

## Venice and Lebanon: together through the mirror

The project “Venice and Lebanon: together through the mirror” is a joint project involving UNDP Art Gold and Venice municipality. It offered to a group of about 100 Lebanese youngsters from different villages and confessional backgrounds in the South the opportunity to participate at three artistic workshops that were ran in South Lebanon by Lebanese experts and Italian young artists from Venice: a photography workshop; a graffiti workshop; and an atelier of puppet production using recycled material.



The objective of such a project is to help the youngsters acquire new communication tools; to develop the creativity of the youngsters by helping them observe and discover their own country and people from an artistic perspective; to provide the youngsters with photographic, painting and handmade crafted puppets & masks skills; and to provide spaces and opportunities where Lebanese and Italian youngsters can meet, work together and communicate using Art as a common language.



The initial sessions introduced the youngsters to: the history and basics of photography; the history of graffiti through an interactive video and samples of graphics all over the world highlighting the use of graffiti as a mean to convey social messages and self expression; samples of puppets through pictures of the carnival parade in Venice that highlighted the use of such puppets in cultural events.

The second stage involved brainstorming sessions on the themes to be selected for each workshop: “community life” was chosen for the photographic session; the sentence “future together” was selected to be painted on the wall; while

“Alice in Wonderland” and “Lebanese folklore” were elected as themes for the puppet show.

The workshops led to an improved self confidence of youngsters, for instance the participants were encouraged to express their identities further through the “name drawing” exercise using different calligraphies fitting their personalities.

They acquired new artistic skills and techniques and acknowledged art as a tool to spread awareness, self expression, and city embellishment. The pleasant atmosphere, the enthusiasm of youngsters, their eagerness to learn and curiosity was specifically striking *“Italian youngsters in the same age group would have been totally disinterested”* mentioned Lucia Madoli the Art Gold junior focal point.



The graffiti activity attracted the community’s attention and interest: local people assisted in the painting and others invited youngsters for tea as an appreciative sign of the work done for the city. In addition to that, the municipality of Tyre was directly involved in the workshops and was continuously following the progress of work.

Few youngsters could fluently speak English/ French, however they helped in translating and insuring a proper communication flow. In addition, art proved to be an excellent communication tool overcoming language obstacles, *“Fantasy is the only rule”* said Rocco Cacciari. Houssein Mahdi from Nabatyeh explained that *“drawing is an indirect way of communicating, our drawings on the wall attracted many people who were on the beach, and the message we chose showed our willingness to work together for a better future”*. Dina and Hiba from Bint Jbeil were delighted to share their experiences with Italian youngsters; they wanted to know more about Italy and were learning Italian words. The group of

Nabatyeh also invited the Italian experts to a cultural exhibition and dinner in their village. They were excited to show (and discover for some) the rich city of Byblos to the Italian. Sherine is still communicating with the Italians through facebook.

The successful experience of the workshops (graffiti and puppets) was duplicated in a less intensive manner in the summer camp. Ten youngsters who participated in the initial workshop in Tyre accompanied by the instructors were selected to share their experience with the camp attendees. For some youngsters like Mona, Marwa and Mayssa it was the first time they sleep out of their houses. Houssein mentioned that the fact that he had to teach other youngsters gave him more self confidence and he feels ready to teach the member of his community. Hiba intends to paint a wall in her village in Bint Jbeil, *"our youth group already got the permission from the public Library to embellish a wall!"* While Sherine believes that the puppet workshop will be very useful in her career as a child educator. On the other hand, a photo exhibition portrayed the work of the youngsters in front of around two hundred attendees.



These workshops were specifically appropriate to the youngsters of the South, a region where few opportunities are presented to expend creative and artistic skills.