



Catalytic Action

IMPACT REPORT 2022



About us

CatalyticAction is a charity that uses design and architecture to empower vulnerable children, young people and their communities.

We achieve this through built and research projects, delivered using a participatory approach that engages local communities.

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.

We are a team of architects, researchers, artists, builders, educators, filmmakers and humanitarians. Our story began in 2014, when we supported refugee children in Lebanon by co-creating safer and stimulating educational spaces.

Today, we continue to work with vulnerable communities to enhance the quality of their built environment and improve people's wellbeing.



Our approach

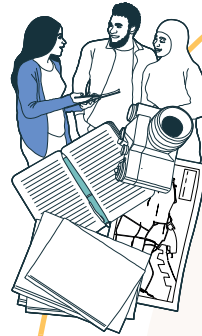
Participation is at the core of our approach. We believe that to generate sustainable and just interventions, people's and children's visions and ideas must drive interventions. This is why we developed context-specific participatory tools to meaningfully engage with communities in each step of a project cycle.

Participation

To achieve impact, four key values are embedded in our approach:

- **Valuing local knowledge**
- **Promoting inclusion and equality**
- **Innovating for sustainability**
- **Caring for people and culture**

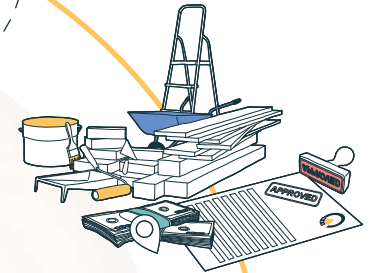
RESEARCHING LOCAL CONTEXTS AND NEEDS



TRANSLATING IDEAS INTO SOLUTIONS

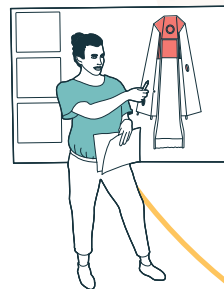


LOCAL AND SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

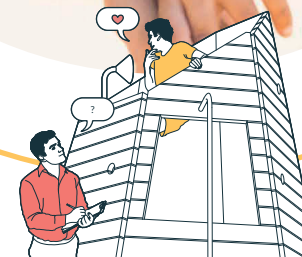


LOCAL ACTIVATION, OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

LEARNING AND DISSEMINATION



IMPACT EVALUATION

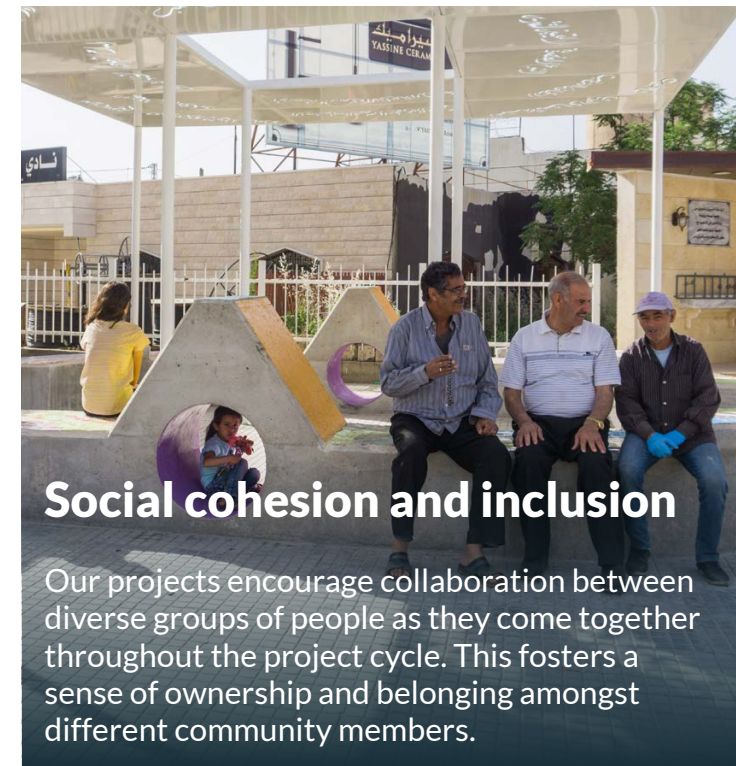


Our impact



Children's wellbeing

We aim to improve children's wellbeing through the process of co-design, creating safe and nurturing places that address their needs, acknowledge their rights and translate their ideas into reality.



Social cohesion and inclusion

Our projects encourage collaboration between diverse groups of people as they come together throughout the project cycle. This fosters a sense of ownership and belonging amongst different community members.



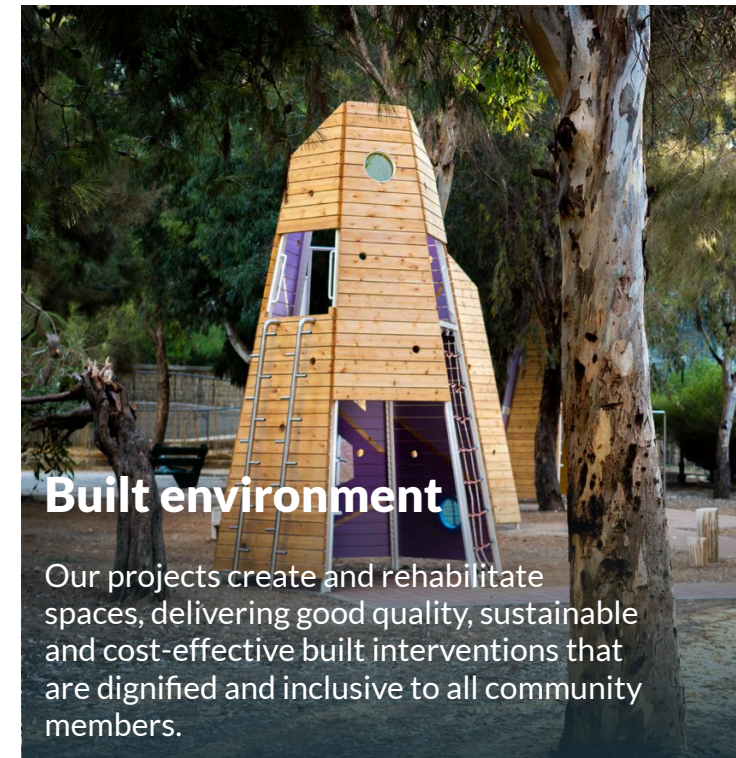
Local economy

We boost the local economy by providing employment to local labourers, adopting context-appropriate technologies and purchasing local materials.



Local capacity

We enhance the skill-set of local people and contractors by transferring knowledge around innovative design solutions. We train professionals in research methodologies, participatory design and just-decision making processes.

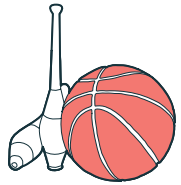


Built environment

Our projects create and rehabilitate spaces, delivering good quality, sustainable and cost-effective built interventions that are dignified and inclusive to all community members.

Impact in numbers

2015-2022

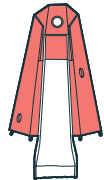


m² of play opportunities **43K**

145 trained community researchers



DESIGN



built projects **38**

RESEARCH

20 research projects



61 talks given



PARTICIPATION



participatory activities **450**

ADVOCACY

12K professionals and students engaged



children and youth directly engaged **1.6K**

Our services

We achieve impact through strategic and collaborative partnerships for which we provide:

Design and Build

Research

Participation

Advocacy



Design and Build

We successfully develop safe spaces worldwide, from initial ideas to co-designing solutions with the community. This also involves employing local labourers, adopting technology that is appropriate to the unique contextual challenges, and purchasing local materials.

Our projects create and rehabilitate spaces, delivering high-quality, sustainable and cost-effective built spaces that are dignified and inclusive to all community members.

Design and Build

Research

Participation

Advocacy



Research

It's vital that projects serve the community they're designed for. Research is a critical part of guaranteeing this outcome, which is why we combine data analysis with consultations that bring in voices from a wide group of community members.

Beyond the built environment, we use our skills, experience, and insights to inform and educate the current and next generation of architecture professionals.

Design and Build

Research

Participation

Advocacy

Participation

We engage each community in context-specific participatory processes that give them agency in shaping their built environment and lives. And we don't simply construct a project and move on. We enhance the skillsets of local people and contractors by sharing knowledge around innovative design solutions. We train professionals in research methodologies, participatory design and just-decision-making processes.

Our projects encourage collaboration between diverse groups of people as they come together throughout the project cycle. This partnership fosters a sense of ownership and belonging among different community members.



Design and Build

Research

Participation

Advocacy



Advocacy

We know how important it is to get support from the government, NGOs, and charities in these projects. That's why we advocate for inclusive, dignified built environments co-designed with the community to help guarantee their rights.

We're vocal in our determination to improve children's wellbeing through co-design. We're dedicated to creating safe and nurturing places that address their needs and encourage active cooperation with all stakeholders to make these spaces a reality.



Dear Friends,

Since the founding of CatalyticAction in 2015, we have been continuously working to advocate for the mainstreaming of participatory design approaches with children and youth in the development sector. We succeeded in implementing several impactful participatory projects with a diverse pool of partners, including around 1,600 of child and youth participants. These projects not only brought joy to many children but also contributed in changing the mindset of many practitioners, making them realise the multiple positive impact that participatory built interventions can generate. We are very proud that our process has also recently been endorsed by University College London, and two of the world's leading organisations when it comes to child protection and the built environment: UNICEF and UN-Habitat. Together we published the '[DeCID Handbook](#)': a practical guide that aims to raise the number of built interventions that have been co-designed with children in contexts of displacement.

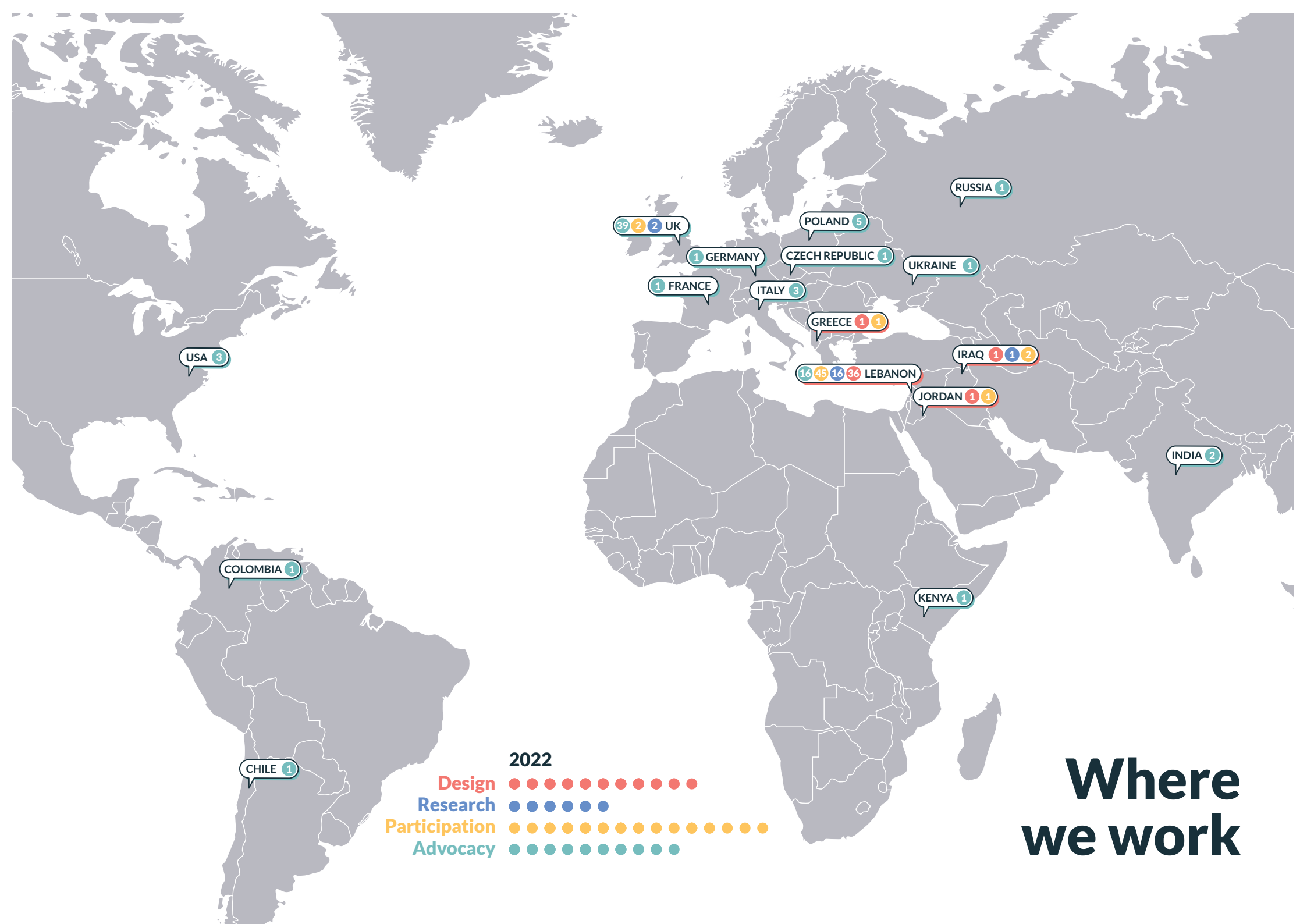
Although progress is being made, and change is occurring, we still face many challenges in popularising our approach. We need your support - donors, and partners - to be able to continue our mission in various locations.

Over the past year the living situation in Lebanon has deteriorated further; this due to the escalating economic and financial crisis compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating Beirut Port explosion. Lebanon remains the country hosting the largest number of refugees per capita. In Iraq, internally displaced children and youth are affected by the protracted crisis due to conflict, political instability, and the COVID-19. In Ukraine, the erupted war has internally displaced more than 2.5 million children. Children and youth's wellbeing continues to be deeply affected across these countries, and the consequences can have lifelong impacts. In the past 7 years we have seen firsthand how engaging children in shaping their own environments has a positive impact on their own and their communities' recovery process.

Year after year, we join forces with local communities to enable opportunities for hope, empowerment and the improved wellbeing of children and youth: one project at a time.

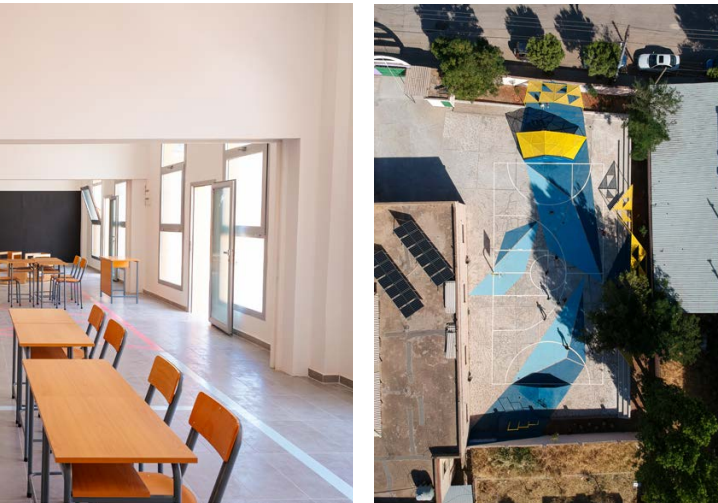
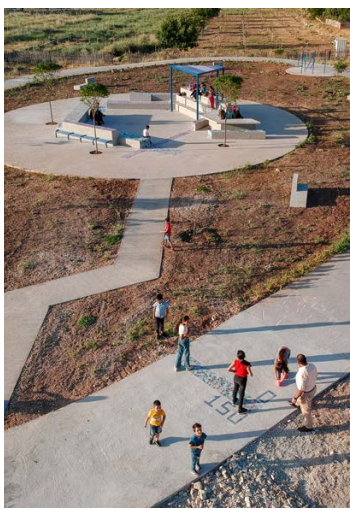
In the following sections, we present a selection of our work from last year. We hope they will inspire you to join our cause. Together we can make a difference!

 **Joana & Riccardo**
December 2022



Where we work

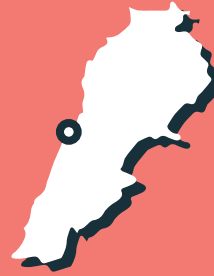
2022 Selected projects



Support us and
make the next
project possible!

Beirut's Public Stairs

Mar Mikhael & Gemmayze
Beirut
Lebanon



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, Beirut. This was achieved by fixing damages, adding furniture, increasing play opportunities and improving accessibility.

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.

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, we integrated interactive sensory play items such as speaking pipes, rolling spheres and built a slide. We also added coloured tiles to create playful floor spaces for gathering and to bring a variety of colour to the staircases.

Once the construction was completed, we activated these public space interventions through community activities. These activities enhanced the community's sense of belonging to the space and created opportunities for community building.

UN HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE





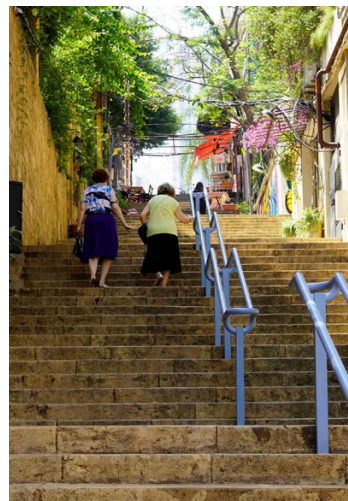
“I suffer from shortness of breath so I need to take breaks as I go up the stairs to reach my home. Now I have opportunities to sit and rest.”

“ Resident, Female, 70 Years Old



“I was so proud to present my design to my peers and when I saw you actually built my shade idea, I felt for the first time that my voice matters.”

“ Child Participant, Female, 12 Years Old



Child Friendly Community Centre

Karantina
Beirut
Lebanon



Throughout our work in the neighbourhood of Karantina, Beirut 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. The project rehabilitated and transformed an unused public building that was heavily damaged into a child friendly, playful and safe space.

Almost two years after the catastrophic event, many buildings in the neighbourhood remained destroyed with no clear plans for rehabilitation. Reusing existing buildings is one of the key elements in the implementation of built interventions with a low environmental impact. In close collaboration with the community and the municipality, we were able to identify the site of intervention: a derelict storage space.

The design followed a participatory approach ensuring input from children, caregivers, partners and the local authorities around their needs and aspirations. We rehabilitated the building's structure and services to address the evident need for maintenance. Additionally, we 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.



“I remember when I built the cardboard model with my friends. My favourite area is the yellow room where we can all be seated in a circle together.”

“ Child Participant, Male, 9 Years Old

“The place is inspiring. I love the sunlight and vibrant colours. It brings hope to see a building that was destroyed become an attractive and useful space for the community.”

“ Resident & Mother, 42 Years Old

Playground to Cope and Thrive

Kurdistan
region
Iraq



We partnered with Habibi International to co-design a playground in the Bersive refugee camp in the Kurdistan region in Iraq. This project sought to capacitate the local community through the co-designing and building of a playground through a series of virtual training and coordination sessions. We trained four facilitators who engaged children in co-design activities to understand their needs and vision for their new playground. The impact of this learning process has continued beyond the completion of the playground with the facilitators still using the engagement tools they learned to work with students in the classrooms.

Learning from the input of children, facilitators and our partners, we translated the ideas into a technical design. The design was based on the available skill set and materials. The design aimed to transform a courtyard into a space where children could play a wide range of games. Starting from ball games, to different sensory wall games such as the xylophone, as well as offering elements that trigger imagination and role play such as the steering wheel. The playground also offers opportunities for everyone to sit and relax through several seating options.

For the construction, our partners hired local builders to implement the project. We explained the design details and guided the implementation through direct communication with the foreman in charge.





“This playground is so beautiful and unique in the camp! I love playing here with my friends.”

“ Child Participant, Male, 9 Years Old



“This experience enabled me to see children’s spaces from a different perspective. Children change their surroundings in the camp to suit their needs because they need to play!”

“ Local facilitator, Female, 28 Years Old



Citizen Science and Public Spaces

Karantina
Beirut
Lebanon



The project sought to develop and implement citizen science-led research in the neighbourhood of Karantina, Beirut. The aims of this project were to capacitate the local community, to identify the needs within their neighbourhood's public spaces and to develop ways in which residents can participate in the design of more inclusive and resilient public spaces. The research focus area was on public spaces formed of street nodes and their users' diverse experiences. The project involved preparing the Public Spaces Survey Toolkit and selecting the locations for the study. The toolkit was adapted from the Ghel's Institute Public Life Tools that were developed to conduct observations of public spaces to gain further understanding of public life. The selected offer an equal representation of the neighbourhood's diverse areas.

We recruited 10 citizen scientists (local researchers) who were trained throughout the different phases of the project. They collected the data and contributed to the analysis through a series of research consultations, which involved contributions from a wider group of community members. Co-designed public space interventions in Karantina had a positive impact on the community and restored hope for serious change. This [research highlighted](#) the importance of improving public spaces in Karantina, and offers ample data to inform future interventions in the area.





“I learned to analyse the factors that affect public space uses, such as safety. Now I find myself analysing the diverse street activities and understanding my surroundings better.”

“ Citizen scientist, Male, 32 Years Old



“The community consultation workshop showed me that we all deeply care about our neighbourhood despite our differences.”

“ Resident, Female, 39 Years Old



Placemaking with Youth

Majdel Anjar
Bekaa
Lebanon



We tailored a placemaking methodology as part of International Alert's program 'Creating Space for Peace' in the town of Majdel Anjar in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon. International Alert has been working with youth in this town to establish opportunities for dialogue in order to improve inter and intra-community, as well as citizen-state relations. This project is embedded in this agenda and applies the placemaking methodology to build the capacities to reimagine a public space in their town that can be used for dialogue around conflict mitigation. The municipality was engaged in all the phases of the project. We trained and discussed with youth about placemaking, social research, participatory design, and public space. The youth worked together to select the site of intervention and conducted field observations to better understand its users and uses. The findings of the observations were reflected upon in a workshop where we moved towards design and its importance in addressing different users' needs.

The youth developed their design ideas and priorities which were then translated into a preliminary design for the space. Through a series of consultations the design was finalised and ready for implementation. As construction was completed, we worked with the youth to activate the public space. We concluded with a reflection on the impact of this project on youth and their wider community.





“It was the first time I sat at the same table with a member from the municipality, sharing ideas and being part of decision making for our town’s public space.”

“ Youth participant, Female, 25 Years Old



“Engaging in a conversation with the youth to understand their concerns is a huge step forward to making sure the decisions of the municipality serve the actual needs of the community.”

“ Municipality board member, Male



Prosperity Index of El Mina

El Mina
Tripoli
Lebanon



The [project](#) explored what prosperity means for people and how it can be achieved inclusively to benefit all residents of El Mina, a coastal city located in the North Governorate of Lebanon.

We adopted a participatory approach where data was collected by citizen scientists (local researchers) and used to develop urban interventions that address their own community's needs and to create positive change in the neighbourhoods. We recruited 18 citizen scientists who were an integral part of the research process. They provided consultations to prepare surveys, and played an active role in conducting the data collection and analysing it.

The data collection phase included an infrastructure survey, a building condition survey, household surveys, qualitative interviews, and focus group discussions. The household survey sampled 1,023 households across 22 neighbourhoods in El Mina: in both Mina 3 and Mina Jardins cadastres. To address some of the challenges to prosperity in the city of El Mina we tailored a participatory spatial intervention which harnessed the potential of the corniche, a sea promenade, as a public space for everyone. We also hosted a [town hall meeting](#) to present the research back to the community, key stakeholders and local authorities and discuss together how the research data can inform future projects in El Mina.



“The training I received really helped me gain confidence in engaging people in my city, gaining their trust and hearing about their life experiences.”

“ Citizen Scientist, Female, 22 Years Old



“I believe this study will be very helpful for the Municipality and any entity that wants to create an impactful project in our city.”

“ El Mina acting mayor, Male



Co-creating Children's Environments

Beirut
Lebanon



Kan Ya Makan is a child-led program we developed in response to the 4th of August Beirut Blast. It sought to address children's needs by engaging them in a series of activities that explored their relationship with one another and with the environment around them.

The program aimed to engage children in a creative journey of storytelling, arts, play, and spatial interventions. The program unfolded with children reflecting on their personal and collective experiences of space. The stories that emerged throughout this process allowed them to express themselves and form new relationships with their community and environment. Through conceptual exploration and practical implementation, children were invited to become active agents in shaping the world within and around them.

We have witnessed the impact that this work has had on the children. We saw children grow more confident in their ability to express and collaborate. We observed their interpersonal play dynamics transform, with less violence and more tools to cope with conflict. Many conflicts between nationalities have been resolved, as we consistently worked on creating an inclusive space of accepting and caring for one another. Additionally the children's relationship to space has improved, so has their understanding of the natural world. They achieved this by learning tools that allow them to pursue the change they want to see in their environment.





“My superpower is the power of change. It creates happiness; if someone is sad I wave my wand and make them happy. If a house is broken, I rebuild it.”

“ Child Participant, Female, 11 Years Old

“We are trying to work hard to make things around us better, so that when we grow up we can be proud of what we were able to do.”

“ Child Participant, Female, 13 Years Old

Healthy Parks Workshop

London
UK



We ran a community engagement workshop in Kilburn Grange Park, London to test two of the characteristics of the [Healthy Parks Framework](#): 'Open and Communicated to all' and 'Welcoming and Inclusive'. This framework is designed to help park managers and residents better understand their own parks and plan healthy parks for the future.

We engaged a diverse group of 34 park users who were residents, visitors and passers by. We learned about their experiences using the park. Children were encouraged to join through a fun drawing activity using giant colourful chalk.

Some participants shared with us how the park helps them cope with the daily struggles. For instance, the outdoor gym area is attractive to many, there is no need to pay a fee to exercise and this was essential especially with the rising cost of living in the UK. Similarly, the old playground area represents a safe space for mothers to meet and enjoy their time while their children play nearby.

Such engagements contribute heavily to a truly impactful research project. Working with communities and giving them a platform to participate in research, enables them to contribute to decisions that affect their lives.





“I appreciate that you took the time to ask us about our experience using the park. I did not realise how much this park means to me until today.”

“ Resident & Mother, Female



“I live in a crowded shared accommodation so I come to the park to relax and listen to the birds chirping. This helps me feel better.”

“ Resident, Male



Activating ‘Mauj’ Public Space

El Mina
Tripoli
Lebanon



‘Mauj’ is a public space intervention project in the city of El Mina in Tripoli, North Lebanon. The aim was to enhance the existing uses of the corniche, a sea promenade, that represents one of the few public spaces in the city that is accessible and used by diverse groups and communities, especially by the most vulnerable. The built intervention created a leisure infrastructure, a child friendly space, and a safe and accessible space for all.

During the construction phase, many of the interviewees showed concerns about caring for the space after implementation. To help plan for sustainable management we implemented a series of participatory activities to activate the space once the construction was completed; we involved the community, the municipality, and citizen scientists.

For the participatory activities post-implementation we collaborated with local artists, performers and community based organisations to engage space users and nearby residents in arts and cultural activities. Such activities promoted a sense of ownership, invited everyone in the society to participate and devised ways in which the community can lead in maintaining the quality of the rehabilitated public space in the future.





“The space is perfect for many activities for adults as well as children. I enjoyed playing here with my son.”

“ Resident & Father, Male



“This is the first time we participated in an entertainment show on the Corniche. I hope more activities like this will happen that we can enjoy together as a family.”

“ Resident & Mother, Female



11th World Urban Forum

Katowice
Poland



We participated at the [11th World Urban Forum](#), the global conference on sustainable urbanisation organised by UN-Habitat. Our team got the opportunity to present our work at four key events as part of our advocacy to raise the number and quality of built interventions that have been co-designed with children and youth.

We hosted and presented our “DeCID Handbook”, a practical guide on co-designing built interventions with children affected by displacement. It was wonderful to see such great attendance and interest in the role children can play in shaping their cities. We presented some of the co-design tools that we developed and applied in our public space projects at the “Public Space Academy: a transformative learning experience for a new approach to urban complexity built around public space” training. We presented reflections from recent projects in Beirut that used the Block by Block methodology to co-design public spaces with youth at the launch event of “Playbooks and tools for people-centred smart cities”. Lastly, we showcased how playful public spaces are important for healing especially for children affected by displacement at the “Real Play Coalition - expanding the partnership for Play” networking event.





“Adopting the process of co-design should be mainstream in humanitarian work. It is a fun process and important for the wellbeing of children.”

“ Dyfed Aubrey -UN-Habitat



“Psyched to see the significant increase in the number of events focused on children in this WUF11.”

“ Aline Rahbany -World Vision



Play Spaces Design Consultation

Ivano-Frankivsk
Ukraine

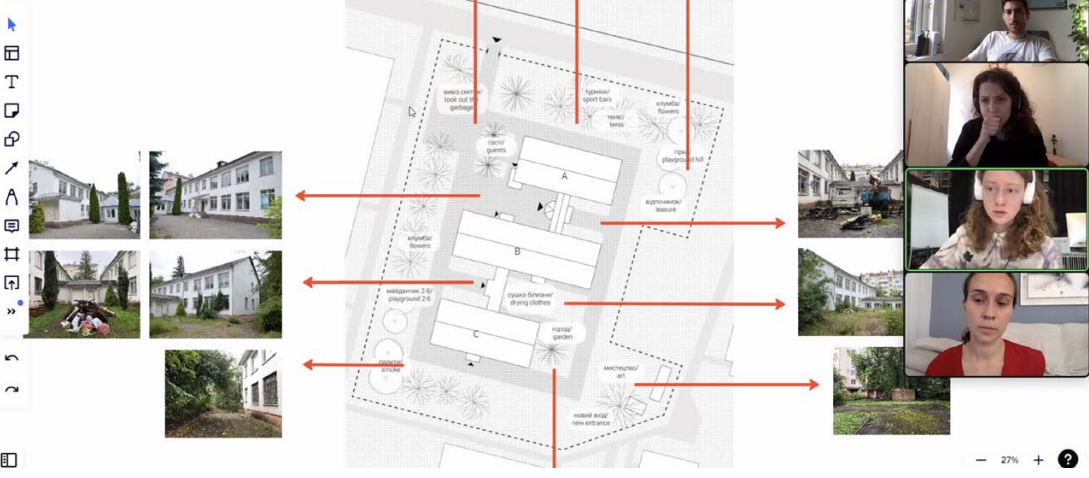


We are collaborating with CO-HATY in Ukraine to support the co-design of a play area in a housing project that hosts internally displaced people (IDP). CO-HATY is a local collective that has been renovating existing buildings to provide comfortable living conditions for people in need.

Our collaboration revolves around the rehabilitation of a former kindergarten in Ivano-Frankivsk to provide good homes for 140 internally displaced people. We have been working with the CO-HATY team to support them in developing a set of co-design activities for the rehabilitation of the outdoor spaces. After analysing the results from the participatory design activities, we provided support for the technical design phase, sharing our expertise in designing spaces for children.

Regarding the design of the space, we discussed with the CO-HATY team about the different types of play that they could aim to enable, including physical, imaginative and collaborative play. We then provided practical examples of how we achieved this in our most recent projects in Lebanon, focusing also on inclusive play. The playground will be built at the end of 2022.





“Instead of implementing a conventional playground we want to co-design with children an inclusive and playful space that can enhance their experience.”

“ Anastasiya Ponomaryova - CO-HATY

“We discussed some of the challenges we might encounter during implementation and learned about ways we could address them.”

“ Varvara Yagnysheva - CO-HATY



- Діти 7-13 років
- Підлітки 14-18 років
- Дорослі без дітей
- Дорослі з немовлятами
- Дорослі з дітьми
- Люди похилого віку
- Люди з інвалідністю
- Відаувачі/ки Карітас
- Діти
- Батьки дітей
- Викладачі Карітас
- Потреби груп користува...
- Матриця потреб користу...
- Уявлення про ідеальний...
- Пропозиція функцій дво...
- Уявлення дітей про ідеа...
- Ігри у які грають діти за...
- Викладачки Карітас - ос...
- Департамент освіти і на...

Молодша група дітей (6-12 років)

<p>Гойдалки, карти, хованки, куліч для ляльки</p>	<p>Куліч, щоб кидати в іншого</p>	<p>Гірка</p>
<p>Гойдалки</p>	<p>Гойдалки</p>	

Sharing Co-design Lessons

Turin
Italy



We were invited by the Politecnico di Torino (Italy) to present our work as part of the 'Mind the Gap' lecture series organised within the Master's Degree course in 'Architecture, Construction and City' that is open to all the Masters students at the university. In order to trigger a reflection about the role and the responsibility of the architect of the future, the lecture series aims to open conversation about manifold disciplinary, ontological or linguistic gaps we see around us.

We presented a lecture in conversation with Professor Camillo Boano on participatory design in the context of displacement, sharing stories from Lebanon. We presented different projects, and discussed methodologies, challenges and successes. By presenting real life examples, students were given the opportunity to expand their knowledge from a practical perspective.

It was fascinating to engage with students in conversations about several topics including participatory approach, the built environment and displacement. Through such conversations we are able to advocate for the importance of co-designing built interventions with local communities.



“I realise now how important children’s spaces are for them. Such experiences of engagement are very beneficial for children as they get together and create their spaces.”

“ Student, Female

“Your lecture made me realise how architecture is evolving from its traditional model. Architecture should work to solve the crises that humanity faces at the moment.”

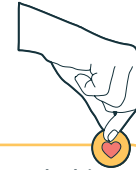
“ Student, Female

Support our work



We need your help to continue our work in generating a positive impact in young people's lives! Here are possible ways you could support us today:

Individual donations



Every donation counts! There is no such thing as small donations. If you live in the UK, your donation can be increased by 25% through GiftAid. [Donate](#) 100£ and we will receive 125£!

Payroll giving



Ask your employer to donate through [payroll giving](#). Your donation will be tax-effective because they are taken before tax is applied. As part of their corporate responsibility, some employers also match employees' donations. You donate 100£ and we could receive 250£!

Corporate responsibility



If you are a company you can reduce your corporation tax by donating to charities. Contact us and we would be happy to present our work at your offices also as part of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for your employees.

Organise a fundraiser



It is very easy to organise a small fundraiser online. Most social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram offer a one-click solution to set up a fundraiser for registered charities. You could do this for your birthday and help us raise funds with your friends!

Become an ambassador



Raise awareness and support our work by acting as an ambassador. As ambassador you would use your personal network to introduce the charity to potential partners, donors, volunteers and supporters in general.

Learn and share



Do you love our work? Share it with your family, friends and colleagues. Do you want to know more about it? Let's have a chat and set up a meeting to visit a project on site!

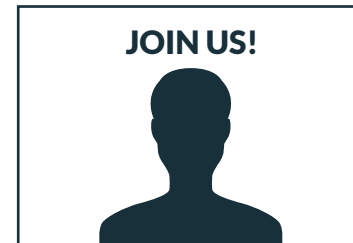
Sign up to our newsletter, follow us on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Youtube](#) and [LinkedIn](#) and spread our work!

Partners & collaborators



Save the Children

The LEGO Foundation



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www.catalyticaction.org

www.decid.co.uk



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