

**IBTASEM (Smile) - A playground for Syrian refugee children. To cope and to heal.**

The playground structure has been designed in response to the large number of Syrian children now living as refugees in Lebanon. Marc Sommers, an expert from the 'Education Development Center' at Boston University, suggests that within humanitarian responses, programmatically, children often become invisible. Our work seeks to challenge this and expand the remit of what is deemed necessary in emergency situations. We believe that children have a right to an education, to feel safe, to play and to develop confidence in themselves. If children live in insecurity, feeling vulnerable and with a lack of structure and space, then how can they go on to make changes in the future?

Dattner (1969) explains: "Play is actually a child's way of learning about his environment and about himself ... The playground is as important a learning institution as a school, and should be given equivalent priority" (pp.41).

The playground has been designed after completing participatory exercises with the children who live within the Bar Elias informal tented settlements. We have taken on board the specificities of the site, the needs of the school teachers and the desires of the children. We are also organising and hosting a workshop which will take place in August 2015. This will be an opportunity for participants to get experience working with the children, designing and building a playground, and collaborating with international NGO's. This will raise awareness of just some of the issues that Syrian refugees are currently facing and will allow participants to continue spreading the word.

This project will be used as a start point; a catalyst with which children can begin to start building their futures and to make positive changes; and a catalyst from which we hope to build long lasting relationships with the people involved.





**A participatory, democratic, multicultural and Interdisciplinary process that fosters community solidarity**

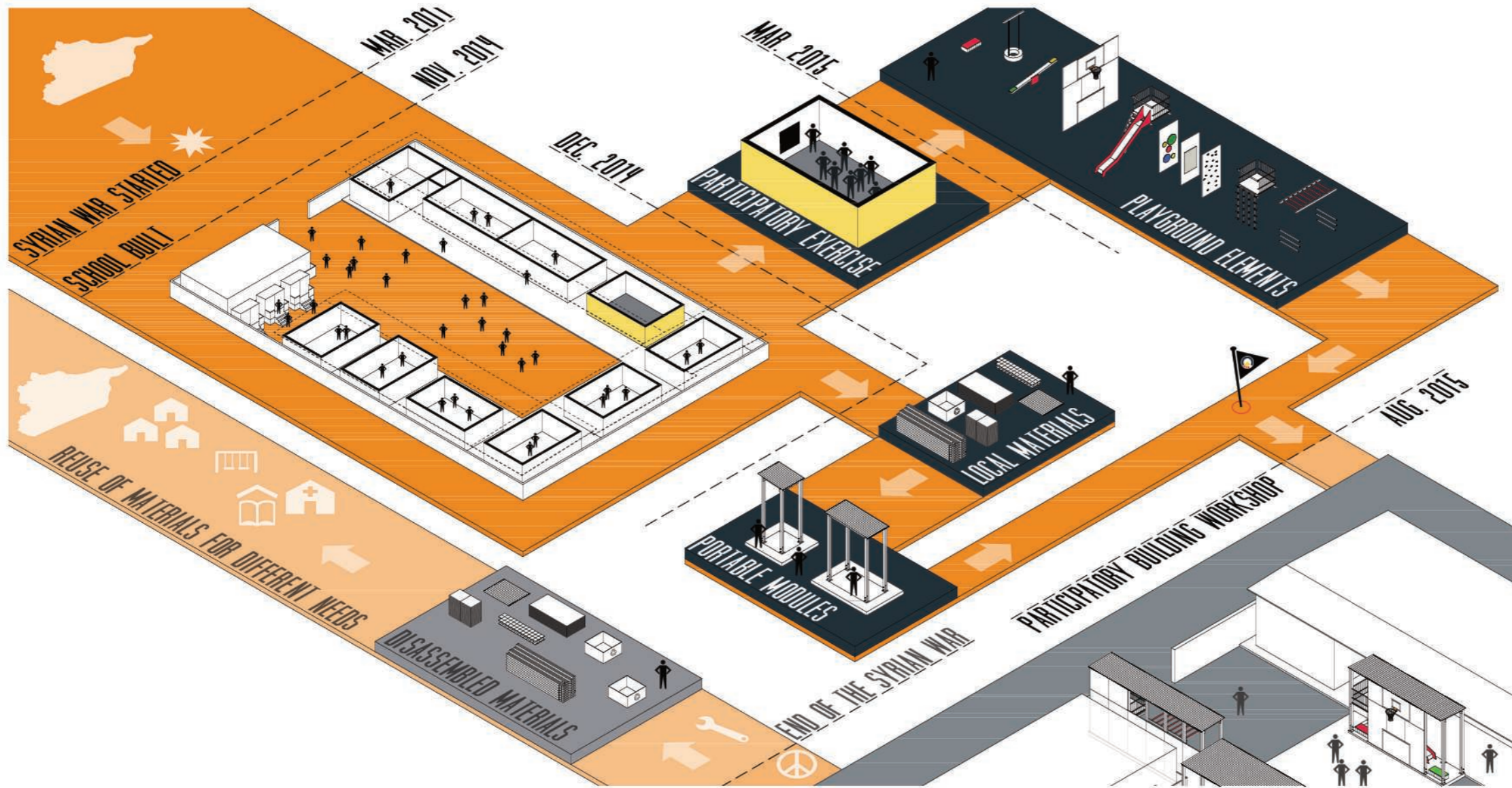
The playground has been designed, and will be constructed, with a participatory and democratic approach; prioritising children within the process. In February and March 2015, we engaged the children of the Nahreya School in a series of exercises that aimed at understanding their playing practices and play spaces. The children, of various age groups, were introduced to the project and were given the opportunity to communicate what they would hope to see in a playground through a brainstorming activity and a collage and drawing session. The first exercise aimed at initiating memories of play spaces, while the second aimed at visualising the play spaces the children desire; triggering their creative imagination. The result was a series of artwork; consisting of a combination of drawing, writing and collage.

We will also be hosting a design-build workshop during the construction period of the project. This will allow for a multicultural and interdisciplinary process where international participants from various professional backgrounds can work alongside local NGO's, students and with the participation of the residents of the settlements. The first stage of the workshop will focus on building the structure of the playground and the second stage will focus on the playground components and finishing.

Participatory art will be used to engage the children during the erection of the building and the playground space will also offer agricultural facilities and educational zones; fostering a more holistic and interdisciplinary approach. Local contractors and residents of the site will be working together to construct this structure which will cultivate community solidarity.

The playground will be inaugurated by DaMove, our European freestyle partners, who, with their international platform, will be able to promote this work and foster community solidarity at a much greater scale.





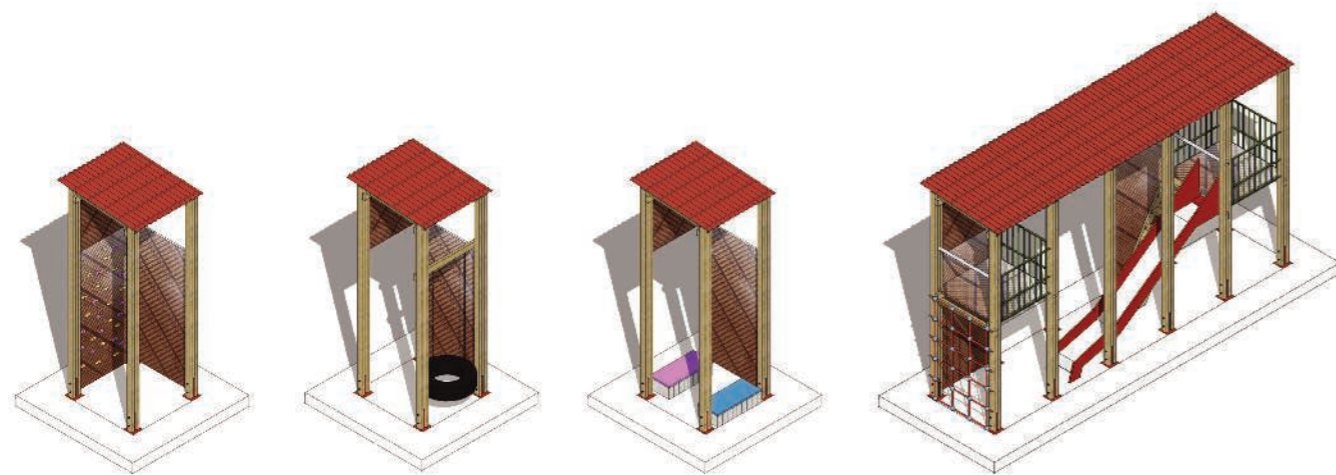
### Transforming post-emergency relief interventions into long-term sustainable development strategies

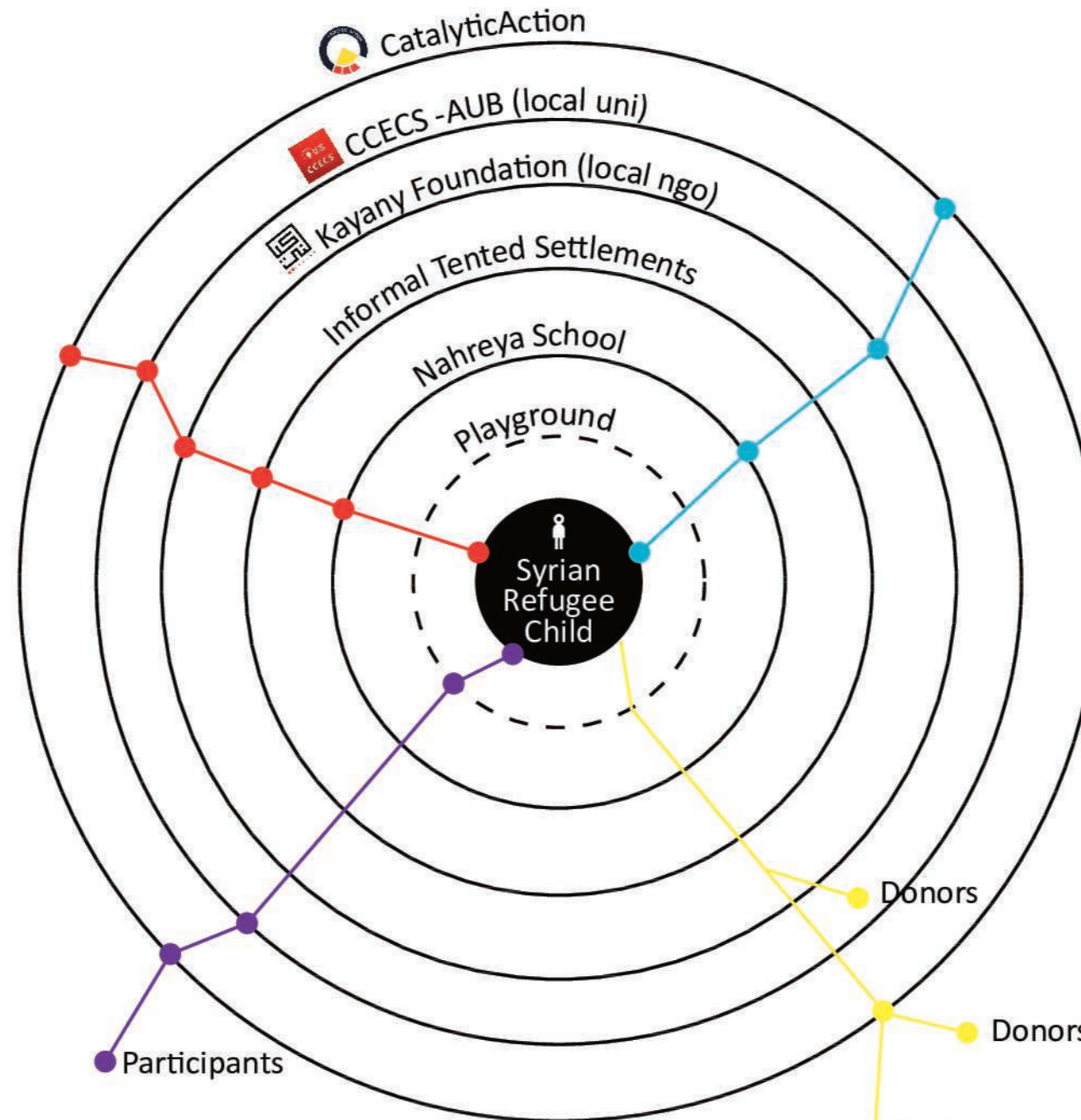
The playground has been designed with the same materials used to construct the schools within the Syrian Relief Project; the initiative that has seen the construction of three schools in Bar Elias, Beqaa. The design is modular, making it easy to expand, move and construct. We believe that these characteristics are essential for transforming the playground from an emergency-relief intervention, to a longer-term and more sustainable development strategy.

The modules used within this playground can, when the refugees of this camp are able to move home to Syria, be disassembled and then be re-used; either again as a playground or as a shelter.

A playground challenges the traditional notions of what should be delivered in emergency relief and presents an alternative by prioritising children and focusing attention on the longer-term social impacts; fostering a more sustainable approach.

The psychological state of these children, and the trauma which they have (and are) experiencing, is poorly understood but will have a lasting impact. They do not have access to the spaces they previously had to play, and to simply be children; a space which is undervalued but hugely important for development. Dattner (1969) argues: "It is in play that our desire for a perfect world under our complete control is satisfied, and it is there that all the meanings of play meet: the theatrical play that can take us out of the real world into another world born of imagination and illusion; play as a spontaneous activity occurring within freely chosen limits; play as a process or a way of acting; play as a manifestation of choice ... Play is the expression of human freedom, and, in a large sense, play is freedom" (pp.15).





- Human Centered Design
- Participatory exercises
- Crowd-funding
- Design-Build Workshop

**Fostering socially responsible built environment professionals and stimulating social modes of practice**

This project has been developed as a collaborative process with international partners and support from individuals and organisations. The fundraising process is an opportunity to raise awareness of the issues that Syrian refugees face and to trigger new debates surrounding the role of the built environment professional and the different methods of practice.

By positioning refugee children as the beneficiaries and priority of this project, this playground stimulates a social mode of production; with a human-centred design process. The finishing of the playground has been left flexible and will be developed on site, in collaboration with the children themselves.

The design-build workshop will be promoted within universities and we hope that this will inspire a new generation of socially responsible built environment professionals.

References:

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