

Asiles NGO

Transmissions - Towards the constitution of a self-managed cultural centre in refugee zone

www.asiles.org

Objectives of the project

Non Governmental Organization, created in 2001, ASILES target is about intervention in refugee zones from an artistic and educative point of view in order to propose different expressive ways and solutions. The main goal is to act on the rejection and abandonment feelings of refugee populations and to help them to voluntarily develop a new vision themselves and their environment. Currently ASILES develops its action in Lebanon by sustaining a cultural organisation called Maison de l'Amitié Franco-Palestinienne – MAFPA (the House of Franco-Palestinian Friendship) in the refugee camp of Baddawi (North Lebanon).

This project is based on a dynamic transmission to a young team of Palestinian students and teachers.

The proposed activities (project management, learning by doing methodology with a foreign language, magazine publishing and artistic workshops) have the same goal: to offer personal expression tools to this section of the people who are right-less in terms of freedom of expression and to empower the skills of the local team of MAFPA in order to help them to reach autonomy and self-management.

ASILES involves teachers, journalists, graphic designers and artists from Europe and now from anywhere, all of them volunteers, during training sessions organized in MAFPA with the entire participation of the local team for organization and decisions. One part of this project encloses the commune intervention of ASILES artists

and MAFPA' s team in Lebanon

Objectives of those interventions:

- Facilitate volunteer commitment of artists wishing to conduct an artistic experience of transmission within a context of isolation, community identity and withdrawn attitudes.
- Create an area of freedom and uncommon speaking able to let imaginations expand.
- Improve the strength of the existing artistic workshops through new personal expression practices in association with the young leaders involved in the preparation and the evaluation of the pedagogical impact.
- Analyse, construct, prepare and lead working sessions during workshops dedicated to children and young refugees.
- Open the artistic possibilities usable with children and young people focused on four main artistic fields: living spectacle (theatre, puppets), music (rhythm, song), visual art (photo, video) and plastic arts.

Project description

Since the House of Franco-Palestinian Friendship (MAFPA) has been created in September 2001, several art teams have successively contributed to ASILES task in Baddawi camp, carrying out workshops with children and teenagers. After being considered merely as a simple pleasure or hobby activity, ASILES, in partnership with a theatre company Du Zieu dans les Bleus, started to process this direct transmission to a non adult public with a more demanding method. ASILES proposed to the local team a new framework based on collaboration between artists and young Palestinians willing to deeply investigate an artistic discipline.

Objective after transmission: to be able to use it again with children and teenagers that used to go to the House.

In 2004 and 2005, a series of workshops were proposed. They highlighted the question of the meaning of an artistic transmission towards young adults less experienced, but deeply involved in their community, particularly with children and teenagers of the refugee camp. This transmission is continuously focused on four main fields: living art (theatre, puppet), music (rhythm, song), visual art (photo) and plastic art (drawing).

The organisation, in pairs of members appeared to be very promising in developing a demanding and pedagogical adapted artistic work. It revealed also the limits of such a process of transmission conceived without enough cooperation with the local youth team. These observations conducted ASILES to elaborate a new concept of artistic transmissions operating by involving the local team entirely in all steps: elaboration, organization, budgeting and realizing the chosen practices.

Social context

The House of Franco-Palestinian Friendship (MAFPA) is located at the border of Baddawi refugee camp and mixes together children and teenagers from Baddawi and Nahr el Bared, two camps built in the fifties.

In a context of community identity, withdrawn attitude and economical crisis, possibilities of individual escape and vision into the future are difficult. In spite of reform announcements, Lebanese law limits intentionally until now the possibility for Palestinians to access most of the qualified professional occupations allowing them a possible future, a desire for personal and constructive commitment and a will to study. Within those camps most of the Palestinians co-habit with Lebanese, Syrian and Kurdish families.

Their situations are equally difficult. MAFPA is open to all the children living in the camp and suburbs without considering national backgrounds and is trying to reach the position of a complementary educative centre through leisure activities.

Equipment dedicated to children are a very few in the camps. Some of the political organizations offer activities (scouting, sport, folkloric Palestinian dance) which remain limited by their political framework and risk to give children a world image based on the convictions of the parties financially supporting the activity.

In MAFPA, boys and girls, together, can benefit from free of charge activities organised by the centre. It became, a "refuge" considered as a second home by the children. In this way, MAFPA encourages the children to learn by developing their imagination and curiosity.

Methodologies

Transmission/training methodology is based on analysing the artistic practise, directly experimented with children and seeking together the appropriate pedagogical tools to be used in the refugee camp. Reflections, exchanges of ideas, debates in the framework of common preparation are proposed by the artists in a perspective of pedagogical assimilation.

The preparation of the workshops are dedicated to pragmatic exchanges between artists coming from a different environment and young leaders willing to explore new ways of expression by integrating external contributions as a way to renew their own activities.

Critical points and applied solutions

- *Art as a tool of exchanges and freedom in refugee zone:* Few opportunities are given to develop children's imagination in refugees' camp. Artistic intervention then appears as an urgent necessity and complex operation. The ASILES's activities were settled to open a space of freedom and neutrality through art, maintaining the artist's freedom to create so as to find good forms and themes to get the children's interest, always considering to open children's vision onto their own environment.
- *Art as a complement of educative approach:* The artist's contribution is developing and upgrading commonly with an educative approach carried out by teachers. Within the context of the camps, the artistic point of view is offering the possibility to run over inhibitions and to allow a space of research much more easily than, for example, a language teaching process could. With few tools, the artist succeeds in pushing the children ahead and bringing them to meet an original universe.

- *North / South cooperation and sustainability of artistic intervention:* Between 1998 and 2001 ASILES developed short-term intervention and a seasonal framework (summer period). In order to establish continuity between each mission and to allow a bigger ownership feeling of artistic practices by the young Palestinian team, ASILES and the local team created together the House of Franco-Palestinian Friendship (MAFPA) as a place of continuous work with children during the year. In 2004, the collaboration organised in pairs opened and materialised a new step in the cooperation between volunteer artists and Palestinians youth leaders, offering a direct and accurate transmission. After two years of cooperation (2004 / 2005) under this new standard, the necessity to answer more precisely to the needs of the team opened a new phase of cooperation.
- *Adjustment of artistic proposals and expressed needs by the local team:* Artists' and project managers' success in the House of Franco-Palestinian Friendship (MAFPA) does not always meet the speed of the local team's appropriation and maturation. It happens that they passively receive the artist's information and proposals without believing that they could importantly influence them and take the opportunity to imagine and develop their own. It becomes important to sustain and give support to closely associated artists and MAFPA's leaders (even if exchanges through internet are limited) during the concept phase of the project offered by the artist. This way of following up the project's life has not been yet experimented with but will be settled between April and June 2006.
- *Artistic and pedagogic intervention:* All artists do not want to register themselves in a pedagogic process. It appears as a necessity to better evaluate the artist's ability in this field and even operate our artist's selection, taking more into account the pedagogic potential of candidates. It is obviously interesting to observe that if the artist is not strictly communicating his knowledge in a pedagogic way, he can transmit feelings, unusual vision and a specific energy that the young adults will remember during their own courses given to the children.

It appears also that physical tools to support the teaching workshops are fundamental. Enhancing children's imagination is importantly related to such imagination in the determining of the right tools used in the right place.

What tools should be used?: videos, books, family support, and strategic progress anticipation. All these elements commonly contribute to awaken imagination. Artists have, more and more, to determine in advance and precisely the methodology and the tools they intend to use with the children and the young MAFPA leaders with whom they will definitively cooperate.

Interaction with partners (communities, public or private institutions, others) and Financing - fundraising strategies

- *Populations:* ASILES has regular and close contact with the local team of MAFPA. This team has the lead to insure the link with families and children.

- *Institutions*: Communication with camp authorities is managed by MAFPA's leaders as it is with the Lebanese. Additionally, MAFPA and ASILES have started to communicate with diplomatic structures existing in Lebanon: Canadian embassy, France embassy, Belgium embassy, Switzerland embassy and UNESCO.
- *Financing*: this project consists of artistic and social aspects allowing the enhancement of partner's interests in interactive relationships between art, culture and development.

In 2004, the project "A cultural house in refugee area" including artists contributions has been supported by the European Cultural Foundation (ECF) and UNESCO-FIPC.

In 2005, the project "Transmissions", was the logical follow up of 2004's activities, it has been supported by the foundations Un Monde par Tous, Via le Monde-CG 93 and the Ile-de-France (Paris) Regional Council.

Evaluation of the project - conclusions

The exchange and transmission system of pairs has been installed in July 2004 and followed up the following year. ASILES is regularly evaluating the results of such methodology focusing attention on:

- *Holding of new workshops and public performances*: Until now, except for the video workshop requesting too high an investment, the MAFPA's team continued during complete year all artistic know-how transferred to the young members. The Palestinian leaders have quickly decided to impulse a creative work with the children. This work with the children and the public performances organised by MAFPA are evaluated.
- *Ability to insure transmitted disciplines evolution and adaptation*: The ability to build a proper workshop and inventive ability to create comparisons to the experience resulting from the teaching phases with volunteers, are studied. Sustainability of art practices is now a reality, but some of the leaders have difficulties in detaching themselves from what has already been done with artists.
- *More important participation of children and parents*: Each year more and more children join MAFPA (50 in 2004 and 80 in 2005) and new leaders join their team (8 in 2004 and 13 in 2005). The House creates a real strong interest for the families, even if they are not deeply involved in the every day life of the structure and the follow up of the activities. The transmission process, the settlement of MAFPA as a cultural area opened to the World in the Baddawi camp are not yet finished and granted. The close cooperation of ASILES and MAFPA open a new phase of collaborative work based on advanced art workshop elaboration.