"Play Scapes" | Building Trust International

In the city of Jerusalem, in a mixed neighborhood, an empty school yard serves as a daily afternoon gathering space and playground for the local Jewish and Arab children living nearby. The process of play amongst the children has emerged spontaneously over the years and opened a unique window of opportunity for communication, understanding and friendship.

The project at hand includes the active participation of both the Jewish and Arab residents who joined together with a mutual dream of making a better place for their children to play and establishing a communal space for leisure; a place that could provide an opportunity for building a bridge of coexistence and raze a blessed horizon of understanding and joint action.

The project strives to convert the empty yard to an appealing and inspiring space for children; a place which creates a real bridge between the two communities and encourage the common game, dialogue and acceptance of the other.

The Site

The school yard is a plot of an estimated 1500 sqm with five structured terraces. The yard has two entrances – one gate at the top, leading to the upper terrace and the other gate at the bottom – leading to the lower terrace.

Due to the schools specific location, the yard has become an after-school hours meeting place for the Jewish and Arab populations, when the children all come to meet each other and play in the school yard.

Today all terraces are bare and empty. There are no facilities, no proper lighting, no seats or shade. Some areas are considered to be dangerous for children without adult supervision.

The BRIDGE of Coexistence

Our Neighborhood

"Hagiva Hazarfatit" is a peaceful neighborhood in Jerusalem with an estimated 7,000 inhabitants. The neighborhood’s mixed population includes Jewish and Arab families.

"Frankel" elementary school, containing 250 students, serves as the center of the community and the heart of social life in the neighborhood.

The Site Plan

No "Play Scapes"

Today there are very few playgrounds in the neighborhood; there are no public parks or places dedicated merely for play, game or leisure activity. As a result the school yard is spontaneously being used by the children within the community, both Jewish and Arab, as a play and gathering space, during the afternoons and holidays.
The Dream
The Frenkel School has organized a group of residents - children and parents, Jews and Arabs, who came together to work towards the restoration of the courtyard and to turn it into an attractive and inspiring space for their children. A beautiful dream of establishing a communal space for leisure, that could also serve as a platform to coexist and raise a blessed horizon of understanding and joint action among all the neighborhood population. A place where reality and dreams can come together.

Elliptical focal points
On the basis of the five existing terraces, five activity areas were planned to cater to the specific needs of the local community. The design of the five focal points was inspired by the elliptic shape which forms a clear center and yet allows directionality that encourages movement and continuity.

Concept
The bridge - a light construction formed between the two entrances, often excavating and often hovering above the ground, encouraging the children to move, play, explore and create a magical space by simple means, based on the existing topography.

The ground - The five existing terraces remained mostly unchanged and constitute the basis for the new planning. By adding stairs, ramps and slides between the existing terraces, the courtyard area becomes accessible and safe. The use of a distinguished design language creates a unique space with simple and affordable means.

Vegetation
Along the yard we propose to plant and cultivate a community garden based on local flora and water-effective vegetation integrated edible and medicinal plants and herbs for the use of the local residents. Trees are an important source of shade in the Mediterranean sun and also serve as focal points in the yard’s landscape.

Circulation
The circulation is based on three main routes across the yard:
1. The bridge - a light construction formed between the two entrances encouraging the children to move, play, explore and meet each other.
2. Accessible Sidewalk - an illuminated route with standard ramps and stairs allows access to the entire courtyard for all community members (including wheelchairs).
3. Free Track - removing the existing obstacles created a new attractive and interesting track that encourages free movement between the terraces in a variety of ways - stairs, ramps, ladders, and slides.

Materials & Construction
The entire structure is based on a simple construction method - a light bridge with basic and uniform metal constructions. The uniform constructions method reduces the costs and complexity of implementation. The selected materials - metal and wood, are inexpensive, commonly available and recyclable. The construction method allows modularity. So that the project can be established in several phases.
THE CONCEPT offers an experiential linear pathway that connects the two existing entrances to the yard, often serving the two different populations, through a course of various gathering and playing points.

1 LEARNING
On the upper terrace near the school, an outdoor classroom space, allowing intimate seating in small groups, drawing and writing on the erasable board walls and various science games.

2 GATHERING
Various tribunes allow seating and gathering in large groups, conducting local community events, performances and organized activities.

3 TREE HOUSE
In the center of the site - the main attraction - a real “tree house” drawn from the dreams of the neighborhood children is intended to encourage a common game and meeting spot.

4 SPORTS
Near the existing sports field, a terrace dedicated to sports and fitness activities, encouraging movement and health.

5 PLAYGROUND
Shaded playing area for younger children surrounded by a big designed bench for sitting and relaxing.