

# play from play

playing for a better future

Nicolas Abou Haidar





AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT  
FACULTY OF ENGINEERING AND ARCHITECTURE  
DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE OF DESIGN  
UNDERGRADUATE DESIGN THESIS  
IN  
ARCHITECTURE  
PLAYING FOR A FUTURE  
by  
NICOLAS ABOU HAIDAR  
ARCH 508/509– FINAL YEAR THESIS I & II  
FALL/SPRING 2019-2020  
ADVISORS: RANA HADDAD - SINAN HASSAN

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT  
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IN  
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SUBMITTAL FORM

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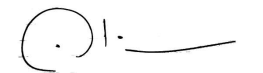
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Approved by Thesis Advisor:

SINAN ALI HASSAN

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[Prof. SINAN HASSAN, Senior Lecturer]  
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# play from play

a decentralized network to play for a better future

thesis by Nicolas Abou Haidar

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Department of Architecture and Graphic Design  
Fall 2019

I would like to sincerely thank my advisor Rana Haddad for her time, support and enthusiasm; she played a great role in the development of my thesis.

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## introduction

What if we could introduce “play” for deprived children in order to create for them new opportunities, far from child labour and menial jobs, proving that there is a place for them in society?

I first started my research having a particular interest in children’s creativity and imagination. Sparked by encounters during a previous installations studio, “Appropriation 2018, by Rana Haddad & Pascal Hachem”, my interest in understanding how children can contribute to architecture as well as designing objects and spaces grew.

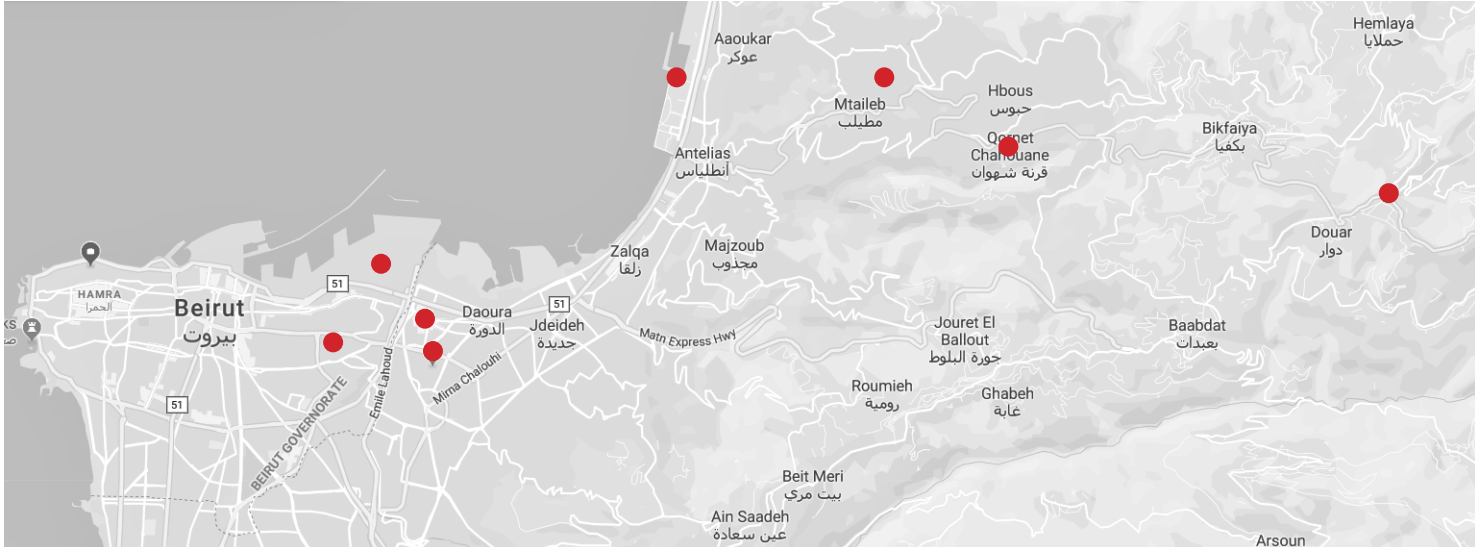
Can one imagine designing “with” children?

Through understanding and learning from play, can we then use “meaningful play” as a learning activity for less fortunate children and adapt it as a process for the development of their futures?

I. play ground

# 1. finding play

Beirut - Mount Lebanon



I began my research by visiting different areas in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, looking for kids performing play in order to observe and learn from them. From this, I was able to categorize these outdoor play spaces into three types.

## private spaces

Kornet Chehwan - Dbayeh



## public parks

Beit El-Chaar - Karantina



## street

Karm El-Zeitoun - Nabaa





## 2. Kornet Chehwan; obedient children

Kornet Chehwan



I visited a privatized park in Kornet Chehwan and installed a simple intervention, three balloons hung on a string attached between two trees. I set up a hidden camera and disappeared. From my recordings, I discovered that most of the children stopped to interact with the foreign objects but were interrupted and dragged away by adults.



### 3. Beit El-Chaar; a bit of both

Beit EL-Chaar



I performed the same event in a public park in Beit El-Chaar. A couple of minutes later, kids rushed to try grabbing the balloons where one of them climbed a wall to better reach the string and lower it for his friends to take them. Another kid popped one of the balloons with a stick and tried popping the rest until adults came and thus he moved away.



## 4. Karantina freedom

Karantina



My third attempt was to set up the same intervention on the streets. I attached the balloons onto the fence of a parking lot where kids were playing and so they instantly rushed to take them and play with them.

## 5. where to play

private spaces

desire to play

interaction

freedom

public parks

desire to play

interaction

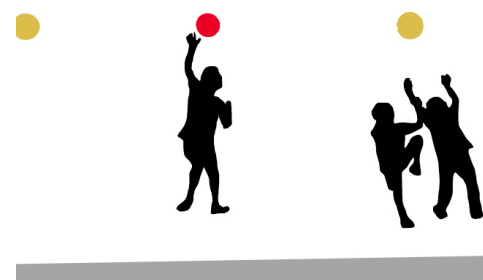
freedom

streets

desire to play

interaction

freedom



These experiments, performed in three different types of outdoor play spaces, helped me come up with a conclusion. The desire to play is found in all children, but interaction with foreign objects is based on the level of freedom and adult supervision they are subject to.

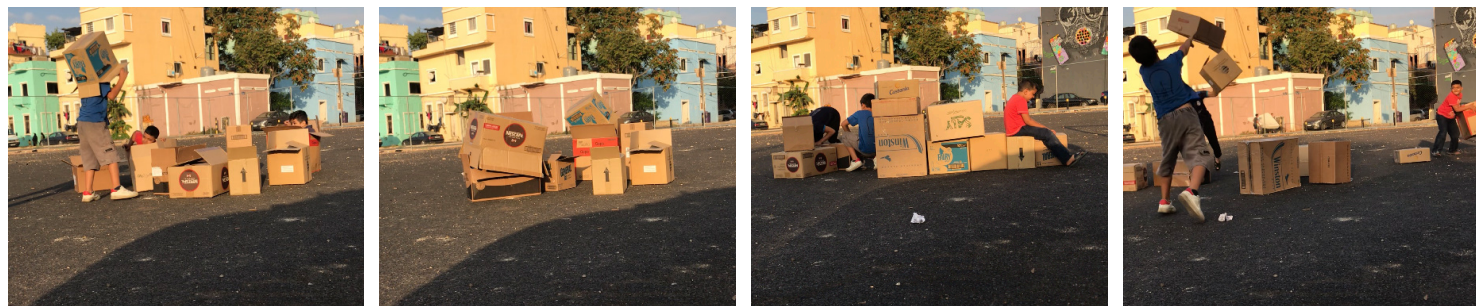
I decided to focus on street play, with the less fortunate, ready to make something out of anything, far from any limitations.

II. playful streets



# 1. surprises

Karantina

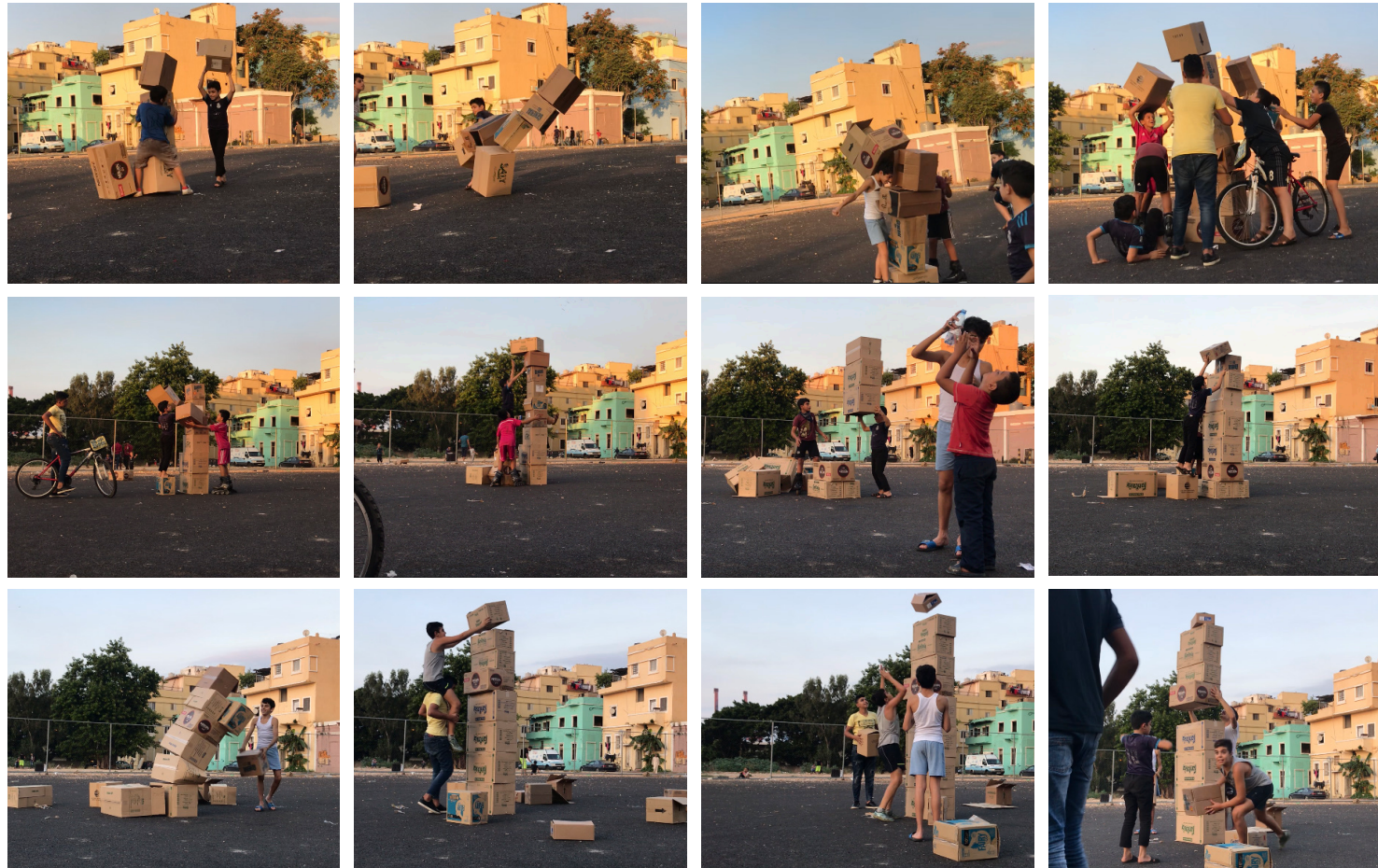


I went on performing simple experiments on the streets to better understand how kids will interact and play with what I expose them to. I placed a bottle of baby powder (discretely) in between children playing soccer where after some time, one of them used it to draw a soccer goal on the asphalt.

I then came back with several empty boxes which I placed in a pile in the middle of their play space. The kids directly took over and began hiding inside them, building a staircase with them and eventually throwing them at one another when they got bored.

## 2. highest tower

Karantina



To become more involved in the activities taking place, I asked them to build a tower from the empty cardboard boxes. They built the highest tower they could by carrying one another and tossing boxes to the top. At this point, I interfered to show them a simple method, lifting and inserting at their point of reach, that allowed them to continue building higher.



### 3. higher highest tower

Karantina



The second challenge was introducing an additional element, rope. Some chose not to use it and resorted to the lifting and inserting technique I previously taught them, while others tried building the tower on the floor and wrapping it with the rope then straightening it up, but it collapsed in the process. I then interfered to show them how they could have tied a couple of similar boxes together to form several bundles/sets that could then be lifted in parts.

III. playful learning

## 1. Ms. Montessori

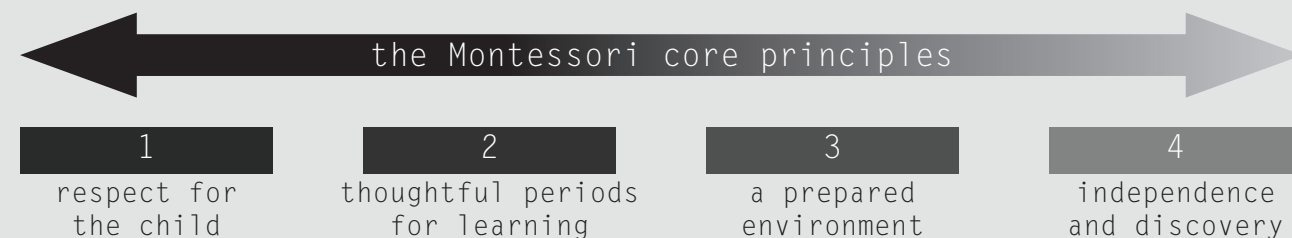
Ms. Montessori's method of education is based on self-directed activity, hands-on learning and collaborative play.

Children work in groups and individually to discover and explore knowledge of the world and to develop their maximum potential.

Every material in a Montessori classroom supports an aspect of child development, creating a match between the child's natural interests and the available activities.

Children can learn through their own experience and at their own pace.

It pays special attention to children's interests based on the evolutionary stage they are going through and with the belief that manipulating concrete objects helps the development of knowledge and abstract thinking. They can respond at any moment to the natural curiosities that exist in all humans and build a solid foundation for life-long learning.



## 2. Swedish play

Primary education in Sweden is based on learning through play. The curriculum is based on "fri-lek, spark-lek, mat-lek, and much more."

"Lek *n*,  
*play*"

Characteristics of "meaningful play":

- gives the child a choice about what he or she wants to do
- feels fun and enjoyable for the child
- evolves spontaneously, rather than giving kids a script to follow
- is driven by intrinsic motivation about what the child wants to do
- creates an environment where kids can experiment and try new ideas





### 3. Mr. Steiner

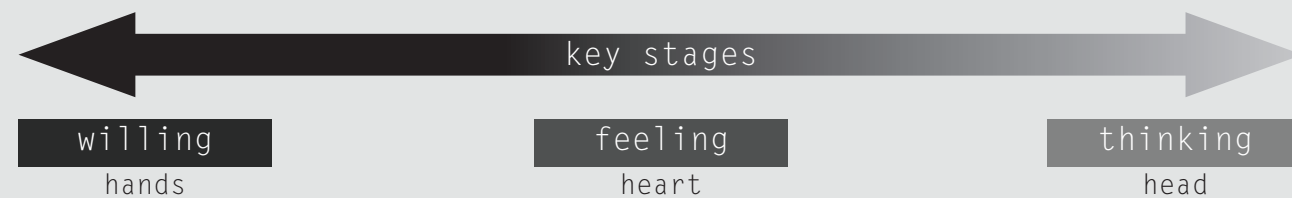
“At the heart of the Waldorf method comes education as an art- it must speak to the student’s experience, educating the whole individual, where the heart, will and mind are reached together.”  
-Rudolph Steiner

The stated goal of the Waldorf Method is to produce individuals able to create meaning in their own lives. Waldorf emphasizes the child’s imagination and fantasy. It focuses on imaginary play, learning through imitation and doing.

Workshops are designed to improve students’ fine motor skills, imagination and help them become productive members in society.

This method is applied by a school, Step Together, in Lebanon that has a curriculum based largely on crafts such as mosaics, pottery, candle making, weaving, embroidery, soap making and candle making, all which aim to develop fine motor skills, creativity, imagination and coordination.

In Waldorf Education, the learning process is essentially threefold, engaging head, heart, and hands  
- or thinking, feeling, and doing.



### 4. city from scratch

Christiania is an intentional community of about 850 to 1000 inhabitants in the Danish capital Copenhagen. It was initially a military base that then became appropriated by homeless people trespassing to use the empty buildings. Inhabitants of the surrounding neighborhood also took over parts of the unused area as a playground for the children.

It is the biggest opportunity so far to build up a society from scratch - while nevertheless still incorporating the remaining constructions.

Christiania’s self-management is based upon every individual having a responsibility for his/her own life and his/her home. The residents in an area have a common responsibility for the area’s development and condition. All Christianits, grown ups and children, have to take responsibility and action in any developments in the local community.



## 5. come and play

The paper 'iPLACE' by Rana Haddad "documents a series of installations built by students around Beirut in response to the socio-political inconsistencies and presents a comprehensive explanation of the design process and outcomes. It reflects on the power of public interventions as urban catalytic tactics."

"Moving away from exercises in representation, we chose to take the risk, and move to the streets.

Our design studio, Appropriation 2018, culminates with 1:1 built installations in the city within the discourse of a participatory approach. We aim to give way to a new reflection of the city's normal. As people come to the idea of realization through use, our installations are acupunctured in the city examining it through the scopes of the mundane and the restrained."

### 'COME AND PLAY'

"The students who designed the installation, 'Come and Play' viewed Beirut through the lens of defiance and resistance. They responded by using 'objects and appropriating them, they believe that what they're left with is appropriating the city in order to survive it. This is how they employed the representative objects of the city to become their survival kit."



IV. play; from learning to crafting



## 1. what's your name?

**يوسف حسام**  
8 سنوات  
الصف الثاني  
مدرسة البسطة المختلطة  
لعيب فوتبول



**أمين عمشة**  
9 سنوات  
الصف الثالث  
مدرسة الشارع الطريف  
جيشي



**حسين حسين**  
12 سنة  
الصف الخامس  
مدرسة المتوسط الأشرفية  
قبطان



**كريم حسين**  
8 سنوات  
الصف الثالث  
مدرسة المتوسط الأشرفية  
جيشي



**عمر الحسن**  
5 سنوات  
روضة  
مدرسة راس النبع  
جيشي



**بهاء حسام**  
13 سنة  
الصف السابع  
مدرسة المتوسط الأشرفية  
مهندس



**هادي جواد**  
13 سنة  
فران  
مدرسة البسطة المختلطة  
فران



**يزن حريري**  
13 سنة  
الصف السادس  
مدرسة الارغوي  
رسام



**ريتشي مسير**  
13 سنة  
الصف الثامن  
مدرسة الوطنية  
مخبرات

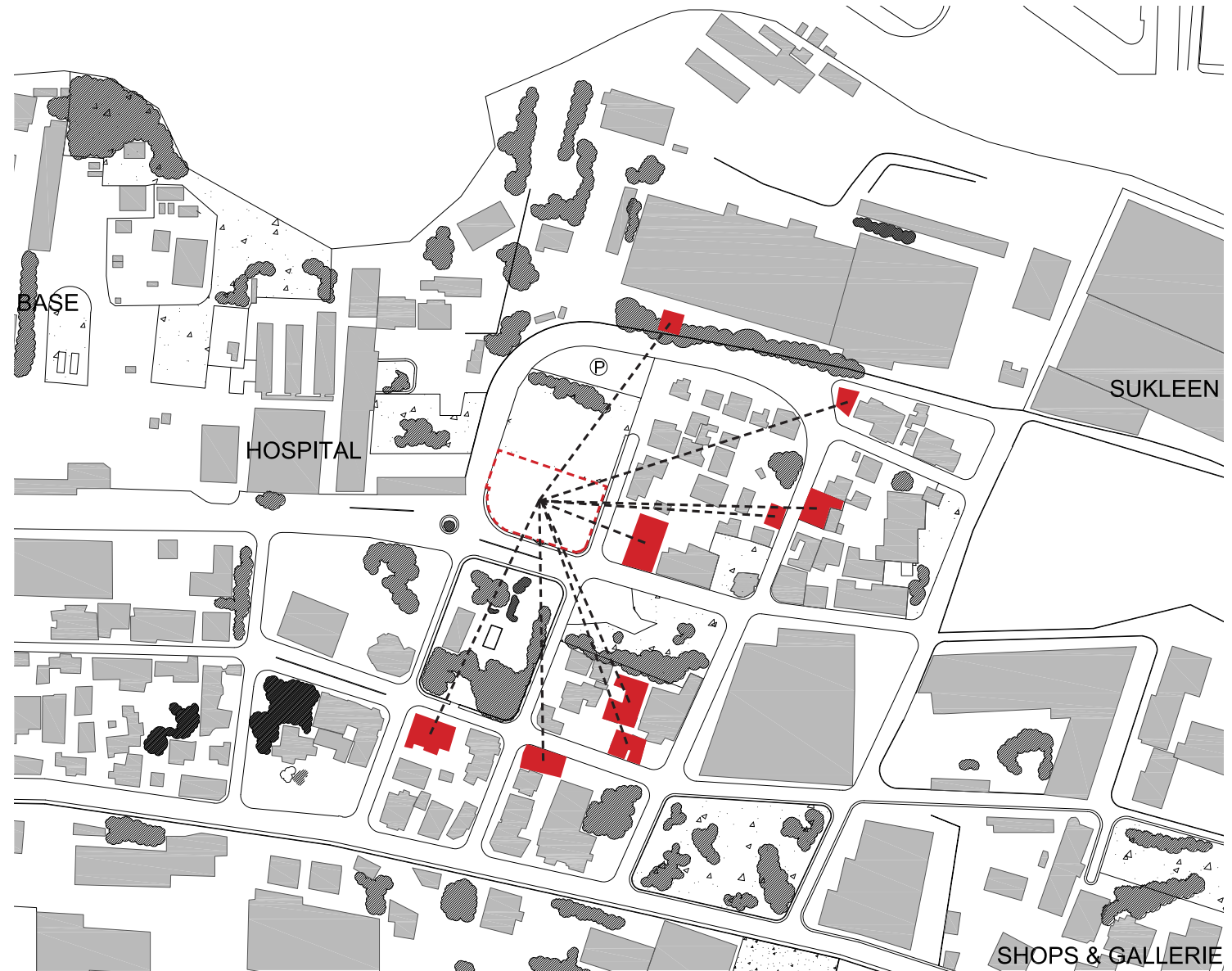


To further develop my understanding of the field, I began profiling and getting to know the kids better. I looked into age, school year and dream career. Many of the kids were late in their education due to economical issues and others were already working. Many of them want to become soldiers or part of the intelligence forces.

I also mapped the parking lot - their play space and second home - in relation to their houses.

## mapping

Karantina



Karantina parking lot | children's second home & everyday play space  
52m X 31m

## 2. more developed fun

As part of the profiling and a more systematic approach to playful learning, I started a series of exercises.

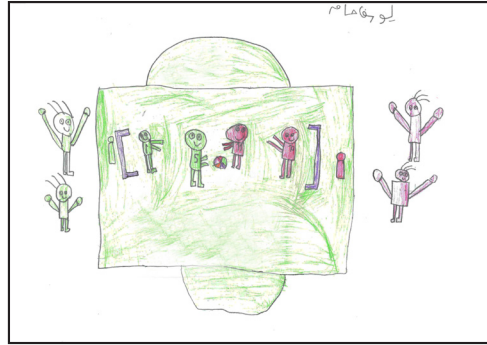
Drawing a future; where each one of them drew themselves in the future.

Many knots; where they knotted pieces of rope to create a soccer goal net.

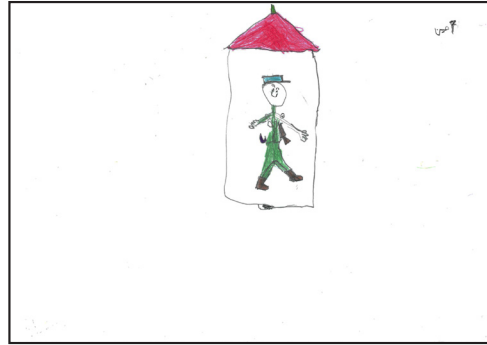


# exercise I: drawing a future

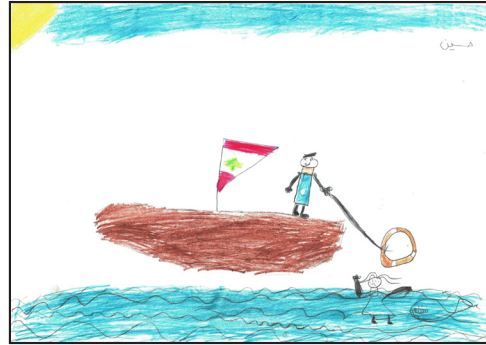
Karantina



يوسف حسام  
لاعب فوتبول



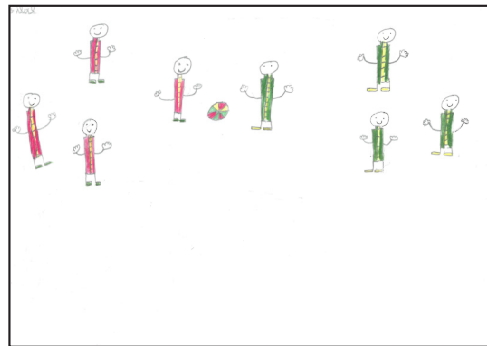
أمين عمشة  
جيشي



حسين حسين  
قبطان



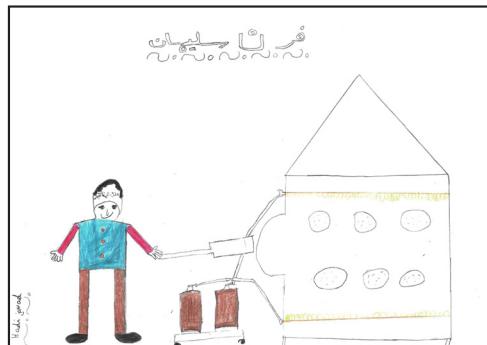
كريم حسين  
جيشي



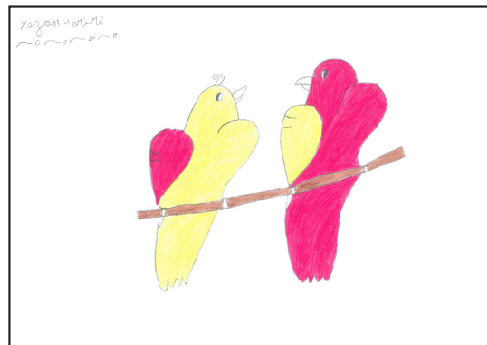
عمر الحسن  
جيشي



بهاء حسام  
مهندس



هادي جواد  
فران



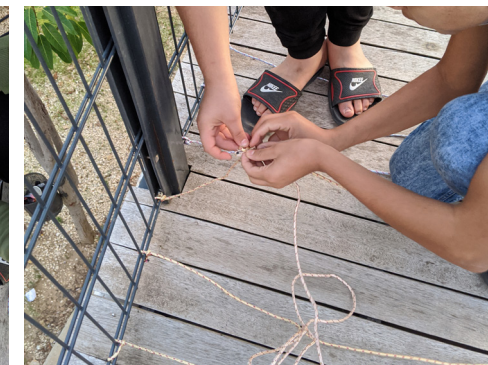
يزن حريري  
رسام



ريثي مسبر  
مخابرات

# exercise II: many knots

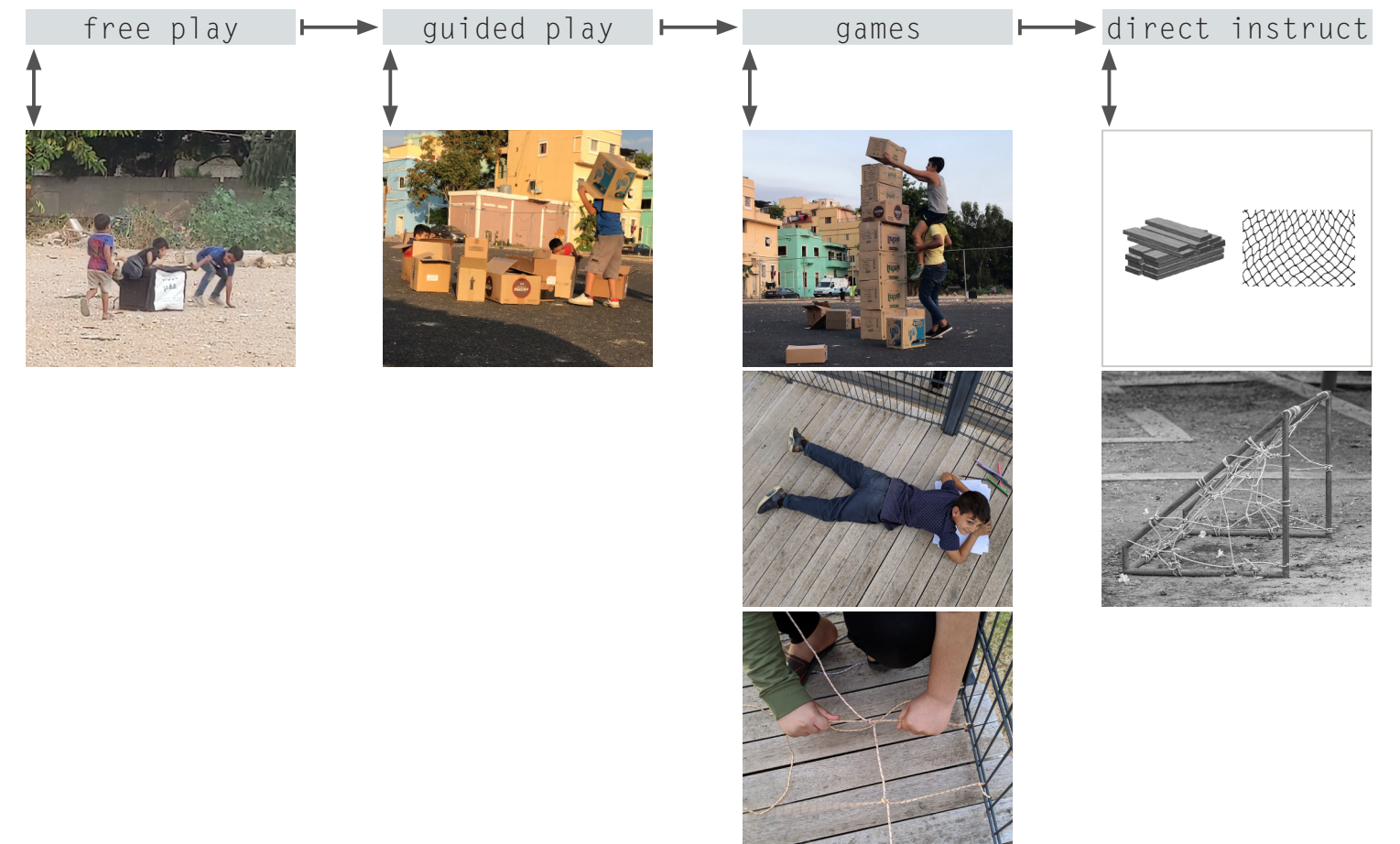
Karantina





### 3. an adaptive process

These exercises and experiments were now based on an adaptive process that I developed from the educational systems. The free play where the kids are performing their daily fun activities, guided play where I provide them with elements but don't direct them with what to do, games where they are provided with rules on how to proceed and potentially direct instructions on what to do.



## 4. craftsmanship in Lebanon

Now thinking what should be the next step that would come in parallel to the playful learning experience, I started looking into Lebanese crafts, a part of our culture that is slowly fading.

## craftsman; Mr. Salamoun

Baouchrieh



Souheil Salamoun, one of Lebanon's last remaining leatherworkers.

'My son Elias newly developed an interest in this field after suffering from the lack of job opportunities here. It's only been a few weeks, so let's wait and see.'



## craftsman; Mr. Saade

Zouk Mikael



Salim Saade, one of Lebanon's last remaining nawl weavers.

'It's for my son. He learned weaving and likes it very much. But he found a well-paying job abroad, he's not likely to become a weaver.'

## craftsmen; Khalife family

Sarafand



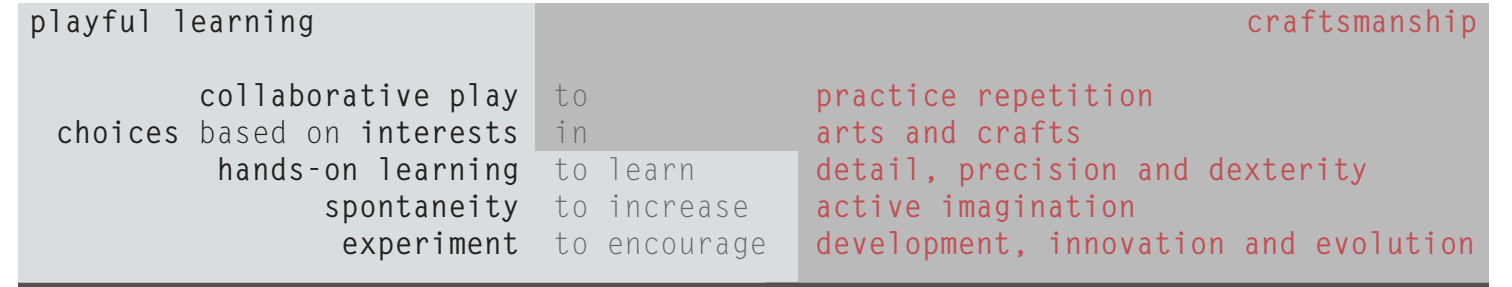
'We're the only glass artisans left in Lebanon today,' says Ali Khalife.

'My niece, she loves to be here, she usually stays in the workshop all day. When she grows up, she will work in the family business as well - that's for sure.'

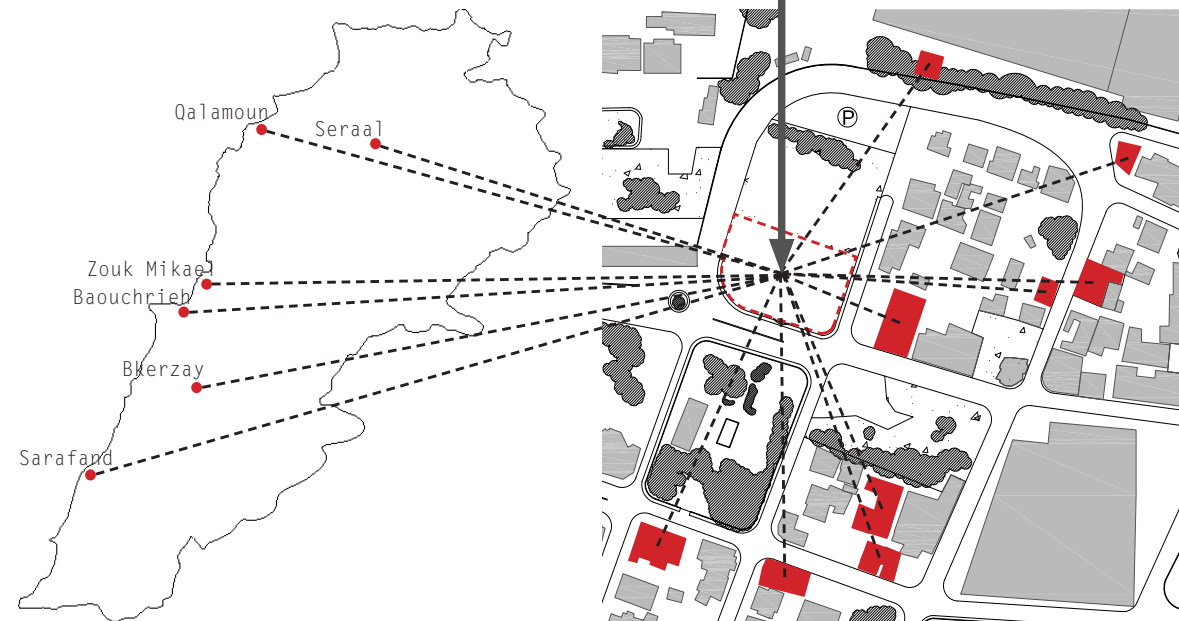
# 5. playful craftsmanship

Karantina

Looking into the main characteristics of both, playful learning systems and craftsmanship, I started exploring how these two entities can come to gether to complete one another through a process that would happen both locally at a micro scale and nationally at the macro scale



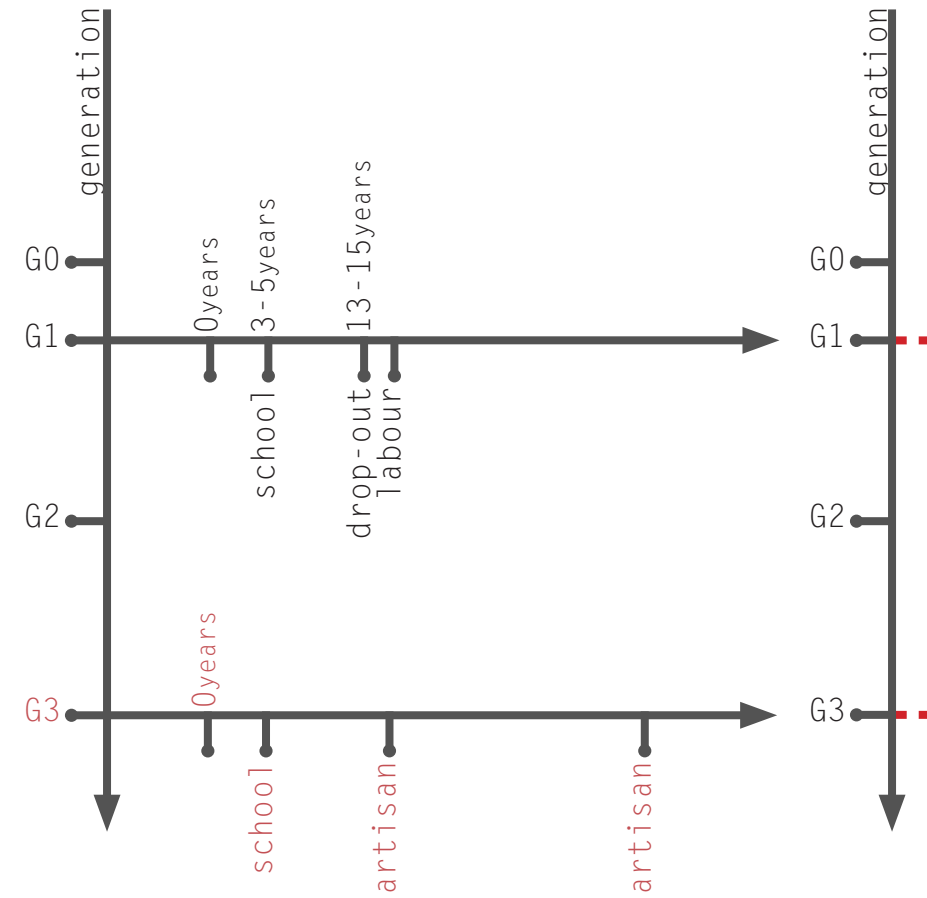
adaptive process; different activities happening within their play space

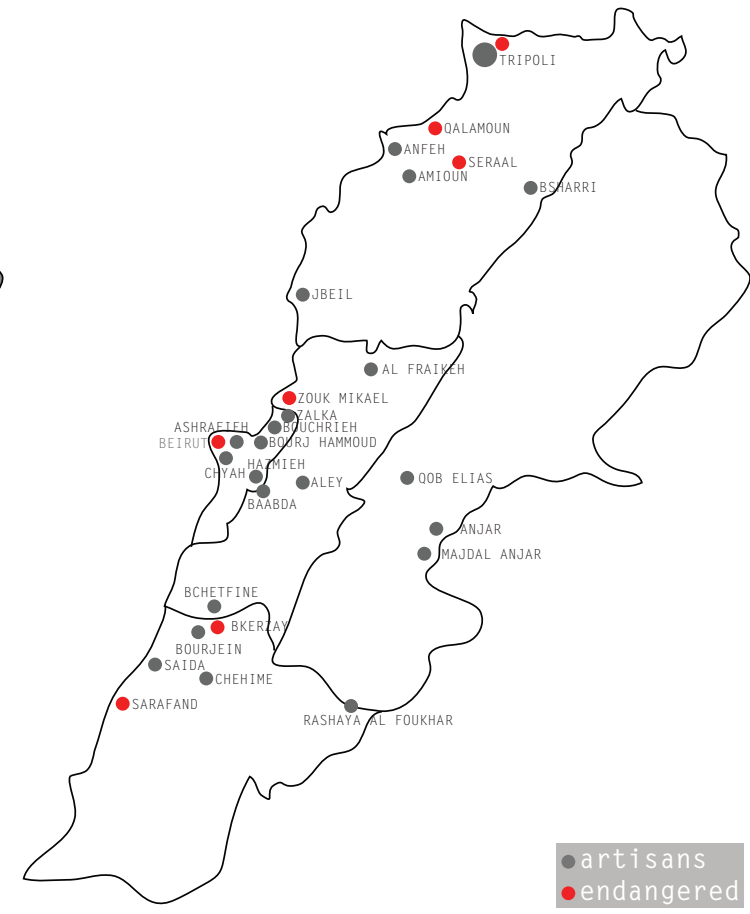
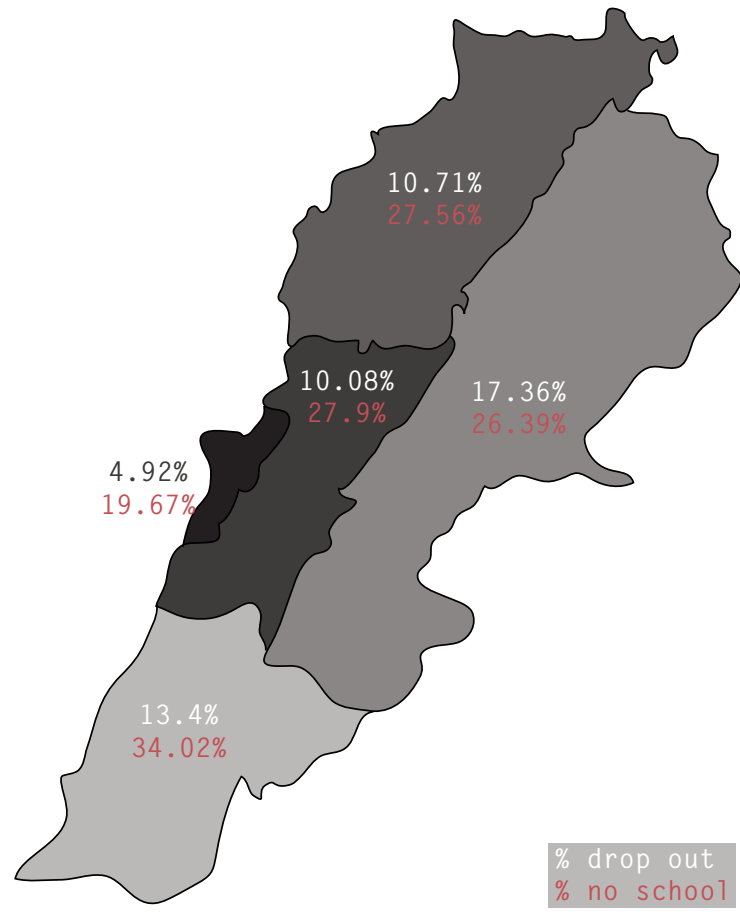
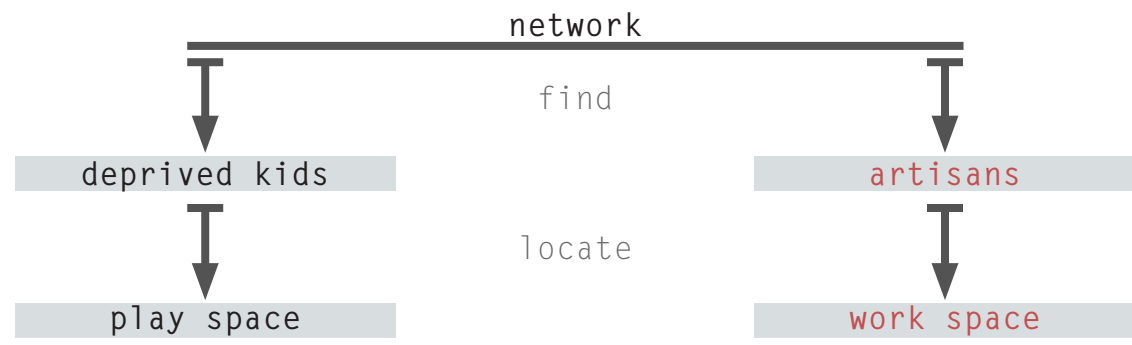


V. a decentralized network of fun

# 1. the treasure hunt

I looked in depth into who those people are and broke them down into two groups, generation 1 and generation 3. The specificity here lies in connecting the two ends through creating a revitalizing cycle.





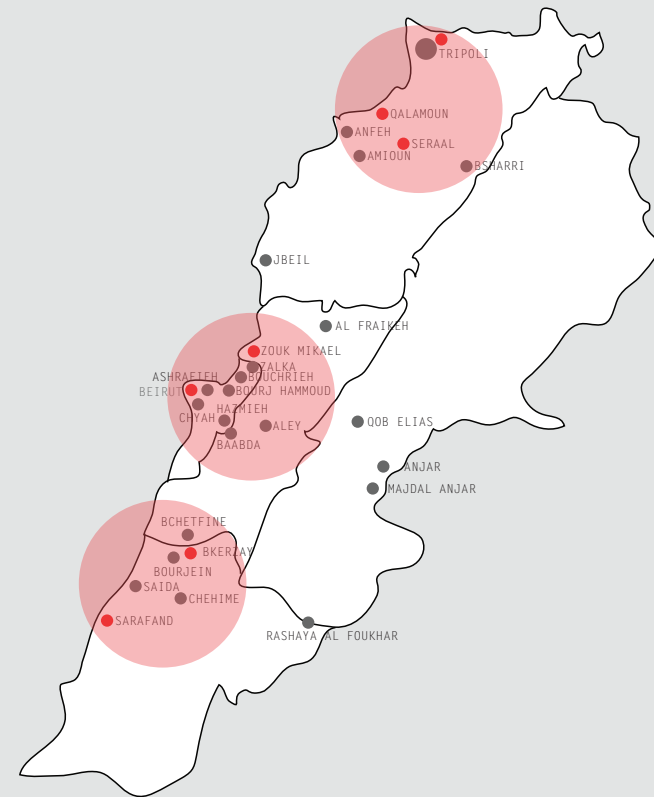
## 2. fission to fusion

The challenge of bringing these individuals together would happen on the basis of two models.

The first would be organized by the ministry of culture and happening in three different locations.

The second would be happening at a more local level between the craftsmen and the children.

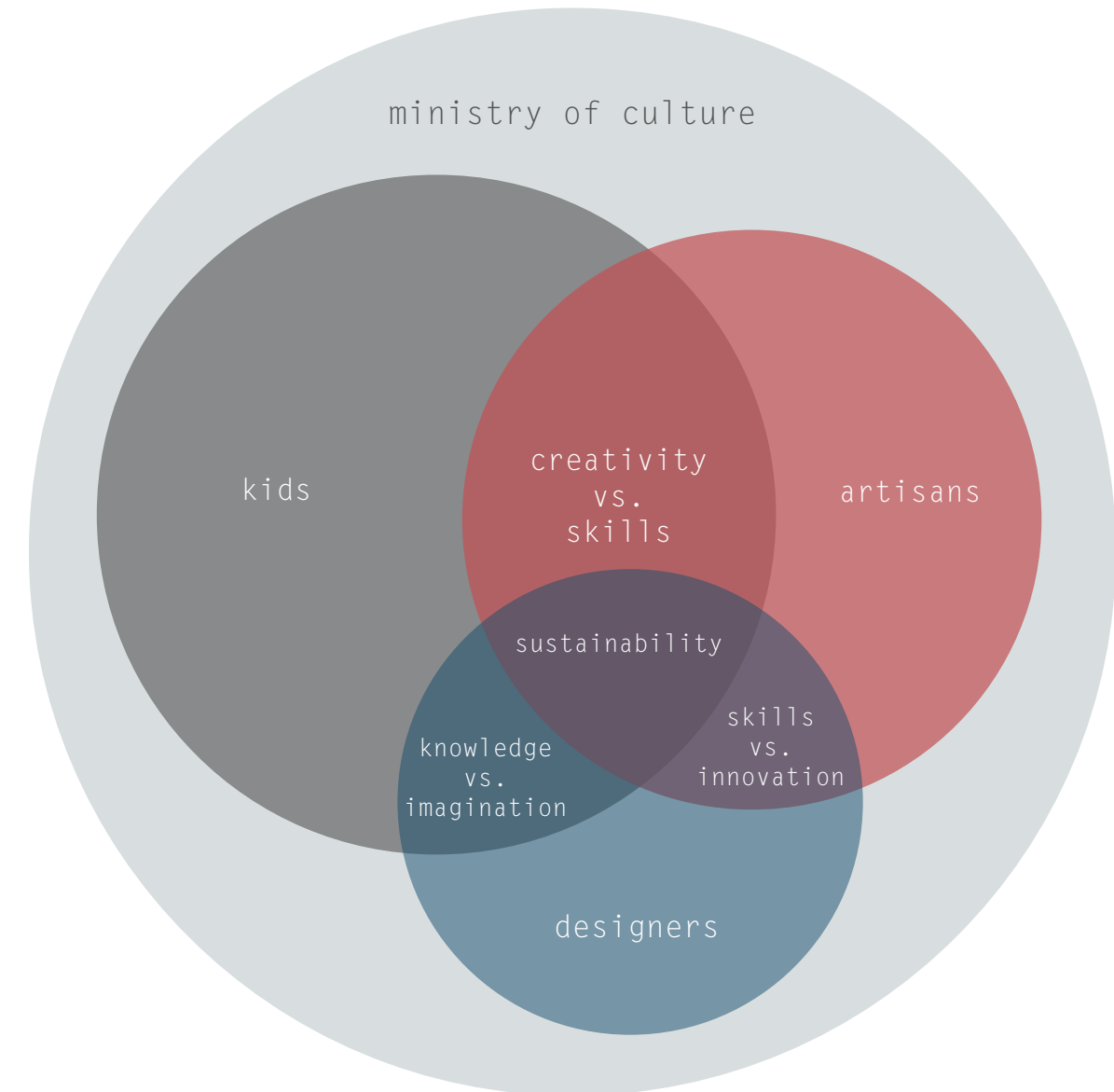
Both of the models would be based on a new system derived from the previously studied educational systems.



Tripoli - international fair

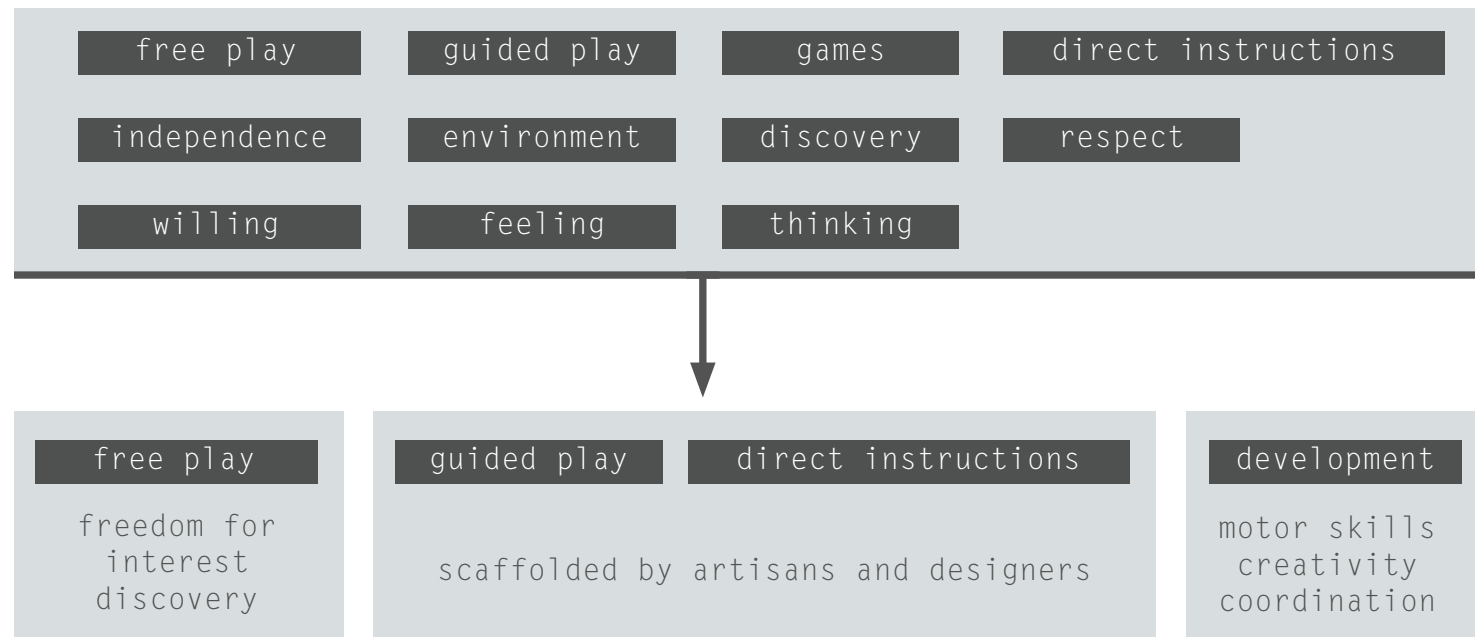
Beirut - ministry of culture

South - potentially Saida

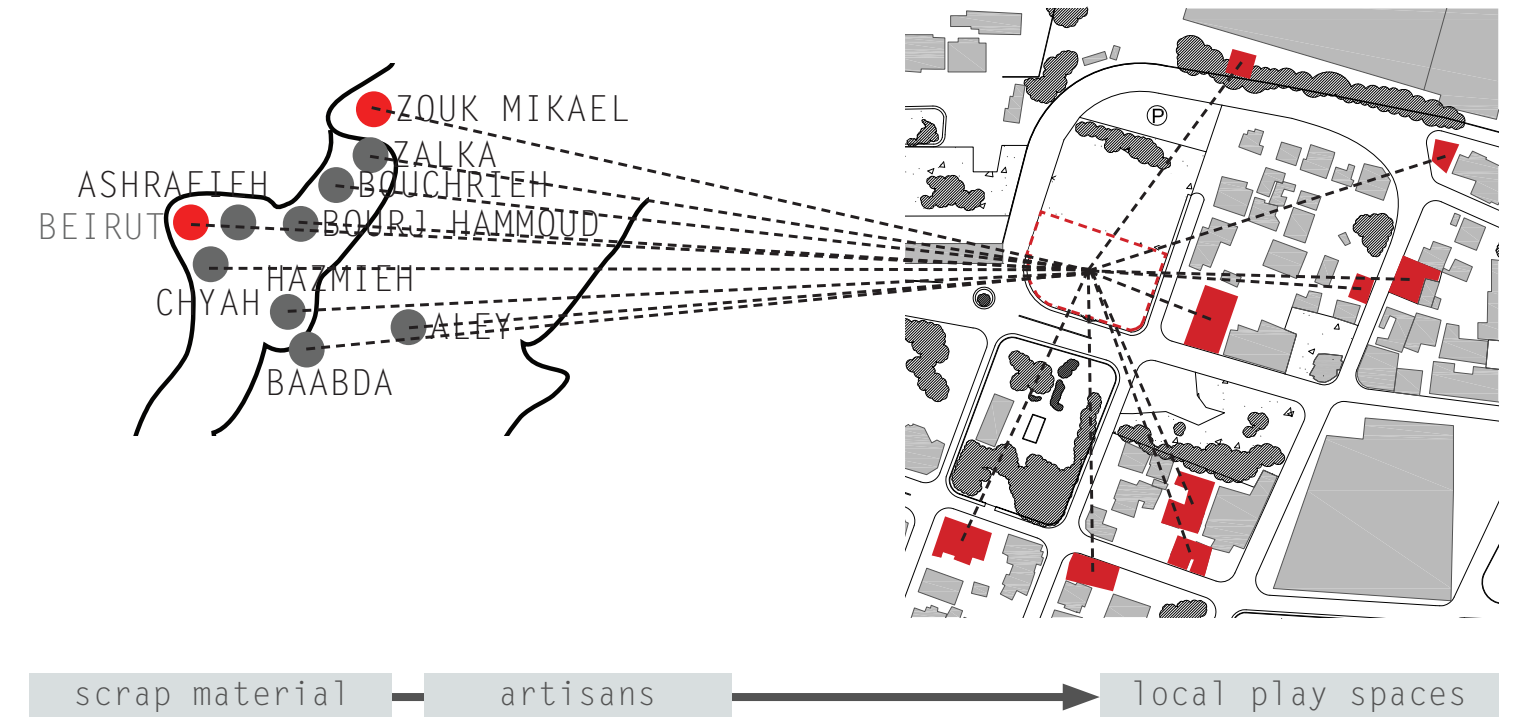




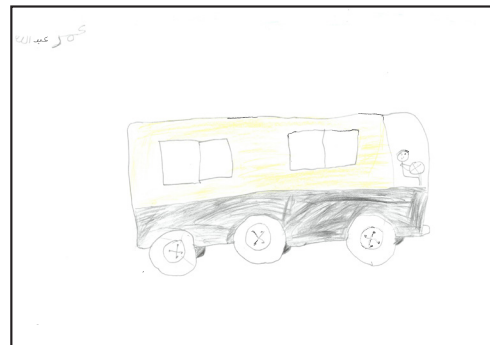
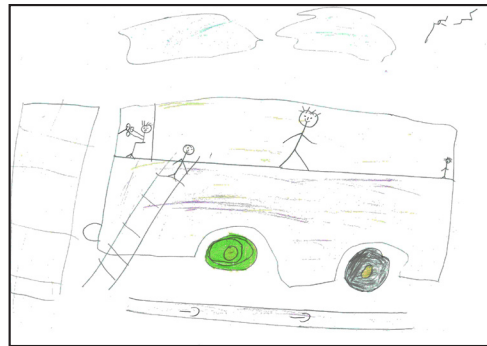
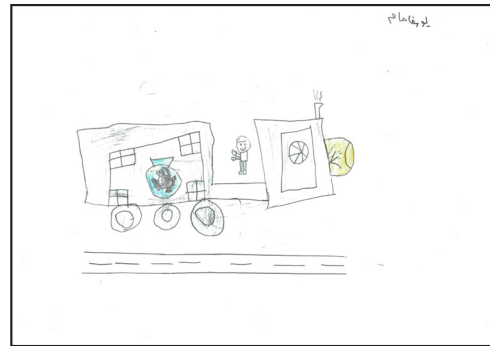
### 3. a new born education



### 4. hubs on wheels



# 5. hubs on wheels redefined





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playing for a future  
hybridizing Play, Pedagogy & Production

thesis by Nicolas Abou Haidar





a decentralized network to play for a better future

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advisors: Thesis 1 - Rana Haddad | Thesis 2 - Sinan Hassan

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Spring 2020

I would like to sincerely thank Rana Haddad, Sinan Hassan  
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role in the development of my thesis.

introduction

I. kids & artisans

II. the Madiné

III. the HUB

IV. one step back

V. exercises

VI. everywhere & everyone

VII. program

VIII. mobile unit

IX. PLAYSHIP

X.

## introduction

What if we could introduce “play” for deprived children in order to create for them new opportunities, far from child labour and menial jobs, proving that there is a place for them in society?

Can one imagine designing “with” children?

Through understanding and learning from play, and through introducing craftsmanship, a part of our culture and society that is suffering to persist, can we create a mutual learning process for less fortunate children and artisans to adapt as a method for the development of their futures?



I. kids & artisans

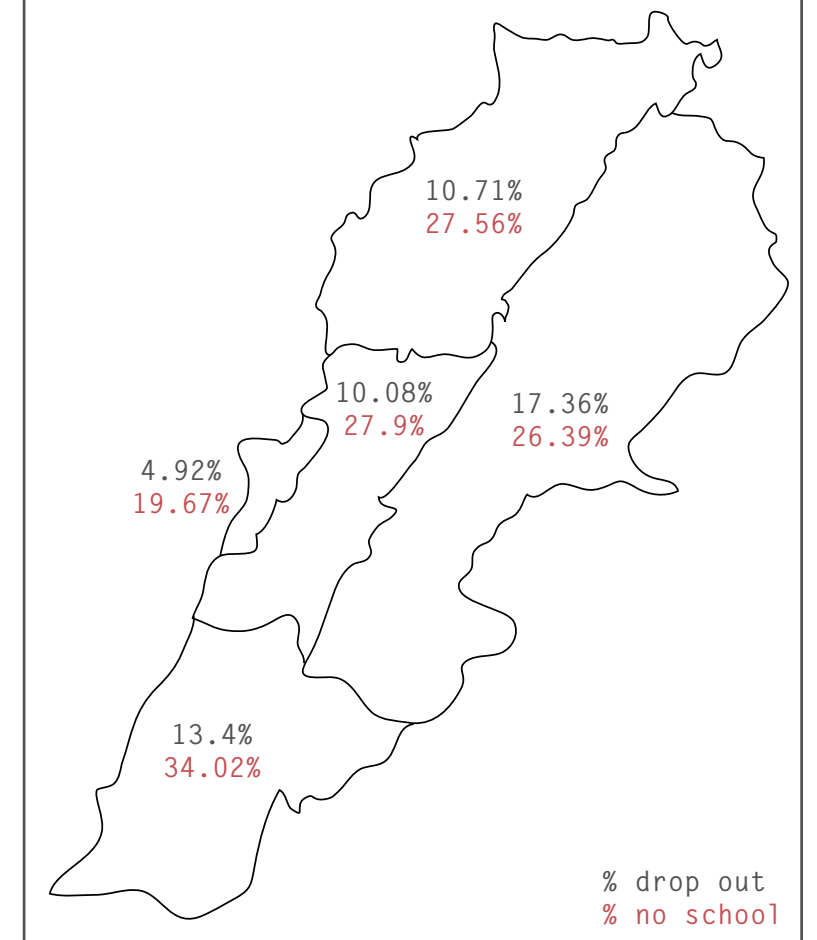


This is a story for kids

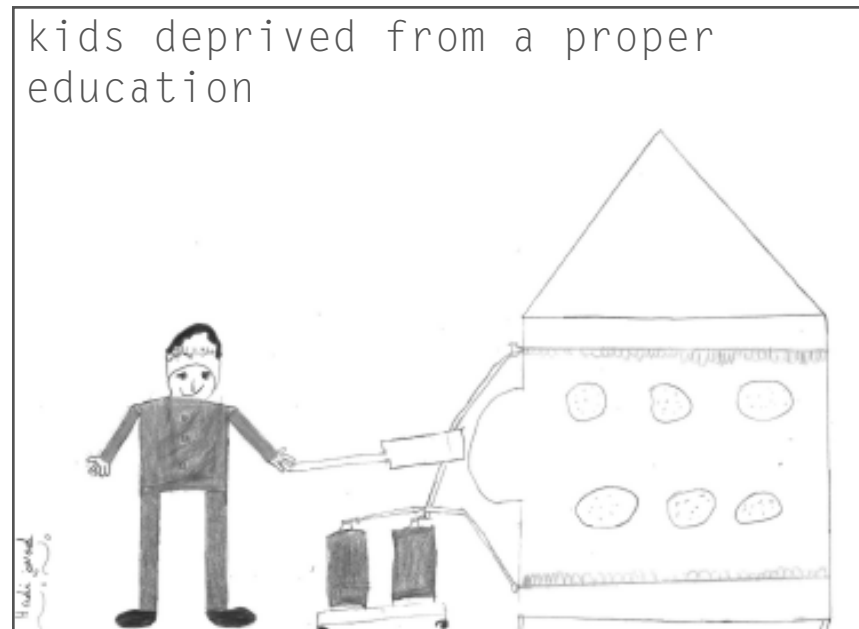


these kids play in this place

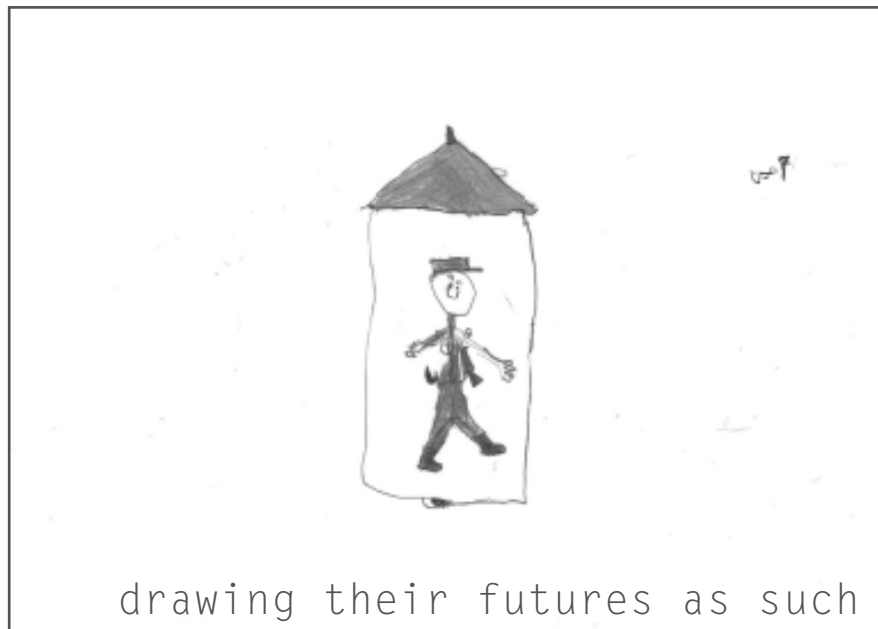
but these kids are found all over Lebanon and their numbers are increasing



kids deprived from a proper education



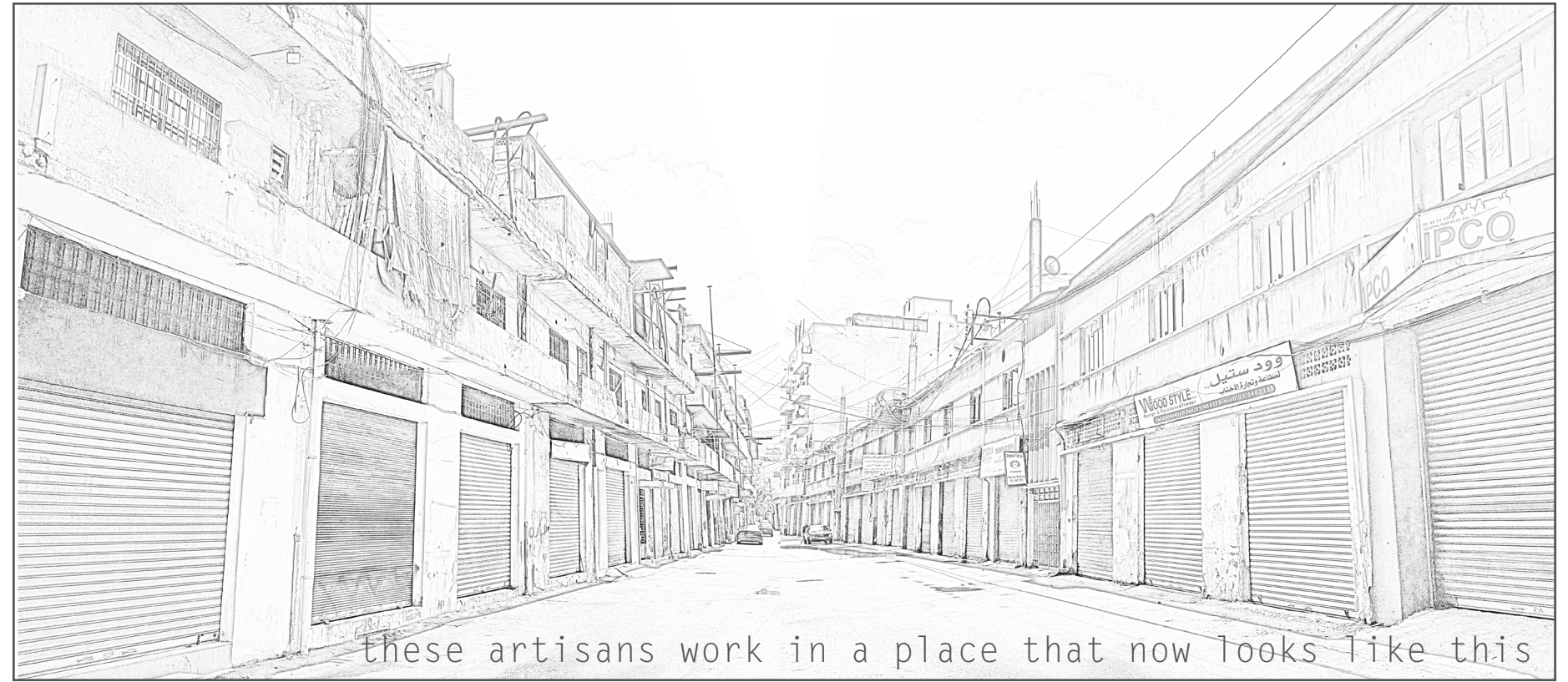
drawing their futures as such







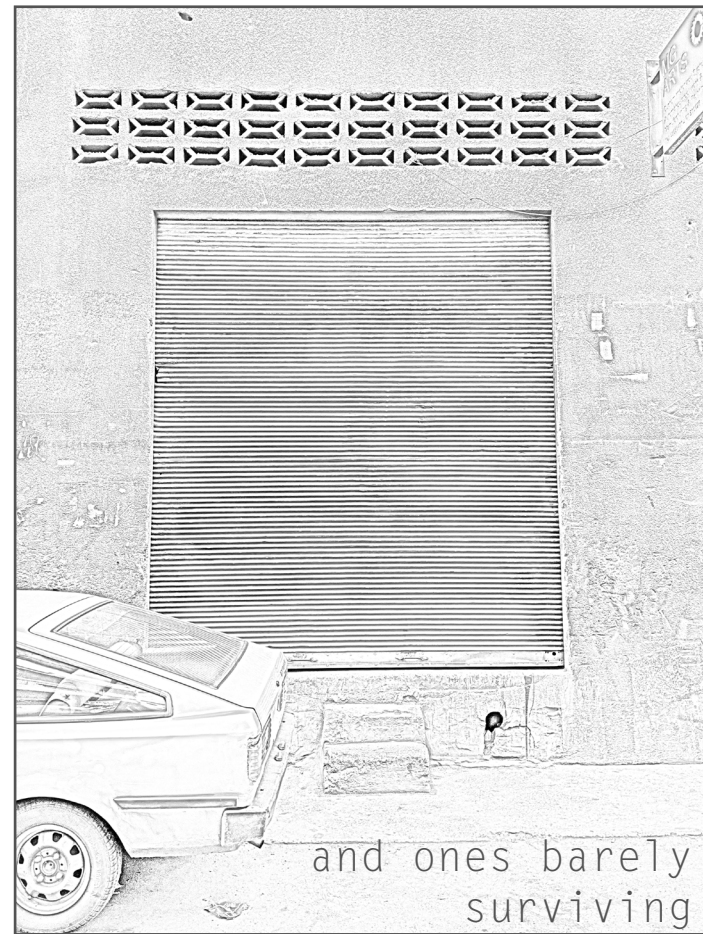
this is also a story for craftsmen



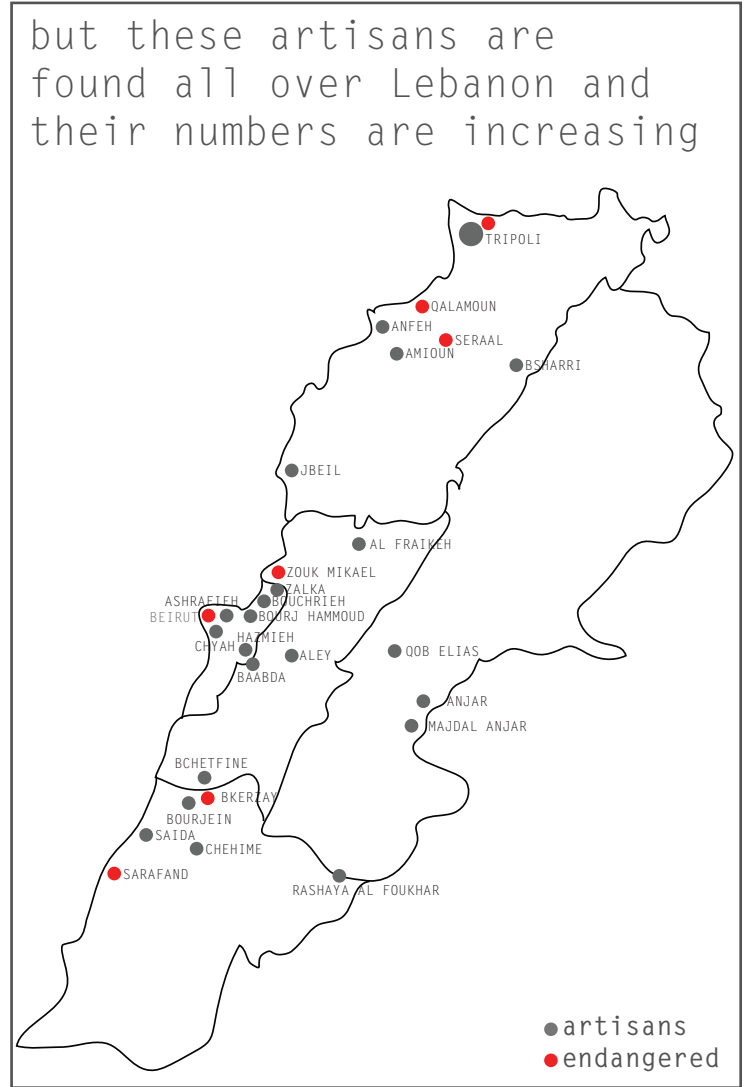
these artisans work in a place that now looks like this



craftsmen with no successors



and ones barely surviving

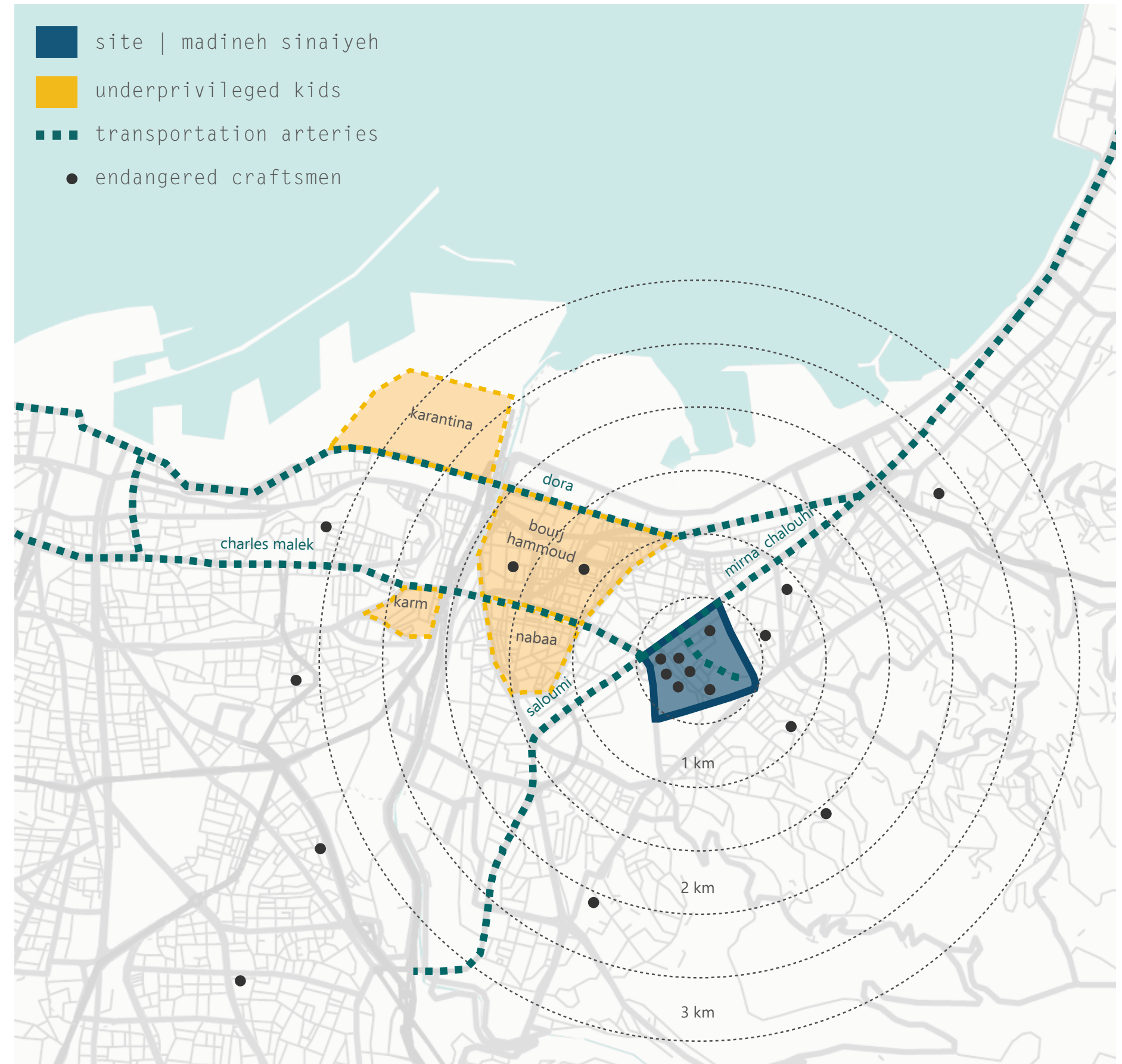




II. the Madiné



I aim to provide opportunities for children to learn from play and develop better futures while also providing opportunities for artisans to learn, develop and persist



- site limit
- transportation arteries
- workshop
- closed workshop
- warehouse
- closed warehouse
- commercial
- residential
- car garage
- food & beverage



The zoning of different occupations of spaces on site could not leave the amount of closed down workshops and warehouses go unnoticed. The craftsmen no longer have the financial means to sustain themselves.



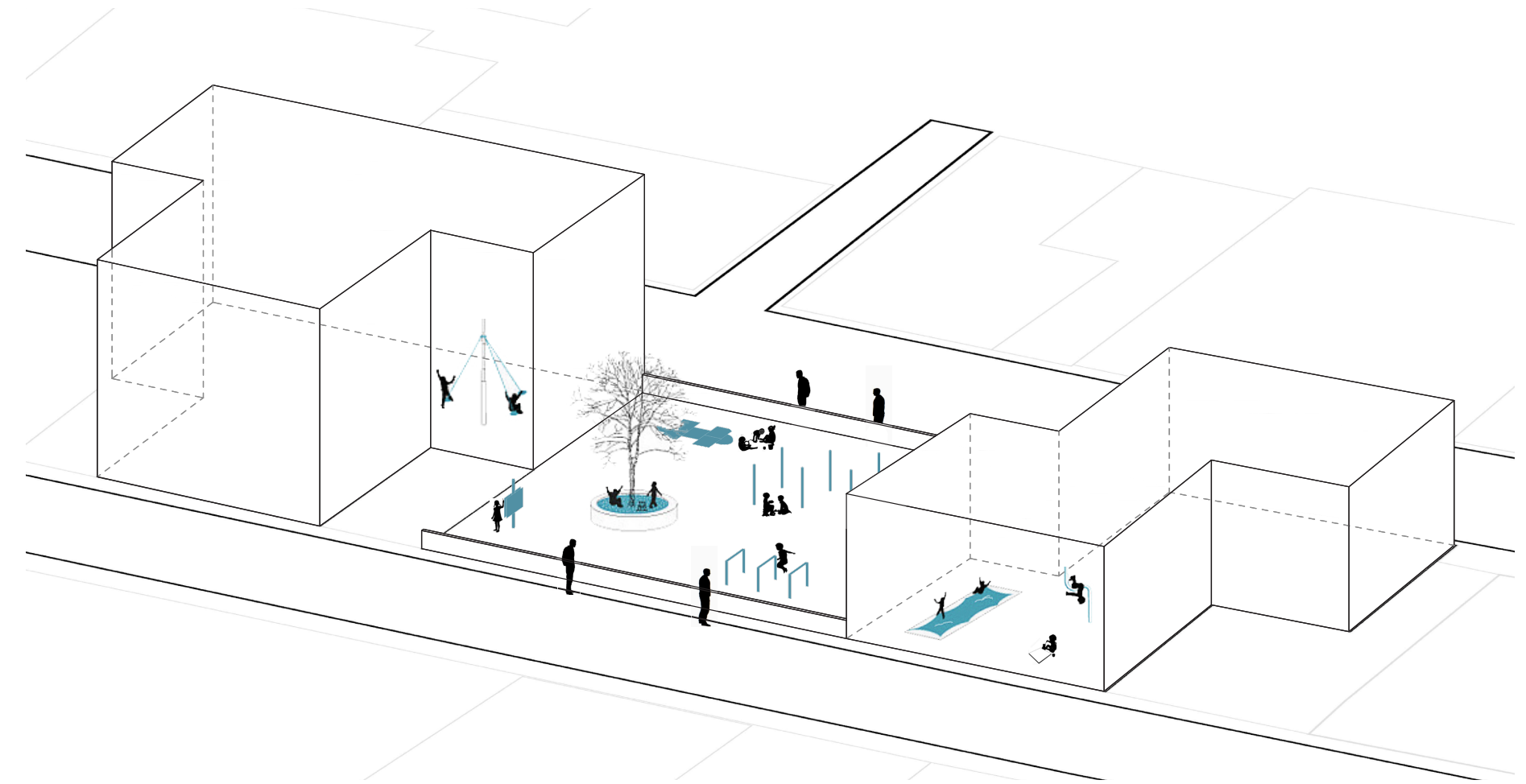
- workshop
- closed workshop
- closed warehouse
- out of zone

Selection of a strip to focus and intervene on mainly based on the diversity of the existing closed down shops

III. the HUB



Transformation of the centered cluster of closed down shops set up for sale into the main hub of the project with the other components of the project situated around it.



The craftsmen observing and learning from a distance. The children taking part in activities that will passively teach them skills and increase their knowledge in concepts such as gravity, density and tension as well as notions of math, proportions and counting and much more. The spaces are designed in a manner to accommodate for the playful learning while most importantly, safeguarding the children.



IV. one step back



## playful streets



## whats your name?

**يوسف حسام**  
8 سنوات  
الصف الثاني  
مدرسة البسطة المختلطة  
لعيب فوتبول



**أمين عمشة**  
9 سنوات  
الصف الثالث  
مدرسة الشارع الظريف  
جيشي



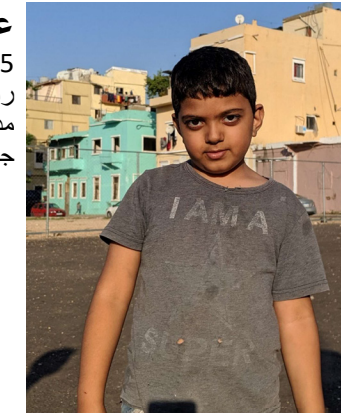
**حسين حسين**  
12 سنة  
الصف الخامس  
مدرسة المتوسط الأشرفية  
قبطان



**كريم حسين**  
8 سنوات  
الصف الثالث  
مدرسة المتوسط الأشرفية  
جيشي



**عمر الحسن**  
5 سنوات  
روضة  
مدرسة راس النبع  
جيشي



**بهاء حسام**  
13 سنة  
الصف السابع  
مدرسة المتوسط الأشرفية  
مهندس



**هادي جواد**  
13 سنة  
فران  
مدرسة البسطة المختلطة  
فران



**يزن حريري**  
13 سنة  
الصف السادس  
مدرسة الارغواي  
رسام



**ريتشي مسير**  
13 سنة  
الصف الثامن  
مدرسة الوطنية  
مخبرات



Research, Thesis I: spent most of my time interacting with children and performing different spontaneous activities that we both learned a lot from.

I got to know these kids better and discovered how unfortunate and disappointing their future plans were.



Other than the socio-economic issues, a main attempt of this thesis is to hybridize play, pedagogy and production and therefore how to create mutual benefits by introducing play into both production and education. I proceeded to work with the children and adapted a process that was highly based on multiple educational systems and specifically inspired by Friedrich Froebel the originator of the German kindergarten system in and the gift sets he created which allowed children, through play, to construct their understanding of the world through direct experience with it and the importance of focusing on what children could do rather than what they cannot as a start. The 19th century British arts and crafts movement of William Morris also played a significant role in enriching my understanding of the value of hands on artisanal skills.

## playful learning

### 1800 Friedrich Froebel

The originator of kindergarten system

Emphasised play and the use of “gifts” and “occupations”

Through play, kids construct their understanding of the world through direct experience with it.

Focused on what children could do rather than what they cannot as a start.

### 1900 Mrs. Montessori

Based on self-directed activity, hands-on learning and collaborative play.

Creates a match between the child’s natural interests and the available activities.

Children can learn through their own experience and at their own pace.

manipulating concrete objects helps the development of knowledge and abstract thinking.

### 1919 Mr. Steiner

Waldorf emphasizes the child’s imagination and fantasy. It focuses on imaginary play, learning through imitation and doing.

Workshops are designed to improve students’ fine motor skills, imagination and help them become productive members in society.

In Waldorf Education, the learning process is essentially threefold, engaging head, heart, and hands- or thinking, feeling, and doing.

### 1950 Swedish Play - “Lek n, play”

Primary education in Sweden is based on learning through play.

The curriculum is based on “fri-lek, spark-lek, mat-lek, and much more.”

Characteristics of “meaningful play”:

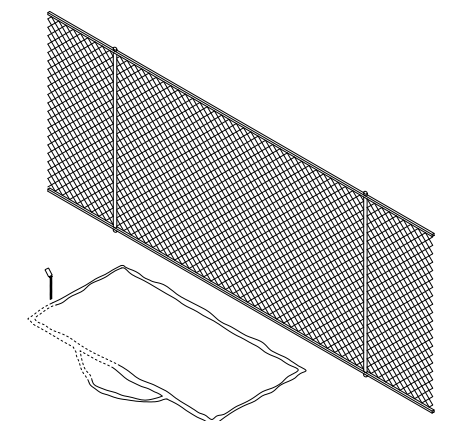
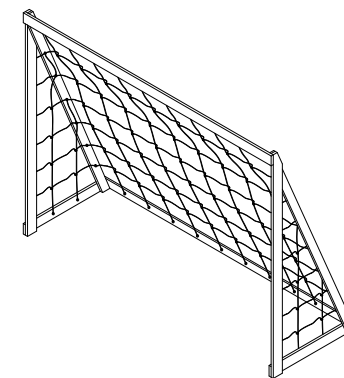
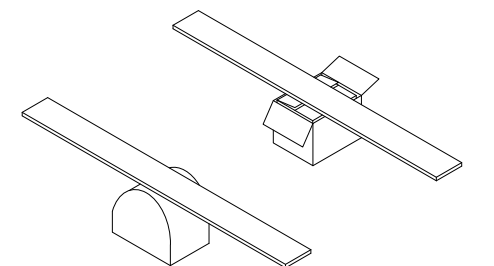
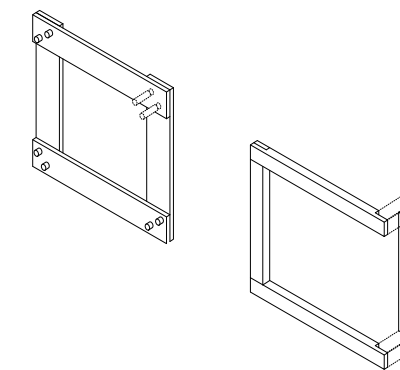
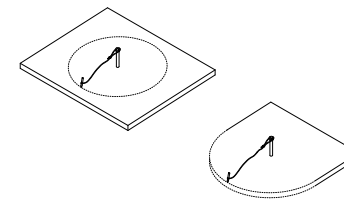
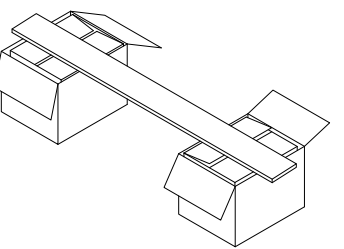
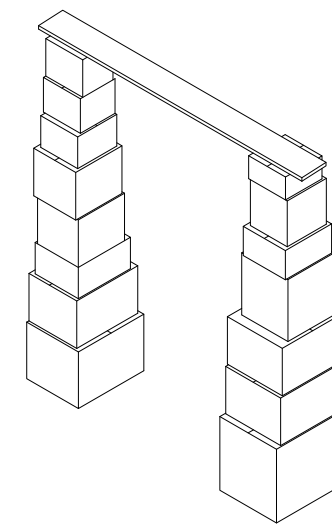
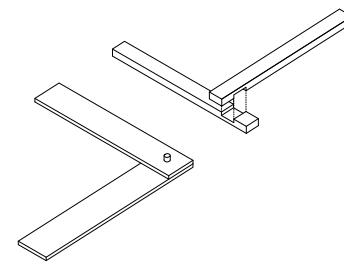
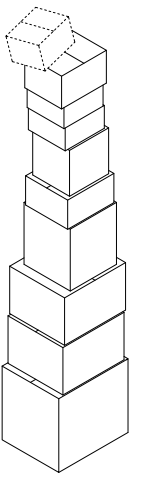
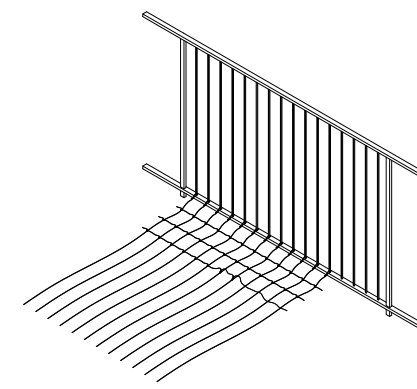
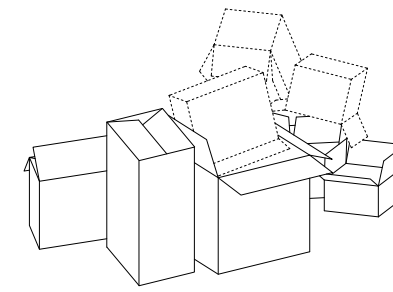
- gives the child a choice about what he or she wants to do
- evolves spontaneously, rather than giving kids a script to follow
- is driven by intrinsic motivation about what the child wants to do
- creates an environment where kids can experiment and try new ideas

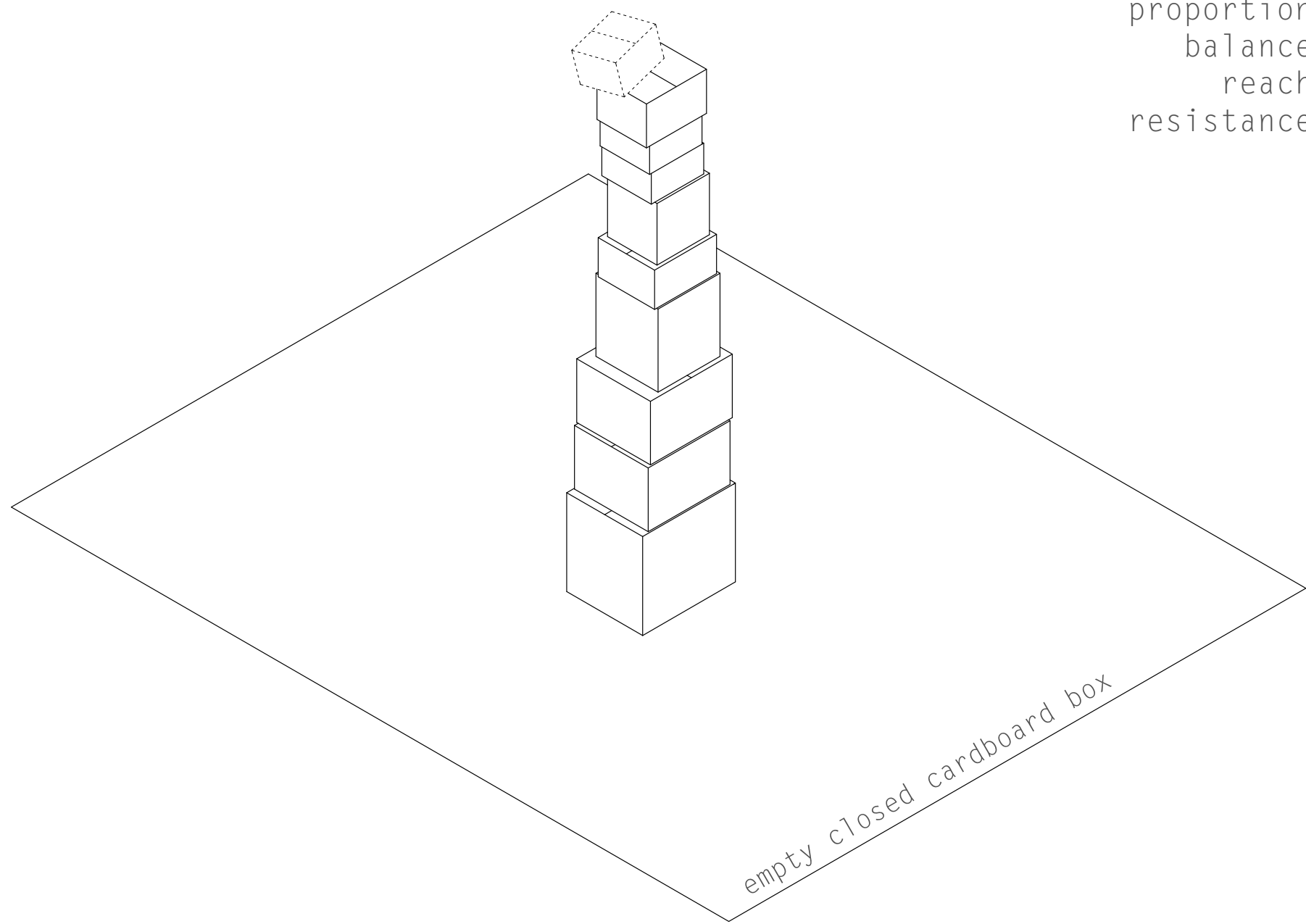
V. exercises



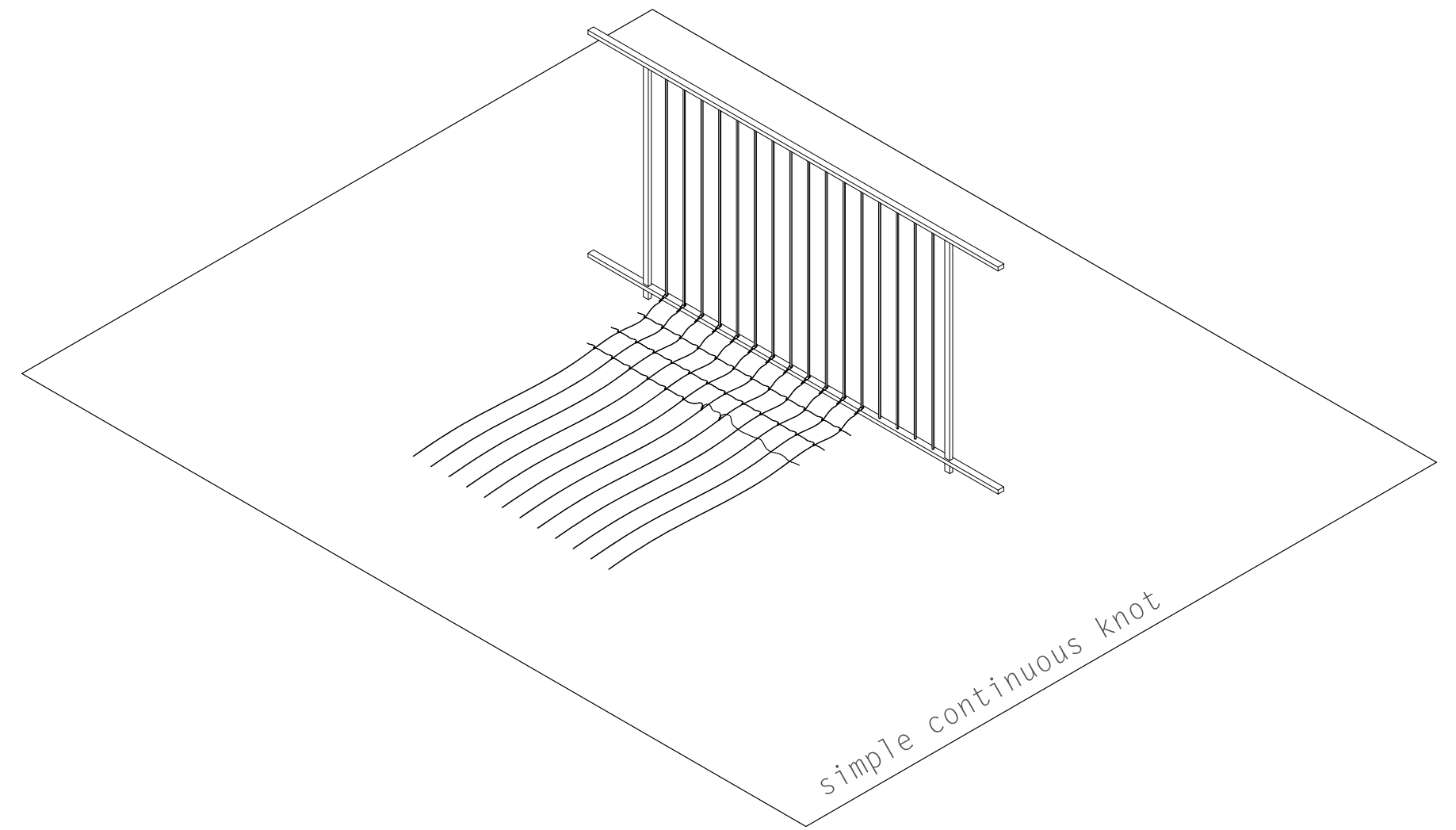
Now I want you to imagine an unlimited set of exercises that feed into one another, and can be performed literally anywhere.

Also, the components of all these exercises are available and accessible by everyone since they constitute mainly of upcycled scrap material.

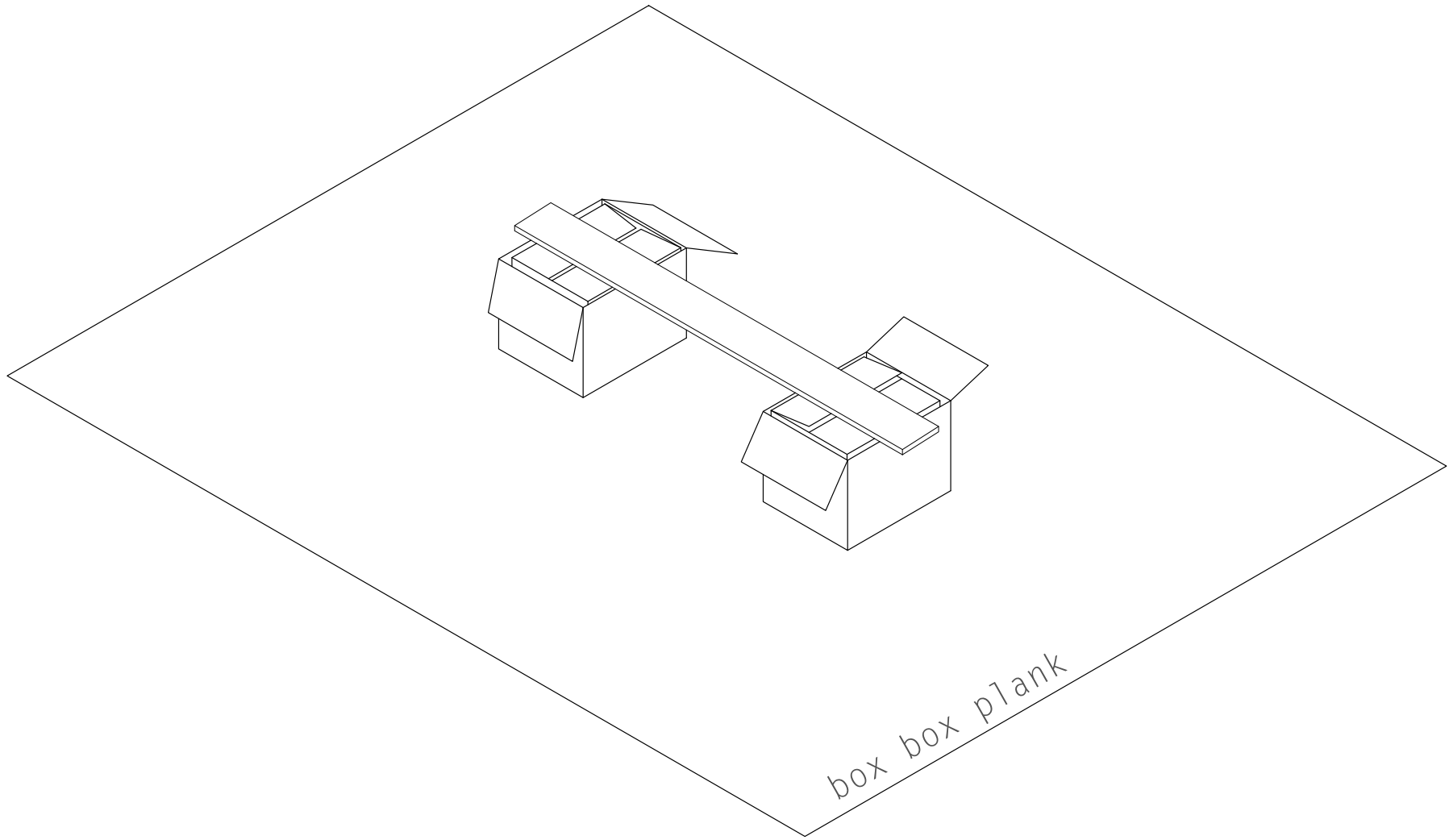




proportion  
balance  
reach  
resistance

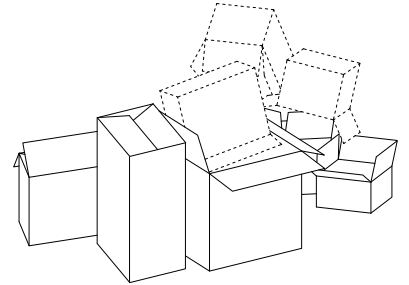


eye-hand coordination  
patience  
patterns & sequencing  
relationships



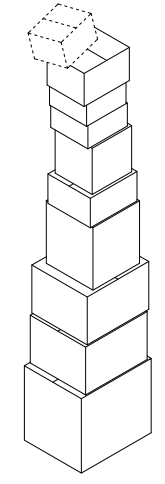
compression  
rigidity  
span & proportion

empty open cardboard box



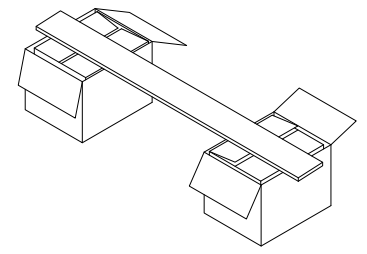
space

empty closed cardboard box

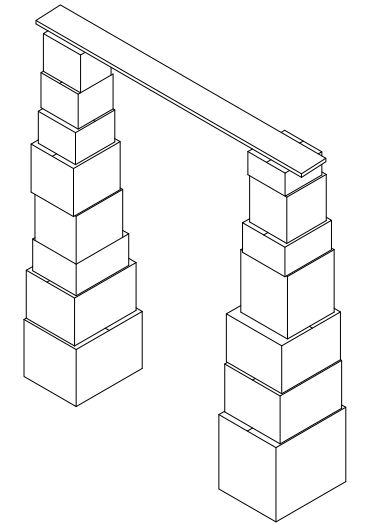


tower

box box plank

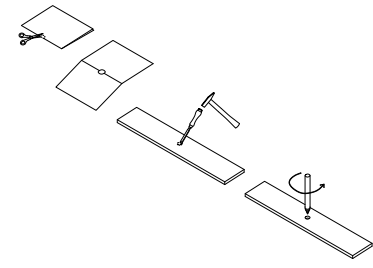


bridge



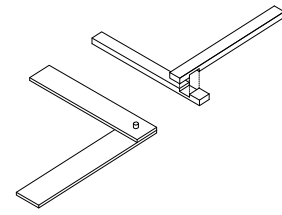
passage

paper plank hole



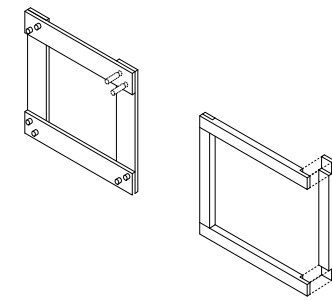
hole

plank hole pin



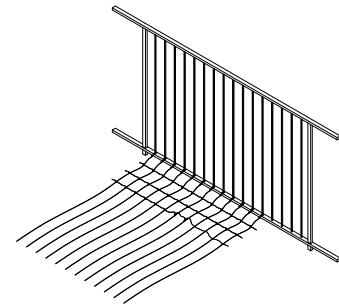
joint

joint plank

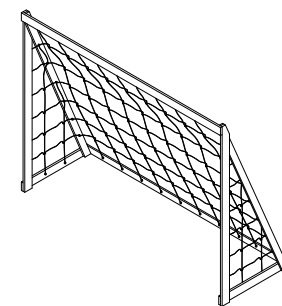


frame

simple continuous knot



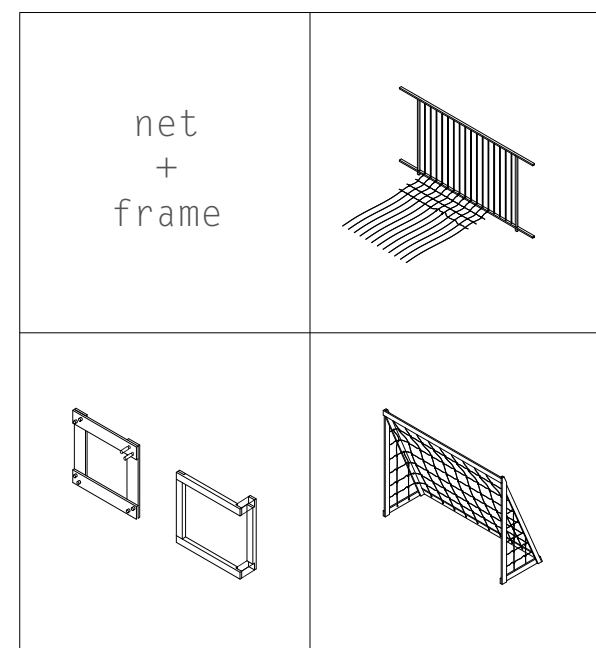
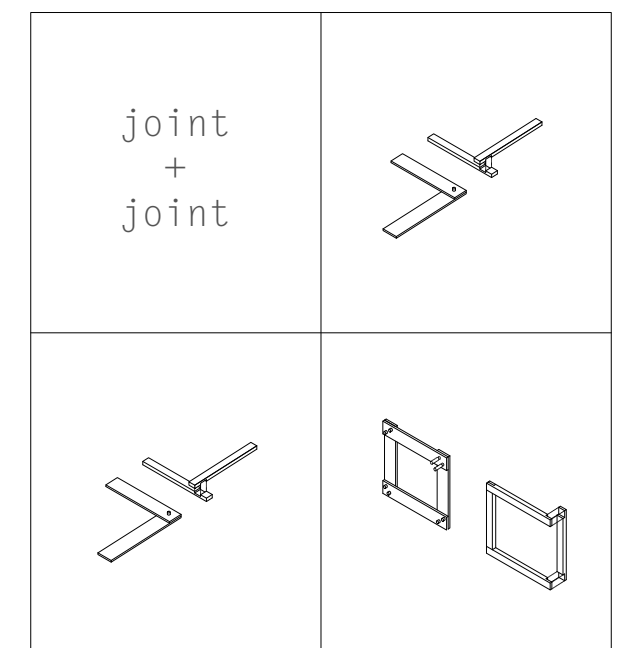
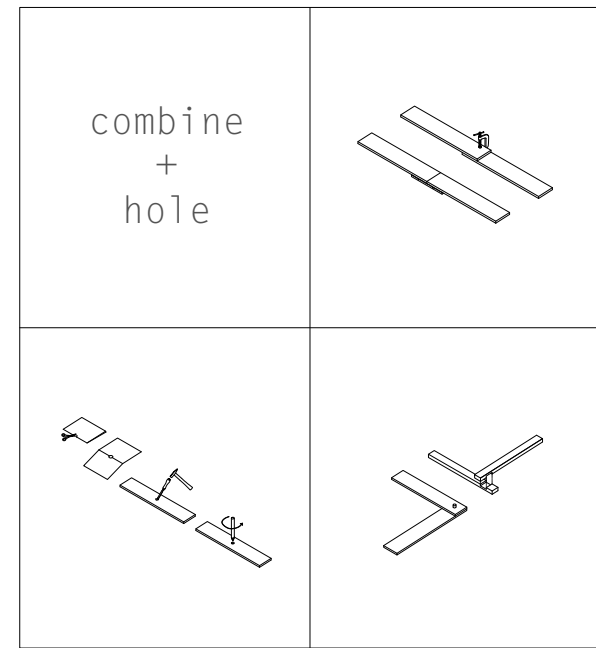
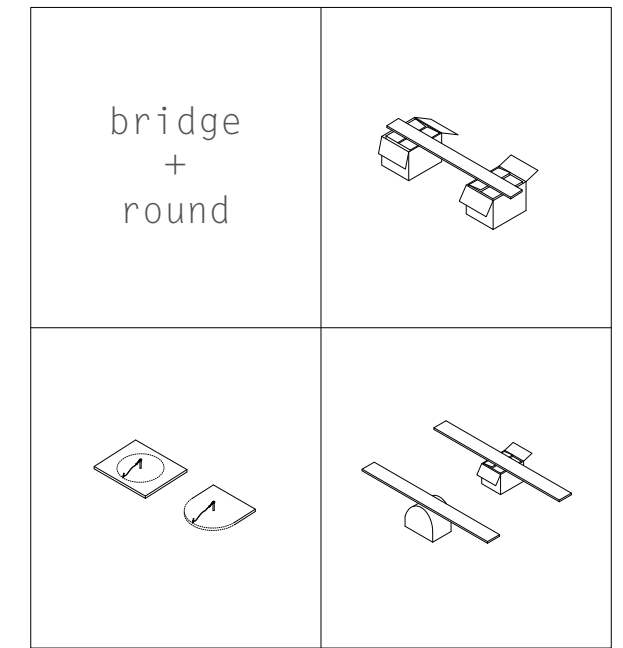
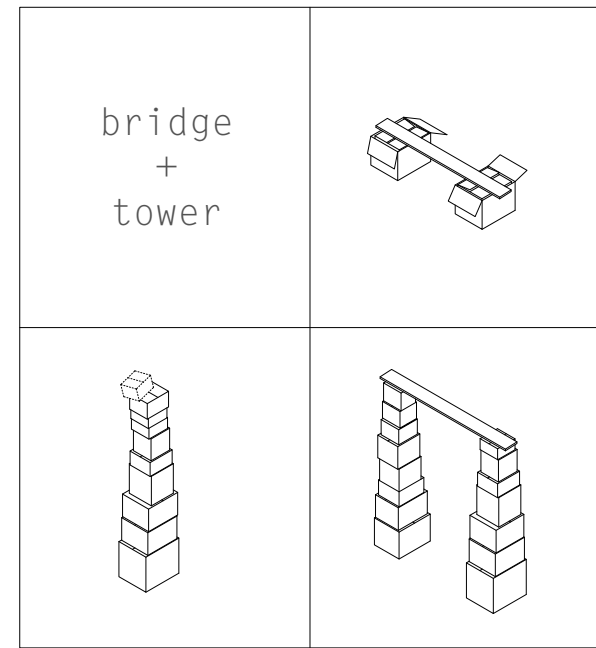
net



goal

different combinations of exercises lead to new scenarios and more developed concepts

allowing for these sequential processes provides an unlimited set of exercises with a learning curve that never flattens





VI. everywhere & everyone

as I began distributing programs and designing spaces, I realized that success will not be achieved through designing the ideal space for playful learning and collaboration

but that the significance and success of this project is highly based on the ability to make it available all over Lebanon without facing constraints

and that the most important part is not the space where the playful learning or collaboration will happen, rather the design of playful learning and collaboration

I proceeded by shifting sites to a natural field located adjacent to the madine and owned by the municipality. My decision was based on the availability of such a site in every Lebanese town or city.



VII. program



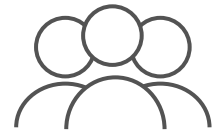
ministries of  
culture X education X industry



municipality



training unit



artisans and community members  
eligible and safe for  
working with children

5 - 9  
years

9 - 14  
years

14 - 18  
years

instructor guided

instructor guided  
X  
artisan cooperation

self guided  
X  
artisan cooperation

free play  
X  
exercises

developed exercises  
X  
artisanal support

developed exercises  
X  
artisanal production

after the age of 18 they are offered the opportunity to keep  
learning through the neo-apprenticeship model

craftsmen

funded by federal government; employer

ministry of culture X education X industry  
invests; pays rent and utility costs

accepts max 3

demonstrate  
observe  
correct

supervises

produce

children

community

municipality

3 - 4 days at a company;  
craftsman's workshop

observe  
imitate  
acquire

practices  
services  
earns fee

produce

rewards

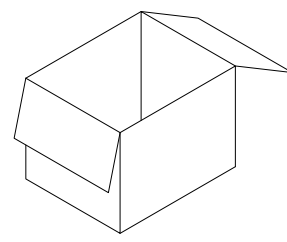
monitors

safe-guards

formal  
mentoring: guiding the mind  
3 - 4 years  
friendly  
familial

The idea of simplicity and availability is important where the notions and concepts can be available in a simple manual as such to be used in training the trainers. Simply composed of a title, what the material and components are, where they are available for free, and the question. The last page provides the opportunity to develop the manual even further through the contribution of the learners.

PLAYING  
FOR A  
FUTURE



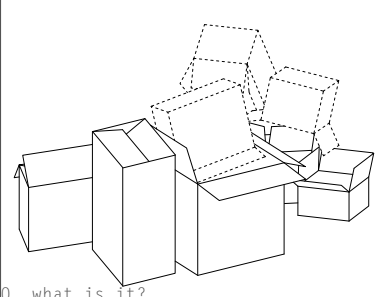
VOLUME I  
5-9 years

this user manual aims to help  
professionals guide children  
to benefit and learn  
from play

1. Box Discovery

empty open cardboard box

supermarket  
minimarket  
retail store

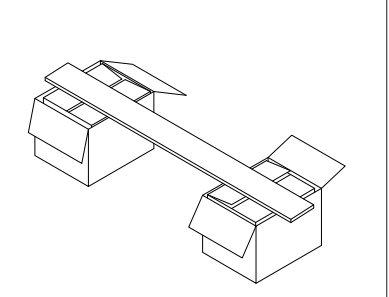


Q. what is it?

8. Bridge

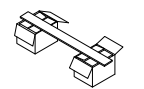
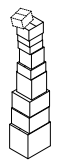
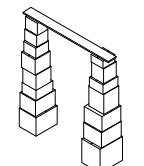
empty open/closed cardboard box  
wooden plank

factory  
workshop  
port



Q. how to bridge?

10. Passage

$\begin{array}{r} 2 \\ + \\ 8 \end{array}$	
	

Q. how to create a passage?

21. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

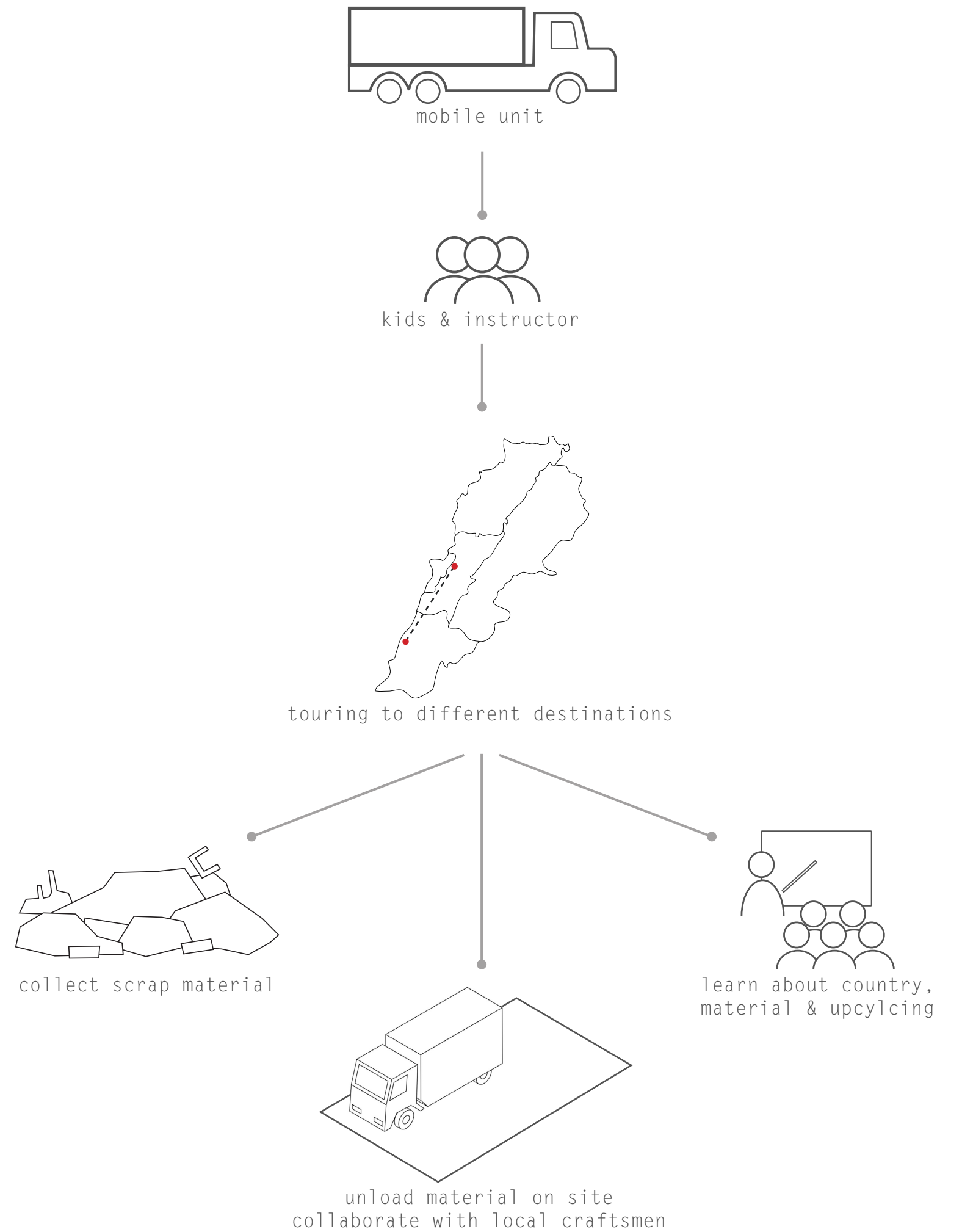
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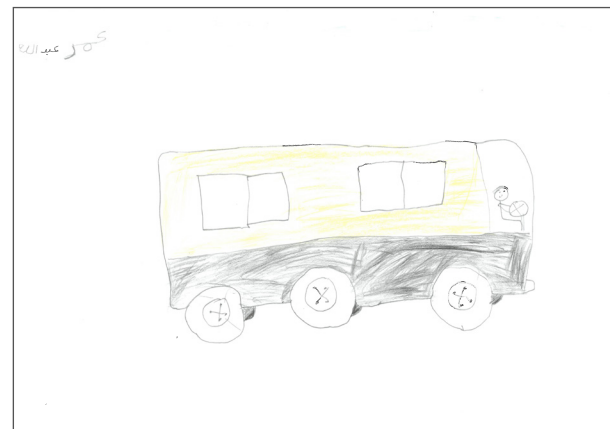
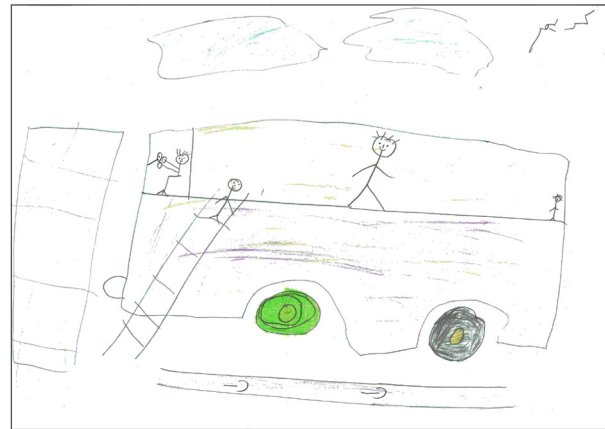
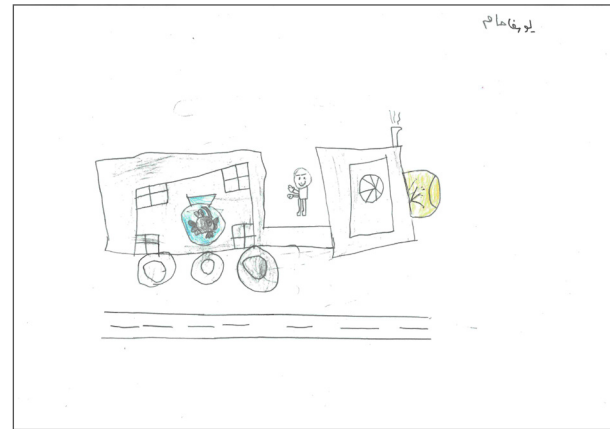
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VIII. mobile unit



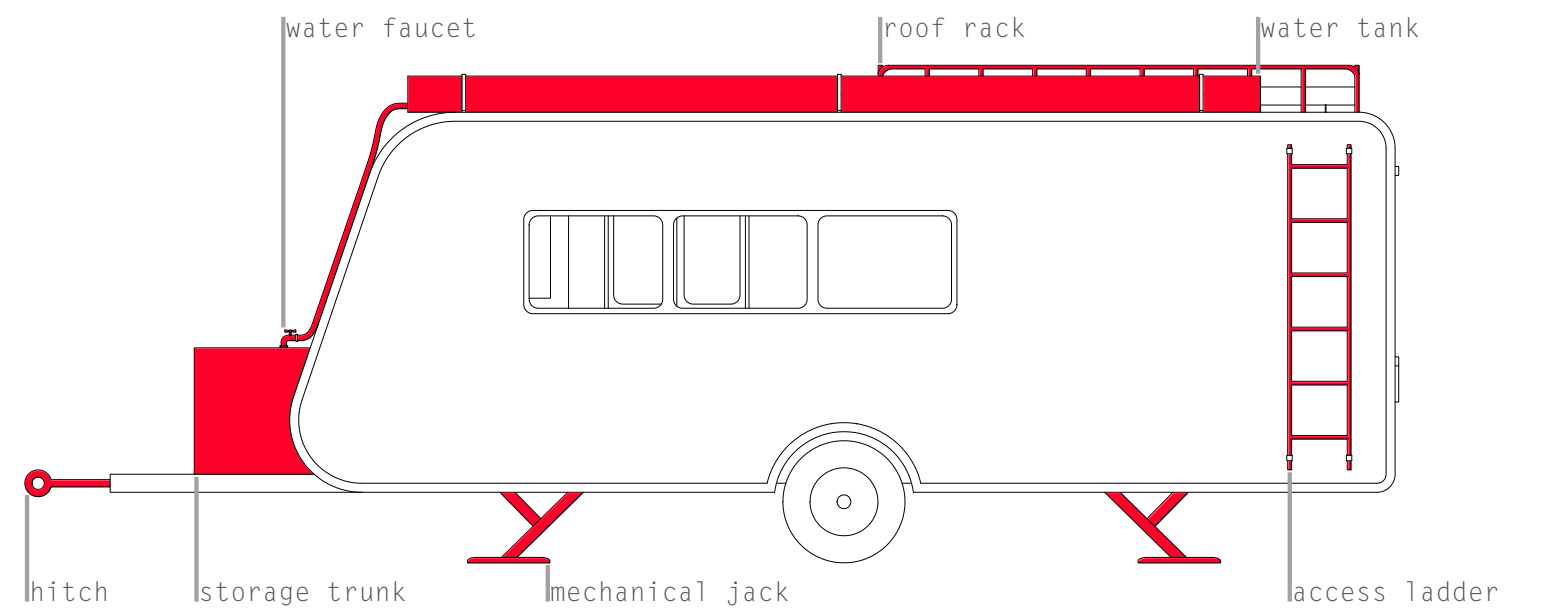
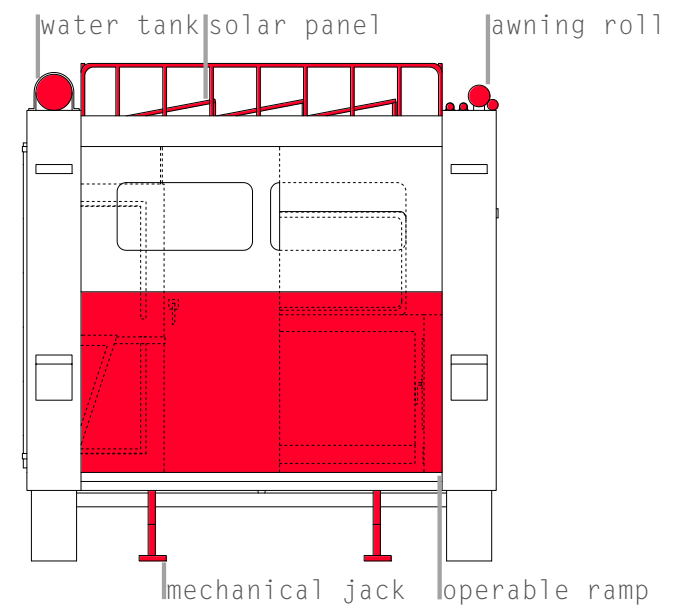
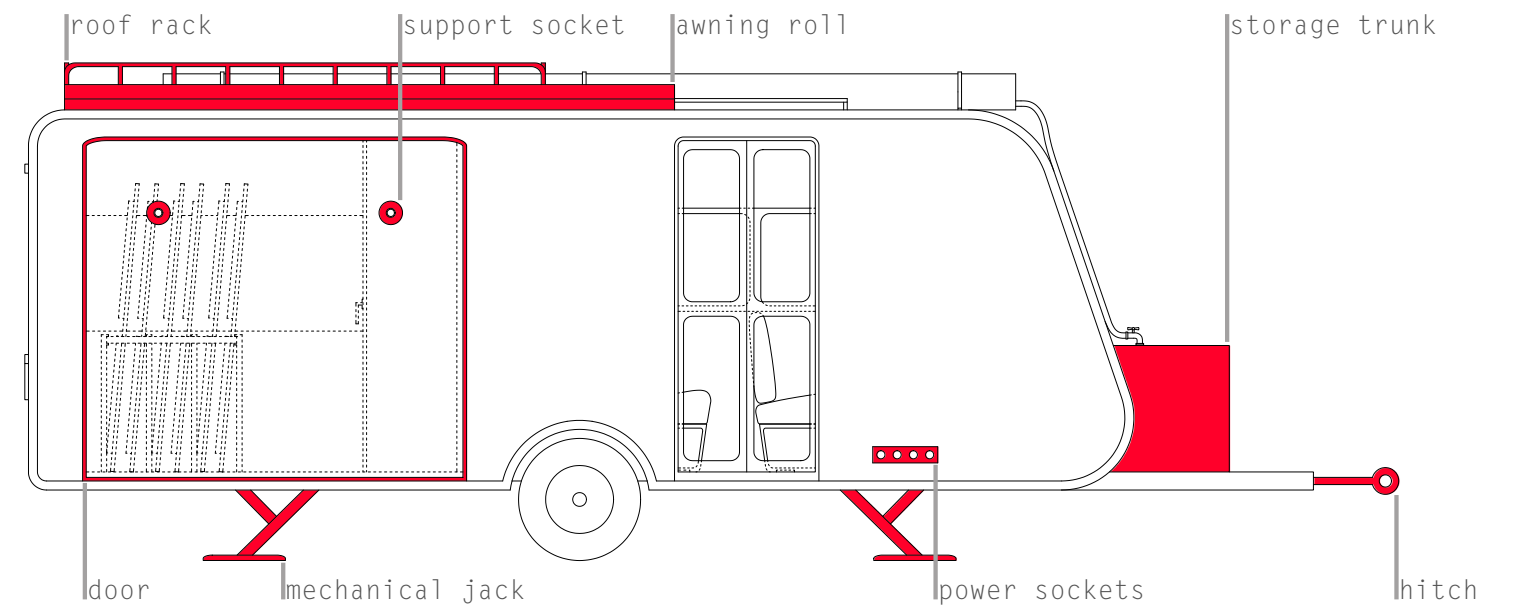
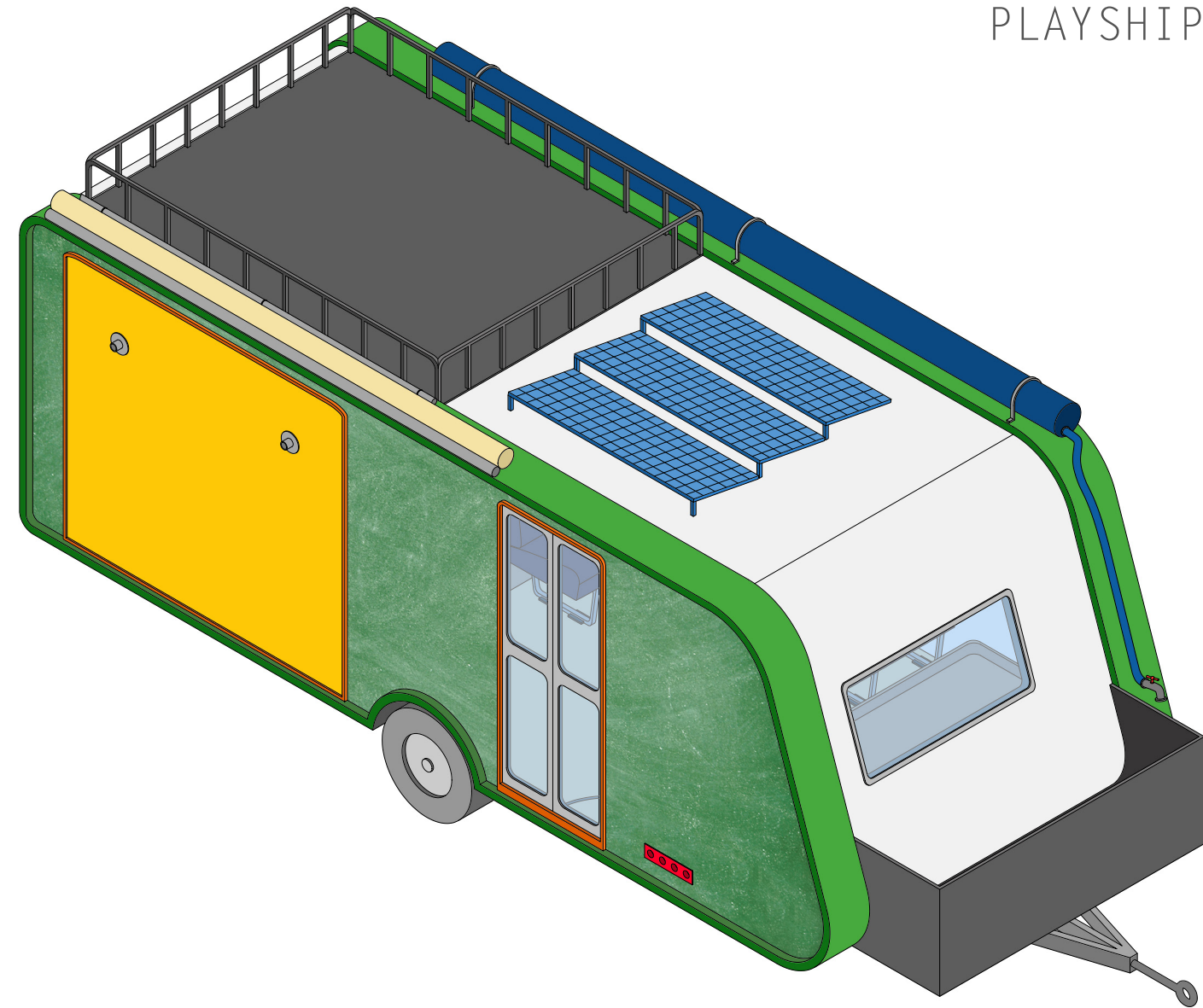
Imagine a mobile unit, one that takes off at a destination, picks up children and a trained instructor and heads to a different city. The ride constitutes of touring the country to learn and build relationships with different cities, as well as picking up scrap and available material that will be used at the destination. Children get to select different materials and understand them as well as the importance of upcycling and reuse. Once the unit arrives at the destination, it unloads and the performance begins.





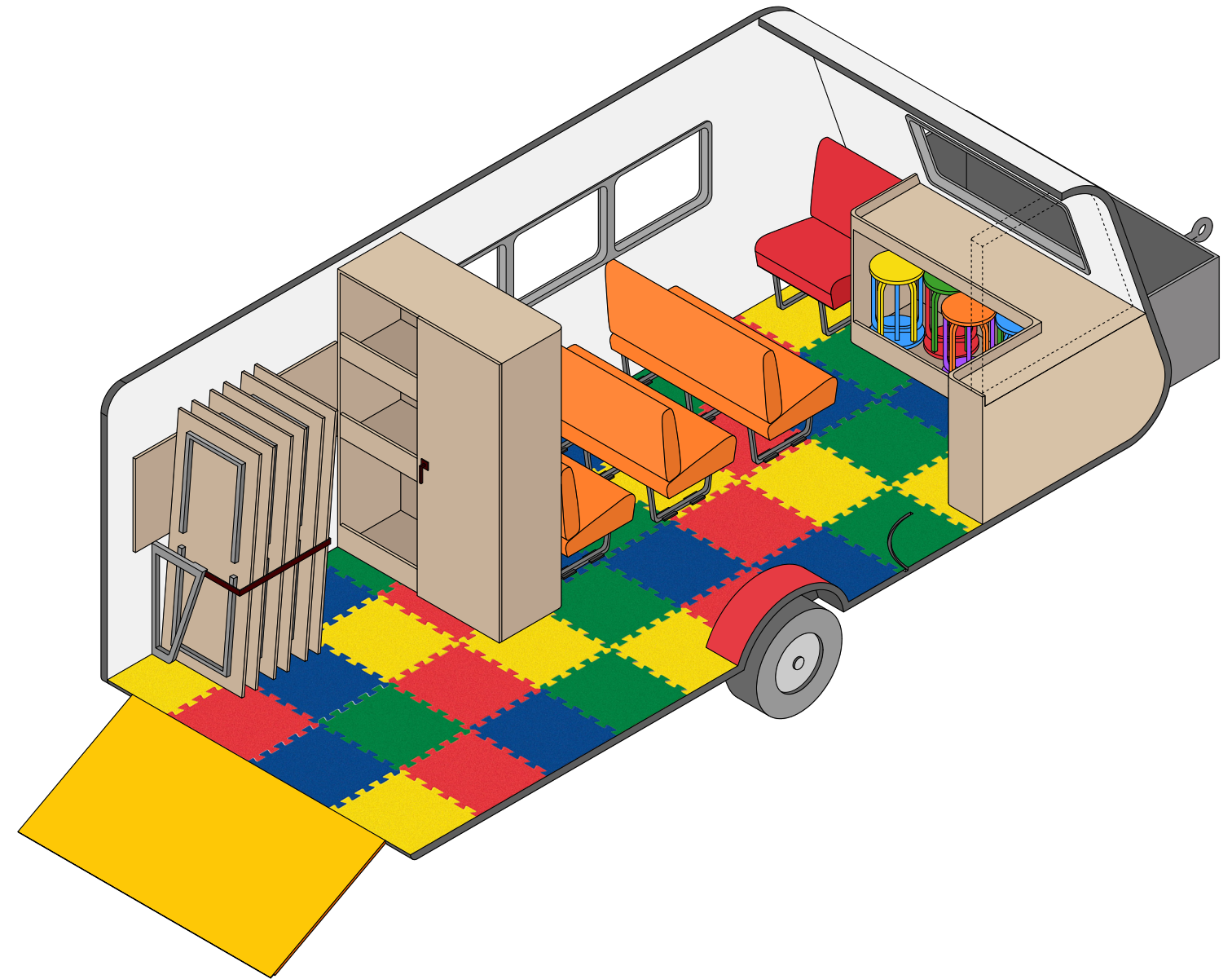
IX. PLAYSHIP

PLAYSHIP





This is what the interior of the ship looks like while mobile,  
with dynamic components such as seats and tables that can  
be displaced when parked.



And this is the unloaded parked PLAYSHIP with the sides covered in chalk drawings done by the children and multiple other activities taking place simultaneously from children observing craftsmen performing advanced tasks or directly collaborating and working with them or kids leading exercises on their own or working together to produce a product. Some meticulous tasks such as weaving a net or building a kite can take place on the tables and others anywhere.



This is a view of the interior once the ship unloads where the seats, stools and tables have been set up on the exterior and now it is almost empty with children playing and designing the space themselves. Other activities are also happening all together on the outside thus creating the ultimate mobile learning experience that is not limited to one place or one people.







I liked ending this presentation by showing how much of an impact a simple car ride had on these children and their joy. So can you imagine how much a PLAYSHIP can change their lives?