the rolling spheres that were later on installed on the handrails. Once the rehabilitation was completed, CatalyticAction engaged youth, residents, businesses and passers by of various age groups including elderly in the activation of the stairs: collective mural, planting, puppet show, interactive street parade and clean-ups.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.catalyticaction.org/beiruts-public-stairs/>
- <https://www.catalyticaction.org/beiruts-public-stairs-block-by-block/>
- <https://www.catalyticaction.org/beiruts-public-stairs-activation/>



Borderless community centre

Implementing actor: Borderless NGO

Partners: None

Funding: Crowdfunding

Description:

The project established a community centre in Karantina to provide services (educational and social) for the community, especially children.

Project start: August 2020

Project end: December 2020

Budget: Info not found

Ownership: Private

How was the project initiated?

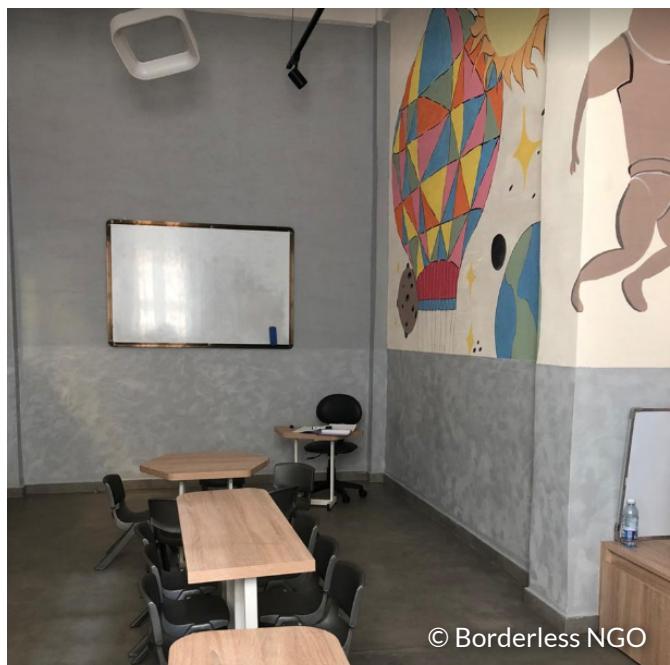
Borderless identified the need for a community centre in Karantina to conduct their regular activities with children so they raised funds to establish a centre to run their activities from.

What was the role of the residents?

Borderless NGO invites residents and mostly children to engage in activities they are running at the centre.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.borderlessngo.org/our-work>



Crossing Together, Latin Apostolic Vicariate community centre

Implementing actor: Design for Communities (D4C)

Partners: Roman Catholic Apostolic Vicariate Church, Design Impact Lab (DI-Lab), American University of Beirut (AUB)

Funding: Info not found

Description:

A pilot community centre project set in a former food market shop that was destroyed and abandoned after the blast. This small community centre in Rmeil district hosts several educational and cultural activities for vulnerable communities. A flexible communal space was designed with industrial reused and upcycled materials at the forefront of the community centre where gatherings, workshops and training sessions are held.

Project start: November 2020

Project end: December 2020

Budget: Info not found

Ownership: Private

How was the project initiated?

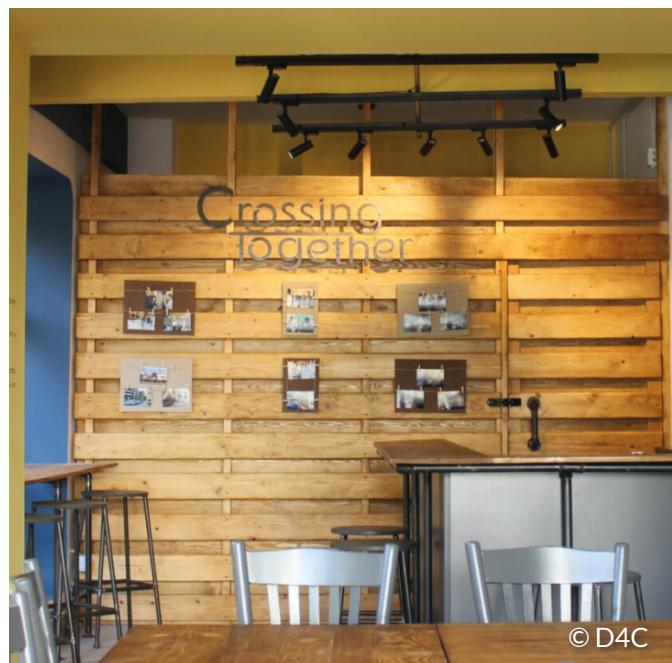
The project partners identified the high demand of a community centre in the densely populated neighbourhood with precarious conditions after the Beirut blast.

What was the role of the residents?

Residents were involved in the activation of the space.

Relevant links:

- <https://d4communities.org/d4c-charity-projects/crossing-together/>



Karantina child friendly community centre

Implementing actor: CatalyticAction

Partners: Terre des Hommes Italy in Lebanon (TDH), Municipality of Beirut, Guard regiment command

Funding: Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS)

Description:

The project rehabilitated and transformed an unused public building that was heavily damaged by the Beirut blast into a child friendly, playful and safe space. The building's structure and services were rehabilitated to address the evident need for maintenance. CatalyticAction adapted the existing layout of the building to create new spatial configurations that enable a variety of activities. The result of this project was a child-friendly multipurpose space, where children, youth and the wider community could meet and engage in activities, contributing to both improved resilience and mental health.

Project start: November 2021

Project end: July 2022

Budget: 50,750 EUR

Ownership: Public





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How was the project initiated?

TDH Italy in Lebanon identified the need to create a safe, child-friendly indoor space that can be used for education and activities as well as training and meetings for NGOs. TDH submitted a proposal to AICS to create a child friendly community centre within the area of Karantina, Achrafieh and its surrounding. The selection was narrowed down to Karantina since it is a neighbourhood with multiple vulnerabilities, and no schools within the neighbourhood. In parallel, throughout CatalyticAction's work in the neighbourhood of Karantina on co-designed public spaces – as a response to the Beirut port explosion – the community highlighted the need for an indoor community centre that could host a wide range of activities. CatalyticAction, in close collaboration with the community and the municipality, were able to identify the site of intervention in Karantina: a derelict public storage space. TDH partnered with CatalyticAction to implement the project.

What was the role of the residents?

To select the site of intervention participatory observations and interviews with residents and local municipal guards were carried out. The design of the child friendly community centre was underpinned by a participatory approach ensuring input from children, caregivers, our partners and the local authorities around their needs, visions and aspirations for the space. CatalyticAction conducted tailored activities for the two age groups of children who were identified as key users of the space: Preschoolers (3-5 years old) who participated together with their mothers, and young children (6-14 years old). The participatory tools used included storytelling, puppets, building blocks, drawing, 3D model making, plasticine and picture prompts. Key stakeholders were also interviewed to give their input to the design. After the rehabilitation was completed, the community of various age groups participated in the activation of the centre such as guards training on child protection, community training, children's activities, and community committee meetings.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.catalyticaction.org/child-friendly-community-centre/>
- <https://www.catalyticaction.org/child-friendly-community-centre-participatory-design/>

Maroun Naccach theatre

Implementing actor: Medair

Partners: Info not found

Funding: Swiss Solidarity

Description:

Rehabilitation of the main facilities of the theatre.

Project start: April 2021

Project end: July 2021

Budget: 45,000 USD

Ownership: Private

How was the project initiated?

Info not found

What was the role of the residents?

Info not found

Relevant links:

Info not found



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Nation Station community centre

Implementing actor: Nation Station

Partners: Info not found

Funding: Info not found

Description:

A grassroots initiative transformed an abandoned gas station into a disaster relief community centre and a platform for young activists to launch sustainable development projects.

Project start: August 2020

Project end: Info not found

Budget: Info not found

Ownership: Private

How was the project initiated?

Nation Station was established the morning after the explosion by Hussein Kazoun, 28, an organic farmer and the owner of a produce delivery company. Kazoun started distributing free produce to Geitawi's residents from the abandoned gas station; other volunteers soon joined him offering their own services.

What was the role of the residents?

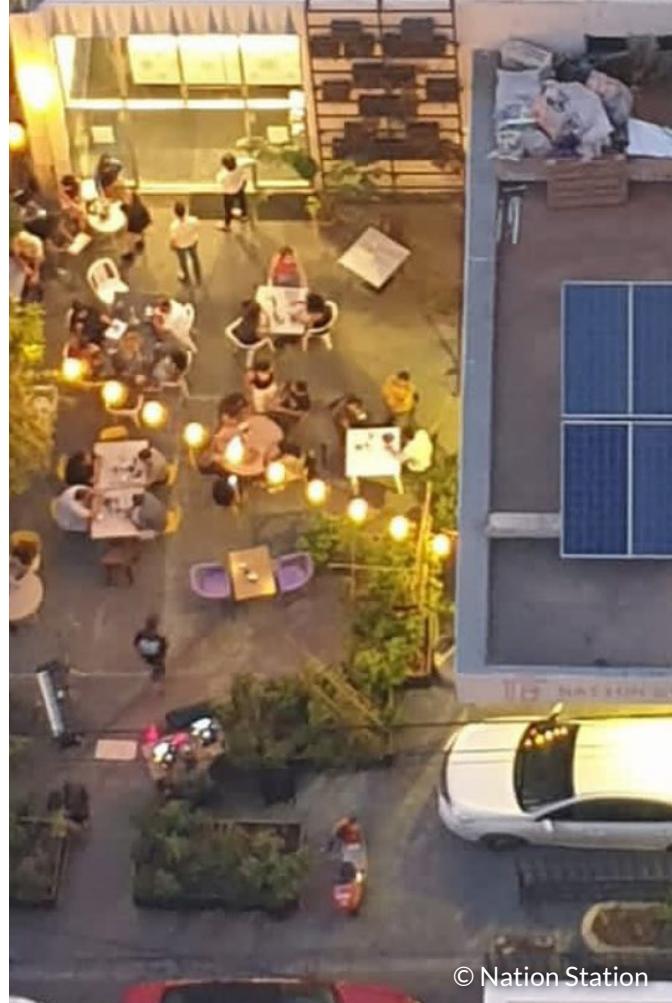
Nation Station is a community driven project - by the community, for the community. Residents and visitors participate in regular activities the centre holds such as Cine Club, Farmers' market and Aperitivo Nights.

Relevant links:

- <https://nation-station.org>
- <https://www.beirut.com/l/64283>
- <https://www.gofundme.com/f/nation-station-beirut-disaster-relief>
- <https://www.npr.org/2020/08/27/905811376/after-beirut-blast-lebanese-volunteers-deliver-relief-the-state-fails-to-provide>



© Nation Station



© Nation Station

Massis Association

Implementing actor: Nusaned

Partners: Municipality of Bourj Hammoud

Funding: Impact Lebanon

Description:

A community centre in Bourj Hammoud (Massis Club) was rehabilitated to resume its activities.

Project start: May 2021

Project end: July 2021

Budget: 1,411 USD

Ownership: Private

How was the project initiated?

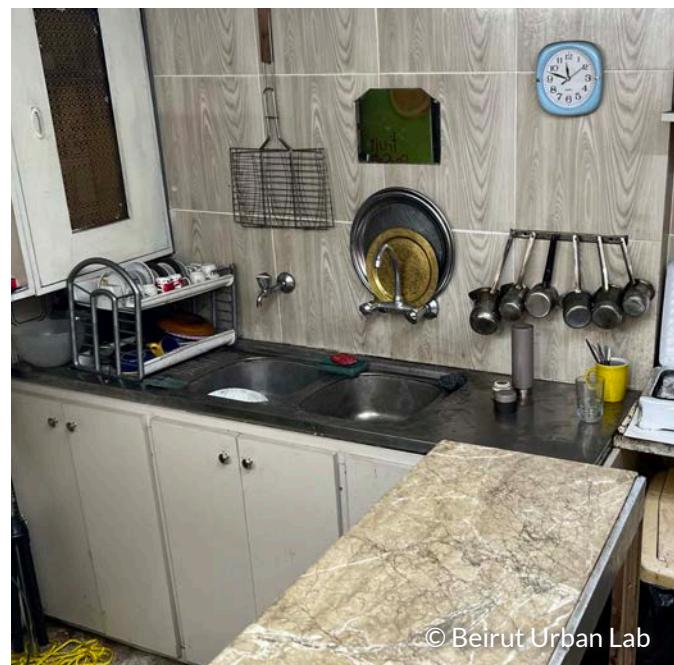
The project was initiated upon the community's request to Nusaned as part of the NGO's repair efforts within Bourj Hammoud municipality.

What was the role of the residents?

Residents were not involved.

Relevant links:

Info not found



Rashet Kheir HQ

Implementing actor: Rashet Kheir

Partners: None

Funding: Info not found

Description:

The NGO's office space was established as a community centre that is open, safe for young people, and providing recreational and psychosocial activities to residents living in its vicinity.

Project start: July 2021

Project end: August 2021

Budget: 6,670 USD

Ownership: Private

How was the project initiated?

Rashet Kheir rented and rehabilitated an apartment to hold their operations close to their projects and the community they work with.

What was the role of the residents?

Residents volunteered to help set up the NGO office and participated in running activities in the centre.

Relevant links:

Info not found



BLAST (beautiful Lebanese artists in strong times) community space

Implementing actor: Rashed Kheir

Partners: Li Beirut, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

Funding: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

Description:

A warehouse that was initially used by Rashed Kheir was turned into a community centre for youth to host various activities for members of the local community.

Project start: October 2020

Project end: November 2020

Budget: 39,500 USD

Ownership: Private

How was the project initiated?

Rashed Kheir applied for a grant launched by UNESCO to rehabilitate the space.

What was the role of the residents?

Youth worked on the carpentry, painting the walls and collecting materials that got upcycled as furniture for the space.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.instagram.com/p/CMcmz4IMjPI/?igshid=NDk5N2NlZjQ=>



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Assabil public library Bashoura rehabilitation

Implementing actor: Medair

Partners: Assabil NGO, Municipality of Beirut

Funding: Crowdfunding

Description:

The three public libraries managed by Assabil were rehabilitated to restore them to a functional state after the damages caused by the port explosion

Project start: August 2020

Project end: November 2020

Budget: 51,500 USD (for all three libraries)

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

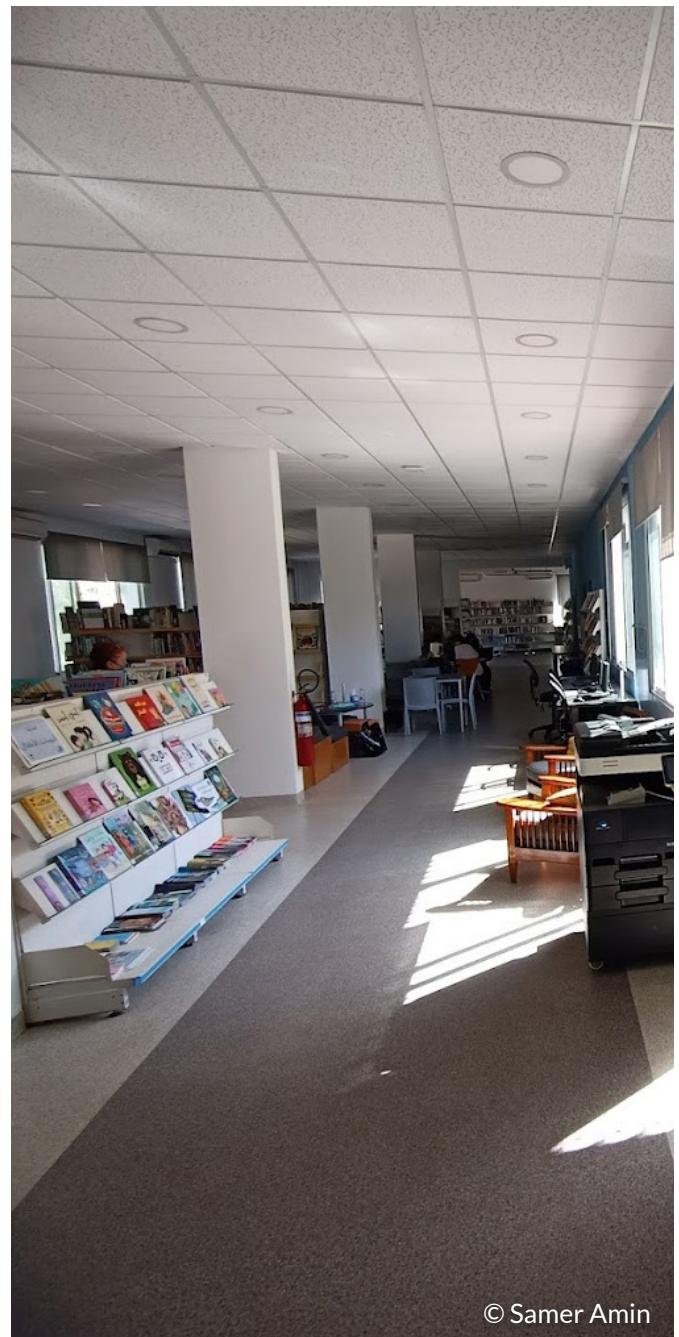
Assabil started a crowdfunding campaign to rehabilitate the three libraries that they manage.

What was the role of the residents?

Volunteers joined in the cleanup of the libraries from rubble and glass caused by the blast.

Relevant links:

- <https://assabil.com/rebuilding-the-libraries/>



© Samer Amin



© Samer Amin

Assabil public library Monot rehabilitation

Implementing actor: Medair

Partners: Assabil NGO, Municipality of Beirut

Funding: Crowdfunding

Description:

The three public libraries managed by Assabil were rehabilitated to restore them to a functional state after the damages caused by the port explosion

Project start: August 2020

Project end: September 2020

Budget: 51,500 USD (for all three libraries)

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

Assabil started a crowdfunding campaign to rehabilitate the three libraries that they manage.

What was the role of the residents?

Volunteers joined in the cleanup of the libraries from rubble and glass caused by the blast.

Relevant links:

- <https://assabil.com/rebuilding-the-libraries/>



© Assabil

Assabil public library Geitawi rehabilitation

Implementing actor: Info not found

Partners: Assabil NGO, Municipality of Beirut

Funding: Crowdfunding

Description:

The three public libraries managed by Assabil were rehabilitated to restore them to a functional state after the damages caused by the port explosion

Project start: August 2020

Project end: November 2020

Budget: 51,500 USD (for all three libraries)

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

Assabil started a crowdfunding campaign to rehabilitate the three libraries that they manage.

What was the role of the residents?

Volunteers joined in the cleanup of the libraries from rubble and glass caused by the blast.

Relevant links:

- <https://assabil.com/rebuilding-the-libraries/>



Beirut explosion memorial

Implementing actor: ACUA foundation

Partners: Dori Hitti Architects

Funding: Info not found

Description:

The art installation is a red Christmas tree made up of people's silhouettes resembling the Lebanese citizens' national unity and strength following the 4th of August blast.

Project start: July 2021

Project end: July 2021

Budget: Info not found

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

Info not found

What was the role of the residents?

Residents were not involved.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.instagram.com/p/CRyZz6ZsHT4/?igshid=NDk5N2NIZjQ=>



Beirut bride

Implementing actor: Habib and Hani Tabcharany

Partners: None

Funding: None

Description:

The art installation features a female statue made from the rubble and glass of the blast, representing the strength of Lebanese women, and the will to rise from the ashes. Around that, there are concrete slabs (the death walls) along the edges of the median with brass plates with the names of the blast's victims engraved to commemorate their memory.

Project start: August 2020

Project end: August 2021

Budget: 25,000 USD

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

Habib and Hani Tabcharany initiated the idea of the art installation to memorialise the blast..

What was the role of the residents?

Residents were not involved.

Relevant links:

- <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1313479/one-beirut-neighborhoods-answer-to-memorializing-the-beirut-blast-a-new-public-plaza.html>



Liberty lady - Hayat min damar

Implementing actor: Hayat Nazer

Partners: People of Beirut

Funding: Self-funded by the artist

Relevant links:

- <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/lebanese-artist-sculpture-rubble-beirut-explosion-trnd/index.html>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWMVx3vilm>

Description:

An art installation shaped like a woman, made up of broken pieces that the artist collected from the streets of Beirut and from residents' homes.

Project start: September 2020

Project end: October 2020

Budget: Info not found

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

The project was a personal initiative after the artist took part in the debris cleanup following the blast, and decided to spark healing through art by creating this art installation.

What was the role of the residents?

The people provided personal items that were used in building the statue. Some helped in building, transporting, and protecting the statue.



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The gesture

Implementing actor: Nadim Karam

Partners: Info not found

Funding: Private companies

Description:

The Gesture is a large-scale temporary sculpture created in response to the 2020 August 4th blast. A 25-metre high installation is made out of the scrap metal of wrecked hangars retrieved from the port area. It resembles a friendly figure that emerged from the destruction holding out a flower to Beirut.

Project start: October 2020

Project end: Info not found

Budget: Info not found

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

The statue is an initiative by the artist supported by a community of professionals who donated their skills, time and effort to create this sculpture.

What was the role of the residents?

The residents were not involved.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/art/2021/07/29/the-gesture-new-beirut-sculpture-to-honour-victims-of-port-explosion>
- <https://nadimkaram.com/work/the-gesture/>
- <https://artreview.com/a-new-monument-to-victims-of-beirut-port-blast-sparks-criticism/>
- https://youtu.be/5NuY_bsIFh0



Memorial of Beirut fire brigade firefighter Sahar Fares

Implementing actor: Sahar Fares's family, Beirut Fire Brigade

Partners: Info not found

Funding: Info not found

Description:

A memorial in front of the Beirut Fire Brigade barracks in Karantina to honour the memory of Sahar Fares, a young paramedic who died in the Beirut port explosion after being dispatched to fight the fire that preceded the blast.

Project start: October 2020

Project end: November 2021

Budget: Info not found

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

The Fire Brigade and the family of the late firefighter wanted to build a memorial to honour Sahar's sacrifice.

What was the role of the residents?

The reveal of the memorial was attended by the victim's family, members of the fire brigade and others.

Relevant links:

- <https://blogbaladi.com/a-memorial-honoring-hero-firefighter-sahar-fares/>
- <https://www.lbctv.com/news/news-bulletin-reports/579757/on-international-women-day-memorial-erected-for-he/en>
- <https://today.lorienteljour.com/article/1254445/beirut-municipal-officials-unveiled-a-memorial-this-afternoon-in-front-of-the-beirut-fire-brigade-barracks-in-karantina-to-sahar-fares-a-young-paramed.html>



ACT new trilogy

Implementing actor: Sami Saab

Partners: Samir Saliba, Patrick Nacouzi, ACT Collective

Funding: Self-funded

Description:

Three installations were created to commemorate different events: 1) The revolution flame was installed to commemorate the first year of the October 17 Revolution. 2) A court hammer under which is the phrase 'ACT FOR JUSTICE' was installed to commemorate the first year of Beirut Blast. 3) A transparent Lebanese Flag under which is the message ACT FOR INDEPENDENCE was installed to commemorate the second Civil Parade on Independence day.

Project start: October 2020

Project end: November 2021

Budget: Info not found

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

One year after the revolution, ACT decided to create an installation by the Beirut Port to commemorate important events and call for action.

What was the role of the residents?

Info not found

Relevant links:

- <https://www.instagram.com/p/CGbtF9QJZVw/?igshid=NDk5N2NIZjQ=>
- <https://www.instagram.com/p/CGfWfkxJYnX/?igshid=NDk5N2NIZjQ=>



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Beirut blast victims' memorial wall

Implementing actor: Art of Change, Brady Black

Partners: Families of the blast victims and the general public

Funding: Info not found

Description:

Portrait drawings of the 215 victims of the August 4 Beirut blast were pasted in the main square of downtown Beirut.

Project start: January 2021

Project end: May 2021

Budget: 5,000 USD

Ownership: Private

How was the project initiated?

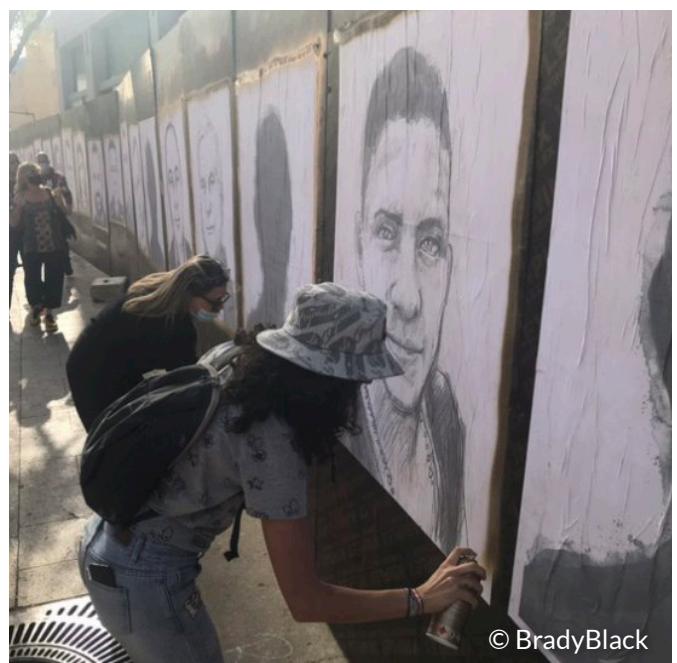
The idea of the mural was proposed by the artist. The site was chosen by Art of Change and the artist after a research.

What was the role of the residents?

After a post on social media, residents volunteered and helped in hanging the posters.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.bradyblack.net/community/project-one-yj4lr-fy4w9-sbsn4-xpzcw-5366h-3ztl4>



August 4th 1st anniversary protest mural

Implementing actor: Art of Change & Brady Black

Partners: Pedro

Funding: Brady Black

Description:

A three-day activity where the public was invited to express their emotions and memories of August 4 Beirut Blast on nine-foot long posters. On August 4, 2021, the day of the protest, the 20 posters were installed along the front lines of the protest.

Project start: July 2021

Project end: August 2021

Budget: Info not found

Ownership: Private

How was the project initiated?

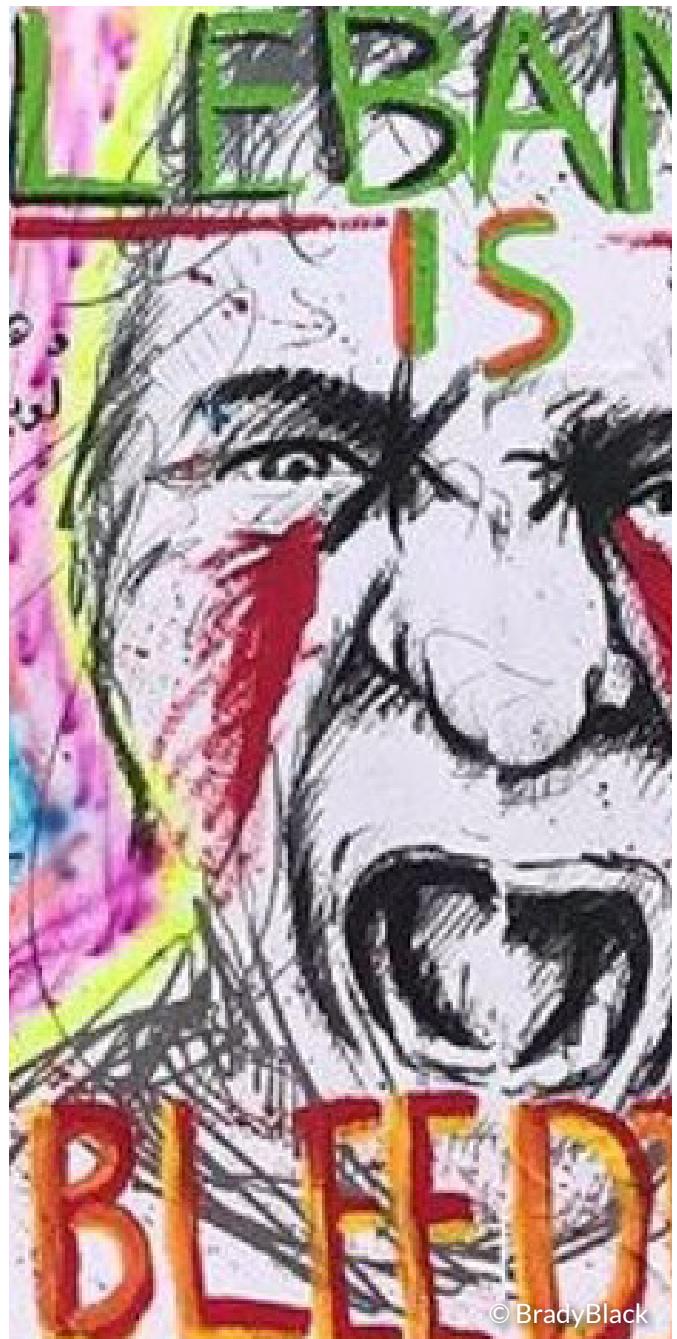
The project was initiated by Brady Black and Art of Change. It was to commemorate the 4th of August, expressing people's anger and the scream for justice.

What was the role of the residents?

Residents painted the posters and hung them.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.bradyblack.net/community/project-one-yj4lr-fy4w9-sbsn4-xpzcw-5366h-kr2sk-yj4f8>



Sustainable mobility mural in Karantina

Implementing actor: CatalyticAction, The Chain Effect

Partners: Nusaned

Funding: Impact Lebanon

Description:

As part of the Kan Ya Makan program by CatalyticAction, CatalyticAction collaborated with The Chain Effect to create a community-engaged mural which sought to rehabilitate the old mural that they had implemented together in 2016. Children and youth in the neighbourhood enjoy cycling which was the theme of the 2016 mural too. The wall's structure was rehabilitated to ensure safety. Through a series of participatory design activities, children expressed their ideas in drawings and texts that were then integrated into the mural.

Project start: May 2021

Project end: June 2021

Budget: 1,800 USD

Ownership: Private

How was the project initiated?

In 2016, CatalyticAction and The Chain Effect painted a mural on a wall in Karantina with children and youth. As CatalyticAction started their Kan Ya Makan program, the topic of cycling and the fond memories children and youth had from the time they painted the mural together sparked the idea for CatalyticAction to rehabilitate the same mural with the same partner. The partners joined efforts again in 2021 to rehabilitate the wall and repaint the mural.

What was the role of the residents?

Starting with a fun activity, children learnt all about the benefits of cycling and got the chance to share their ideas for the mural. On the day of painting the mural, everyone got together to help paint the wall.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.catalyticaction.org/kan-ya-makan-program/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/CatalyticAction/posts/five-years-after-collaborating-with-the-chain-effect-in-karantina-we-came-together/2433393713472193/>
- <https://www.instagram.com/p/CR59IsnMKkD/?igshid=NDk5N2NIZjQ%3D>



Drawings & victims' pictures along the separators between Charles Helou highway and port of Beirut

Implementing actor: Families of three late firefighters: Charbel Hitti, Najib Hitti and Charbel Karam, family of the late Joe Andoun

Partners: Info not found

Funding: the families of three late firefighters: Charbel Hitti, Najib Hitti and Charbel Karam, family of the late Joe Andoun

Description:

A mural of the Lebanese flag, text dating the explosion, and photos of the blast victims were implemented on the concrete separators between Charles Helou highway and the Beirut Port. More graffiti and drawings started to take shape afterwards along the separators.

Project start: August 2020

Project end: Info not found

Budget: 3,500 USD

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

The late firefighters' family initiated the project by calling out to residents and artists to work on the mural.

What was the role of the residents?

Residents of the nearby neighbourhoods participated in painting together with local artists.

Relevant links:

Info not found



Murals in memory of the victims of the Beirut Port blast

Implementing actor: Ludo (Ludovic Vernhet), assisted by Jason Camp, the co-founder of Art of Change

Partners: None

Funding: Self-funded (by the artist)

Description:

The artist created six pasteable hand-painted murals with his signature style with the aim to highlight the situation in Lebanon, pay respect to all those impacted by the blast and show support and solidarity for Beirut. The nature of each artwork was in correlation with each particular selected location. For example: Outside the Wardieh Hospital is an image of a syringe with a flower bouquet and a green heart.

Project start: September 2020

Project end: October 2020

Budget: 200 USD

Ownership: Private and/or public

How was the project initiated?

The murals were a personal initiative of the artist. The artist Ludo couldn't come to Lebanon as he originally intended due to the COVID19 restrictions at the time, so he collaborated with Jason Camp to paste the murals around the city. He gave him directions on the kind of locations he'd select for his murals. Based on that, they picked several locations around the city, created the artwork, and put up the artworks there.

What was the role of the residents?

Info not found

Relevant links:

- <https://www.instagram.com/p/CH5oIQwpH1/?igshid=NDk5N2NIZjQ=>
- <https://www.instagram.com/p/CIDCKedpB8V/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>
- <https://www.instagram.com/p/CG8ADH3pknZ/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>
- <https://www.instagram.com/p/CH91i3epS5P/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>



Girl with facial injury mural

Implementing actor: Ghiath Al Robih

Partners: None

Funding: Art of Change

Description:

A mural implemented facing the port of Beirut, depicting a viral image of a girl with an injury on her cheek caused by the blast, along with the Lebanese flag and Beirut skyline. In the mural, the artist intended to remove the injury from the girl's cheek as a statement of hope that she and Beirut will heal.

Project start: August 2020

Project end: August 2020

Budget: 250 USD

Ownership: Private

How was the project initiated?

The mural is a personal initiative by the artist, reflecting on the blast and its impact on Beirut and the country.

What was the role of the residents?

The residents engaged in conversations with the artist during the painting of the mural. They also helped in documenting the process by taking pictures of the artwork.



© Ghiath Al Robih

Sad Lebanon mural

Implementing actor: Ghiath Al Robih

Partners: None

Funding: Art of Change

Description:

The mural depicts a crying boy with a Lebanese flag draped on his shoulders. It was created as a reflection on the difficult times Beirut was going through after the blast.

Project start: August 2020

Project end: August 2020

Budget: 250 USD

Ownership: Private

How was the project initiated?

It is a personal initiative by the artist, reflecting on the deterioration of the situation in Lebanon after the blast and the negative state it left people in.

What was the role of the residents?

The residents engaged in conversations with the artist during the painting of the mural. They also helped in documenting the process by taking pictures of the artwork.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.instagram.com/p/CCUv2MtKHA/?igshid=MDJmNzVkJY=>



© Ghiath Al Robih

Verdun middle school mural

Implementing actor: Save the Children, Brady Black

Partners: Shakib Erslan public high school

Funding: Save the Children

Description:

A collective mural where 70 children painted the walls around Shakib Erslan Public middle and high school to provide some inspiration and hope to the children and families impacted by the Beirut blast.

Project start: Info not found

Project end: August 2022

Budget: Info not found

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

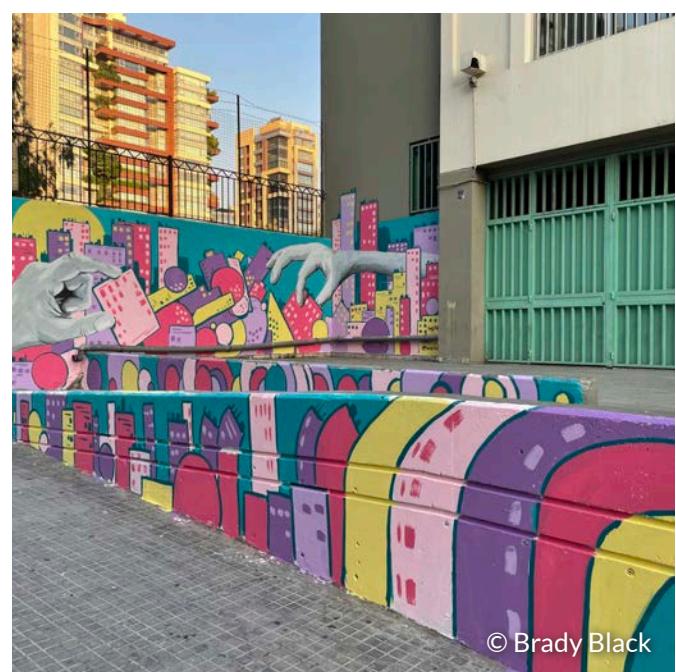
Save the Children wanted to create a mural representing hope for Beirut.

What was the role of the residents?

Students and passersby participated in painting the mural.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.bradyblack.net/community/project-one-yj4lr-fy4w9-sbsn4-w5xwr-5hm7k-fr2w7-9nygd>



© Brady Black

Martyrs' Square hope mural

Implementing actor: Spazuno, EpS, Exist

Partners: Info not found

Funding: Info not found

Description:

The artists interpreted the city of Beirut in a mural depicting a couple of peace doves and the word 'hope' in red on the metal facade of Le Gray hotel of Beirut.

Project start: Info not found

Project end: September 2020

Budget: Info not found

Ownership: Private

How was the project initiated?

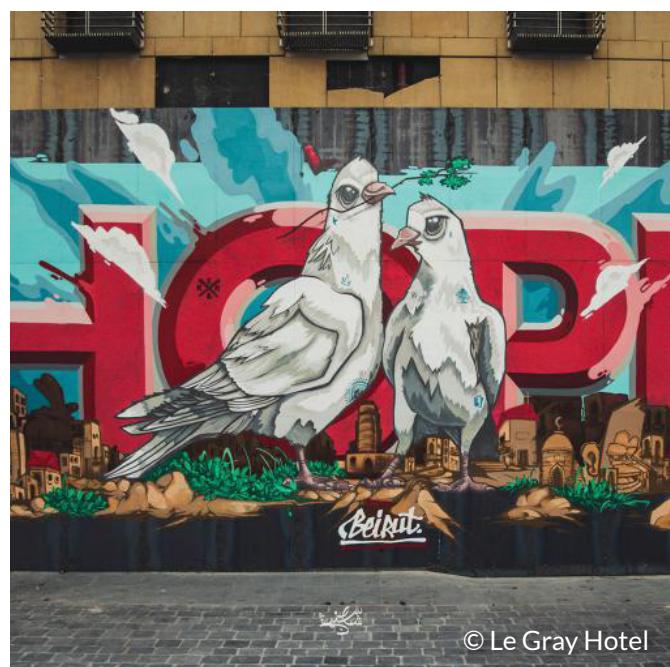
The artists chose to implement this mural in this part of downtown Beirut that witnessed many protests and clashes over the deteriorating situation in Lebanon.

What was the role of the residents?

Info not found

Relevant links:

- <https://thearabweekly.com/art-breeds-hope-resilience-blast-stricken-beirut>
- <https://youtu.be/hFMrzavwMlk>



© Le Gray Hotel

Paint a vision

Implementing actor: Rashed Kheir, IRAP

Partners: None

Funding: Tinol, Daher food

Description:

A collapsed wall was rebuilt and painted with this mural involving the local community, youth from different areas of the country, as well as children and people with special needs.

Project start: November 2020

Project end: November 2020

Budget: 1,236 USD

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

Rashed Kheir wanted to do activities with the community to improve their wellbeing, and decided to do a mural. Rashed Kheir identified the location and took the initiative to renovate and paint the wall.

What was the role of the residents?

The NGO put a call on social media inviting members of the community and their children to paint.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.instagram.com/p/CHIEre6JAS9/?igshid=NDk5N2NIZjQ=>



© Beirut Urban Lab

'Let's light up our community' initiative

Implementing actor: Rebirth Beirut

Partners: MEDCO

Funding: Spinneys, LAUMC-Rizk Hospital, Hôtel-Dieu de France, AUB, Saint George Hospital and the rest are funded by the local community / building owners and proceeds obtained from other activities and fundraising events.

Description:

Lighting of 92 streets, 9 avenues, 3 squares, 2 stairs, one tunnel and one garden all over Beirut. Generator owners provide electricity for the light posts in return for a discount on their fuel bill, provided by MEDCO.

Project start: May 2022

Project end: Ongoing

Budget: 520,000 USD

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

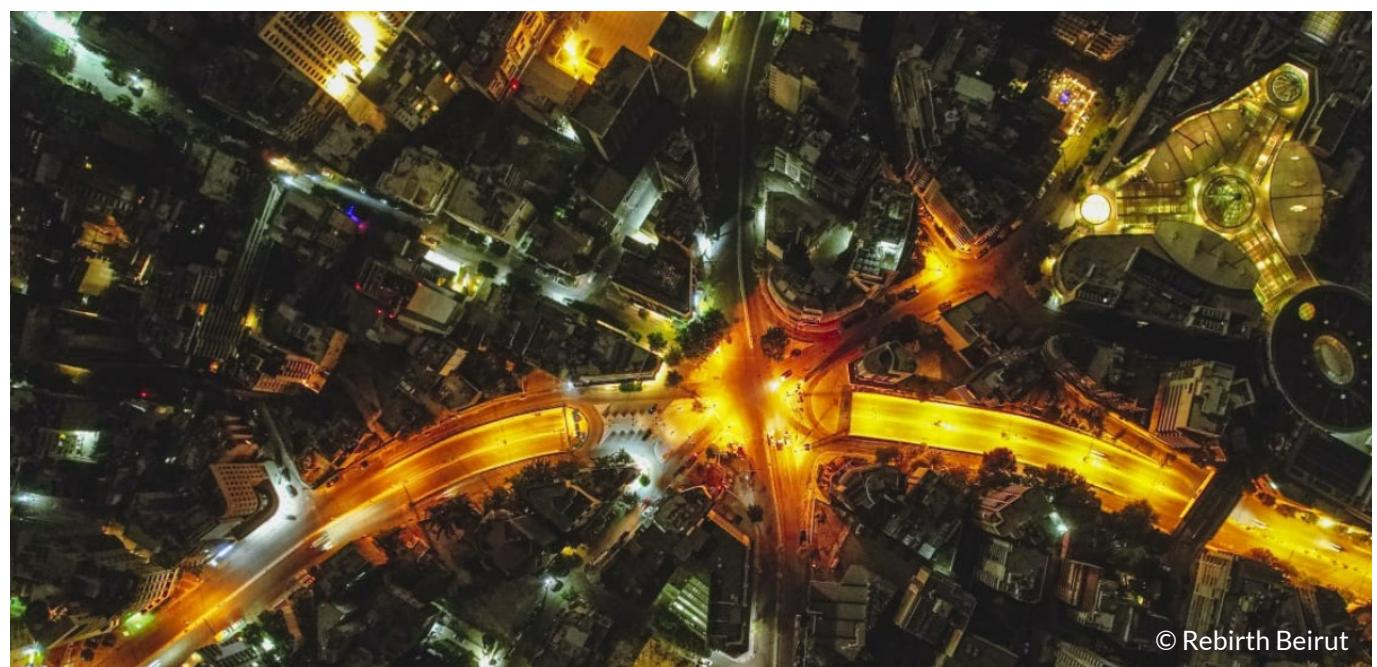
These initiatives were proposed by Rebirth Beirut as a response to the ongoing economic and energy crises making roads dark and unsafe. Rebirth Beirut started by seeking partnerships with the private sector, companies, institutions, businesses.

What was the role of the residents?

Residents are a main actor as donors, neighbourhood champions, or building committees. They approach Rebirth Beirut to offer what they have and choose the project they want to work on. Local buildings, large institutions, the private sector, and neighbourhood generator providers were engaged in making a change to the city either by providing power and/or by funding cabling and installation and/or adopting a traffic light intersection or a group of potholes / manholes.

Relevant links:

- <https://rebirthbeirut.org/lets-light-up-our-community/>
- <https://www.executive-magazine.com/last-word-2/lighting-up-beirut-with-the-power-of-solidarity>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TWGID6XEWhU&t=6s>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=daLhYaZRKLY>



© Rebirth Beirut

Karantina solar street lights

Implementing actor: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Partners: None

Funding: UNDP

Description:

UNDP installed solar lights inside the residential neighbourhood of Karantina and near the Karantina governmental hospital.

Project start: June 2021

Project end: July 2021

Budget: Info not found

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

UNDP responded to the community needs in Karantina who expressed the need for lit and safe streets especially during the energy crisis that started around mid 2021.

What was the role of the residents?

The residents expressed their needs through meetings and direct consultations.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.undp.org/lebanon/projects/sustainable-recovery-lebanon-beirut-explosion>



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Employment Intensive Infrastructure Programme (EIIP) Karantina

Implementing actor: International Labour Organisation (ILO)

Partners: Beirut Municipality and Ministry of Public Works and Transport (MoPWT)

Funding: German Development Bank (KfW)

Description: The project upgraded the sidewalks network in Karantina by maintaining existing ones and applying punctual changes to the network to improve connectivity, inclusivity and accessibility.

Project start: September 2020

Project end: July 2022

Budget: Info not found

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

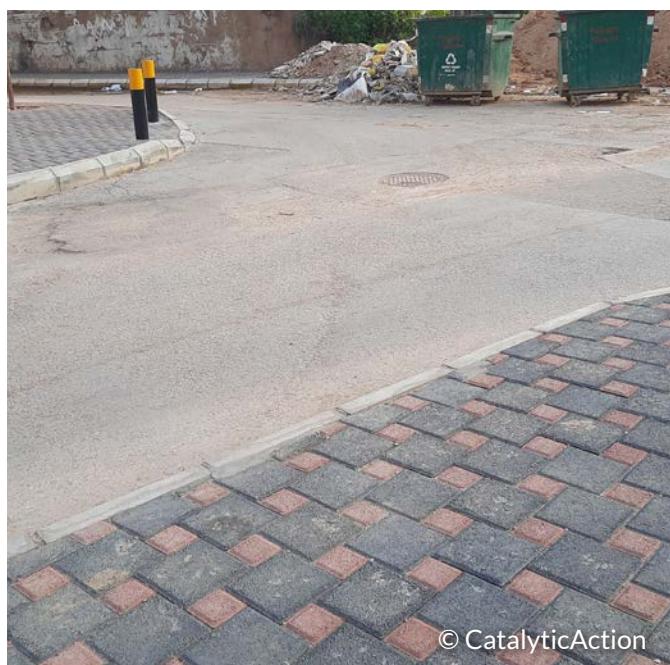
The EIIP was an ongoing program, which aimed at providing short and mid-term employment to Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese people. ILO saw the opportunity to engage the community in the surrounding areas impacted by the blast and this was endorsed by their donor. Working on the streets was suggested as it fits ILO's mandate of upgrading public infrastructure.

What was the role of the residents?

The project involved residents in on site conversations around design decisions especially the local businesses and the Karantina neighbourhood committee. Residents were also hired as local labourers in the sidewalk rehabilitation implementation.

Relevant links:

- https://www.ilo.org/beirut/media-centre/news/WCMS_822378/lang--en/index.html



Beirut traffic lights project

Implementing actor: Rebirth Beirut

Partners: None

Funding: Fidelity Assurance, ACAL, PINS, The Cask & Barrel, Rotary Club Beirut Cadmos, AIMF (Association internationale des maires francophones) and other private sector donors

Description:

Rebirth Beirut launched a project to rehabilitate 110 traffic lights in Beirut to work on solar power. In the first phase, Rebirth Beirut rehabilitated 20 traffic lights.

Project start: February 2022

Project end: Ongoing

Budget: 200,000 USD

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

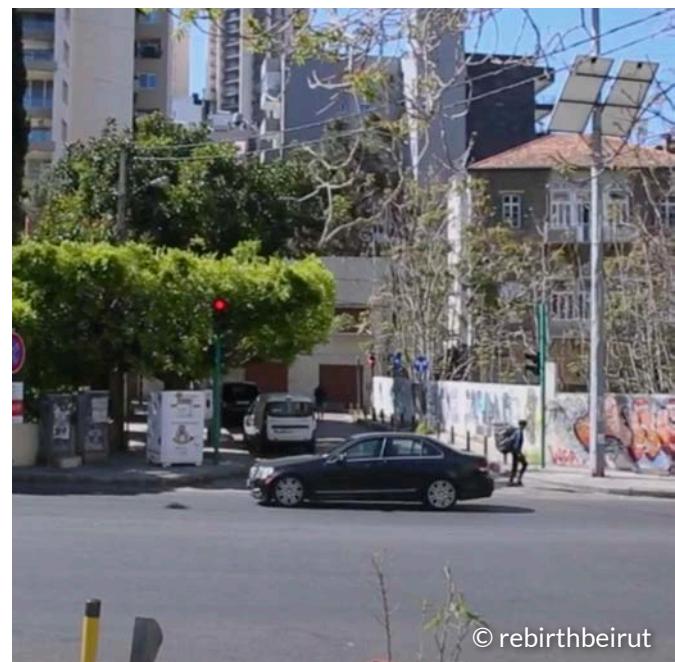
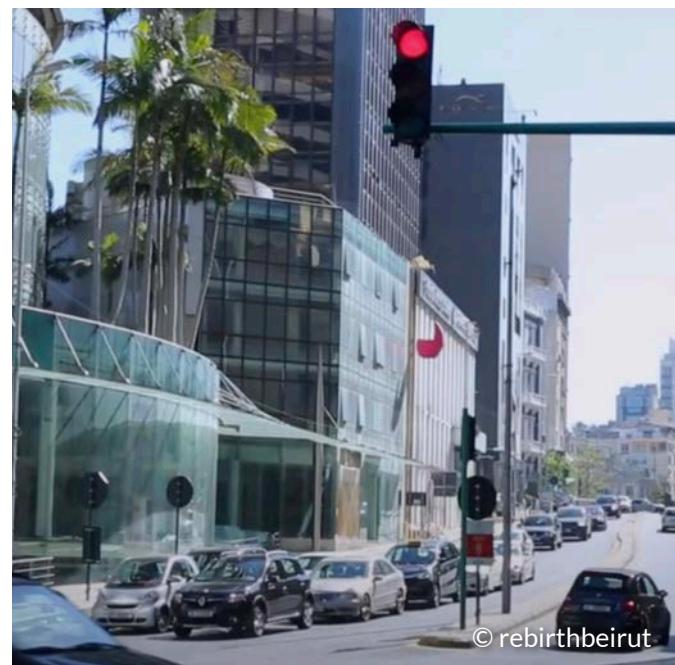
These initiatives were proposed by Rebirth Beirut as a response to the ongoing economic and energy crises making roads dark and unsafe. Rebirth Beirut started by seeking partnerships with the private sector, companies, institutions, and businesses.

What was the role of the residents?

Residents are a main actor as donors, neighbourhood champions, or building committees. They approach Rebirth Beirut to offer what they have and choose the project they want to work on. Local buildings, large institutions, the private sector, and neighbourhood generator providers were engaged in making a change to the city either by providing power and/or by funding cabling and installation and/or adopting a traffic light intersection or a group of potholes / manholes.

Relevant links:

- <https://www.instagram.com/p/CZgeOxUMZDx/?igshid=NDk5N2NIZjQ=>
- <https://rebirthbeirut.org/the-beirut-traffic-lights-projects/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z2KC3z1WOVM>



'Shielding roads potholes' campaign

Implementing actor: Rebirth Beirut

Partners: None

Funding: Private

Description:

The project fixed 1,000 potholes in Beirut for safer roads and still plans to fix 2,000 upon securing the needed funds.

Project start: April 2022

Project end: Ongoing

Budget: 45,000 USD

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

These initiatives were proposed by Rebirth Beirut as a response to the ongoing economic and energy crises making roads dark and unsafe. Rebirth Beirut started by seeking partnerships with the private sector, companies, institutions, businesses.

What was the role of the residents?

Residents are a main actor as donors, neighbourhood champions, or building committees. They approach Rebirth Beirut to offer what they have and choose the project they want to work on. Local buildings, large institutions, the private sector, and neighbourhood generator providers were engaged in making a change to the city either by providing power and/or by funding cabling and installation and/or adopting a traffic light intersection or a group of potholes / manholes.

Relevant links:

- <https://rebirthbeirut.org/shielding-road-potholes-campaign/>
- <https://www.instagram.com/p/CcCt6tssvNP/?igshid=NDk5N2NIZjQ=>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90Umrxdy6Y>



Manholes & drain covers rehabilitation initiative

Implementing actor: Rebirth Beirut

Partners: None

Funding: Private

Description:

30 out of 100 manholes were fixed until securing more funds.

Project start: April 2022

Project end: Ongoing

Budget: 25,000 USD

Ownership: Public

How was the project initiated?

These initiatives were proposed by Rebirth Beirut as a response to the ongoing economic and energy crises making roads dark and unsafe. Rebirth Beirut started by seeking partnerships with the private sector, companies, institutions, businesses.

What was the role of the residents?

Residents are a main actor as donors, neighbourhood champions, or building committees. They approach Rebirth Beirut to offer what they have and choose the project they want to work on. Local buildings, large institutions, the private sector, and neighbourhood generator providers were engaged in making a change to the city either by providing power and/or by funding cabling and installation and/or adopting a traffic light intersection or a group of potholes / manholes.

Relevant links:

- <https://rebirthbeirut.org/manhole-project/>



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APPENDIX 1 - INTERVIEWEES

Interviewee	Number of Projects	Affiliation of interviewee
INGO	4	Social development coordinator (Urban Governance Unit)
INGO	2	Prevention program manager in child protection
Academic research	N/A	Co-founder and research lead
Academic research	1	Architect, researcher and activist
Academic research	1	Professor of Architecture and Urban Design
NGO	6	Founder & President
NGO	1	Co-founder and president
NGO	4	Co-founder
Artist	1	Artist
NGO	4	Project and development advisor
INGO	3	Child Protection Project Coordinator- BML
INGO	1	Urban recovery officer
NGO	2	Head of Fundraising
NGO	3	Municipal Public Libraries Coordinator
NGO	3	Shelter officer
INGO	1	Senior national advisor
Implementing partner	1	Professor of Architecture

APPENDIX 2 - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Working post-blast in Beirut

1. Tell me about your experience working on public spaces in Beirut after the blast. What was your role in these projects?
2. What impact did the port-blast have on public space projects in Beirut?
3. For example, did you notice an increase of projects focussing on the rehabilitation of public spaces?
4. If yes, why do you think this happened? Or Did you notice an increase in NGOs implementing such projects, which required additional coordination? If yes, how did you contribute/deal with this?

Project(s) Initiation

5. How did the project(s) come about? (e.g. a grant opportunity, an internal decision, a community request)

Community Participation

6. In the public space projects your organisation implemented (or funded), how were the residents engaged? (Expand on tools, selection of participants and what groups, in which phase participation was present)
7. How much time and resources roughly were allocated for residents' participation?
8. What did the project gain from engaging residents?
9. What were the challenges? (Expand on compromises made if any)

Spatial Choices (Technical design)

10. How were the design choices for the public space project(s) made? What were the objectives, principles, and values of the design choices? How was this service procured?

Procurement & Building

11. Who built the public space project(s)? How was this service procured?
12. Did you partner or engage with other actors, institutions, and organisations to implement the public space project(s)? How did these partnerships work?

Post-building & Sustainability

13. How do you ensure long-term sustainability of the project? What measures did you put in place to ensure this? for example regarding maintenance, choice of materials/design, agreements with other actors or residents.
14. Have you done any monitoring of the use of the public space project(s) post-building? Have you organised any activity in these locations(s) post-building?

Key learning

15. What are your main learnings on public space projects in Beirut? (could also be something you already mentioned in the previous questions)

Key challenge

16. What are the most important challenges encountered in the implementation of these projects?

APPENDIX 3 - WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

Participant	Affiliation
INGO	Advocacy & campaign manager
INGO	Project Manager
Academic research	Master Student at the MUPP program
Academic research	Architect & researcher
Academic research	Director
Academic research	Researcher
NGO	Steering Committee Member
INGO	Urban Recovery officer
INGO	Child Protection Project Coordinator
NGO	Founder
NGO	Chief fundraising officer
NGO	Regional Manager
NGO	Steering Committee Member

RESEARCH PARTNERS AND FUNDS

This research project is a partnership between the Bartlett Development Planning Unit (DPU) at University College London and CatalyticAction charity. This project is led by Principal Investigator Dr Andrea Rigon. The project is funded by MENASP-CP GCRF and builds on the experience of CatalyticAction in Lebanon and previous collaborative work between them and the DPU.

The Bartlett Development Planning Unit (DPU) conducts world-leading research and postgraduate teaching that helps to build the capacity of national governments, local authorities, NGOs, aid agencies and businesses working towards socially just and sustainable development in the global south. We are part of The Bartlett faculty. The DPU has over 65 years of experience in academic teaching, research, policy advice and capacity building in the field of international development. As part of its mission to build the capacity of professionals and institutions, the DPU undertakes a range of action-oriented work with partners in different parts of the world.

CatalyticAction (CA) is a charity that works to empower vulnerable children, youth and their communities. We achieve this through built and research projects implemented using context specific participatory processes. We work with communities to produce dignified built environments where everyone can take part in the creation of equitable, inclusive and sustainable communities. Through community engagement we build local human capacity that ensures our work has a lasting positive impact.

University College London (UCL) is London's leading multidisciplinary university, with more than 13,000 staff and 42,000 students from 150 different countries. Founded in 1826 in the heart of London, UCL was founded to open up education to those who had previously been excluded from it. UCL's founding principles of academic excellence and research aimed at addressing real-world problems continue to inform our ethos to this day. UCL is consistently ranked among the top 10 universities in the world.