

Empowering the Person Campaign by Aseel Honein

(Mediterranean Interactive Dialogue NGO)

I created a program to fight poverty and social exclusion in my current city Barcelona. I am an architect who is interested in building for people with limited resources and designing concepts that address societal problems as well as environmental. However, I feel challenged to raise awareness of other designers and architects on the impact of their design when those parameters are not taken into consideration. There are few NGO's that probably promote the same ideas and I think there should be a lot more. For example, I am already an active volunteer member in Architecture for Humanity Chapter Barcelona (AFHS) and I created this long term program and was hoping through several funds we can be active in Spain (as in LaCaixa ObraSocial program 2009's theme was to fight social exclusion and alleviate poverty). Unfortunately, AFHS works as a mediator and is not capable of doing the work themselves.

I have a vision that architecture and design students (all domains including fashion and art therapy) can be easily involved in this project under the focused management of an NGO that I wish to create.

As I have stated before the program is a long term intervention, I quite believe that we can not change overnight so we need to plant cultural seeds more often in order to harvest successful awareness in the future. It starts by hosting an awareness campaign to the most needy and socially excluded in Barcelona through Empowering the Person Campaign where volunteers will built temporary movable murals and graphically document on the walls the outcome of their interviews with the public, street beggars and musicians, the homeless and everyone who is willing to cooperate.

Creating food and homeless shelters is directly responsive solution that has been offered by hundreds of institutions, however, I am more interested in tackling the roots of the problem rather than fixing the outcome of it. The movable walls will be constructed in strategically public plazas where human interaction is high on many levels. For example, In the MACBA area (museum) there is Place del Angel which is mainly the threshold between the touristic La Rambla street and the popular Raval area that encompasses of immigrants, prostitution and drugs. It is cultural, artistic, commercial, touristic, and a lot of homeless find refuge in that area.

HOMELESSNESS IN BARCELONA - INTRODUCTION

It has been noted from several NGO's statistics that there are approximately 373,000 people living on streets or in hostels where there has been around 129 institutions that provide shelter for homeless. However, AFHS is looking forward to address the problem of homelessness in a more responsive way which is to look deeper into the causes rather than the effects.

ANALYSIS

Homelessness is mainly derived from complex factors that mainly could be summarized as the following:

UNEMPLOYMENT

- I - Due to lack of qualifications
 - i- personal conditions (alcoholism, drug abuse, etc..)
 - there are specialized institutions for that
 - ii-technical condition (lack of skills..)
 - Educational challenge: to raise awareness and provide different workshops...
- II - Due to lay offs (economic condition..)
- III- By Choice
- The Challenge: to provide hope and raise awareness through art therapy other architectural interventions..

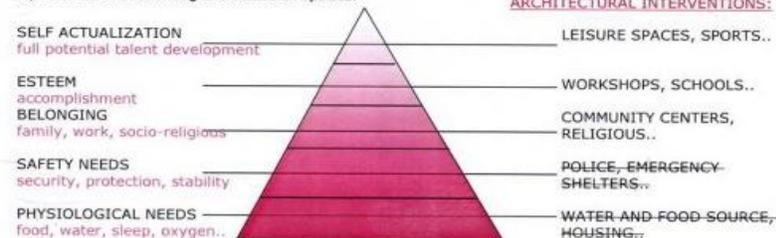
FAMILY BREAKDOWN

- I - Orphan
- (there are specialized institution for that)
- II - Divorced
- (there are special therapy groups for that)
- III- By Choice
- The Challenge: to provide hope and raise awareness through art therapy other architectural interventions..

"I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination —indeed, everything and anything except me." —Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man.

FURTHER ANALYSIS

According to Maslow's Law of Hierarchy, these are the following priorities for human needs that can be interpreted to the following architectural spaces.



Photos by Carlos Lorenzo, BCN



The above analysis diagram is more of a summarized personal assesment. Maslow's Law of hierarchy depicts that the human needs start in the bottom of the pyramid with the basics: food, water and shelter, safety then belonging, esteem and finally self actualization. So with further analysis, I translated Maslow's Law into architectural interventions. As I stated before I am not interested in proposing direct solutions, so the outcome of the different campaigns in different locations should help to assess and conclude the type of 'healing interventions' that is more of a complementary architectural prototypes of Art therapy centers, workshops and training, street theater, public sport corner...

STRATEGY

Homeless people lose their identity within the community and allocate non-spaces to occupy or live in. The challenge is to address this societal problem and give incentive to homeless people who are stray by choice to find their lost identities. The architectonic interventions will vary from temporary architectural elements to permanent spaces depending on the addressed areas.

FIRST PHASE:

TO RAISE AWARENESS by creating "EMPOWERING THE PERSON" CAMPAIGN
fighting homelessness, poverty and social exclusion

Volunteer work of used, donated and recycled ceramics can be used to make movable walls with awareness messages to *interact* with the public and homeless stray people. There are food and other type of shelters but some of the homeless use these facilities and come back to the street.



Plaça del Angel, La Rambla



INSPIRATION - HOW AN INNOVATIVE ARTWORK BY A WRITER CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE LESS FORTUNATE...

A blind beggar on the road... no one is paying any attention to him...he is so poor that he cant even afford tears...he has not cried for years...
a writer who is broke in his life... its spring... the writer leaves his home to wander with out a penny in his pocket. he notices the beggar and his miserable state...there is a slate and a chalk kept beside the beggar...
the writer approaches the beggar and says ' dear friend, i am a writer who doesnt have a penny but i have an art...i have power of words...i can give you that...please allow me to write on the slate which you have...' Beggar' sir...hardly any one speaks to me...i am a poor blind beggar...you are free to do what ever you want to do with the slate' the writer writes something on the slate and walks away...
as writer leaves, the beggar could feel that every person passing by him is stopping and throwing coins at him... after few minutes there is a heap of coins in front of him... he becomes uneasy...the heap keeps raising second by second...
he becomes so restless that the next man who throws a coin in front of him, the beggar grabs his hand and says sir, sorry for misbehaving...but i am a poor blind man...please do me a favor and read out to me what has been written on the slate?' the man takes up the slate and reads out

' ITS SPRING AND I CANT SEE! '

The first phase will have a dual role in addressing the less fortunate and to raise awareness among designers to promote creative approach and demonstrate how being creative can help at least one person as the story illustrated in the upper right column. Barcelona is a city in an Economic Crisis. Yesterday, I heard on the news how the two largest saving banks are crashing in Barcelona due to the crashing of the Real estate. This is a living proof of planning for the sake of investments rather than addressing the needs of the people may probably lead to failure. The urban planning of Barcelona city did not address the needs of its inhabitants but rather allowed big investors and developers to build freely neighborhoods that became deserted. Why? Average people could not afford them and the investors gave in their buildings to the banks instead of closing their debts and loans. The outcome is empty apartments no one can afford and average people having to share their apartments with friends /others or stay with their parents.

I instantly addressed the Generalitat department responsible for social housing planning and offered my free consultation.

Before I go back to my program, I once read by a socio-economic analyst here in Barcelona saying "we decided without knowing to have immigrants in Spain instead of children" so I researched the facts and found that an average Spanish woman bears 1.24 children in her lifetime. The birth rates are very low! While unemployment reaches 21%, Spain needs a lot of immigrants to fulfill a lot of different labor and jobs! So maybe love and marriage inspirational campaign should address the locals as well :)

Now back to my program, the first phase is on a smaller scale where the temporary walls are built to communicate and address individuals. But the aim is to conduct a study of all the deserted areas, the "once agricultural areas", industrial and slum areas.

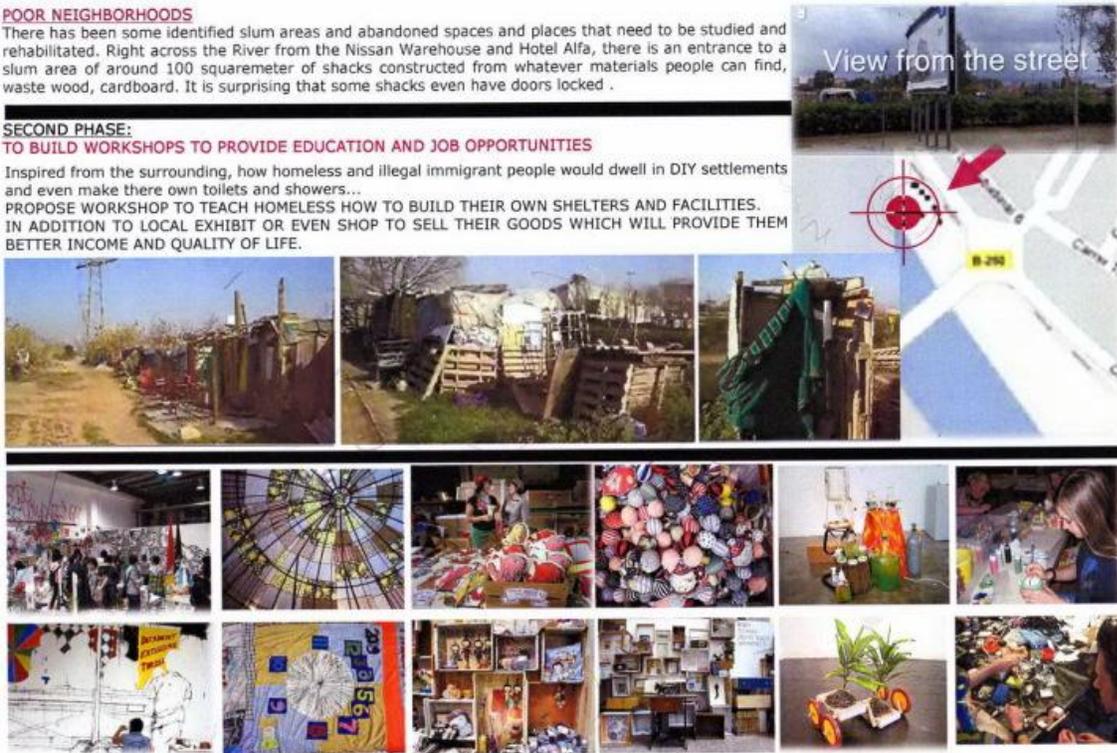
POOR NEIGHBORHOODS

There has been some identified slum areas and abandoned spaces and places that need to be studied and rehabilitated. Right across the River from the Nissan Warehouse and Hotel Alfa, there is an entrance to a slum area of around 100 squaremeter of shacks constructed from whatever materials people can find, waste wood, cardboard. It is surprising that some shacks even have doors locked .

SECOND PHASE:

TO BUILD WORKSHOPS TO PROVIDE EDUCATION AND JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Inspired from the surrounding, how homeless and illegal immigrant people would dwell in DIY settlements and even make there own toilets and showers...
PROPOSE WORKSHOP TO TEACH HOMELESS HOW TO BUILD THEIR OWN SHELTERS AND FACILITIES.
IN ADDITION TO LOCAL EXHIBIT OR EVEN SHOP TO SELL THEIR GOODS WHICH WILL PROVIDE THEM BETTER INCOME AND QUALITY OF LIFE.



Under the second phase, I posted some pictures of a slum area in Barcelona where it is full of stolen goods and DIY dwellings and showers. This inspired me to later address this kind of neighborhood by introducing building or crafts-work workshops.

Probably people coming from far more problematic countries would prioritize studying far more underserved areas. I agree but now I am here and this is an approach where I am hoping to further elaborate it to address a wider range of neighborhoods. By not imposing structures as most of designers do but rather look deeper into our society and understanding its real needs.

Any money raised through Global Giving or Evoke matching Funds would be used to fund the "Empowering the Person" campaign. It is the first step in initiating an Interactive Dialogue NGO. Coming originally from Lebanon, I would like to think that this NGO can be active in Mediterranean countries. Maybe it can be called Mediterranean Interactive Dialogue NGO (MID) where it promotes awareness among designers by involving design schools in volunteer social work!

*This project raises funds for
Empower the People Project: Mediterranean Interactive Dialogue NGO (MID)*

1. *Constructing and maintaining movable art walls documenting the conditions, needs, and potential of people and targeted areas. These walls should address societal as well as environmental problems.*
2. *Conducting studies, interviews, and assessments of at-needs areas covered by the Empower the People Projects. These areas include urban and rural blight areas, and those*

with high crime/poverty rates, areas where homeless find refuge, former agricultural zones, degraded industrial zones, and slums.

- 3. Hiring artists, specialists and trainers, to conduct outreach, assessment and interactive documentation of targeted areas.*
- 4. Involving professional designers, architects, and architecture and design student (from all domains, including fashion and art therapy) in contributing to “healing interventions” including designing and constructing Art therapy centers, workshops, shell theaters and street theater zones, sports corners and other recreational/interactive zones...*
- 5. Further address needs of targeted areas/blighted areas, through creative interventions, ranging from arts, sports, theatrical and architectural/design projects and training, and maintaining accurate and creative updates and additions to the moving walls.*
- 6. As possible, create/maintain ecologically/environmentally sustainable and special-needs accessible moving walls and recreational/interactive zones, and building and crafts-work/arts workshops and kiosks.*
- 7. Promote awareness of need for ecological/environmental/societal sustainability through moving walls and recreational/interactive zones.*
- 8. Ensuring adequate staff to fulfill needs of the Empower the People: Mediterranean Interactive Dialogue projects (paying staff as needed).*
- 9. Provide adequate office space, computer, cameras, art equipment, and other supporting technologies, to complete and maintain ongoing projects.*
- 10. Provide lighting for all spaces, to improve visibility and safety*
- 11. If possible, involve the homeless, community residents, et al, in creating works self-expression, art, or other tangibles, which might be sold if they so desire, through the crafts-work workshops or kiosks or other additions to the moving walls and recreational/interactive zones.*