

9 للترينو
بيروت

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2006, Lebanon went through a devastating war. Apart from the physical destruction in large parts of the country, the recent war brought up, yet again, questions on how Lebanon should be ruled, with different parties holding different ideas and visions, pushing the delicate socio-political society that is Lebanon to the brink of a civil war.

Most major relief efforts by friendly nations are geared towards what the donor country considers to be representative of the public body. By choosing sides, nearly all donor contributions are politically charged, serving further to destabilize and fragment the fragile civic society of Lebanon.

At a time when humanitarian aid and the reconstruction of infrastructure are a priority and housing has taken sway over the country, it is vital to have an independent platform that closely monitors effects on the reconstruction of the country and its society, knowing that these efforts alone, without an independent social effort, will not ensure that war (and tension) in Lebanon will never happen again.

In a country, such as Lebanon, where governments fail to prioritize and deliver platforms for cultural interaction, and where exclusive spaces are flourishing, and the lack of common, impartial and credible media is overwhelming, a social activism supported by the press in general is needed, based on personal or group initiatives, that will animate the cultural scene (which suffered a set back during the recent events) and address social and human rights issues that have manifested themselves after the July war.



EVENT 1

BEIRUT UNBUILT

In November 2006, several Lebanese volunteers, in collaboration with Dutch organizations (Archis, Partizan Publik and Pearl Foundation), organized a research expedition under the title "Beirut Unbuilt" on the "coming back" of Lebanon.

The focus of the expert platform was on the use and function of public space (physical, intellectual and virtual space) in Lebanon. The platform aimed at mapping out the core challenges, suggested viable solutions to overcoming them and sought to question the exclusive claim and use of public space, thereby contesting the demarcation lines between the various groups in society.

Beirut Unbuilt was a success.

Beirut Unbuilt was also the start of the establishment of Studio Beirut, a think and action tank made up of local and international participants, which aims to widen its network and the level of participation among different Lebanese communities.

With the close collaboration of the listed partners, Ole Bouman (director of the NAI) and Chris Keulemans (former director of deBalie), Studio Beirut is now developing a program that intends to contribute to an open, inclusive use of public space to reinforce society.



PROJECT THEME 1

PUBLIC SPACE

INVADERS

REINFORCING

PUBLIC SPACE



Facilities included in the program are:

- Studio Beirut, a cultural centre comparable to deBalie in Amsterdam, with several centralised activities (cine club, exhibition space, design shop, spaces for fresh graduates to operate, workshops and summer school), and also many decentralised events throughout the country
- A Street Blog, a free posting urban element that will reclaim the streets as a public space for discussing social issues, working as a send and receive platform between Studio Beirut and the public
- A Bus, instant movable public space that will transport elements and activities to several regions and 'deploy', under the tag line "If you don't come to the public space, the public space will come to you"

- A Website (including a blog), working as an E version of all activities and as an international communication medium with, among others, the Lebanese Diaspora
- Noise/Dajjé, a bilingual magazine
- Boat Line, a coastal ferryboat network, taking Lebanon from infrastructure to extrastructure
- Orphanage, playground and computer centre, in several villages in the south

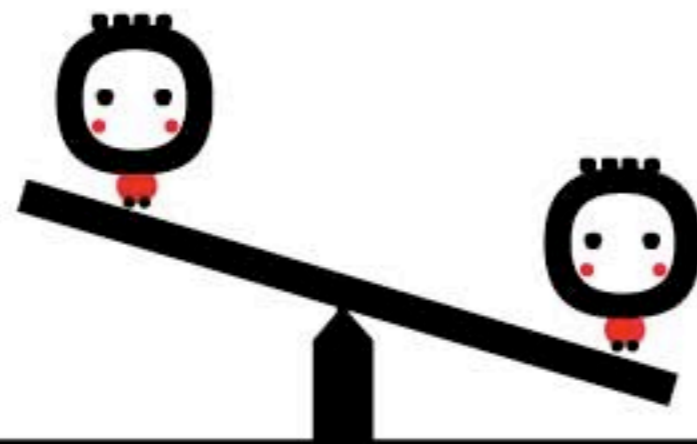


EVENT 2

PEARLS IN LEBANON

All of the projects listed before were presented in a special evening in deBalie, Amsterdam, on the 6th of March 2006, as well as through a specially prepared 'zero issue' of Noise/Dajjé, published in Volume #11 (April 2007).

The presented projects and future initiatives will aim at reinforcing and initiating public sphere and culture, and working as a think tank and communication tool between different cultural communities. The Studio, the Street Blog, the Bus and the Magazine; are all part of a platform for discussing conflicts and expressing different points of view regarding critical social, spatial and political issues.



PARTNERS AND INITIATORS



Studio Beirut is an NGO operating as a social and cultural engine, presenting itself as a public platform that facilitates and initiates cultural projects and interventions through local and international networks.

Studio Beirut is constituted of a group of young professionals, Lebanese and foreigners living in the Middle East, working closely with students and fresh graduates.

See also www.studiobeirut.org

Archis Foundation is a cultural think tank devoted to the process of real time spatial and cultural reflexivity. Archis Foundation publishes Volume Magazine, a project by Archis, AMO (Rem Koolhaas' Office for Metropolitan Architecture) and C-Lab, the architectural laboratory of Columbia University; organises international events that initiate interdisciplinary debate on spatial and cultural issues; advises governmental organisations and private companies on a variety of urban and spatial issues.

See also www.archis.org

Partizan Publik is a think and action tank devoted to a braver society. The Partizans explore, produce and implement social, political and cultural instruments, which generate positive and sustainable change to people and their surroundings. As such, they take part in the complex and continuous process of global social engineering by implementing capacity building projects, instigating social research, producing journalistic accounts and organizing public events.

See also www.partizanpublik.nl

Pearl was founded after the recent war. Pearl's objective is to support the Lebanese to help them recover after the war. Pearl establishes contact with Lebanese people in order to determine what needs to be done. The ideas and initiatives are realized together with people in Lebanon. Pearl supports the restoration of public services and the realization of cultural activities.

Furthermore, Pearl aims to stimulate intercultural understanding by bringing people together and encouraging an intercultural dialogue. Pearl would like to emphasize the importance of throwing light on people's daily lives as countries that are hit by disaster often are depicted in a one-sided manner by the media.

See also www.pearl-foundation.com

FUTURE EVENTS

>>Event #3
Summer School
(August 17 – September 1)

This event, with the collaboration of Rotterdam University and professionals in several fields (architecture, urban planning, sociology, political science...), and inviting local and foreign students, will enable Studio Beirut to run a case study on the concept and affiliations of public space in Lebanon, serving as a basis for the international architecture competition, which will be evolving around the same theme.

>>Event #4
Pearls in Lebanon
(September 1)

The Pearls in Lebanon event will be an occasion to publish and discuss the result of the summer school's workshop, but it will also serve mainly to introduce Studio Beirut and its activities, and to launch Noise magazine in tandem with the promotion of Volume magazine (#11: Cities Unbuilt) in Beirut.

This event will also be a call for individuals to participate and initiate their projects with Studio Beirut, and the start of the forum addressing public space in Lebanon.

>>Event #5
International Architectural Competition
(November 2007)

Building on the results of the summer school, Studio Beirut will launch an international architecture competition focussing on the function, the use and structure of public space in Lebanon.

With the presence of professionals within Studio Beirut's network (Felix Claus of Claus and Kaan, Martijn van Tol of the University of Amsterdam, Lucas Verweij of the Academy in Rotterdam, Ole Bouman of the NAI...), the level and quality of the competition is guaranteed.

Studio Beirut, with the collaboration of relative municipalities and the Order of Architects and Engineers, will try to present feasible plans leading to the execution of the contest's results.



STUDIO BEIRUT, TOGETHER WITH ITS PARTNERS, IS PLANNING A SERIES OF EVENTS TO INTRODUCE NEW PARTICIPANTS WHO FEEL ALIGNED WITH ITS MISSION AND INITIATE THE THINK AND ACTION TANK AMONG A LARGER PUBLIC.