

## **About us**

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

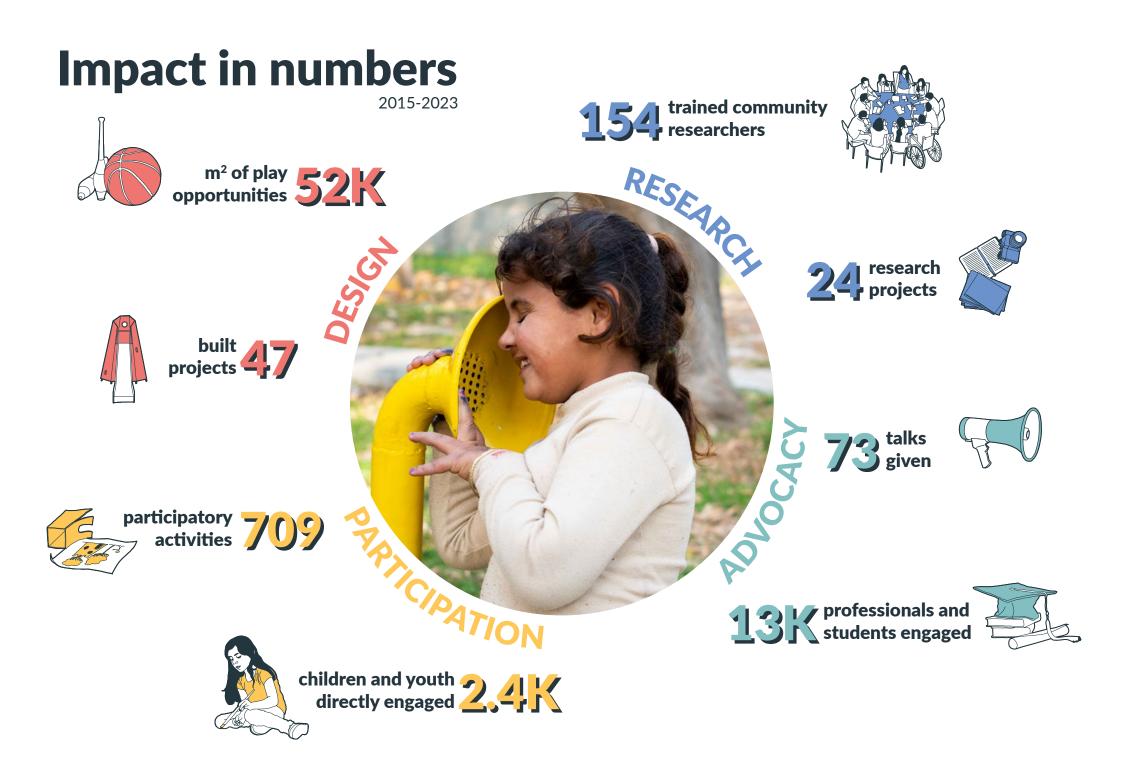
We achieve this through built and research projects delivered using a participatory approach that engages local communities.

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 impact**



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

different community members.

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

#### Local economy

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





Built environment

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







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.



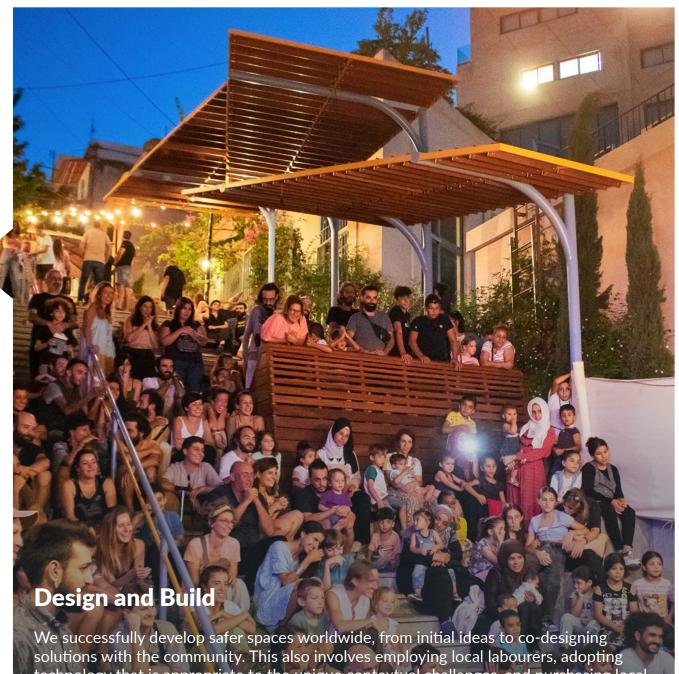
We achieve impact through strategic and collaborative partnerships for which we provide:

## **Design and Build**

#### Research

### Participation

### Advocacy



technology that is appropriate to the unique contextual challenges, and purchasing local materials.

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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.

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

## **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. We don't simply construct a project and move on. We enhance the skill sets 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.

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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 codesigned 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,

Another year has passed, filled with joyful moments, exciting things to look forward to as well as challenges.

As of 2023, we have completed over 70 projects reaching 2,400 children and youth. Our work also generated a positive impact for 6,230 community members who participated in our activities and used the spaces we implemented. It always fills our heart with joy to hear the positive feedback children share with us on the projects. They share words of excitement, happiness, hope, fulfilment and pride to be part of our activities and to have contributed to the implementation of a space that has now been built. This is very empowering for young people.

This year we have decided to embark on the exciting challenge to initiate a project fully funded and managed by CatalyticAction. The topic we decided to address is gender inequalities and how they manifest in public spaces in Beirut, working specifically with teenage girls. To fund this important project, we reached out to many of you and were happy to receive your valuable support. We are incredibly grateful for that. On the 25th of April 2023, we've successfully raised the necessary funds to implement this project, thanks to all of you!

Lebanon continues to face the negative impacts of multiple crises hitting the country and the region. We are very saddened about the tragic events in Palestine. No child should ever have to go through this. In Lebanon, communities are fearing a war might break at any moment; especially with Southern Lebanon being under attack. Everyone is living in a state of uncertainty, and a very low morale is looming over the region. We are continuing our activities and addressing these new concerns with the communities we work with. The highly participatory nature of our work allows us to address the changing concerns of people, which is why it is important to promote this approach with communities who experience highly destabilising events.

Following the interest that the DeCID Handbook generated internationally, we have explored in 2023 opportunities to bring CA's work to new countries. Early in 2023 we started working in Italy with disadvantaged families, including those with a migrant background living in Castel Volturno. We also started a conversation to explore opportunities for working on public spaces with vulnerable communities in China.

























Support us and make the next project possible!









## El Mina Public Park







This project aimed to enhance the social activities in El Mina public park by incorporating design elements that address the needs of the various community groups. This project is part of the wider MACAN project funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit in partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs and in cooperation with INJAZ Lebanon and El Mina municipality.

The design was developed based on our partners' community engagement assessment. We engaged with our partners' Working Group throughout the different phases of the project: from ideation, to design and implementation. We reached out to UN-Habitat Lebanon who rehabilitated the park back in 2019 - making it the first inclusive public space in North Lebanon - to ensure that our design aligns with their vision.

We created the first skatepark in North Lebanon, a new landmark destination for young people. We incorporated five inclusive play stations connected by an accessible path. Play items included a playhouse, swings, a slide, pull up bars, spinning cubes and sensorial games. To enhance group gatherings, we added picnic tables, a firepit with circular seatings and added backrests to the existing benches. An 'I•Mina' sign and colourful paint across the park were used to amplify its visual appeal.







"The skatepark is now our second home, we are here all day! Before we used to go to Beirut to skate. Now we have a place to practise our passion and grow our community in El Mina."



Skater, Male, 16 Years Old

"I have many memories in this park, it was an important part of my childhood. I am happy to see the park well equipped again so my children can build their childhood memories here too."



Resident, Female, 38 Years Old

# **Beirut EcoPlay**



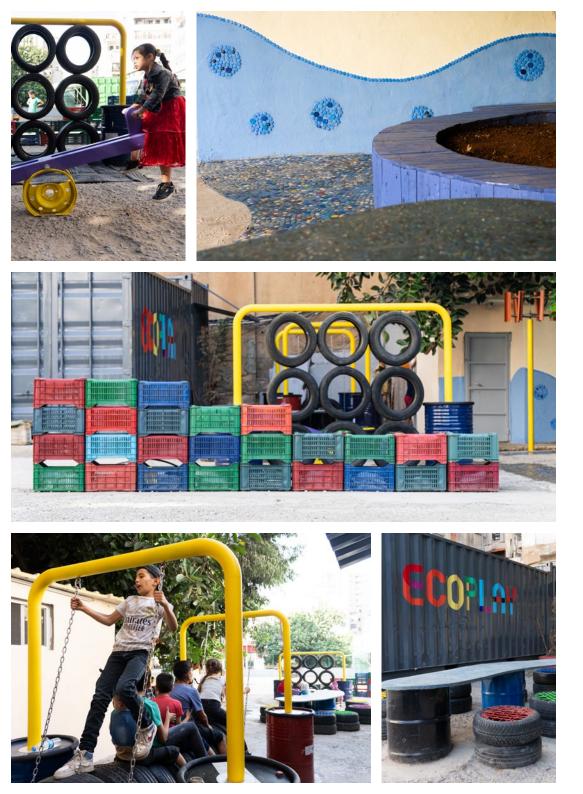




Ecoplay is an eco-friendly playground intervention as part of the EcoHub, a space set up by Ahla Fawda NGO at the heart of Beirut city with the aim to restore ecosystems and promote sustainability through creativity and community engagement. EcoPlay aims to create a play area for all community members using discarded materials. To achieve this, a participatory approach was utilised to research local materials and engage residents and key stakeholders to think about eco-friendly design.

The design of the EcoPlay space was developed based on the locally available discarded materials that we were able to source: plastic bottle caps, car tyres, plastic vegetable crates, wooden pallets, metal pipes, PVC pipes, metal barrels, retired bicycle wheels and flex banners. The materials were sourced from a variety of places: junkyards, vegetable market, tyres shop, printshop and recycling centres. We also worked with the Lebanese startup Plastc Lab to create table tops made out of plastic bottle caps.

Located by a busy road, we used retired flex banners to create a colourful visual separator weaved on the wire-mesh with the help of residents and passers-by. We experimented with alternative flooring surfaces; for instance, we replaced the asphalt with plastic bottle caps to create a colourful path. EcoPlay includes a variety of play items, sensorial elements, colours, greenery, tables and seats.



"I am happy to see that we can use old tires in fun and useful ways rather than burning them and causing pollution."



South Participant, Male, 16 Years Old

"The space shows us the journey of recyclables starting from the sorting centre where everyone is handing the material, to this space that was built using them."



Youth Participant, Female, 14 Years Old

# Inclusive Playgrounds

Abbasiyeh, Rachaya, Mohammara **Lebanon** 





We partnered with Humanity & Inclusion to create inclusive play spaces for all children by rehabilitating three public parks in three governorates in Lebanon: Abbasiyeh in South Lebanon, Rachaya in Bekaa and Mohammara in North Lebanon.

The project of the inclusive parks focused on two main elements: creating inclusive playgrounds and making the public spaces accessible.

The design of the Abbasieh park aimed to maintain the natural character of the space. The new steel structures have been painted orange to create a colourful contrast with the green of the trees and plants and enhance visibility for people with low vision. We also made use of the existing infrastructures by transforming the non-accessible ramps and bathrooms into features that could be used by everyone.

The design of Mohammara park was informed by the existing play structures that were rearranged to form a new layout and enriched with shapes, colours and music which offer new opportunities for inclusive play experiences.

In Rachaya we divided the park into 4 different areas: two play-stations, a kiosk spot and a resting area, incorporating existing structures to maximise the available resources.







"My brother uses a wheelchair, next time I can ask my parents to bring him to play with us here. He can now easily access different play items to play with them."



Child Participant, Male, 7 Years Old

"This giant playhouse is so cool! I can't believe I am actually playing here with my friends, usually we only sit and chat when we are in public. The playhouse hides us from other people, so we felt encouraged to play."



> Youth Participant, Female, 14 Years Old

## Beirut Public Spaces Analysis







The Participatory Analysis of Public Space Projects in Beirut is a research project implemented to map the different public space interventions that took place in Beirut following the port blast in 2020 and that consisted of a physical and lasting component. The project also aimed 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 a shared learning process among participants.

This project produced a participatory assessment of the reconstruction efforts following the Beirut explosion, particularly in relation to public spaces. Data was gathered and analysed through a series of interviews followed by a <u>participatory workshop</u>, bringing together the different stakeholders working on public spaces in Beirut to 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 <u>art installation</u> produced in collaboration with residents of the Karantina neighbourhood, and a <u>database</u> of public space projects. More details about the methodology and the outcomes are available in the published report.







**"There were many plans to renovate** public parks in Beirut after the explosion. Some were successful and we could see the impact, while others stopped at the ideas phase. We learnt from both."

(Regional Manager, National NGO

"It was interesting to see all the projects that were implemented in Beirut, and I feel like it's very important to learn from each other's experiences because every experience is unique."



Director, Academic Institution





# Playful Cities Design Guide





# ARUP The LEGO



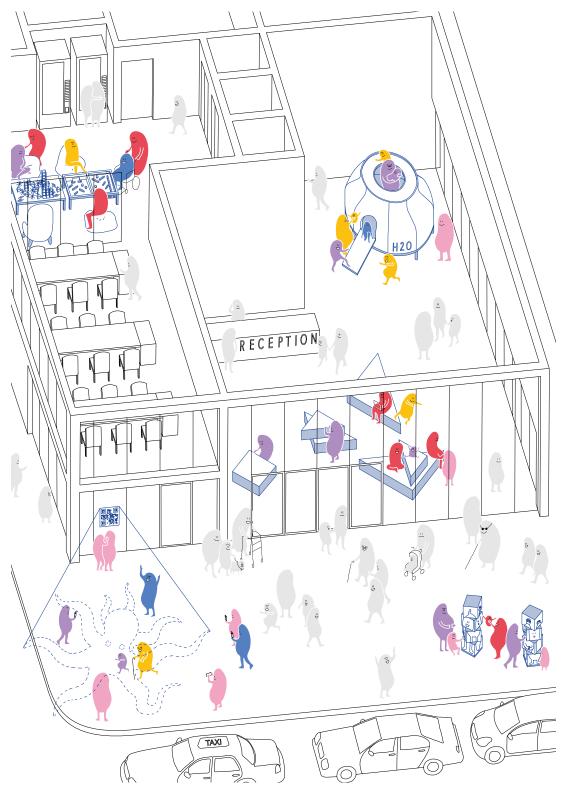
The <u>Playful Cities Design Guide</u> provides practical and inspirational ideas to facilitate play in our urban centres by addressing these three questions:

- Where can we add play in our cities, and what kinds of spatial elements can support playful experiences?
- How can we design for play in a way that is inclusive of different age groups, abilities, and identities?
- How can play help us to develop a diverse range of skills, as well as to connect to our urban and natural environment?

We worked closely with the ARUP team to develop this guide that would inspire urban practitioners and city authorities to imagine and embed small-scale play elements for children, youths and adults in city design and planning.

Working on this guide provided us with the opportunity to reflect back on all the playful interventions we have implemented and share this learning with a wider audience.

Designing for play has the power to generate diverse experiences of the city that may lead to new ways of learning and developing skills, of living in the urban and natural environment, and of cultivating a greater sense of place and community interactions. Also, playful spaces can enable prosocial behaviours that yield substantial benefits for people of all ages.



"I haven't seen such a helpful and inspirational handbook for a long time! Play isn't just for children, it's a vital part of everyone's development and health. And this guide helps to prove it."

Drban Designer (LinkedIn), Female

"What an amazing inspiring guidebook the Playful Cities Design Guide has become. A true joy to read. So do download, be inspired to create cities where all children can find freedom in play."

Architect (LinkedIn), Female

## Vital Lebanon Exhibition





## PROCOL المحتبر التشاركي للبزدمار Lebanon





'Vital Lebanon: Capacities of people; capacities of cities' is an <u>exhibition</u> implemented in partnership with the Institute for Global Prosperity's PROCOL Lebanon which showcased the work and outputs of the RELIEF centre as it transitions into PROCOL Lebanon. The exhibition offered insights into localised scales of livelihood and prosperity that various Lebanese communities have constructed in times of uncertainty. 'Prosperity' is dynamic in that it means different things to different people and places.

We helped curate the contents of the exhibition; we researched, designed and implemented the exhibition as an experiential space, providing visitors with opportunities to immerse themselves physically and mentally into the themes of Uncertainty, Sociality, Vitality and Prosperity.

A form of public engagement was also envisioned as part of the exhibition through interactive design elements, whereby the public could learn, reflect and contribute. The exhibition was animated with an interactive sound performance, a film screening and a live music performance. Citizen scientists from Bar Elias, El Mina, Hamra and Mar Mikhael participated in a panel discussion around the key themes of the exhibition and their role as citizen scientists in various research projects.







"The exhibition design and curation is very inspiring in how it translated a rich research project into an interactive experience."

#### Disitor, Male

"This exhibition was a necessary step in light of the current situation of people's struggles. It is wonderful to learn about the work and its impact."



Exhibition Visitor, Female



## Teenage Girls' Public Spaces









We used different participatory tools including participatory mapping, body mapping, model making, drawing, storytelling, photography, and activation in selected sites of intervention. We learnt a lot from each activity and each girl about their sense of safety, comfort and enjoyment and what it means for a teenage girl in Karantina to have the freedom to use public spaces. This process was highly empowering, and it is the core element of this project, generating an impact that goes beyond the built public spaces.

Together with the girls and artist Roula Abdo we designed and implemented our first public space intervention: a mural that represents adolescent girls' needs and aspirations from public spaces in their city. As we progress with the design phase, we are also working on securing the permits to implement further public space interventions in the neighbourhood areas selected by the girls.







"Today I felt free to enjoy my time on the street. We created a temporary intervention that made me feel safe and at ease to enjoy my time with friends without worries."



Youth Participant, Female, 12 Years Old

"I don't know yet how the spaces we design will turn out to be, but I am very curious to participate in all the activities to design and build them."



Youth Participant, Female, 15 Years Old

## Participatory Art for Climate Change







Working from the colourful 'warming stripe'<sup>\*</sup> showing the annual temperature change in Lebanon between 1901-2021, we used colours and drawings to discuss the urgent topic of climate change with children and youth from Ouzai, Beirut.

In partnership with AICS, the aim of this project was to raise awareness on the topic of climate change and enable a safer space for children and youth to express their emotions and discuss the impact this has on them.

We successfully engaged 158 children and youth through a <u>participatory mural</u> that was implemented on a recently built pier in the Ouzai port. Coming from different backgrounds and demographics, the group worked together to shape this vibrant mural: a medium for expression and a tangible contribution to shaping their built environment. As soon as the grey concrete pier turned colourful, children living nearby started using it to play.

\* '<u>Warming stripe</u>' graphics are visual representations of the change in temperature, created by climate scientist Professor Ed Hawkins. Each stripe represents the temperature in the location averaged over a year.







#### "Climate change is real and I can feel this environmental crisis we are living in!"

Youth Participant, Female, 14 Years Old

"The sea and the sky here are beautiful, but the bad smell and the trash make me sad. I want my painting on the wall to tell people that it is not okay to cause pollution."



Child Participant, Male, 8 Years Old



## **Co-designed Community Centre**









We collaborated with the local association Black&White to support the co-design of an outdoor community space in Castel Volturno, a coastal city in the south of Italy that has one of the greatest migratory pressures throughout the whole region.

Black&White promotes the inclusion of immigrant people through after-school programmes for children, Italian school for adults, and cross-cultural mediation. The new space aims to create multiple opportunities for community building.

We engaged 70 children and youth of different nationalities and a diverse group of residents who shared with us their needs and visions for the new space.

Through different participatory tools we learnt about the daily lives of these young people in the local urban context, their use of public spaces, and the dimensions that affect their well-being.

Children and youth were then invited to visualise the features that they would like to see built in the new centre. Many indicated sport facilities and spaces where they could eat together, watch a movie, dance; and spaces to build relationships.



"There are so many empty spaces in the city that I would like to become public spaces for the community."

Youth Participant, Female, 15 Years Old

"I would like to have a football pitch because during the matches there are always opportunities for new friendships."



## Karantina Women Collective







Women have the right to gain access to and participate in public spaces as a realm for expression, dialogue, cultural exchange, social cohesion, and equality. Building on our continuous efforts to advocate for public space rights in Beirut, we launched a pilot advocacy programme that engaged both older and younger women from the Karantina neighbourhood. The programme established the Karantina's women collective for public space rights: 'My Happiness in My Park'. The programme aimed to capacitate women with the needed skills in advocacy, conflict resolution, and collective action, and build resilient relationships to fight for the right to open and collectively manage the Karantina public park. Throughout the project's activities we sought to create a safer space for community building where women can meet, share, and learn.

One of the key outputs of the programme was the co-design of a sustainability action plan and the liaison of the women's collective to local authorities. The women's collective obtained permission from the municipality of Beirut to open their local park and started the implementation of their action plan. For over six months they have been opening the park on a weekly basis. They mobilise, meet, solve issues, reach out to community members to join them, and present their work to local NGOs and press to cooperate in maintaining the sustainability of their efforts.







"We are opening the park, playing with the children and enjoying our time. We got this opportunity to do something meaningful for our community."

Programme Participant, Female,
 59 Years Old

"For the first time in my life I am proud of an achievement that I am doing on my own. Being part of the women collective gave me a distinguished social status among my family and community."

Programme Participant, Female,
 44 Years Old

## 2023 Design Workshop

Beirut. Tripoli, Bar Élias Lebanon



Syrians Forward Together Juscor

Last summer we hosted a design workshop that brought together thirteen female participants from across the globe: Italy, Lebanon, UK, Portugal, Canada, Philippines, France and China. The workshop focused on the theme of gender inequality and how it manifests in the built environment.

The workshop activities included visiting and discussing CatalyticAction's various co-designed built interventions in Beirut, Bar Elias and Tripoli. Participants got the opportunity to meet some of the key stakeholders that helped realise these impactful projects; this included community members, local partners, citizen scientists, and local youth groups. Participants worked in groups to design their own participatory process while addressing multiple imposed challenges. They also engaged in two hands-on participatory activities with teenage girls in Karantina as part of our ongoing Public Spaces for Teenage Girls project (see page 25) in Karantina.

Throughout the different visits and workshop activities we reflected on how gender inequalities are manifested in public spaces and discussed how an inclusive design process that embeds a gender lens is essential to address gender imbalance and develop an impactful project for the whole community.







"Empowering young women and girls and engaging them in co-design processes is a great leverage to foster lasting change in societies."



Workshop Participant, Female

"My responsibility as an architect is stronger now, and I wish to go back to work with the participatory tools I learnt to help improve the lives of people."



Workshop Participant, Female

## Strategies to Engage Kids

Online and in-person event LSE London **UK** 



LSECITIES URBAN95 O Bernard

We participated as a panellist at the insightful event 'From childhood needs to urban reality: strategies to engage kids in urban design' that was hosted by the Urban95 Academy, LSE Cities and Bernard van Leer Foundation.

After Francisca Benitez from the Global Designing Cities Initiative presented their upcoming publication "How to Engage Kids in Street Design", we engaged in a discussion alongside panellist Silvia Amoros from Waltham Forest Council (an Urban95 Academy alumnus) to discuss the theory and practice of creating an inclusive and participatory environment by incorporating kids' voices and ideas into the street design decision-making process. The panel was chaired by Savvas Verdis from the LSE.

The discussion was rich; it covered multiple topics including the value of engaging children in co-design processes, the role of the facilitator, the challenges of participation, the impact of this process on children, and the importance of knowing the local context.

Engaging children, youth, and caregivers should be a common practice in any street transformation project. Cities that are designed with the needs of kids and caregivers in mind better serve everyone using them, from older adults to people with disabilities.







"I was very inspired from the experience of the panellists on how to engage children in design. No matter where we work, this topic is a priority!"



#### Attendee, Female

"It was very interesting to learn how participatory processes with children can really influence policy making."



Attendee, Female

# 2023 Awards



We are extremely happy and honoured to have been selected for the Happold Foundation Organisational Grant.

As a small charity that works to empower vulnerable communities through participatory design, this grant will be of great support in our charity's next strategic steps. It will contribute to improving the sustainability of the organisation, amplifying the reach and impact of our work.

We have been admiring the work of the Happold Foundation for many years, and got inspired from the different organisations they have supported. We are truly honoured to be part of the network of organisations they support and look forward to working together.

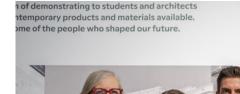
We have also received <u>The Inspire Future Generations Award</u> -Long term programme: children category for our <u>Kan Ya Makan</u> programme with children in Karantina, Beirut.

We are beyond grateful to receive this review from the judges: "The overall soundness, professionalism and therapeutic social value of the non-profit's response in a challenging context of multiple crises, in applying empowering creative arts skills including naturebased solutions, but also successfully overcoming tensions between Lebanese and Syrian children traumatised by the severe effects of the 2020 port explosion etc. Responding with great skill to a broken, divided context – these capabilities are badly needed across the world and CatalyticAction is showing exceptional leadership in their well – judged balance of play/learning/creative/exploratory activities."





The Happold Foundation













## **Partners &** collaborators



























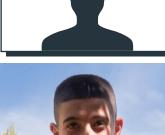








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# Support our work

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£!

# 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.

# 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.

Sign up to our <u>newsletter</u>, follow us on <u>Instagram</u>, <u>Facebook</u>, <u>X</u>, <u>Youtube</u> and <u>LinkedIn</u> and spread our work!



+75%

Ask your employer to donate through <u>payroll</u> <u>giving</u>. 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£!



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!



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!

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