Pavilion Re-claimed
Adaptive reuse for refugee education, El Marj, Lebanon

Main authors
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Project data
Project group: CatalyticAction
Client: Save the Children Italy
Project background: Private commission
Planned start: July 2016

Summary and appraisal of the project by the jury
The jury was greatly moved by the project’s contribution to the ongoing humanitarian crisis of Syrian refugees and the ingenious reinvention of the pavilion as a school. Within a context lacking basic infrastructure, the project provides not only space for education, but also a dignified environment that is a source of pride for the community who helped to build it. Through the use of what would otherwise be material waste (i.e., both the pavilion and the wool insulation), the school is the impressive result of limited means and resources. The project is an implicit critique of the high design, short lifecycle model of grand exhibition events and offers a potent template for future application.

Statements on the sustainability of the project by the author
A participatory process as catalyst for positive impact in the lives of the community
The design was tailored around an interdisciplinary approach between the different stakeholders, having the community at the core of the process. CatalyticAction (CA) engaged with the children, teachers and family members in the ideation, design and construction of the project. Conceptual planning started with children participating in envisioning exercises that directly informed the design; they had the opportunity to be decision makers. By creating a community project through an inclusive approach, CA aims at improving social cohesion within the settlement and the neighboring Lebanese communities. The inclusive approach adopted succeeded in generating livelihood opportunities, capacity building, empowering women and children, boosting local economies and enhancing community resilience.

A sustainable and innovative building cycle for prosperity and transformability
The reuse strategy of a temporary pavilion structure adopted succeeded in generating livelihood opportunities. The materials were sourced locally including sheep wool, timber, corrugated metal sheeting, etc. Throughout the building process, workers from the settlement were employed, most were construction workers in Syria. The community members learned new building skills working alongside our team and transferred this knowledge to the youth.

Environmentally conscious, cultural and context specific design solutions
The school is located in the Bekaa valley, an agricultural area hosting thousands of refugees who endure harsh climate conditions. The design of the school adapted to the local context, facilitating the use of suitable technologies, materials and labor. The design also adhered to the cultural specificity and responded to the natural environment. The Lebanese sheep farms, 72 km of which are located in Bekaa, usually treat the sheep wool as waste. We chose to make use of this material for the school insulation. Sheep wool is a completely natural and sustainable material, its use empowered farmers and women in the process. The school design allows for bright, naturally lit and ventilated classrooms. The materials and techniques used inspired the families of the ITS to employ them in their shelters.

Further authors
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Further images:
1. The school seen from a pigeon house within the Jarahieh Informal Tented Settlement in Bekaa, Lebanon. The school is a very important landmark in the settlement, and its building process empowers the refugees.
2. A diagram showing the process, its benefits and its linked social values.
3. The project cycle diagram: The Save the Children Italy pavilion at the Milan 2016 Expo being shipped, repurposed and redesigned to become a school for Syrian refugee children in the Jarahieh Settlement, Lebanon. The cycle also highlights the possibilities of the building’s future reuse. This pilot reuse strategy can be replicated on various scales to summit a higher number of vulnerable populations.