

Dima Boulad: “It is necessary for our society to have open spaces where individuals can interact”

Fellow discusses need for The Beirut Green Project and creating alliances with other countries

During the Salzburg Global session, *The Child in the City: Health, Parks and Play*, participants have learned how valuable the role of open space can be in post-conflict countries. Dima Boulad, co-founder of the Beirut Green Project, is one of the reasons behind that. Salzburg Global’s Andrea Abellan sat down with Boulad to find out more.

The Beirut Green Project is a social initiative, born with the aim to assemble the concerns of citizens seeking to develop a more liveable city. With 0.8m² of green space per person, Beirut remains below the Wealth Health Organisation’s standards which recommend every citizen should have at least nine square meters of green space. Boulad says, “Some citizens do not recognize the access to public spaces as a right they can claim, and this is what we aim to change.” The Project has run awareness campaigns and organized many social events.

The consequences years of war have had on Lebanon remain visible. In some areas, the country lacks basic facilities such as electricity or access to water. Outages of these services remain frequent. Complicated circumstances such as those above make it harder to place the development of green spaces as a priority in the minds of politicians. The goal of non-profit organizations such as the Beirut Green Project is to make clear that in spite of the urgency of meeting basic needs, citizens should not have to waive other civil rights such as the opportunity to enjoy public spaces.

Boulad highlights the significance public spaces have in post-conflict areas. Boulad says, “In Lebanon, we grow up in a culture of fear. It is necessary for our society to have open spaces where individuals can interact with others. Accessible public areas might help to change our habits, break



the bubbles where we live and therefore, improve our relationships.”

Boulad says the work of advocates such as herself is not easy in Lebanon. She says, “It is very hard to have the attention of the government and to manage to get things done. Taking part in a Seminar like this can facilitate our jobs as it allows to create alliances with other countries from which we can learn and get aid.”

Maria de Kruijf: “We will be able to improve our projects and have a better view of citizens’ demands”

De Verre Bergen Foundation associate discusses projects being undertaken in Rotterdam

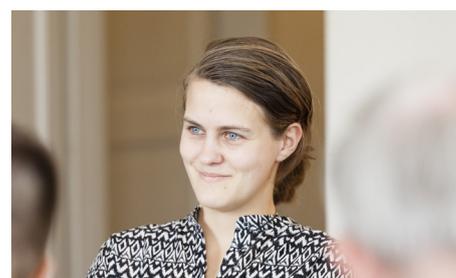
During discussions at Salzburg Global’s *The Child in the City: Health, Parks and Play*, participants have debated issues around accessibility, equity, and the need to open up green spaces to everyone. Maria de Kruijf, a participant, and associate at the De Verre Bergen Foundation spoke with Andrea Abellan to discuss how she has previously sought to create stronger communities within a city, and how this may apply to work moving forward.

Nearly half of the population in Rotterdam - the second largest city in the Netherlands - have an immigrant background. More than 170 nationalities live together in this metropolis located alongside Europe’s largest port. Concerns related to multiculturalism emerge frequently. De Kruijf, as an associate for De Verre Bergen Foundation, is one of many looking to address these concerns and create a stronger and more equal place to live. De Kruijf started her career as a high-

school teacher, a job she decided to leave while looking to get involved in projects that “could have a positive impact not only on certain groups of people but on a whole city.”

At De Verre Bergen Foundation, De Kruijf’s efforts are focused on Rotterdam. De Kruijf says there is a lack of dialogue between the cultures represented in the city. De Kruijf explains, “People who have lived in the Netherlands for years might feel intimidated by recent immigrants. The financial crisis cost many jobs, and there are some groups blaming foreigners for this.”

De Kruijf also has concerns surrounding the rising inequality between population groups in the city. De Verre Bergen Foundation, founded in 2011, seeks to overcome these challenges by supporting diverse social ventures. The organization follows a holistic approach designed to foster real integration. One of its latest projects has provided 200 Syrian families



with accommodation, language courses, and bureaucratic support.

De Kruijf feels very positive regarding the outcomes achieved at this session. She says her interaction with other participants has made her reflect on the need to “invest time in talking with different social groups to learn what their demands are. In this way, we will be able to improve our projects and have a better view of citizens’ demands what hopefully will help them to feel greater represented by our programs, especially when it comes to a program about their own public spaces.”



Working Groups: Looking ahead and narrowing down outcomes

There are multiple paths the conversations surrounding parks, protected areas, cities and children can be taken. Participants at *Child in the City: Health, Parks, and Play* have been asked to consider several questions to guide their thinking as they look to push forward a new change agenda.

The aim is for this agenda to take a form, something tangible which can be shared. To get closer to this goal, participants have asked themselves what children need from green spaces and parks, and how to improve access to these areas.

Participants have asked themselves why they want to connect children with nature in cities. It stems from concerns about children's health to wanting to include the voice of a child in the decision-making process. Children can help create a culture where they can be and feel a part of nature, acting as "stewards."

To provide a stronger connection, participants believe we need to address children's perception of safety and ensure there are cross-generational solutions. Existing infrastructure can be used to address issues with nature-based solutions.

One working group suggested all children around the world are in a situation where their access to nature is at an impoverished level. Wilderness experiences could provide a good solution, but these aren't practical for everyone.

Instead, children could innovate the green spaces they do have access to. Disused pieces of land, such as power line corridors, could be turned into green

spaces. Funds could be provided by the power line companies to transform them.

Transportation is a barrier to getting people to a park, and into it. Access is a financial issue, as well as a geographical issue. One solution is to promote free travel to a national park on a select day each month.

Children have a right to play in nature. Community engagement and co-creation can develop solutions. Basic experiences such as Open Streets or "grow anything" concepts could get people hooked. Cities could also be measured with regard to their nature score, benchmarking themselves against each other.

Participants called for children to connect to a "meaningful" nature experience on a daily basis. Outside actors have to address the different needs, and abilities children have. Awareness must be raised among caregivers, and more should be done so children can have a nature-rich experience in a walkable distance. Low-cost transport to nature could exist through partnerships. There can be a greater shared use of existing spaces for the wider community as well.

During this session, participants have shared many thoughtful ideas but the time has come to present them in a succinct, crisp, and memorable fashion.

They will consider which audience they want to put their message across to and whether they need a preamble which reaches out to more than one stakeholder. One participant concluded a compelling and emotive case is required.



#FacesOfLeadership

"I was a programmer, and I was so busy creating a new software. I was very happy but so busy. There was no time to hang out with my kids – I have two kids. Then,

I got cancer, and I had to get rest, and during that time, it was my first time to spend a long time with my kids. I realized

I had to teach or show them that the world is very big and exciting. So when I was a kid, I was watching the Discovery Channel, and I found that [kind of]

knowledge isn't taught in school. I wanted to have that for the kids, so that's why I started TEDxKids. The kids who attend TEDx as speakers are sometimes alone because they're very unique. They say they're very happy meeting people who think like them. I feel like I could create the community for the kids...

When we talk about the environment for kids, it's only adults talking about it... It's good to involve the kids to discuss with adults about it."

Ryuta Aoki is the founder and CEO of VOLOCITEE Inc., a design firm which supports communities in creating innovative products, services, and systems. Mr. Aoki also founded the first TEDxKids event in Japan in October 2011.

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Hot Topic: “What are the main issues we need to address to optimize well-being in a growing urban environment?”

Denise Macalino

“First of all, I think children’s well-being needs to be more on the municipal agenda in cities around the world. At the moment, children just go under education or health, but there isn’t a focused look on children’s needs across disciplines and across service areas. [There definitely isn’t] across issues that are not traditional areas, like dealing with children in [terms of] transportation and mobility, open space and green space. So I think by having a closer look at what children’s needs are, and a focused structural way within municipalities, which would require going across silos and bringing different departments together, to think about the holistic needs of children and their families, would lead to a much greater impact for children... [Young people] are often seen as a problem that needs to be solved, and not part of the solution... There’s so much energy and creativity in these human beings – these young human beings. If we leverage that, we can help them to change their environments to make it better for everyone.”

Daniella Ben-Attar

Bernard van Leer Foundation, Israel

“I look forward to taking back from here, and further conversations, scale-up strategies. There are a lot of good ideas around. We need a concerted effort to spread them to more cities and communicate them in an easy way. There’s a vibrant discussion, but it probably needs to become a more inclusive discussion about people who are working on issues such as community economic development. In particular, community gardening, urban agriculture, [and] food access, so that it’s not a conversation limited to people thinking about parks and large green spaces, but thinking about green spaces of all sizes.”

Andrew Moore

National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, USA

“Today’s session really helped me to see the bigger picture... But also [to] see

the beauty in thinking small. One of the stories we heard about someone who fell in love with nature when they saw grass peeping through the street cracks and realizing that many of our communities and children just don’t have access to urban green spaces or parks. How do you come up with innovative solutions to incorporate greenery to very condensed, very vulnerable, low-income communities, where people often are disconnected from transport systems? The discussion we had was very insightful in getting opinions from people from different countries and different contexts.”

Xanelé Purén

See Saw Do, South Africa

“If children can’t access nature or parks, how can we include isolated children? Such as handicapped children, or children from isolated families? If we say children, we have to think of [all] children. We have to use the design to [accommodate] every child.”

Ibuki Ozawa

Chairman and Founder of NPO PIECES, Japan

“When I started my work, I recollected my past and thought I had a very good experience over the years. That became a power to overcome my hardships that I’ve faced. I realized that the children in the current era don’t have that kind of experience when they’re young. They don’t have the experience of playing, so they never know how to handle some hardships. I wanted to give children those experiences, and my work started at this point... children aren’t notified that they have a right to play... When we say something to them directly, it becomes education. I wanted to let them know unconsciously and in a natural way. But it was hard for them because they don’t have any idea of what to do for play, which is one of the main challenges in supporting their wellbeing in an urban environment.”

Haemoon Phyen

Miracle Playground, South Korea

Session Highlights

A selection of photos from *The Child in the City: Health, Parks and Play*, taken by Ela Grieshaber. These and more will be made available on Facebook and Flickr.

