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The Jarahieh School project is located in the Jarahieh refugee Informal Tented Settlement (ITS) in Al-Marj, Bekaa, Lebanon. The ITS, formed in 2012, now hosts more than 300 families who fled the war in Syria. Lebanon currently hosts over 500,000 displaced Syrian children, half of whom do not have access to education. Following this urgent need, CatalyticAction (CA) together with Save the Children (STC) Italy, Jusoor and Sawa for Development and Aid joined forces to provide an adequate learning environment for Syrian children.

The process undertook to design and implement this project engaged both the children and their families, the teachers and local authority members in a series of participatory exercises which were fundamental to ensure the successful realisation and future operation of the project. This project represents an innovative pilot example of re-use of a temporary exhibition structure for a humanitarian cause; in this case to tackle the Syrian refugee crisis.

The original structure, which formed the skeleton of the Jarahieh School, was initially designed and used for the Expo 2015 in Milan (Italy) hosting the STC Italy pavilion. The structure was then dismantled and shipped to Lebanon where repurposed to become the school. The choices of materials adapted to the low budget and focused on empowering the local community by sourcing materials locally, and when possible purchasing them from the most vulnerable.



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The Syrian refugee crisis is the largest refugee crisis for over a century under the UNHCR mandate. Intervening to address such global crisis should not only take into account the local post-emergency relief interventions but their integration into long-term sustainable development strategies. The Jarahieh school project addresses this principle (9) of the Hasselt Charter:

The Jarahieh School was built by adaptively reusing a pavilion donated by Save The Children Italy, shipped to Lebanon from its original location at the 2015 Milan Expo. By globally redistributing the materials and resources, this project advocates for addressing long-term global sustainability goals.

The redevelopment of the Jarahieh School created a space of safety where children can grow and develop confidence. It also represents a place for aid distribution, a community shelter from the elements, a school for adults and youth or a public space and hangout after school hours. The spatial quality of the school as well as its building process enhance the learning and exchange environment within the settlement, which advocates for the Syrian refugees to be active agents in charge of their own future, becoming part of the reshaping of their nation.



1. The school building exterior



2. The wooden structural frame



3. A shipping container being used as a building component



4. The vertical wooden posts of the structure



5. Workers constructing the roof structure



6. The initial structure & layout adapted to fit the new functions



7. The school building at night



8. Courtyard for recreational activities including a climbing wall



9. Syrian children access adequate & safe learning environment





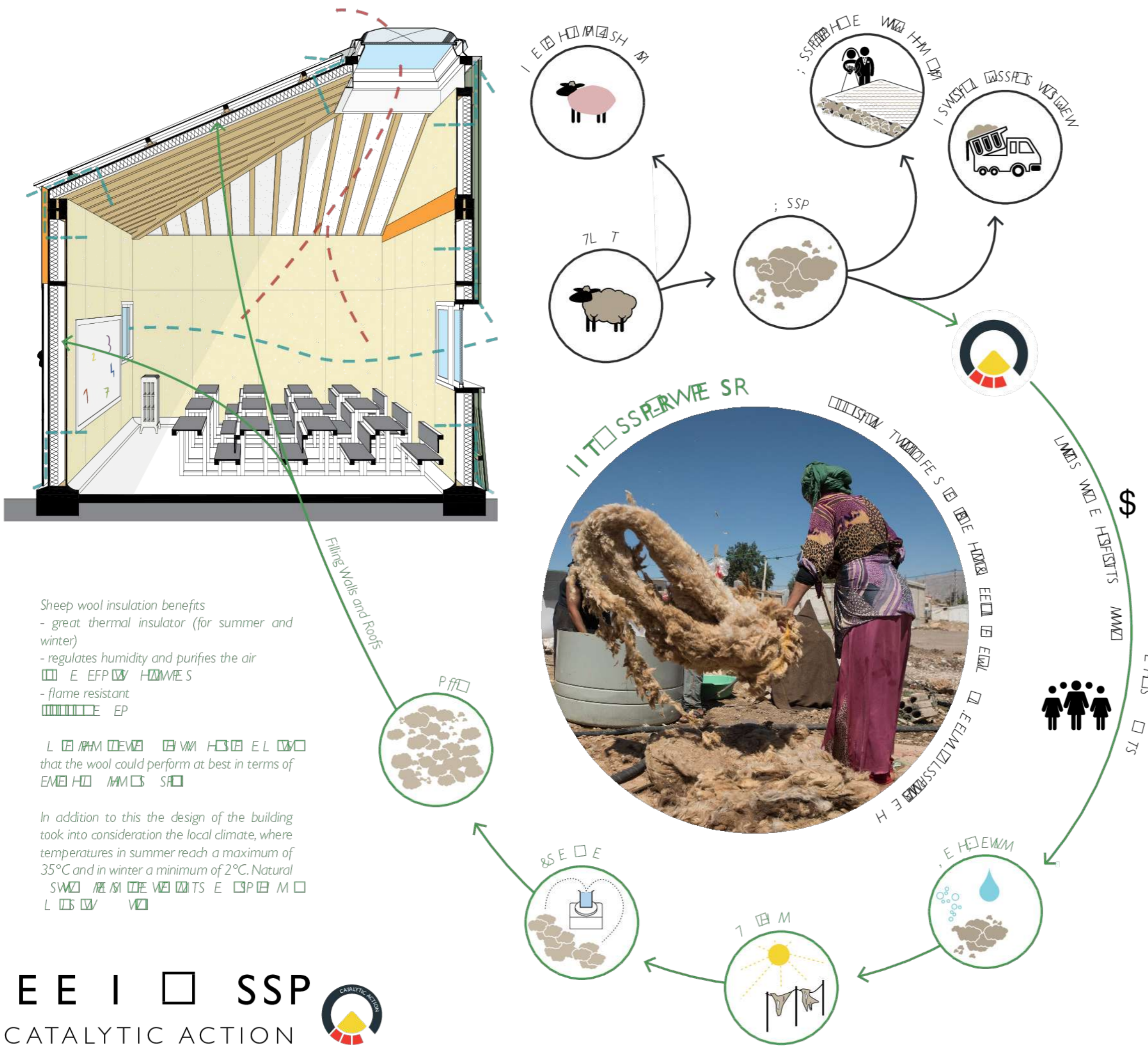
Innovating cultural and site-specific  
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The Jarahieh ITS is located in the Bekaa, characterized by its agriculture lands, hosting thousands of refugees who live in harsh climate conditions. The design of the school adapted to the local context, facilitating the use of appropriate technologies, materials and labor adequate to local values, to the cultural specificity and responsive to the natural environment (Principle 5)

From a pavilion designed to be part of an International Expo with an open space structure, it was a challenging design exercise to adapt it to become a school in an ITS. The layout of the independent pavilion units was readjusted to include a courtyard. The skin of the building was designed in order to create enclosed spaces. To achieve this, the materials were sourced locally including sheep wool, wood, reclaimed corrugated metal sheeting, etc.

The choice of materials adapted to the low budget and focused on empowering the local community, and when possible purchasing material from the most vulnerable. Throughout the building process, local labor from the settlement secured livelihood, most of whom were working as construction workers in Syria. Having the main structure of the school made of wood, the community members exchanged new building skills working alongside CA team. The walls of the school are insulated with locally sourced sheep's wool, empowering local farmers and women in the process.





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The Jarahieh school project aims at strengthening community solidarity through participatory, democratic, multicultural and interdisciplinary processes and approaches as a factor of urban social development. (Principle 8)



The design of the school was tailored around an interdisciplinary approach between the different partners having the community of the Jarahieh ITS in the center of the process. CA has engaged with the children and the local community in the ideation, design and construction of the project. Conceptual planning of the Jarahieh School started in December 2015 with groups of children participating in envisioning exercises that directly informed the design of the school.

The children had the opportunity to be decision makers. When the drawings on paper back in December 2015 became an actual building the summer after, the children felt empowered, as their visions and aspirations became a reality.



A diverse range of Syrian ethnic groups live within the Jarahieh settlement; by creating a community project through an inclusive approach, CatalyticAction aims at improving social cohesion within the settlement and the neighbouring Lebanese communities. The inclusive approach adopted in this project includes transferring skills and building knowhow to local labours from the Jarahieh community, empowering women in the settlement to be part of the project field team and sourcing the construction materials from the most vulnerable.

*"We learned a lot of building skills from CA team and we will transfer this knowledge to others in the settlement"*

Hussein, father of 3 in the Jarahieh ITS

