

International House New York
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Peace of Art: Building Hope in Tripoli, Lebanon
Tripoli, Lebanon

Background and Aim of Project

The Bab al-Tabbaneh–Jabal Mohsen conflict is a recurring battle between Sunni Muslim residents of the Bab-al-Tibbaneh and Alawite Muslim residents of the Jabal Mohsen neighborhoods of Tripoli, Lebanon. Residents of the two neighborhoods have been rivals since the Lebanese civil war. Clashes have been ongoing ever since killing over 600 individuals in the area. Many fighters have joined ISIS and other extremist groups as a result. Tensions still remain between these groups and this radicalization has been transmitted to younger generations, thus reinforcing conflict. Having our youth lured and brainwashed into committing their lives to crime and violence is a cry for help to take action.

If asked to define peace, I would simply say the absence of discrimination in all its subdivisions. It is the ability to find kindness and acceptance in other regardless of differences. The aim of this project revolves around peace-building and de-radicalization efforts in the warring neighborhoods of Tripoli. How? 100 Young women and men ages 15-25 of both opposing and rival groups, who had participated in the fighting one way or another or were even part of radical extremist groups will collaborate together in revamping and remodeling a small, forgotten church in Tripoli and turn it into a theater. The theater hall will allow room for expressing talents such as acting, singing, playing music, poetry and all sorts of art. The second part of the project will include performing a play in that theater on the participants' experience in collaborating with their "opponents" to create peace. To end the project, the citizens of Tripoli will be invited to attend the play on the day of the performance. In order to recruit volunteers, I will be collaborating with the NGO MARCH Lebanon. I chose this particular NGO because I have had a good relationship with the co-founder and they have been involved in Tripoli for a long time and have established good connections there. They have also worked with former and current fighters on peace-building projects. Consequently, they would be a contributing factor to the success and long-term maintenance of the project.

Proposed Activities and Project Plans/Timeline:

Work will be achieved over the weekends (full days on Saturday and Sunday) of the months of June and July in order to give a chance to employees and students to be involved as well.

Phase 1: (First weekend of June, 6/3/-6/4)

- Meeting the participants and explaining the aim of the project
- Dividing the participants into two groups (construction group and performing group, 60/40 respectively)
- Planning how the revamping process will take place (plastering, redo the painting, decorating with peace-related drawings, replacing old electrical wires, refurbish the floor and wall tiling, cleaning etc.).

It is important to note that the existing structural condition of the church is intact and does not require full restoration.

Phase 2: (7 weekends over the months of June and July, 6/10 through 7/22)

Both groups will be working on their tasks simultaneously.

- In this phase, the performing group will be working on the play from script writing to choreography, stage decoration etc. I will be assisting this team with the play since I have had years of acting and stage directing experience and can offer skills and techniques.
- The construction group will be working on the interior design of the theater and will begin with the remodeling. My friend, Celine Kanaan, who is an architect, has volunteered to lead and supervise this group pro bono.

Phase 3: (Last weekend of July, 7/29-7/30)

Ending the project by performing the play in the remodeled “Peace of Art” theater where families, friends, villagers and people from neighboring areas will be invited to support. Attendees will be invited by word of mouth and via fliers.

Results and Goals:

By completing this project, I hope to achieve the following goals:

Short-term goals

- Allow this community to have access to a safe, non-political space for constructive self-expression through art and talent by collaborating with one another
- Establish peace among the two opposing groups, challenging them to have a different outlook on the issue
- Help young people in the area engage in productive work (e.g. construction, acting, dancing, painting, drawing) thus steering them away from engaging in violence acts
- Strengthening and shedding lights on many hidden talents among this population and the importance of healthy self expression

Long-term goals and methods of sustainability

- Use the space for future plays/concerts/workshops to be performed in the theater integrating other individuals from opposing groups fostering a sense of peace and channeling the youth’s energy into something healthy and productive
- Fundraise money through these performances as a long term maintenance project for the theater
- Encourage other members of the village to use the theater as a healing, safe place to hang out, to work and to unleash their talents on stage
- Invoke a sense of responsibility in the younger generation, giving them a sense of purpose
- Raise awareness on de-radicalization, conflict resolution, tolerance and peace building.

MARCH has agreed to sustain the needs of this project after I leave in the summer. We have decided to assign a project/fundraising manager for this theater. MARCH will be responsible for facilitating monthly workshops (art, acting, music etc.) with the help of their pronounced network of actors and artists in Lebanon that have collaborated with them on previous projects. As I visit my country every 6 months, I will now have the opportunity to continuously monitor the progress of this initiative.

Indicators of success

SHORT TERM

1. Number of participants taking part in the project (in construction and performance groups) (i.e. percentage of the community)
2. Number attendees for the show (i.e. percentage of the community)
3. Having a remodeled theater and a show to perform

LONG TERM

1. Number of people who use the art space on a daily/weekly basis (attendance/registration sheet)
2. Number of art/musical/theater shows on a monthly basis (compared to baseline/benchmarks)
3. **An indicator for PEACE:** Reduction in the number of fights/violent acts in both groups after the construction of the theater and the performance by comparing behavioral changes in the groups before and after project (e.g. 3 months later) through focus groups, qualitative interviews and/or confidential surveys
4. Revenue from ticket sales from shows